

The background image shows a vast, rugged landscape under a dramatic sunset. The sky is filled with warm, orange and yellow hues, transitioning into a cooler blue at the top. In the foreground, a lone cyclist in a blue jacket and white pants rides along a rocky, ridged path. The landscape is characterized by deep, eroded gullies and ridges, with a range of mountains visible in the distance. The overall atmosphere is one of vastness and challenge.

# Adaptability

## The New Competitive Advantage for US Companies

### C-Suite Barometer 2026 US Insights

# Contents



**3**  
**Forward**



**4**  
**Adaptability**  
The New Competitive  
Advantage for US Companies



**6**  
**Transforming  
With Technology**  
A Laser-Focus on AI



**9**  
**AI Is Driving  
Workforce Change**



**12**  
**An Optimistic  
Outlook**



**15**  
**Fear Not  
the Tariffs**



**17**  
**International Expansion  
Priorities Have Shifted**



**20**  
**Conclusion**  
Adaptability Is the New  
Competitive Advantage

# Forward

Despite ongoing economic uncertainty, geo-political factors, and intensifying competition, U.S. executives are entering 2026 with strong optimism and a clear commitment to investment—particularly in technology, talent, and operational resilience. Transformation through technology, with artificial intelligence (AI) at the center of this movement, has become the top strategic priority across industries and company sizes.

At the same time, competition, tariffs, and shifting global trade dynamics are reshaping how organizations think about supply chains, pricing, and international expansion. Leaders are responding with confidence and pragmatism: driving efficiency, revisiting operating models, and expanding into new markets while maintaining a sharp focus on compliance, risk management, and long term value creation.

This year's Forvis Mazars Global C Suite Barometer—our sixth annual study—shows executives acting rather than waiting. Technology transformation is firmly in execution mode, with AI being scaled across core functions and teams being restructured to support it.

As organizations accelerate this shift, many are returning to the enduring People Process Technology (PPT) framework, ensuring that new tools are matched with the right skills, redesigned workflows, and a culture capable of absorbing continuous change. Modern

interpretations increasingly add Data as a fourth pillar, underscoring its role in enabling both automation and strategic decision making.

Meanwhile, confidence in managing regulatory complexity and geopolitical risk remains high, and growth plans are becoming more flexible as organizations adapt to a shifting landscape. The message is clear: adaptability is now a defining leadership capability. Organizations best positioned for success in 2026 and beyond are those aligning innovation with disciplined execution, strong controls, and strategic clarity—balancing people, processes, technology, and data to drive sustainable transformation. At Forvis Mazars, we look forward to helping organizations continue to build that capability.



**Rob Pruitt**  
Chief Practice & Innovation Officer



# Adaptability

## The New Competitive Advantage for US Companies

**Adaptability is the defining competitive advantage.**

U.S. leaders are not waiting for clarity in the external environment. Instead, they are:

Revising plans

Diversifying resources

Accelerating investment to stay resilient amid volatility

The results of Forvis Mazars' sixth annual, global C-suite barometer are in. C-suite leaders of companies ranging from small businesses with \$1 million in annual revenue to large, multinational enterprises whose revenue exceeds \$1 billion have weighed in on their strategic priorities and outlook for 2026.

# Adaptability

## The New Competitive Advantage for US Companies

Of the more than 3,000 executives who participated worldwide, 600 are U.S. based. This segment of the findings reveals an encouraging story: Despite slight revenue declines last year, tougher competition, and nagging economic uncertainty, U.S. companies are investing and planning with confidence in the new year.

From the U.S.-only responses, another clear theme comes into focus: the fact that American companies are resilient, agile, and adept at navigating disruption. Their high degree of adaptability is evident as:

- They take tariff-driven costs in stride
- Pursue global expansion opportunities
- Accelerate their use of technology, particularly AI





# Transforming With Technology

## A Laser-Focus on AI

Technology transformation is the top strategic priority.

**#1**

Strategic  
Priority

**83%**

C-suite U.S. leaders say they have technology transformation strategy in place

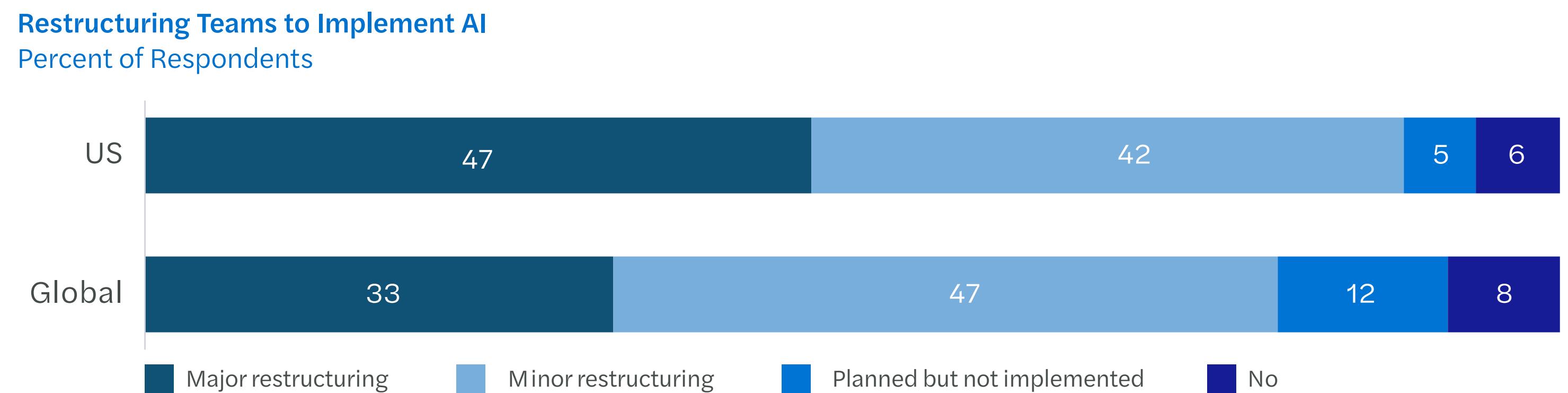
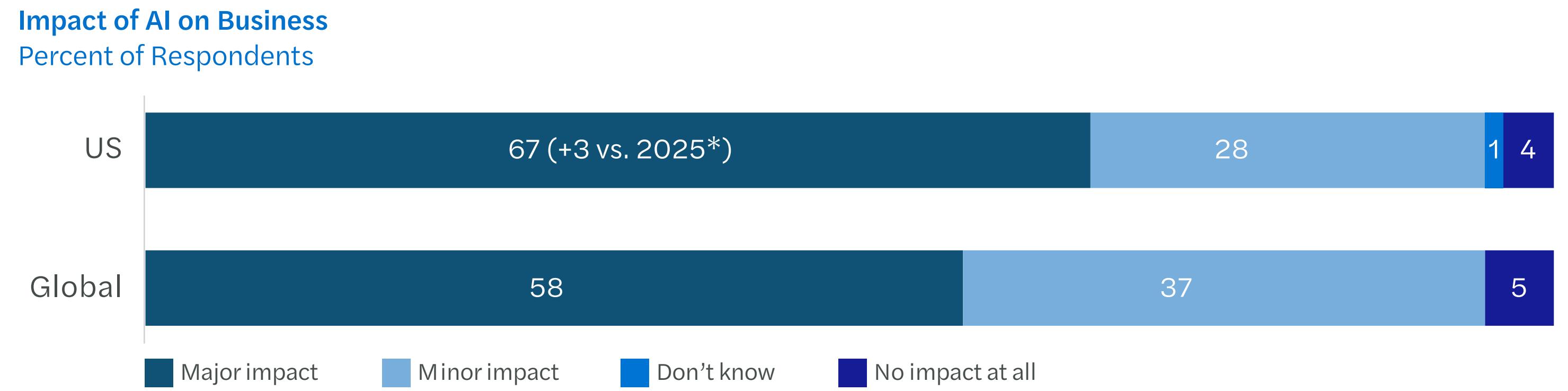
Transforming company IT and technology ranks as the number-one strategic priority across all revenue bands, sectors, and seniority levels in the U.S. While most firms have a technology transformation strategy, the focus is shifting from planning to execution. For companies with less than \$100 million in revenue, having a talent strategy is just as important as a tech transformation strategy.

Technology is at the center of this adaptability. It has become the primary lever enabling companies to adjust and compete. For U.S. leaders across every revenue band and industry, transforming their businesses through technology is their top strategic priority, well ahead of any other initiative, except for companies with less than \$100 million in revenue, for which having a talent strategy is just as important. While 83% of C-suite U.S. leaders say they have a technology transformation strategy in place, this figure is down six points year on year, suggesting a shift from strategy design to execution.

# Transforming With Technology

## A Laser-Focus on AI

C-suite executives say their top area for increased financial investment is in AI implementation. Nearly seven out of every 10 U.S. executives say AI is having a major impact on their company, and nine in 10 U.S. companies have already restructured teams to implement AI. This compares with six out of every 10 and eight in 10 executives globally.



