# Canada CEO Outlook survey

Spring 2026

The better the question. The better the answer.
The better the world works.

EY Parthenon
Shape the future with confidence

# “Uncertainty is high for CEOs. But in Canada, leaders have adapted to instability. That sets us apart.

Like businesses everywhere, local leaders are wrestling with geopolitical conflict, macroeconomic volatility, rapid technology changes and workforce capability gaps. Canadian organizations are racing to keep pace with AI and other emerging technologies, even as megatrends shake up the operating environment from one week to the next.

But something interesting is happening in Canada: CEOs are not freezing because of this uncertainty. Instead, they're using it to carve out a competitive edge. What does that look like?

Canadian CEOs are focused on achieving greater operational efficiency but are expecting to use that gained efficiency for investment.

This quarter's EY-Parthenon CEO Outlook Survey shows a meaningful increase in a desire to transact compared to our January survey. The survey revealed a 16-point increase in CEO intentions to pursue M&A, with 38% expecting a divestment.

Leaders here are looking less for opportunistic gains and more for transactions that help drive long-term, disciplined growth through either acquisitions or portfolio reshaping. 80% of CEOs are planning to increase investment in AI and are spreading that investment evenly over multiple value creation levers.

This tells me Canada's CEOs have a new mindset about the ups and downs we're facing. The survey findings also offer a great reminder to focus on what the business can control: operational efficiency, resilience to geopolitical shocks and the right transactions. Then, execute against those with rigour.

**Shane Dunn**
EY-Parthenon Canada Managing Partner

# About the Study

Our CEO Outlook Survey is designed to offer critical insights into the main trends and developments that are influencing the world's leading companies, as well as business leaders' expectations for future growth and long-term value creation.

In times of uncertainty and disruption, CEOs must build confidence in their ability to navigate risks and accelerate transformative strategies. Advancements in technology, an increased focus on geopolitical issues, an evolving regulatory landscape, and ESG-related challenges all require the integration of strategy, transactions and transformation capabilities to create an ecosystem that is prepared for now and beyond.

## Participant profile

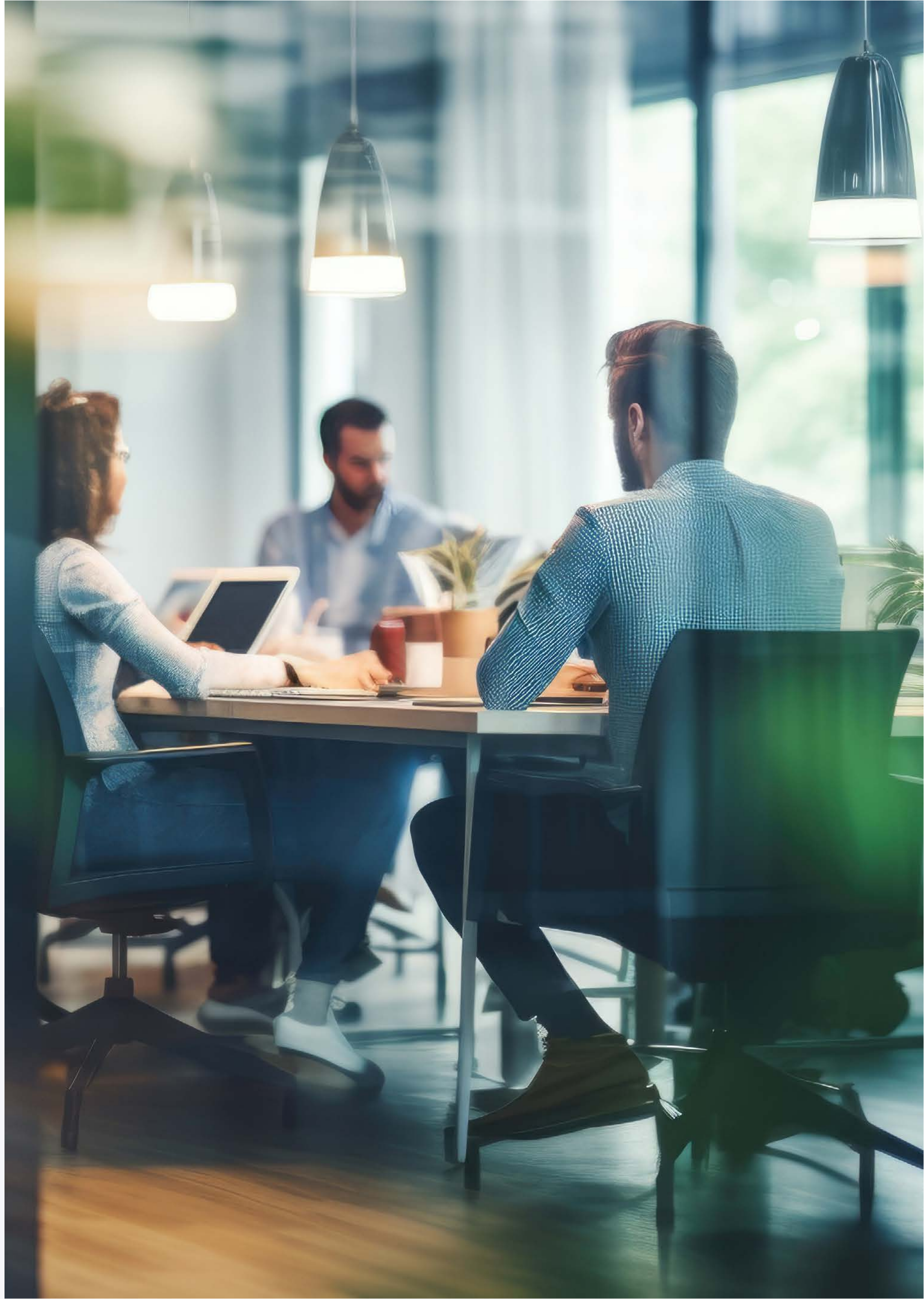
**Industries**

- Consumer and health
- Financial services
- Industrials and energy
- Infrastructure
- Technology, media and telecoms

**50**

CEOs surveyed March and April 2026

Produced in association with FT Longitude, the specialist research and content marketing division of the Financial Times Group.



# Key Insights

Top risks that will shape decisions over the next 12 months:

1. Geopolitical tensions, instability and conflicts
2. Macroeconomic volatility
3. Talent shortages and workforce capability gaps

## Strategic responses to risk are focused on resilience and productivity

**34%** of leaders cite strengthening financial resilience as their primary response to current uncertainty

**80%** of leaders report increased AI investment in 2026 vs 2025, signalling continued adoption

Leaders' focus on transaction initiatives has seen a marked increase since January 2026, with a focus on disciplined capital deployment.