# Transforming With Technology

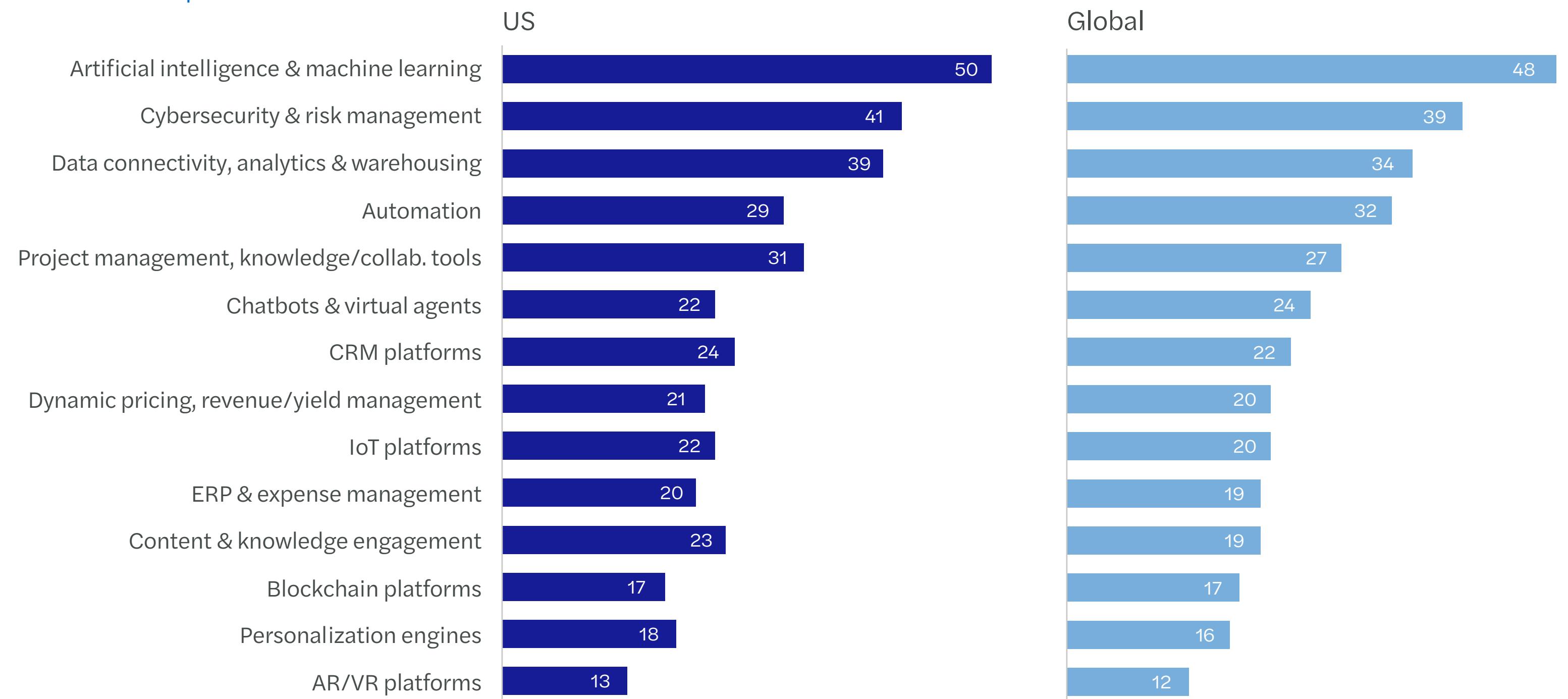
## A Laser-Focus on AI

After AI, broader economic forces—including inflation and cost of living pressures—are the external trends executives expect will have the greatest impact on their businesses over the next 12 months. Leaders are preparing for continued volatility by strengthening technology capabilities, tightening cost controls, and planning with greater flexibility.

Despite economic uncertainty, U.S. companies are doubling down on their AI investments. Across digital transformation investments, U.S. executives are most confident in the ROI of AI, followed by cybersecurity/risk management and data connectivity. This holds true for global executives as well.

### Confidence in ROI for Technology Transformation Investments

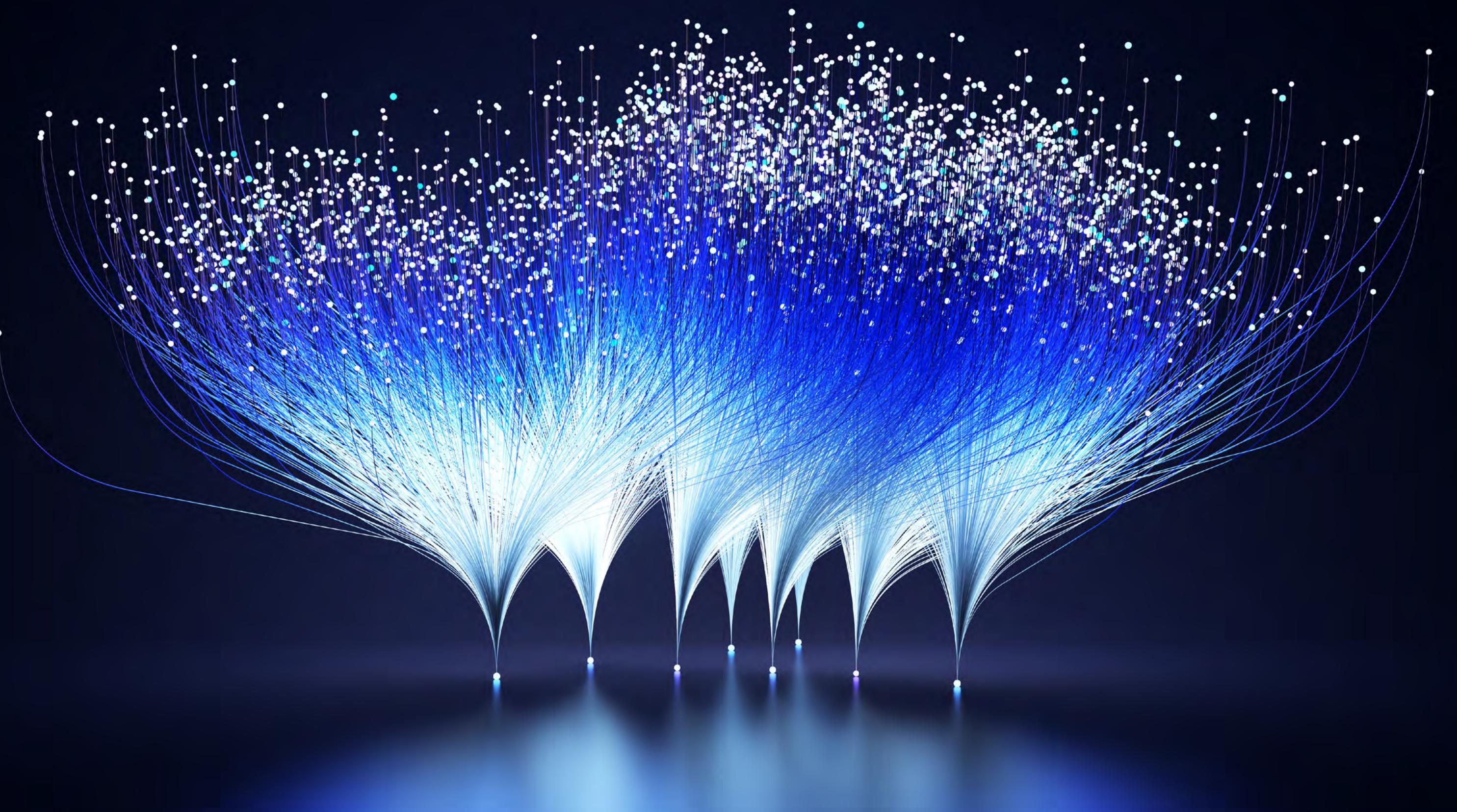
Percent of Respondents



DigReturn. Which of the following technology/digital transformation investments are you most confident in delivering the best possible returns? Global sample, n=3012; U.S. sample, n=600

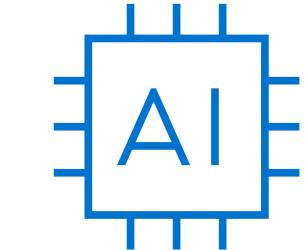
**AI and economic trends top the list of external pressures.** Executives cite AI, inflation, and cost-of-living trends as the forces most likely to shape their businesses over the next year, prompting renewed focus on cost discipline, technology investment, and strategic flexibility.

# AI Is Driving Workforce Change



AI is central to investment, confidence, and growth.

AI is the leading area for increased financial investment and the technology leaders feel most confident managing. U.S. executives reveal strong ROI confidence in AI, cybersecurity, and data connectivity, with AI already reshaping operations and decision-making.



AI is also driving workforce change—and net job creation long term

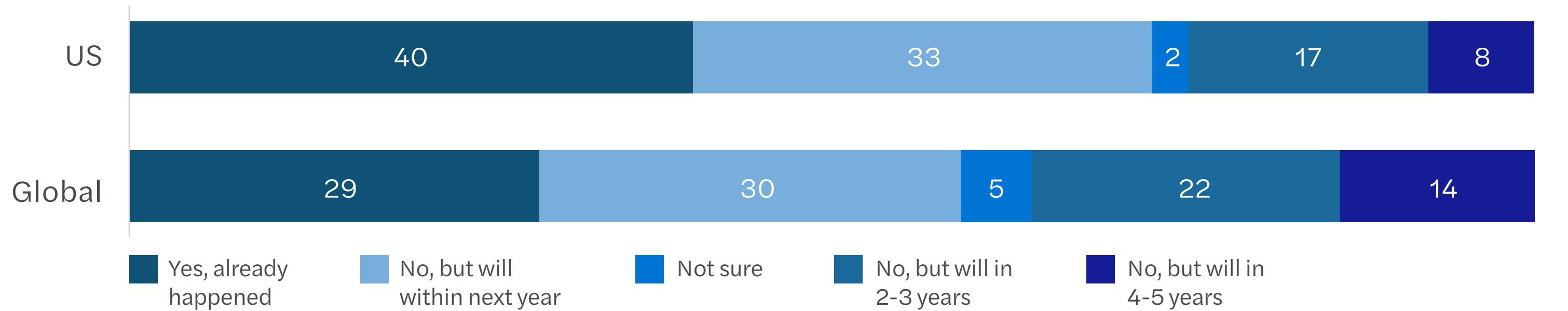
AI adoption is widespread across business functions, with most U.S. companies restructuring teams to integrate the technology. While some roles are being displaced, executives indicate that AI will be creating new jobs, creating potential for net job growth over the long term with reinvestment and reskilling.

# AI Is Driving Workforce Change

U.S. leaders report that AI is already creating new roles in their organizations—even as some tasks and positions are automated. In our survey, three in five respondents say AI has led to new roles in their business. To harness these opportunities, companies can pair productivity gains with reinvestment in their workforce through reskilling—equipping employees with new skills to adapt to evolving job requirements.

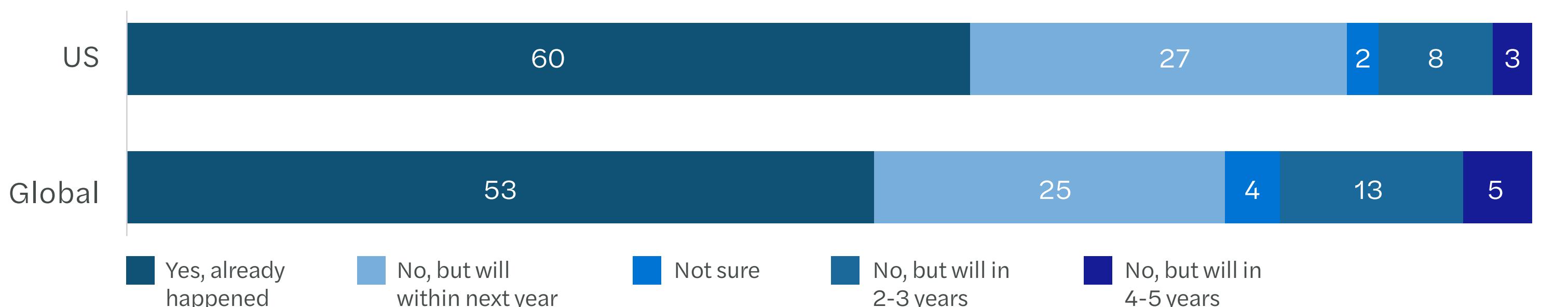
## Has AI Replaced Jobs in Business?

Percent of Respondents Whose Business Uses Some AI



## Has AI Created Jobs in Business?

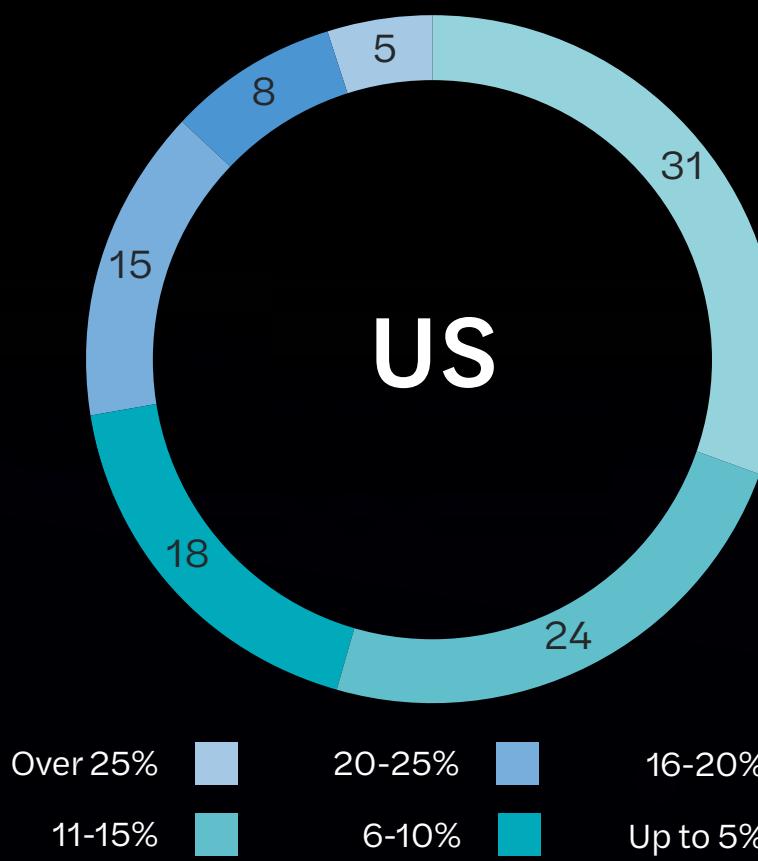
Percent of Respondents Whose Business Uses Some AI



3 in 5 respondents say AI has led to new roles in their business

AI investment is high in the U.S. One in five (20%) of American companies now spends more than 20%, or a fifth, of its budget on AI, which exceeds the global average of 10% of total budget.

**Proportion of Budget Invested in AI**  
Percent Among Businesses Using AI



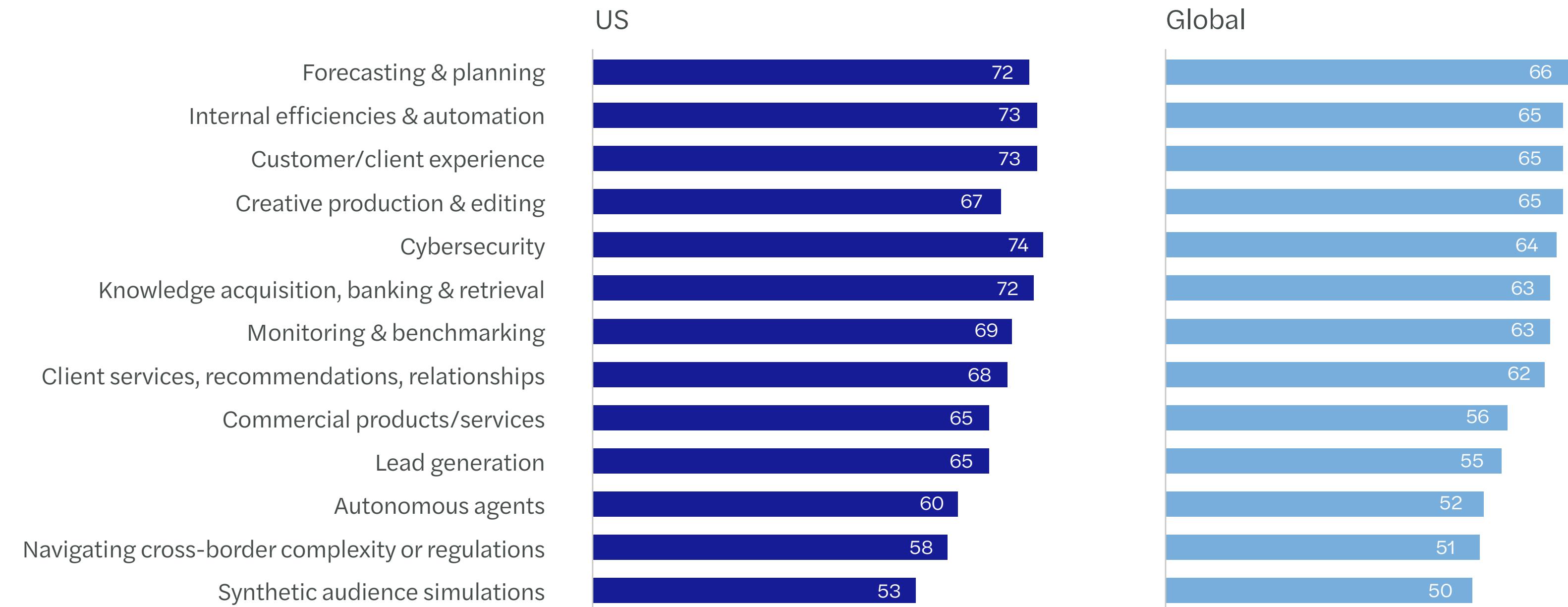
Alinvst. What percentage of your company's budget is invested in AI? | Business uses some AI: Global, n=2960; U.S., n=593

# AI Is Driving Workforce Change

What's motivating C-suite leaders in the U.S. to use AI? The two main reasons cited are better decision-making/insight accuracy and strategic positioning for the future. Nearly 75% of U.S. executives say they use AI for cybersecurity, automation, customer experience, and forecasting, compared to only about 65% of executives globally.

While enthusiasm for AI remains high, seven in 10 U.S. executives express some ethical concerns. Encouragingly, the proportion with "major" concerns has fallen from 50% in 2024 to 36%—suggesting growing maturity in governance and risk management.

**US executives report high uptake of AI across their businesses: Nearly three quarters use it for cybersecurity, automation, customer experience, forecasting, and knowledge banking.**  
Percent of Respondents

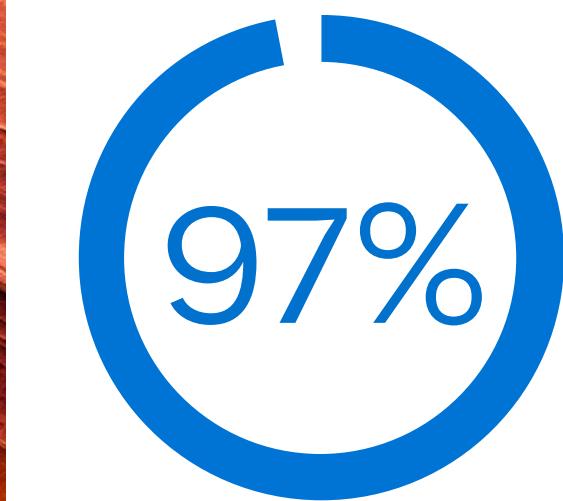


Alapply. Does your organization use AI for... | Global sample, n=3012; U.S. sample, n=600



# An Optimistic Outlook

**Optimism remains high despite uncertainty.**  
Nearly all U.S. executives are optimistic about growth in 2026, even as economic uncertainty and intensifying competition emerge as the top factors holding back performance. Concern over increased competition has risen sharply year on year.