**62%** intend to pursue M&A activities

**38%** intend to pursue divestments, spinoffs or initial public offerings (IPOs)

**76%** Prioritize disciplined growth over rapid market expansion

Chapter 01

# CEO Confidence Index

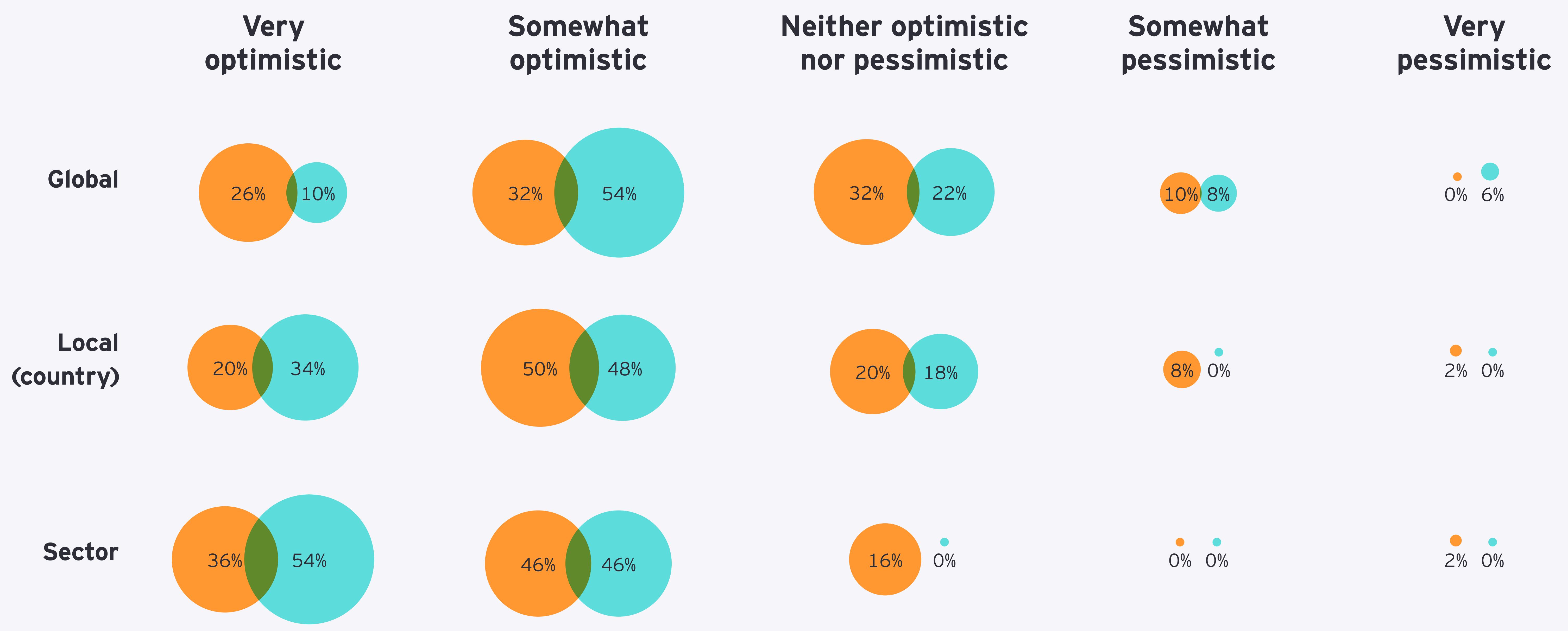
# Confidence has shifted toward more moderate expectations

LEGENDS
May 2026
January 2026

Q

**CEO Confidence Index:** How confident do you feel about the outlook for the following areas over the next 12 months?

[The respondents were instructed to choose one option per statement.]



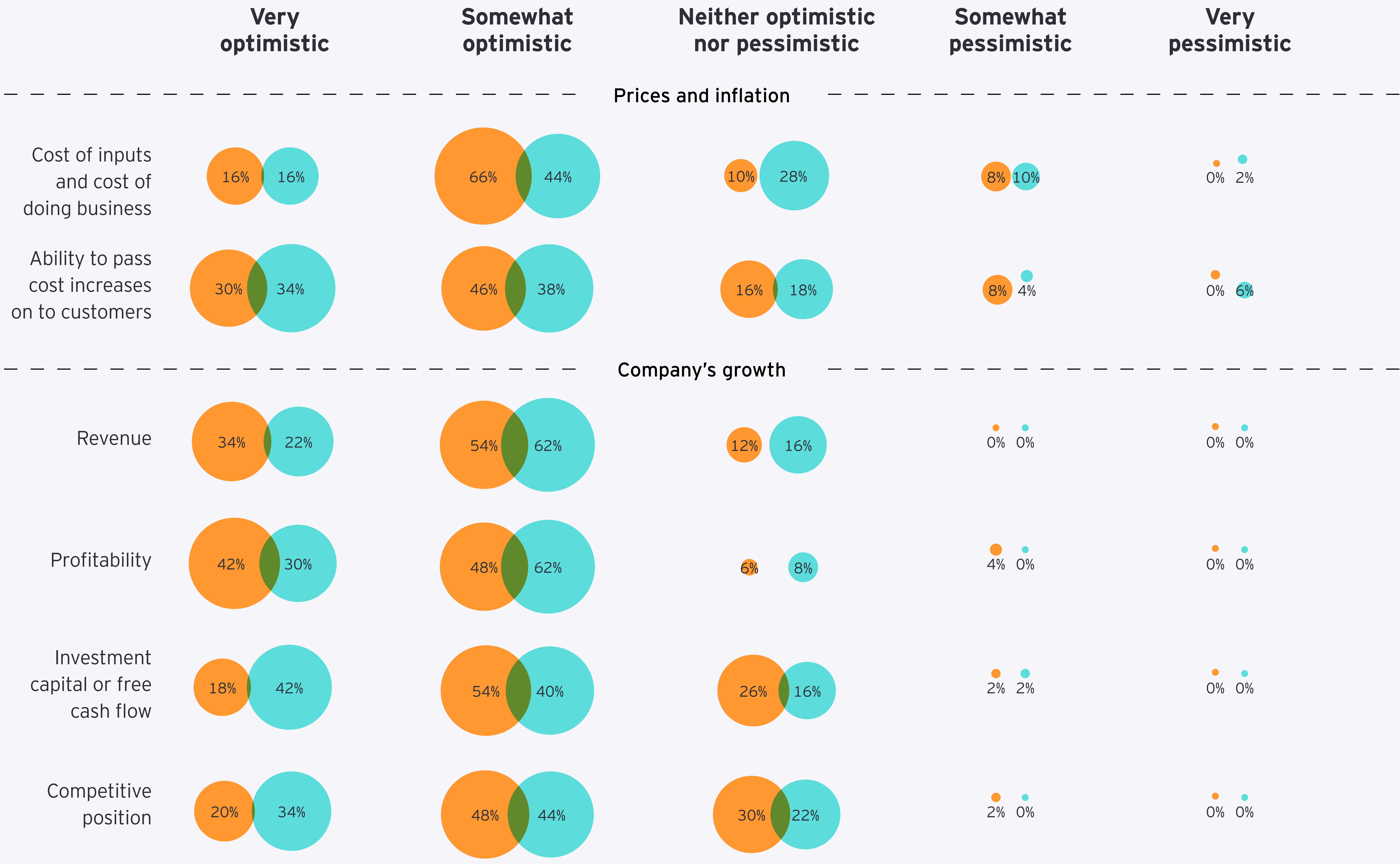
# CEO confidence in company performance is holding strong, despite pressure on pricing and inputs