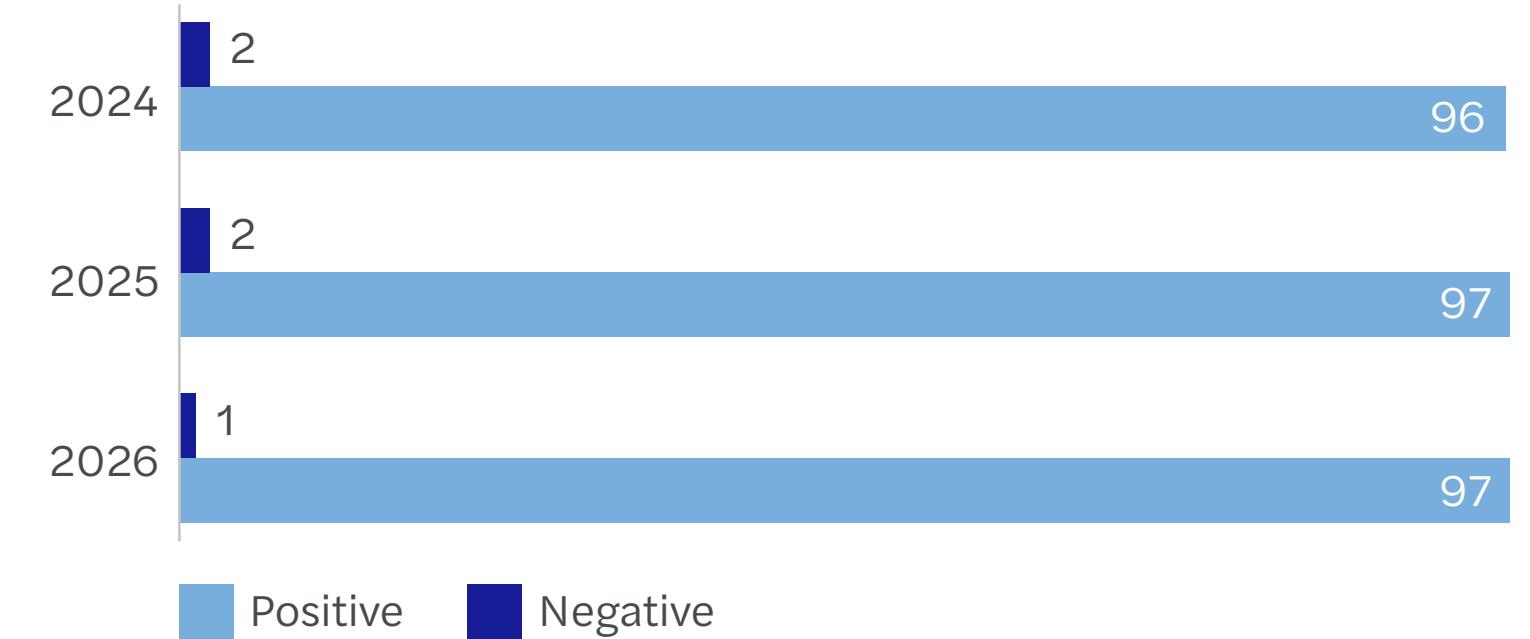
of U.S. executives  
are optimistic about  
growth in 2026

The theme of adaptability stands out against a backdrop of widespread optimism. Of those surveyed, 97% of U.S. executives are optimistic about growth in 2026. Businesses with more than \$1 billion in revenue and those in the Financial Services, Energy/Infrastructure, and Consumer sectors are the most positive about their growth outlook.

# An Optimistic Outlook

## Tracking Next Year's Growth Outlook

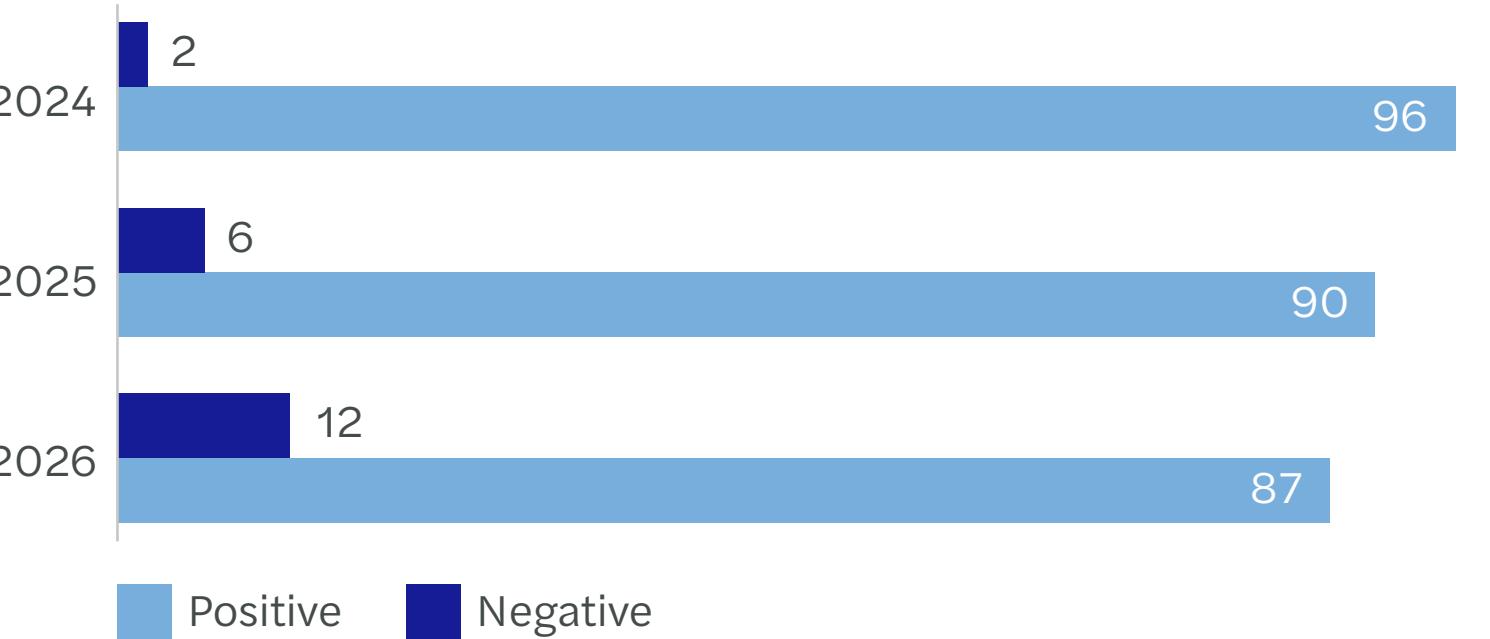
Percent of US Respondents



RevFwd. How do you assess your company's outlook for growth in 2026? | Global sample, n=3012; U.S. sample, n=600

## Tracking Revenue Expectations

Percent of US Respondents

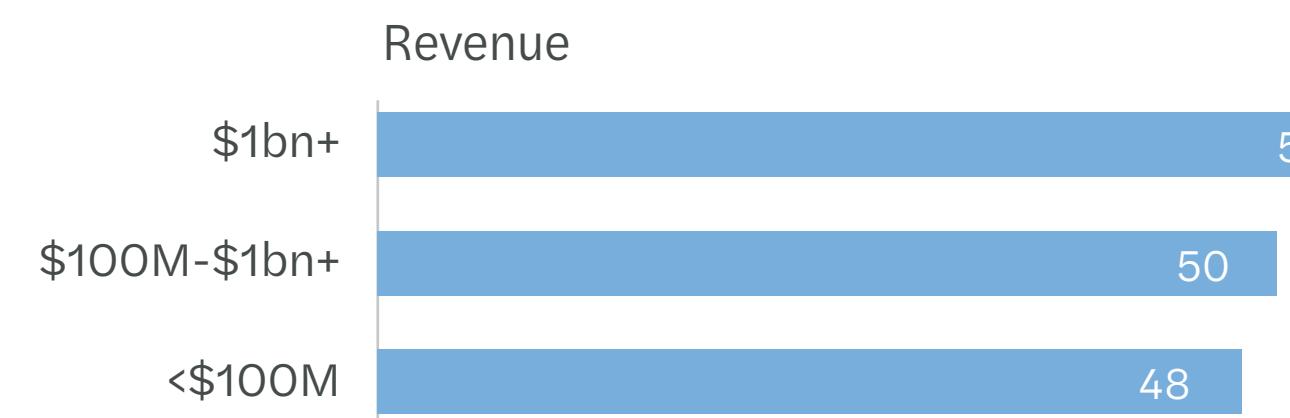


RevChng. Please estimate your organization's expected change in annual revenue for financial year 2025, compared to 2024. [N.B. wording "financial year" added this wave; focus of question shifted from respondent's own division to overall organization.] Global sample, n=3012; U.S. sample, n=600

Perhaps one reason for their optimism is the fact that nearly nine in 10 U.S. leaders indicate that they expect an increase in 2026 revenue. This is only slightly down from their expectations for 2025 and 2024. Medium and large firms and companies in the Technology, Media, and Telecom (TMT) and Energy & Infrastructure sectors report the highest increases in annual revenue.

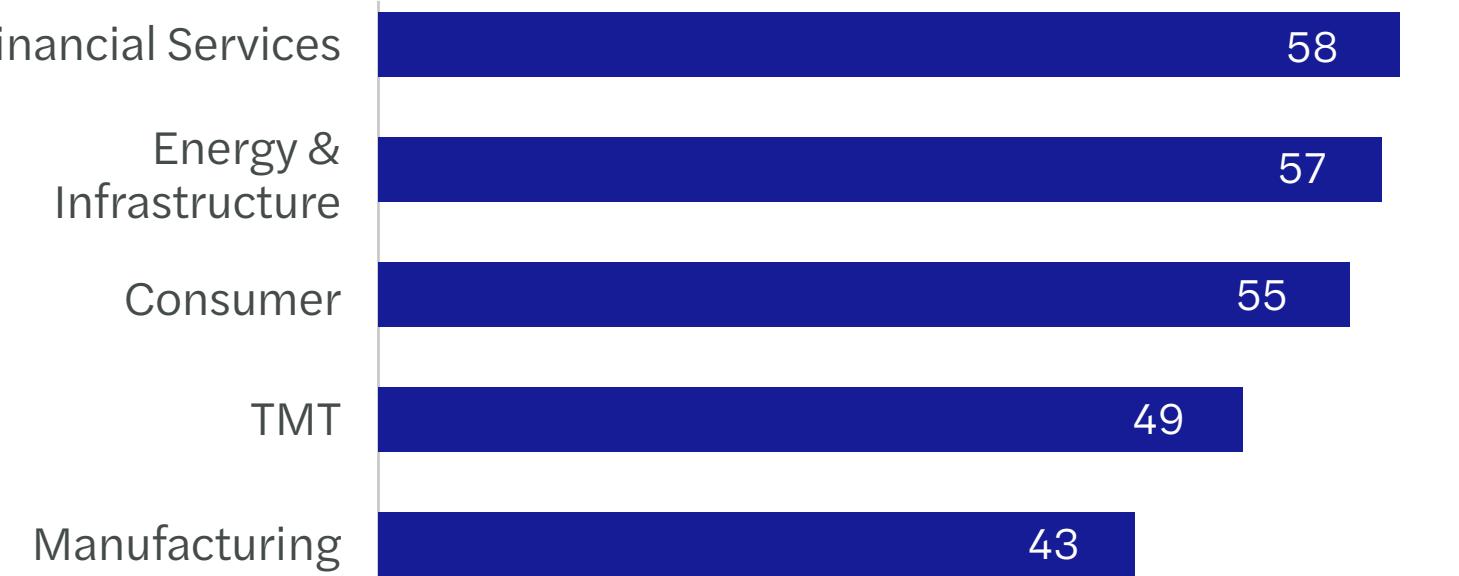
## Next Year's Growth Outlook: Breakdowns

Percent of US Respondents Reporting "Very Positive"



RevFwd. How do you assess your company's outlook for growth in 2026? U.S. sample, n=600; Revenue: <\$99M, n=27; \$100M-\$1bn, n=306; \$1bn+, n=267; Seniority: CEO/Chair/Board, n=395; Other C-suite, n=205; Sector: FS, n=215; TMT, n=150; Energy/Infra, n=47; Manufacturing, n=61; Consumer, n=64

## Industry Sector

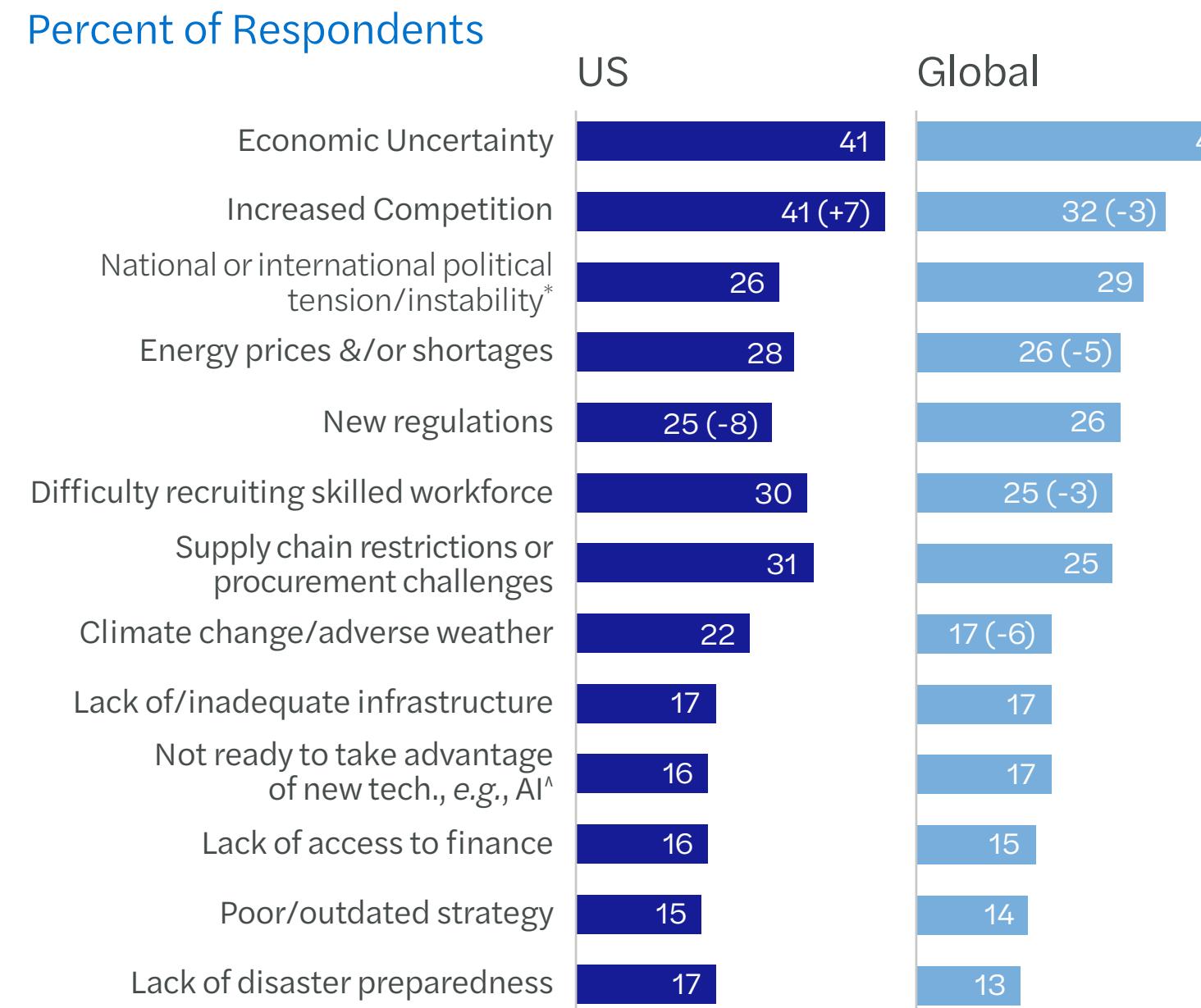


nearly nine in 10 U.S. leaders indicate that they expect an increase in 2026 revenue

# An Optimistic Outlook

However, U.S. executives cite economic uncertainty and intensifying competition as the two factors most likely to hold back growth in 2026. Notably, increased competition has risen seven points in salience year on year, reinforcing the need for adaptable strategies that can respond quickly to market pressure.

**Leaders in the US report economic uncertainty and increased competition as the main factors holding back growth. Increased competition rises seven points in salience this year.**

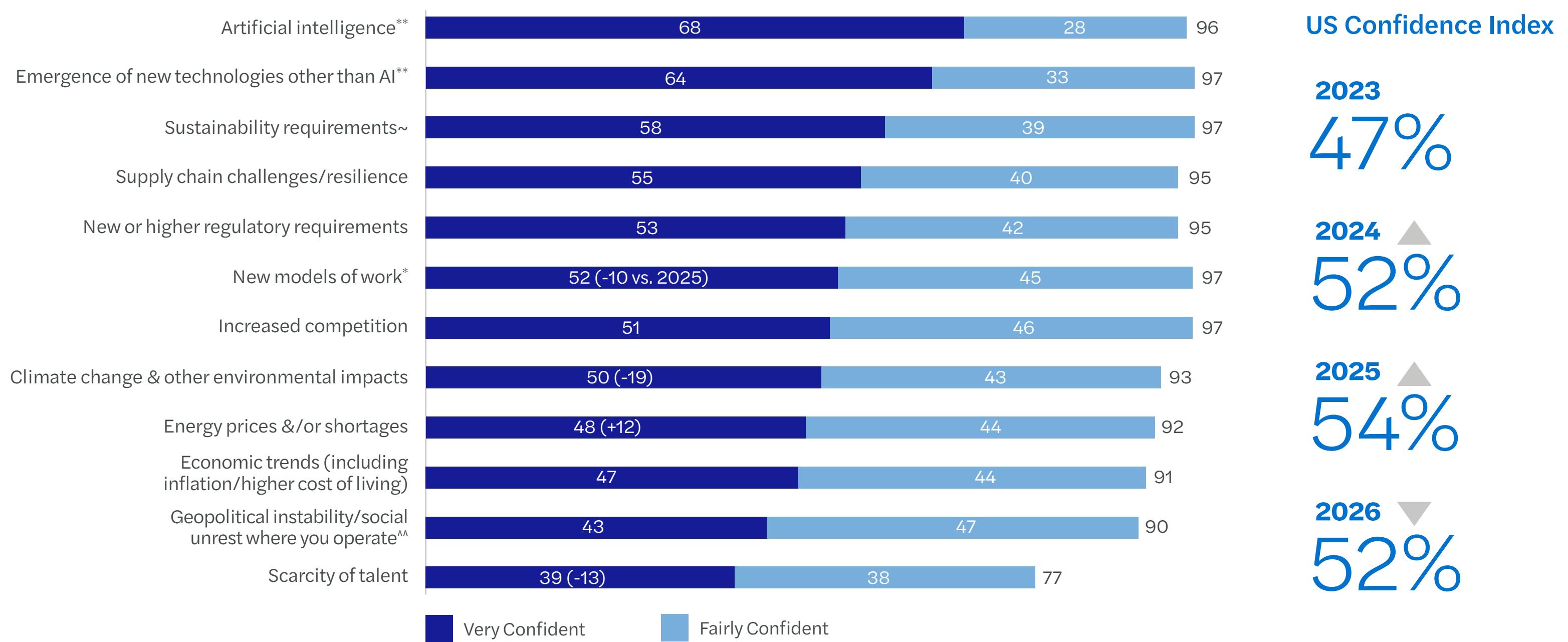


RevFwd. How do you assess your company's outlook for growth in 2026?  
U.S. sample, n=600; Revenue: <\$99M, n=27; \$100M-\$1bn, n=306; \$1bn+, n=267; Seniority: CEO/Chair/Board, n=395; Other C-suite, n=205; Sector: FS, n=215; TMT, n=150; Energy/Infra, n=47; Manufacturing, n=61; Consumer, n=64

Other significant changes since last year's study are C-suite executives' confidence levels in being able to manage through climate change and other environmental impacts (down 19% from last year), scarcity of talent (down 13%), and new models of work (down 10%). Interestingly, their confidence in their company's ability to manage energy prices and/or shortages is up 12% this year.