**LEGENDS** May 2026 January 2026

Q

**CEO Confidence Index:** How confident do you feel about your own company's outlook for the following areas over the next 12 months?

[The respondents were instructed to choose one option per statement.]



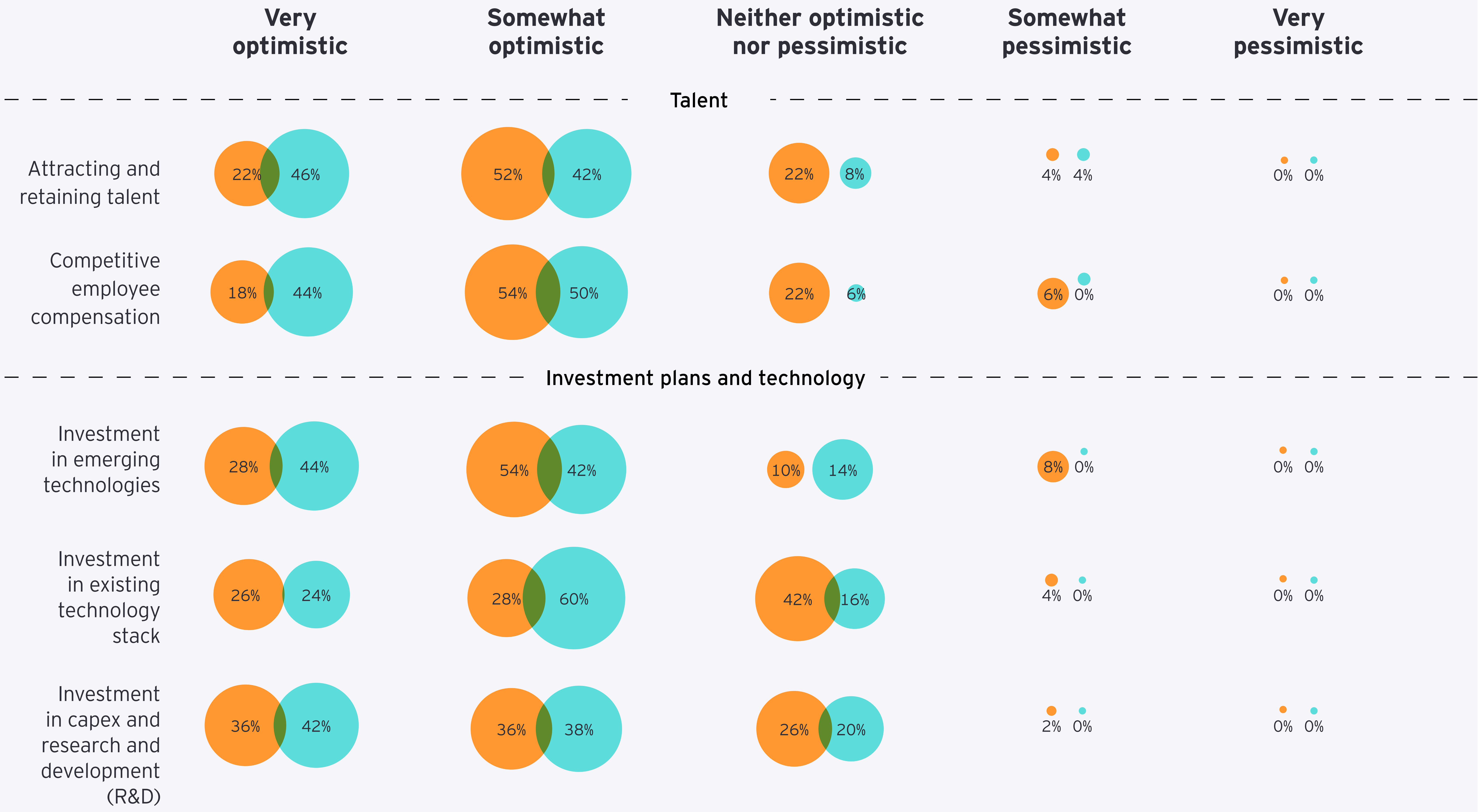
# Talent and investment outlooks are recalibrating toward more measured expectations

**LEGENDS** May 2026 January 2026

Q

**CEO Confidence Index:** How confident do you feel about your own company's outlook for the following areas over the next 12 months?

[The respondents were instructed to choose one option per statement.]