**The US Confidence Index is in line with 2025. US executives are most confident in their ability to manage AI & emergence of other new technologies.**

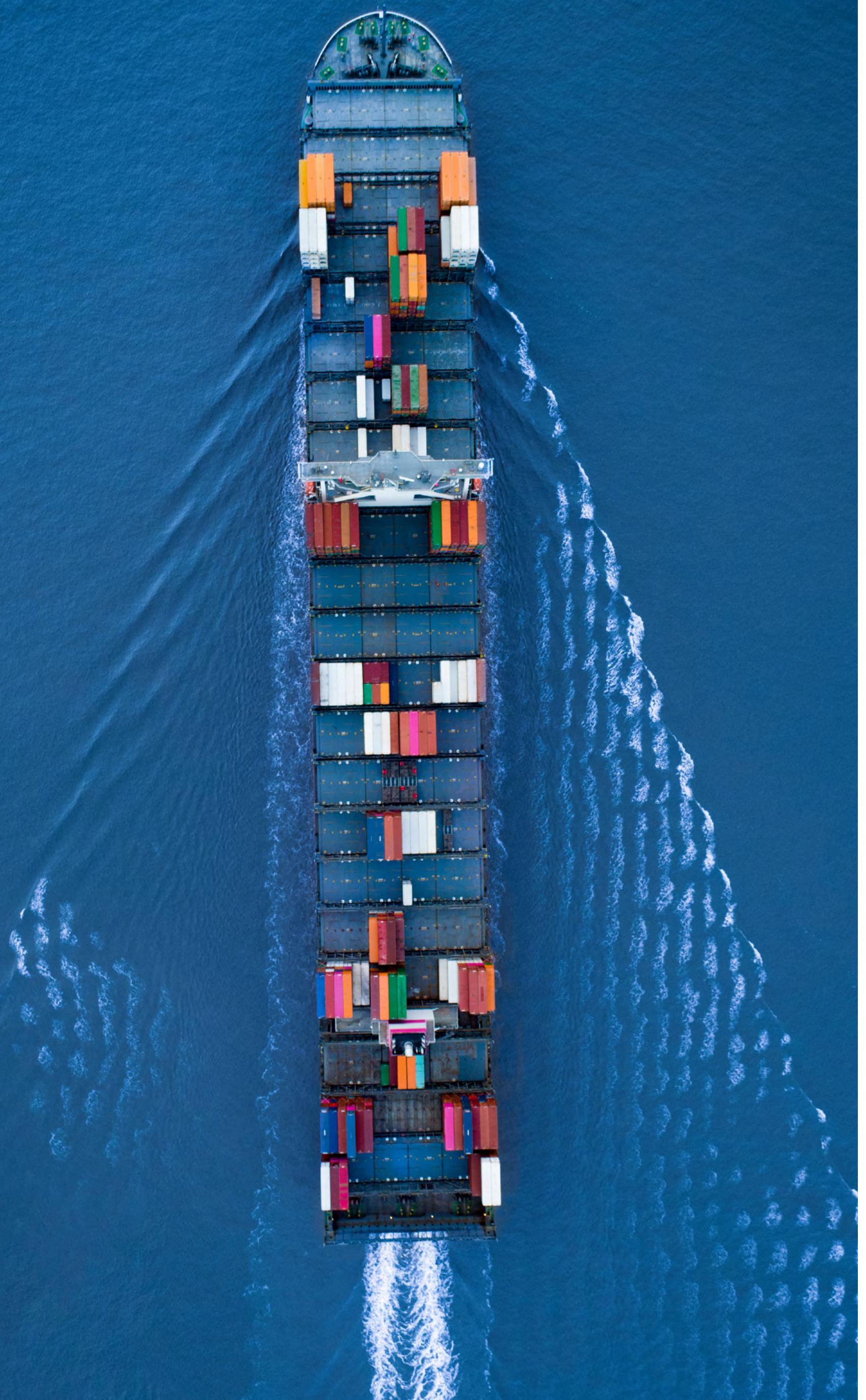
Percent of Respondents Who Selected Each Trend as Impactful



TrndConf. How confident are you that your organization is prepared for each of the following trends?

\* Pre-2025 wording was "New models of work such as flexible and remote working" // ^ Pre-2025 wording was "Increased competition in your industry" // \*\* AI split out from technology this wave // ^ Geopolitical instability and Social unrest combined this wave // ~ Pre-2026 wording was "ESG expectations from regulators and society"  
Business sample selecting each trend as impactful, n>120 for every trend in U.S.

# Fear Not the Tariffs



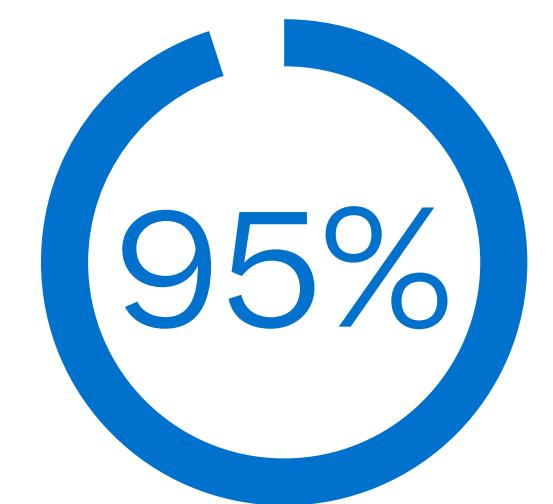
## Tariffs remain manageable.

In the U.S., C-suite confidence is generally very high regarding their ability to absorb tariff-driven costs. Rather than constraining growth, tariffs are prompting:

Efficiency gains

New offerings

Technology-enabled supply chain investments



of U.S. executives are confident in their ability to manage any tariff-driven costs

Optimism in the C-suite of U.S. companies is evident, even in the face of sweeping changes to trade policies. Despite broad tariff increases affecting their supply chains and operating costs, U.S. business leaders aren't rattled. In fact, according to the study, 95% of U.S. executives are confident in their ability to manage any tariff-driven costs. Those most confident in their ability to manage tariff-driven costs are the largest U.S. businesses, the most senior executives, and leaders within the Financial Services sector.

# Fear Not the Tariffs

## Confidence in Managing Tariff-Driven Costs

Percent of Respondents



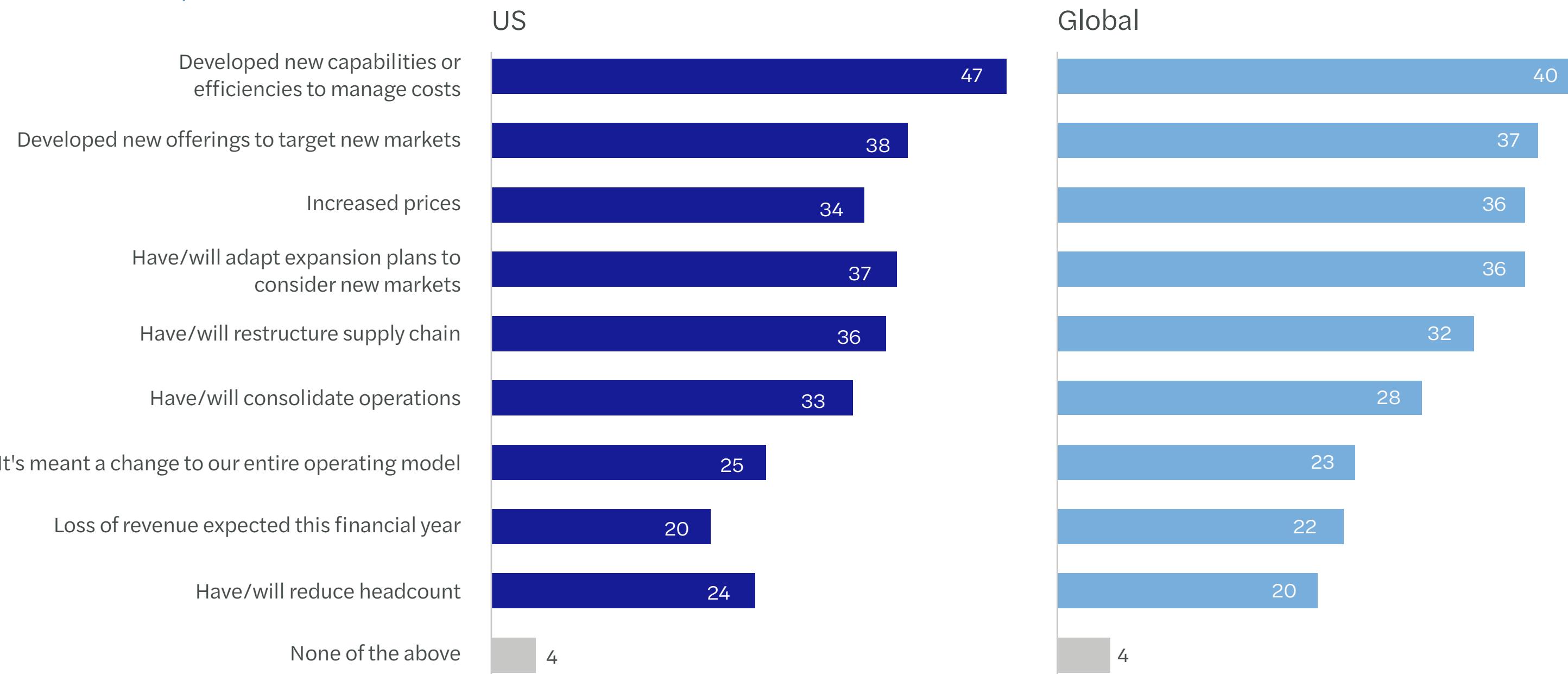
█ Very confident    █ Somewhat confident    █ Don't know  
█ A little confident    █ Not at all confident

TariffConf. How confident are you in your organization's approach to manage and minimise tariff-driven costs?  
 Global sample, n=3012; U.S. sample, n=600

Rather than having a stifling effect on Corporate America, tariffs seem to be fueling innovation. As the findings show, executives in the U.S. are most likely to have developed new efficiencies or new offerings to mitigate changes to international trade tariffs in 2025. More than half of U.S. leaders say they have diversified resources to deal with global trade disruption. They're also consolidating the services they offer in specific countries.