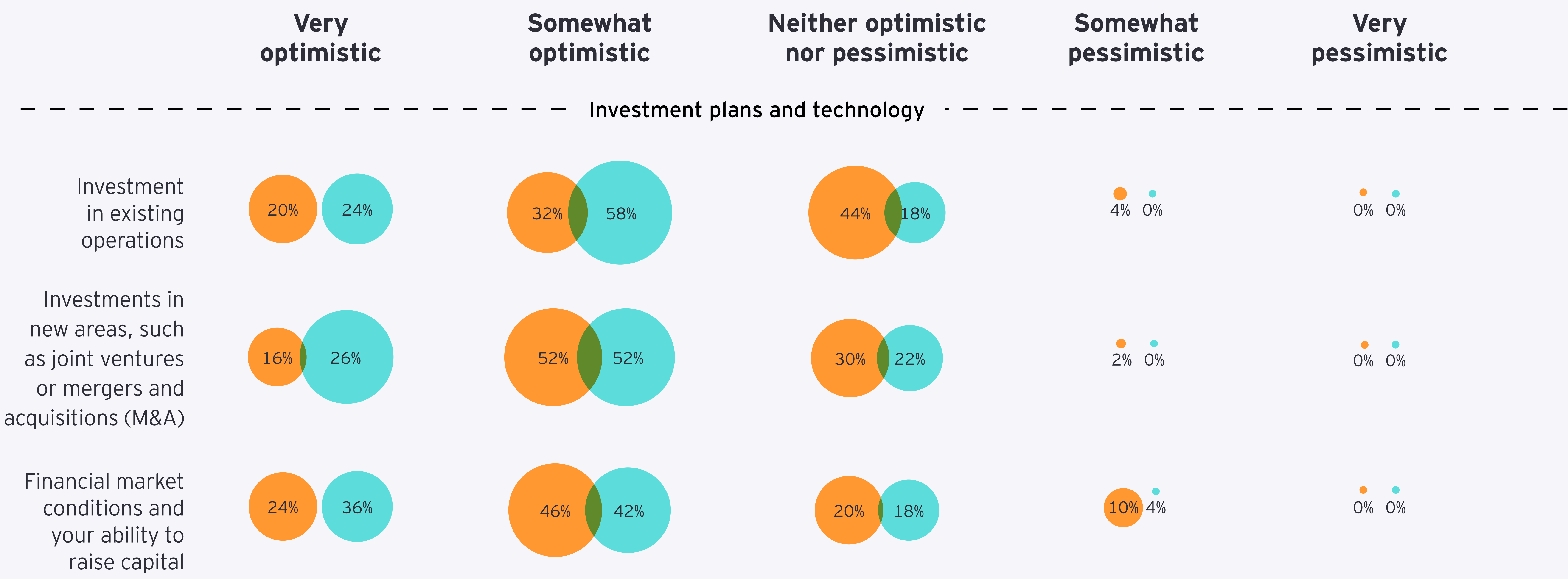
# Talent and investment outlooks are recalibrating toward more measured expectations (cont.)

LEGENDS  May 2026  January 2026

Q

**CEO Confidence Index:** How confident do you feel about your own company's outlook for the following areas over the next 12 months?

[The respondents were instructed to choose one option per statement.]



## Chapter 02

# Macroeconomics, geopolitics and business environment

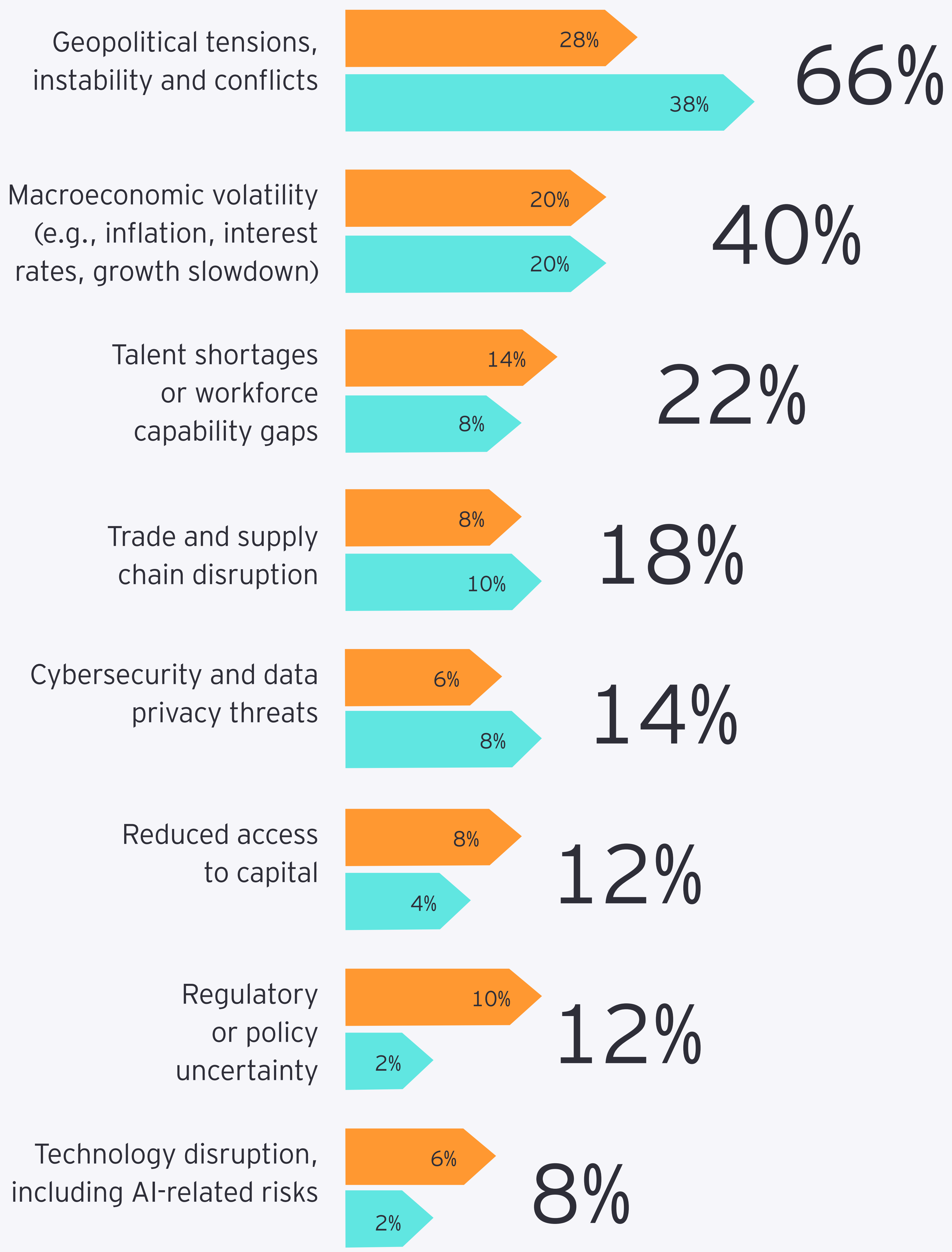
# Geopolitical and macroeconomic risks dominate the Canadian CEO agenda

**LEGENDS** First Priority Second Priorty

Q

**CEO Confidence Index:** What do you consider the most significant risks to your business over the next 12 months?

[The respondents were allowed to select up to two responses.]