## How Tariff Changes Have Affected Businesses

Percent of Respondents



In response, U.S. leaders are prioritizing supply-chain investments focused on sustainable growth and financial reporting, integrating new technologies, and expanding operations in existing markets—further reinforcing the role of technology in managing trade complexity.

# International Expansion Priorities Have Shifted



**International expansion plans are evolving.**  
Most U.S. businesses plan to expand internationally, with Canada and the U.K. now the top destinations. Geopolitical instability and talent availability are driving firms to broaden and diversify their expansion targets.

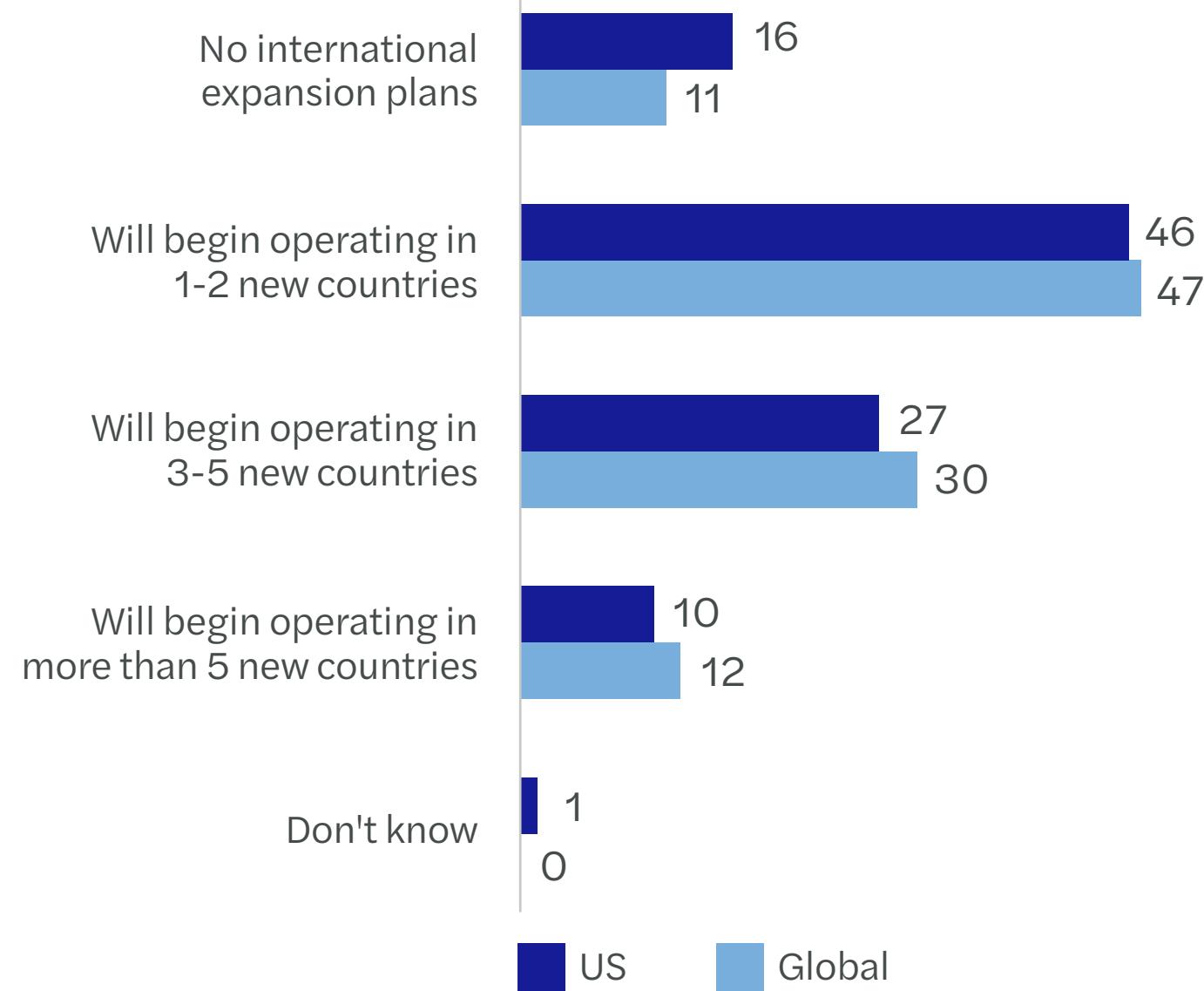
These shifts in trade dynamics are influencing where U.S. companies target their growth. The tariffs and trade tensions between the U.S. and China seem to have shifted American companies' expansion plans away from China toward Canada and the U.K. The findings reveal that these two nations are now the top expansion destinations for U.S. firms, and China trails behind several Western markets. Geopolitical instability and talent availability are key factors driving this trend.

# International Expansion Priorities Have Shifted

Nearly nine in 10 U.S. businesses surveyed have plans to expand internationally, with more than half adding additional target countries this year alone. This increased optionality reflects heightened geopolitical uncertainty and a more competitive global talent market—prompting leaders to spread risk rather than concentrate it.