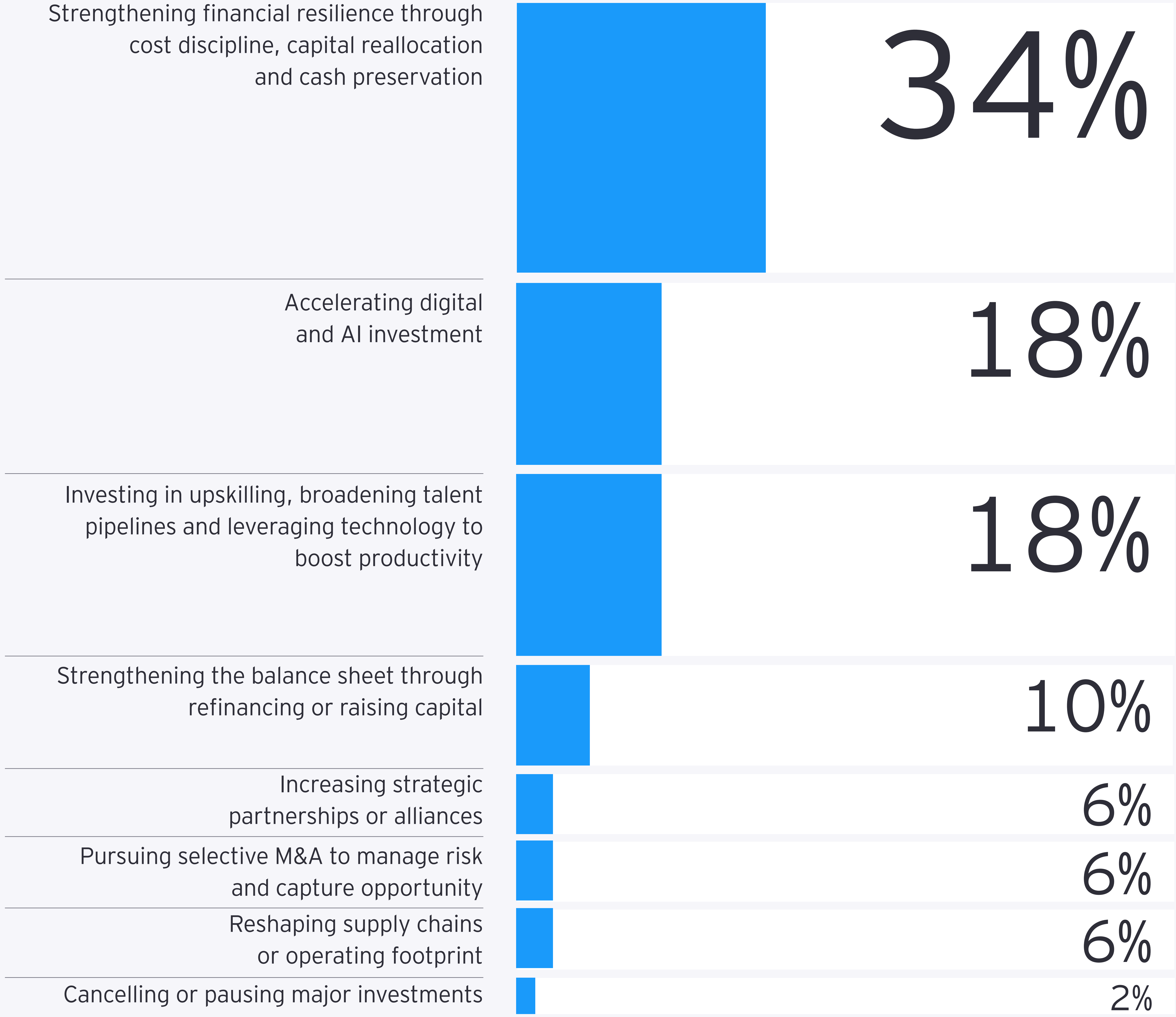


# CEOs are responding to uncertainty with cost discipline and targeted investment

Q

How is your organization adapting its strategy in response to current risks and uncertainties?

[The respondents were asked to select one option only.]



Chapter 03

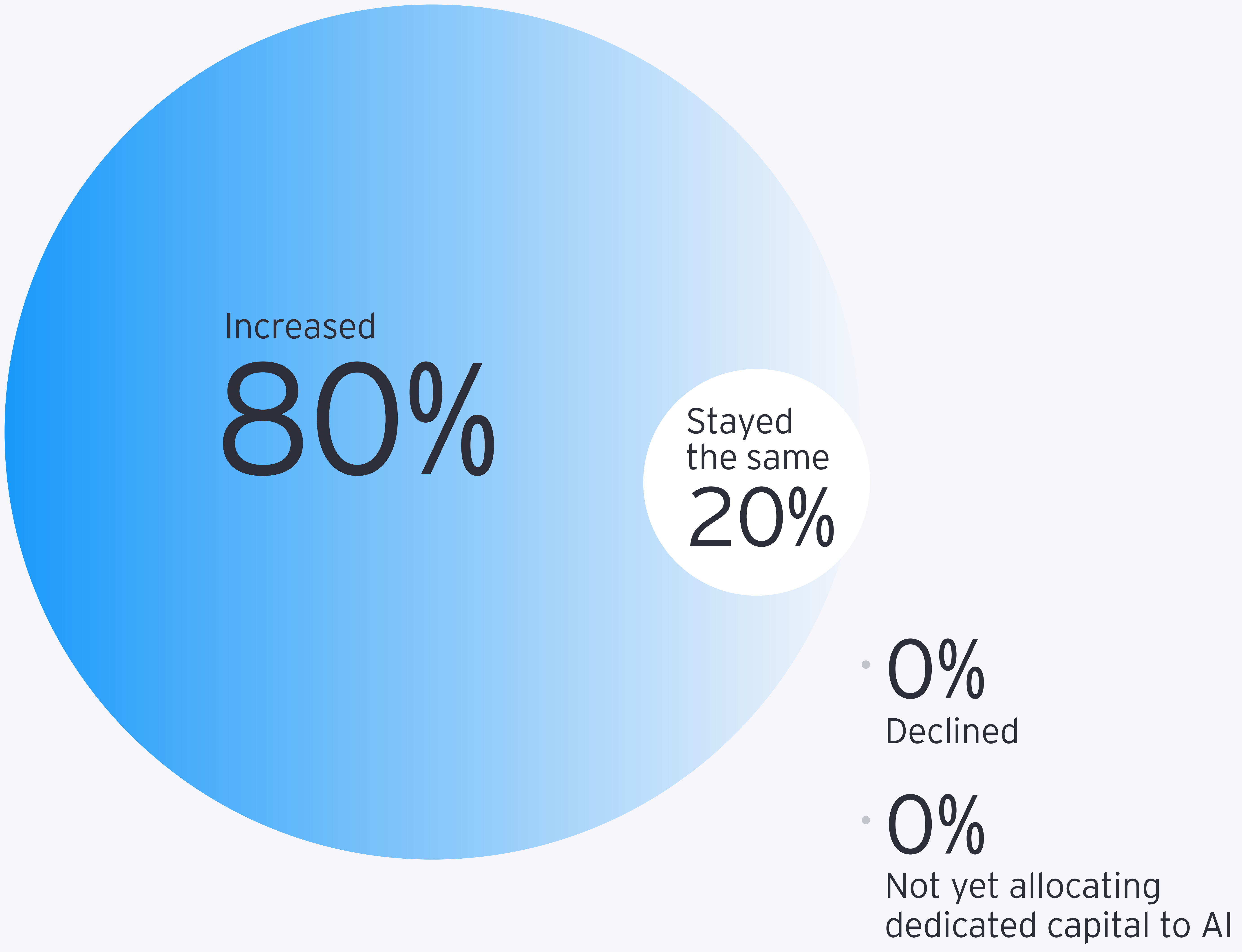
# AI investment, application and performance

# Canadian CEOs are doubling down on AI investment in 2026

Q

How does your company's planned AI investment for 2026 compare with 2025 investment levels?