## International Expansion Plans

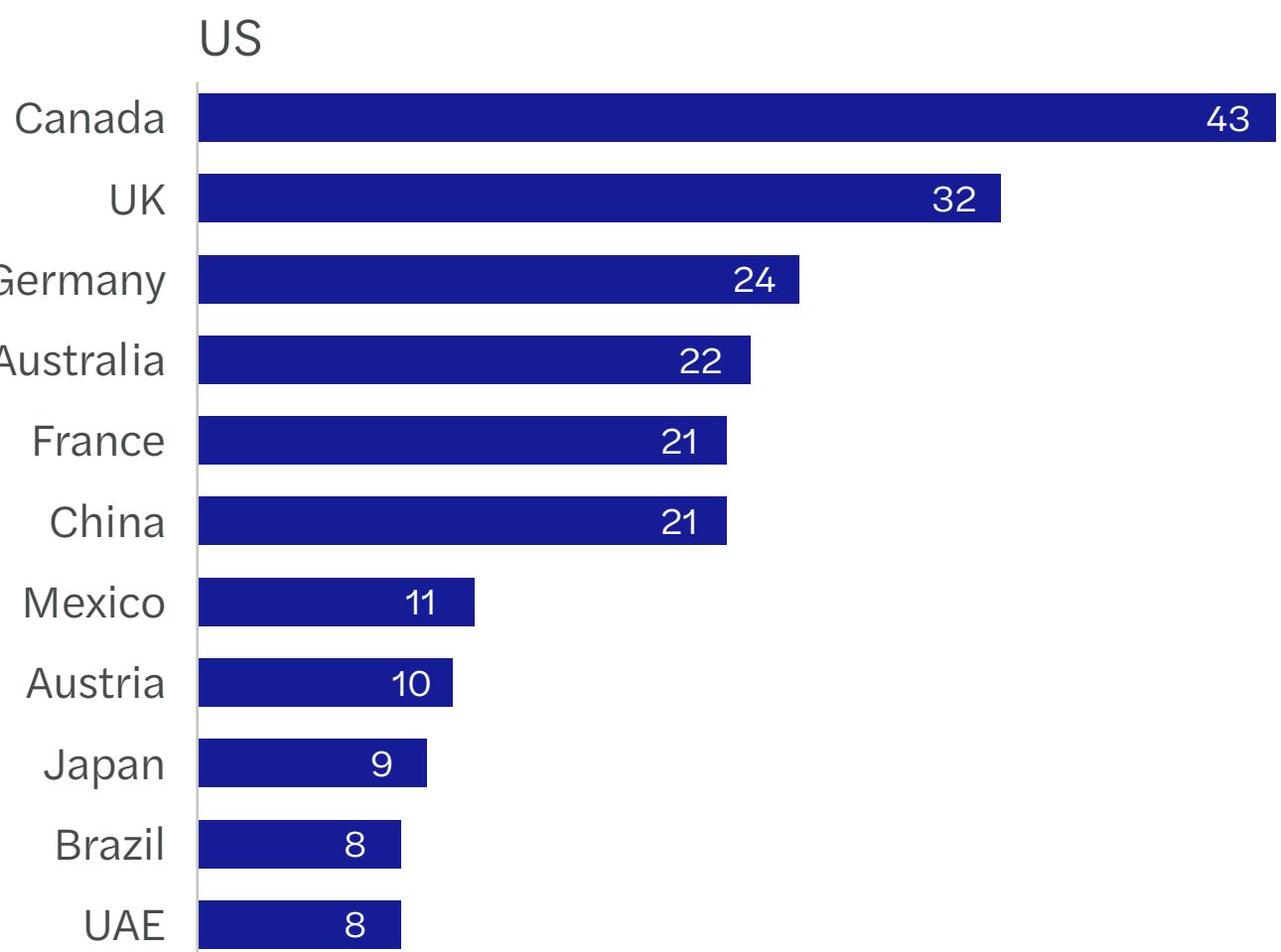
Percent of Respondents



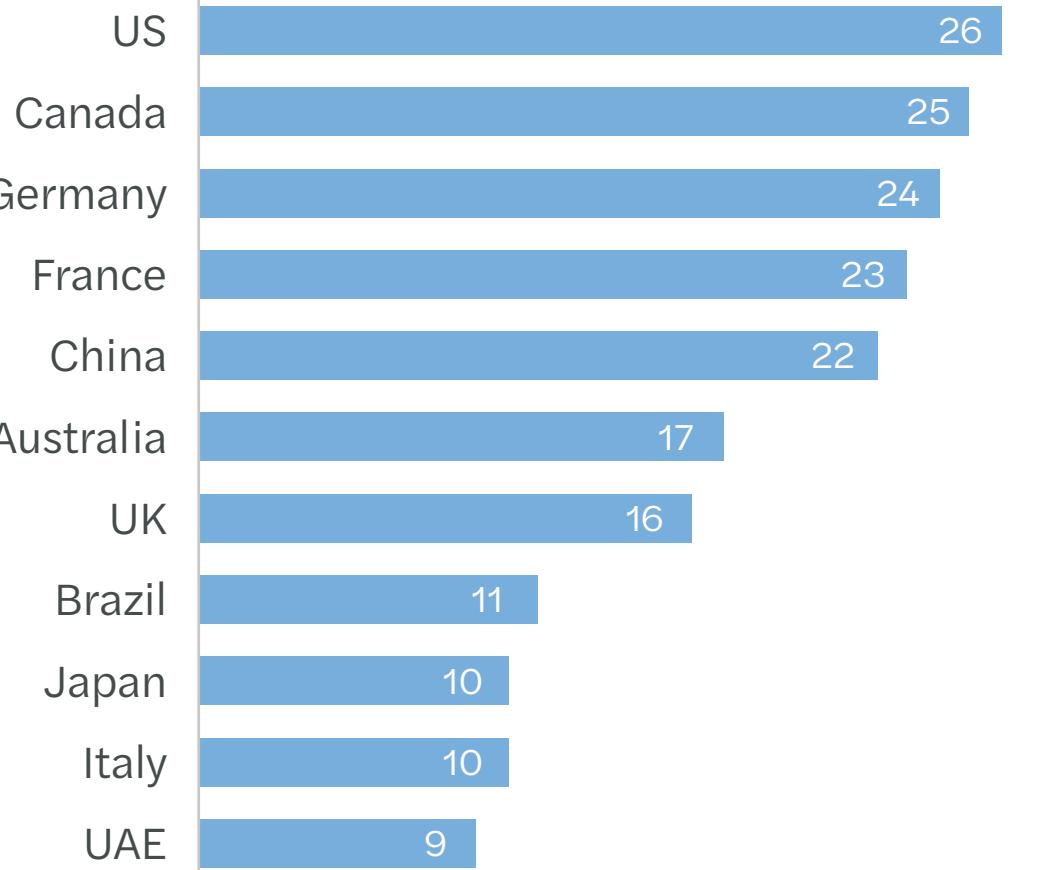
NewCntry. What plans does your business have to expand internationally in the next 5 years?  
Global sample, n=3012; U.S. sample, n=600

## Top Countries Targeted for Expansion

Percent of Respondents Whose Business Is Planning Expansion



## Global



IntlExp. Please select the three most important countries [2025: most important country] in your plans for international expansion.  
Planning int'l expansion: Global, n=2533; U.S., n=536

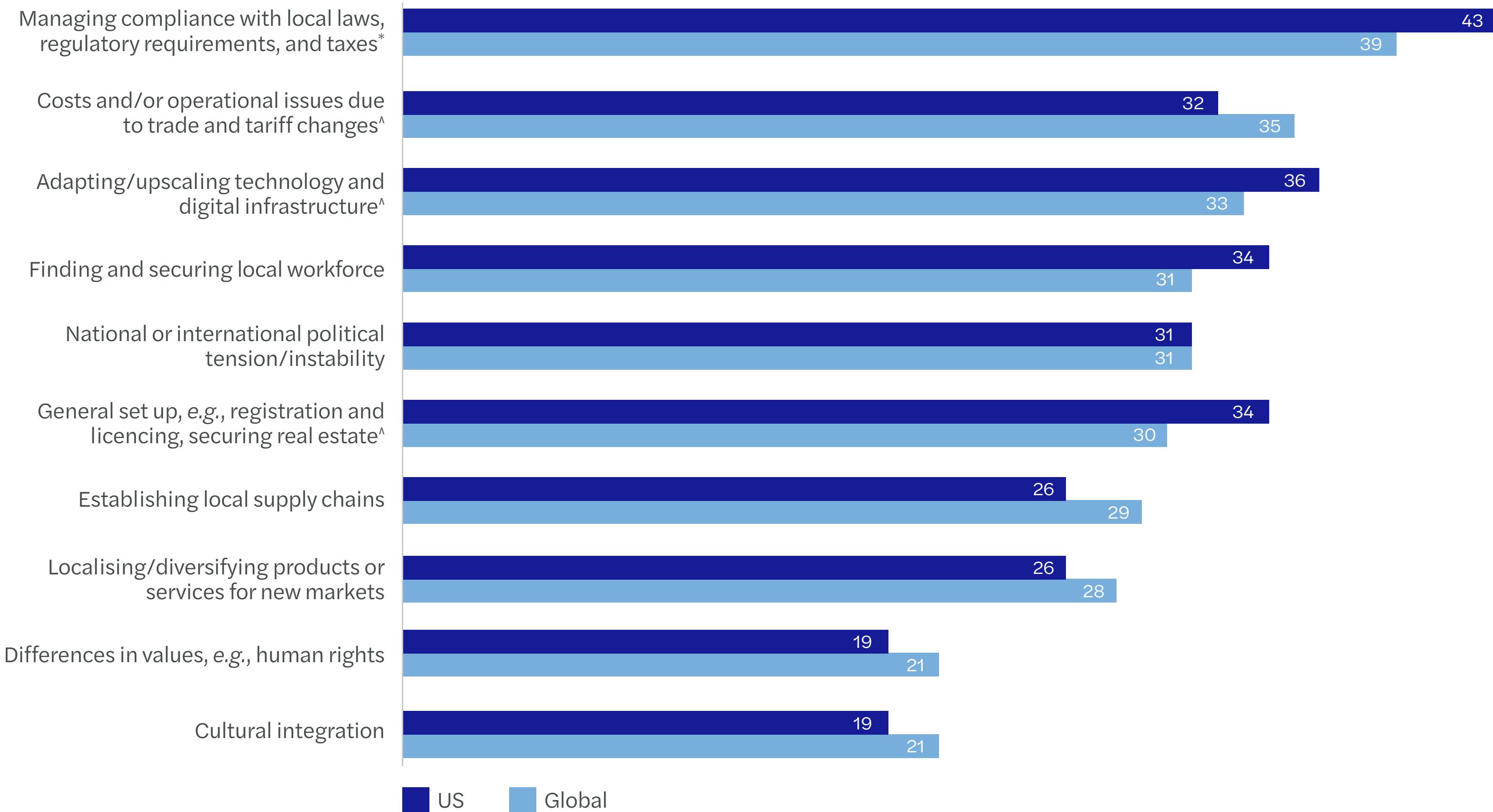


Nearly nine in 10 U.S. businesses surveyed have plans to expand internationally

# International Expansion Priorities Have Shifted

Compliance with local laws, regulations, and taxes is the main international expansion challenge for U.S. leaders, followed by adapting/upscaling digital infrastructure.

Percent of Respondents



ExpChall. What are the biggest challenges you face in setting up operations in new countries? | \* 2025 wording was "Understanding local regulations and requirements" // ^ New option for 2026 | Planning int'l expansion: Global, n=2533; U.S., n=536



# Conclusion

## Adaptability Is the New Competitive Advantage

### **Confidence is strongest in technology—and weakest in talent scarcity.**

U.S. executives are most confident in their ability to manage AI and other technologies, while skilled labor shortages, economic trends, and competitive pressures remain the areas of least confidence, reinforcing the importance of strategic flexibility.

The defining feature of successful U.S. organizations heading into 2026 is the ability to continuously adapt. Technology is at the heart of that adaptability. No longer waiting for economic clarity, leaders of U.S. companies are focusing on self-directed growth. Driven by internal transformation rather than macro recovery, they've adjusted quickly to the sweeping tariff hikes across several industries, and they've recalibrated and maintained stability in a shifting global landscape.

Technology transformation remains the ultimate priority for C-suite executives. As their businesses pursue growth, they must pair innovation with adjustable plans to pursue international expansion to keep up with intensifying competition and the ongoing tariff pressures.

As the data show, U.S. leaders have entered the new year with renewed confidence in their ability to continue adapting and adjusting to ever-changing circumstances. And they'll do so with the help of technology, especially AI, where they're investing heavily, creating jobs, and making richly informed strategic decisions. For 2026, that's where the advantage lies.

Forvis Mazars helps organizations of all sizes build this adaptability—whether by strengthening technology and AI strategies, navigating regulatory complexity, optimizing global operations, or designing resilient operating models. Our teams work alongside business leaders to turn transformation into sustained capability, ensuring they can respond confidently to whatever comes next.

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