[The respondents were asked to select one option only.]



# AI investment is spread across efficiency, cost transformation and business-model change

**Q** Of your AI capital expenditure, what percentage are you allocating to each of the following objectives?

[The respondents were asked to distribute their total AI capital (100%) across the four objectives shown below.]

**25%**
**AI for incremental cost-out:** automating simple tasks to increase efficiency or add scale

**23%**
**AI as a commercial engine to redefine the business model**

**27%**
**AI for quality uplift:** automating or augmenting tasks to improve quality at same (or potentially higher) cost

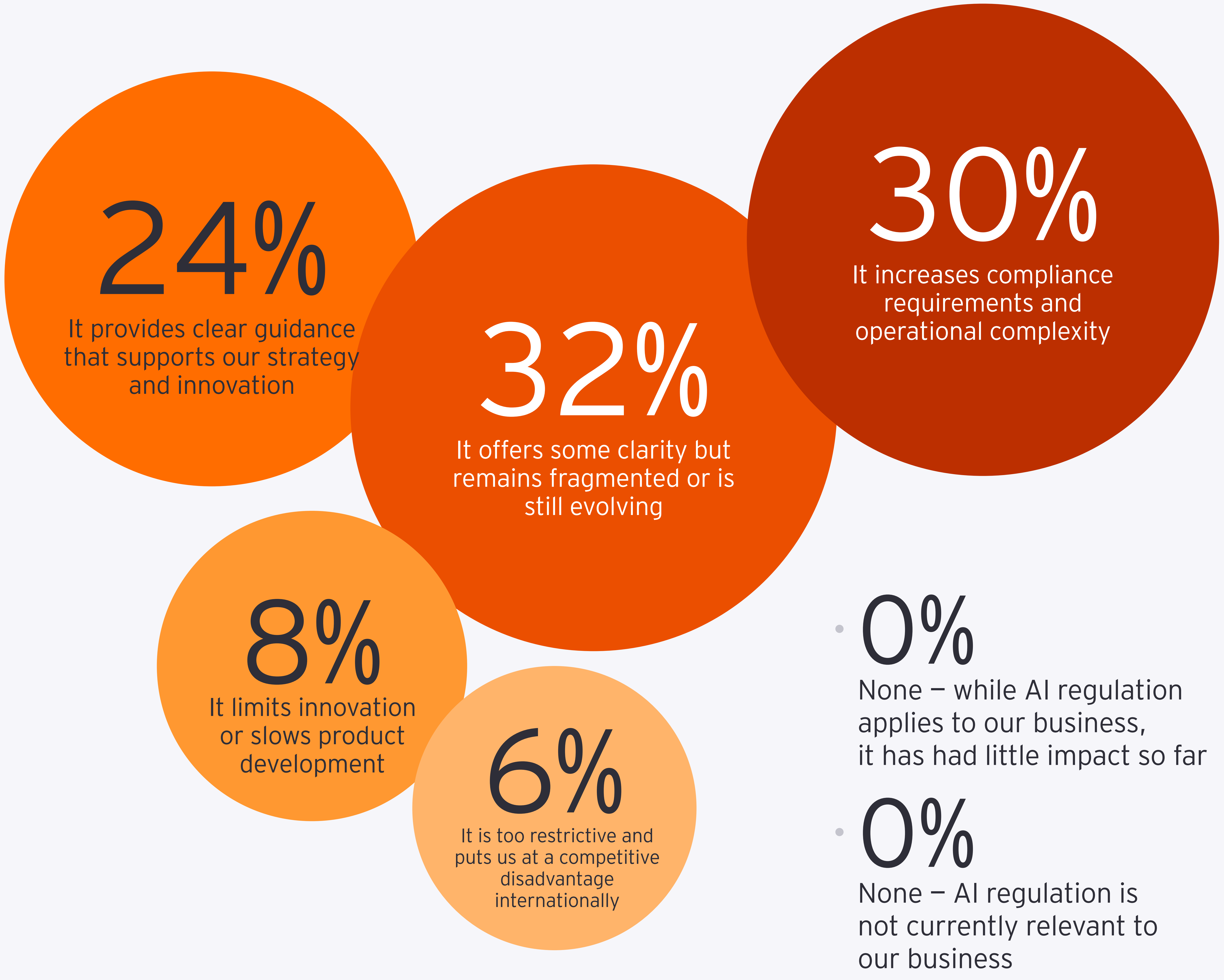
**25%**
**AI to reshape cost base:** automating or augmenting complex tasks to enable step change in cost structure

# CEOs report that AI regulation is adding complexity as it continues to evolve

Q

What is the impact of current AI regulatory frameworks on your business?

[The respondents were asked to select one option only.]



## Chapter 04

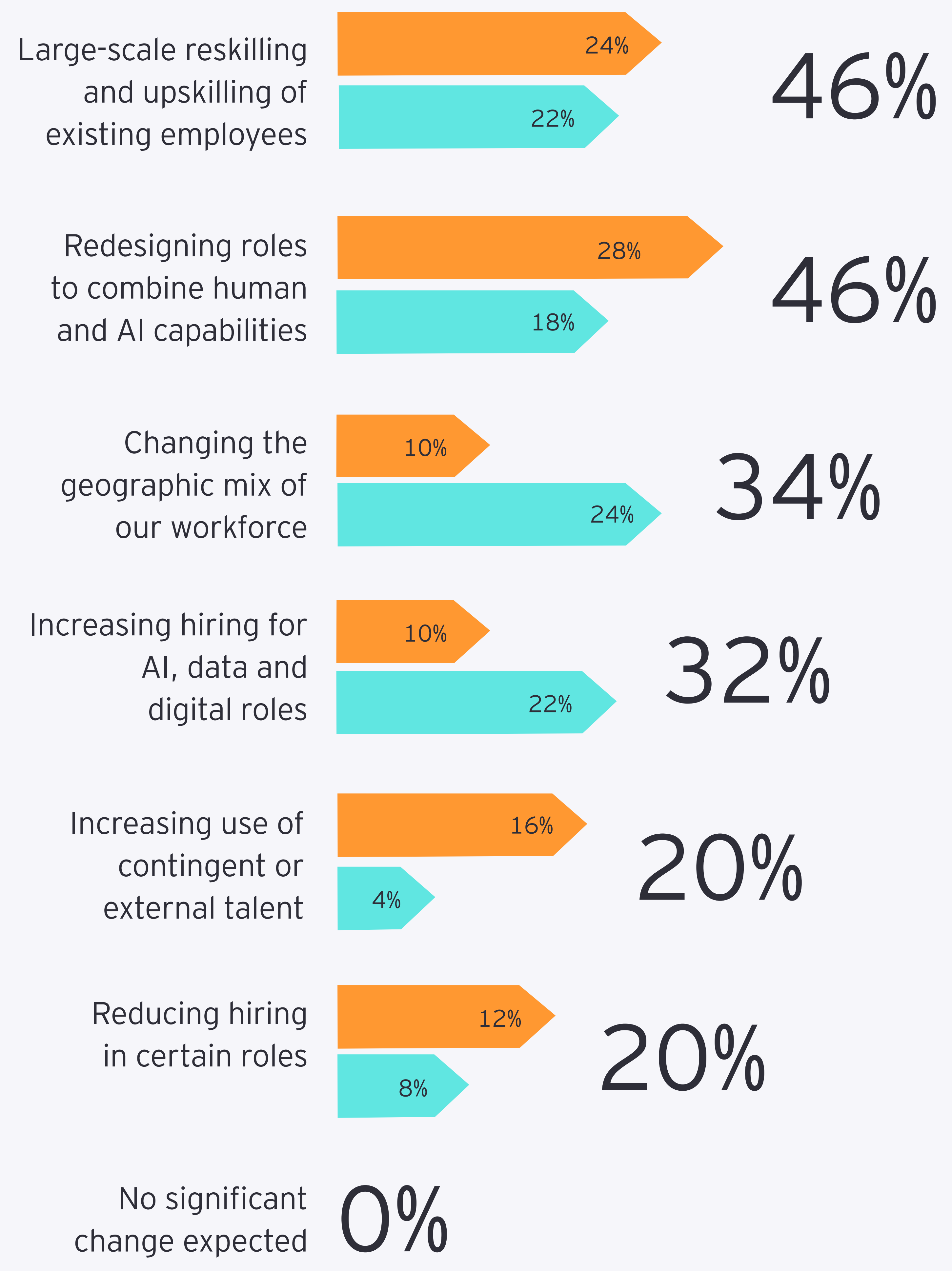
# Talent strategy and the future workforce

# Workforce impacts of AI are focused on reskilling and redesign rather than a reduction in workers

**LEGENDS** First Priority Second Priorty

Q How do you expect AI to change your workforce strategy over the next three years?

[The respondents were allowed to select up to two responses.]



# Cultural and capability gaps are the primary barriers to AI impact

Q

What is the main talent constraint on your company's ability to generate value from AI?

[The respondents were asked to select one option only.]

| | |
|---|---|
| 22% | Maintaining entrepreneurial culture during AI-driven change |
| 20% | Difficulty attracting specialist AI talent |
| 18% | Limited AI and data skills within the existing workforce |
| 14% | Cultural resistance to change |
| 14% | Insufficient leadership capability to manage AI-driven change |
| 6% | Inadequate training and learning infrastructure |
| 6% | Talent is not a major constraint |
| 0% | Unclear career paths in an AI-enabled organization |

## Chapter 05

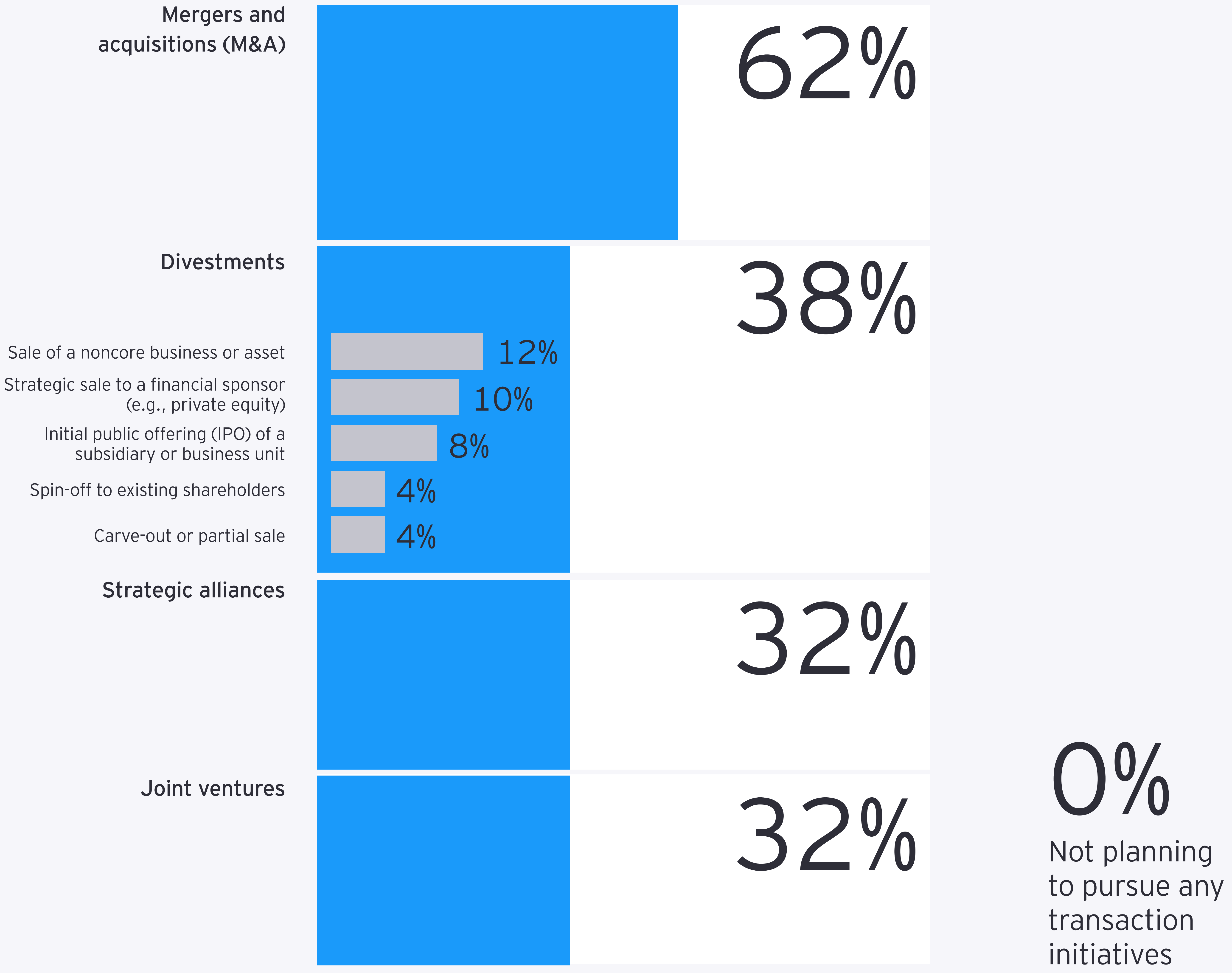
# Transactions

# Transaction intent remains high, with CEOs pursuing multiple strategic options

Q

Do you expect to actively pursue any of the following transaction initiatives over the next 12 months?

[The respondents were asked to select multiple options.]

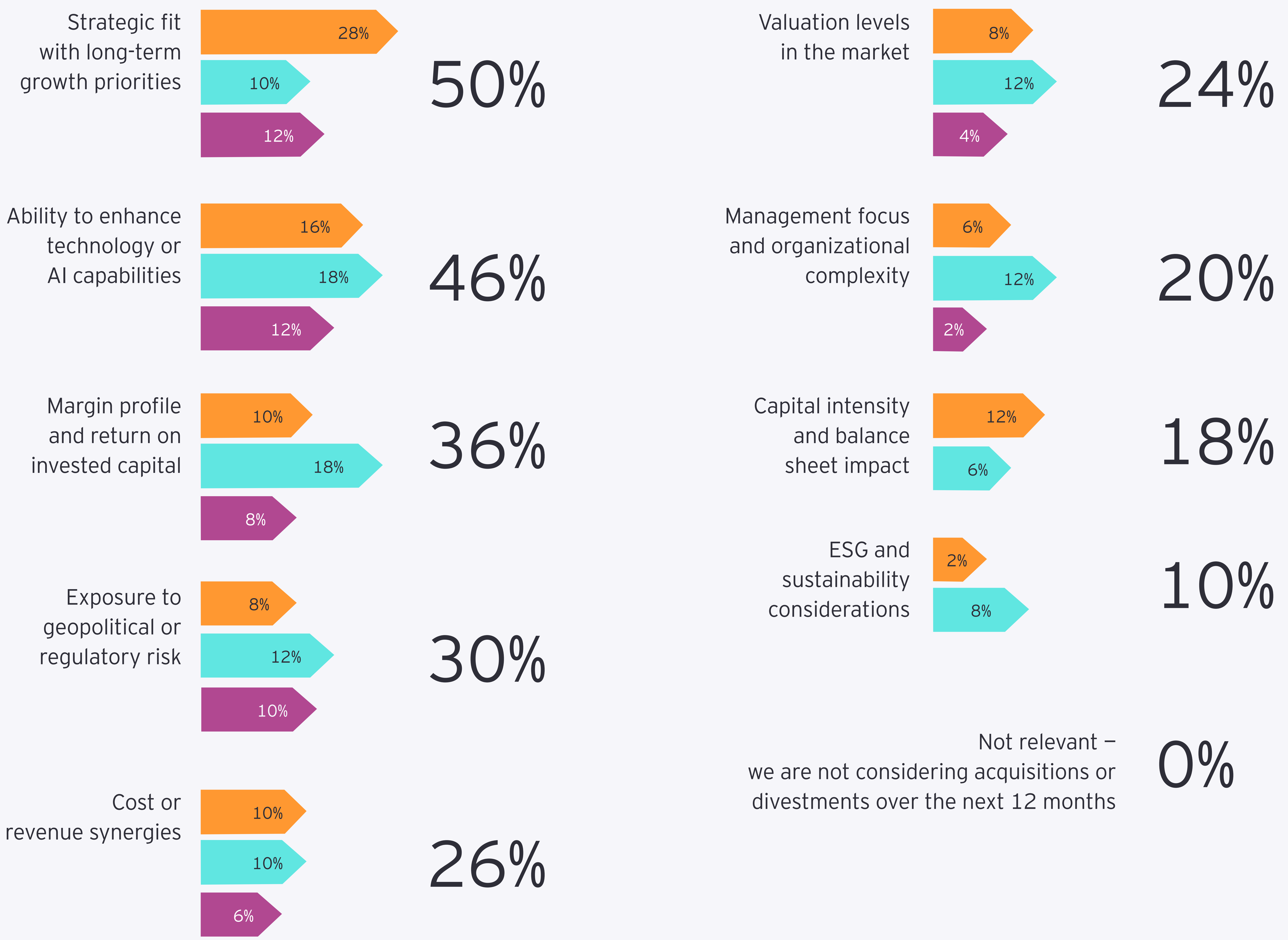


# Canadian CEOs prioritize long-term strategic and operational value in portfolio actions

**LEGENDS**
- First Priority
- Second Priorty
- Third Priorty

**Q** When considering potential portfolio acquisitions or divestments over the next 12 months, which factors will be most important in your decision-making?

[The respondents were allowed to select up to three factors.]



# CEOs are prioritizing profitability and resilience amid continued uncertainty

**Q** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

[The respondents were asked to select one option for each statement.]

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Our access to growth capital is more constrained today than it was 12 months ago | 14% | 34% | 36% | 14% | 2% |
| Our business would be exposed to significant headwinds if energy price shocks are sustained | 18% | 26% | 28% | 26% | 2% |
| Our business would struggle to absorb prolonged and significant disruptions across critical third-party providers, infrastructure or global operating networks | 20% | 30% | 10% | 36% | 4% |
| In the current environment, disciplined growth and a clear path to profitability matter more than rapid market expansion | 26% | 50% | 20% | 4% | 0% |

# Global CEOs rank Canada among the top destinations for capital deployment

Q

What are the top countries in which you are planning to invest capital over the next 12 months?

[The respondents were asked to select up to three countries.]

**Top five priorities for capital investment over the next 12 months**

1. United States
2. India
3. United Kingdom
4. Canada
5. Germany

Note: For the 1,200 respondents globally, the top five countries are listed above in order of priority, for capital investment over the next 12 months. United States (n=373), India (n=234), United Kingdom (n=231), Canada (n=208), Germany (n=197)

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**About EY-Parthenon**

Our unique combination of transformative strategy, transactions and corporate finance delivers real-world value – solutions that work in practice, not just on paper.

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