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# Themes and opportunities 2026

Post consensus – Executive summary



# Foreword

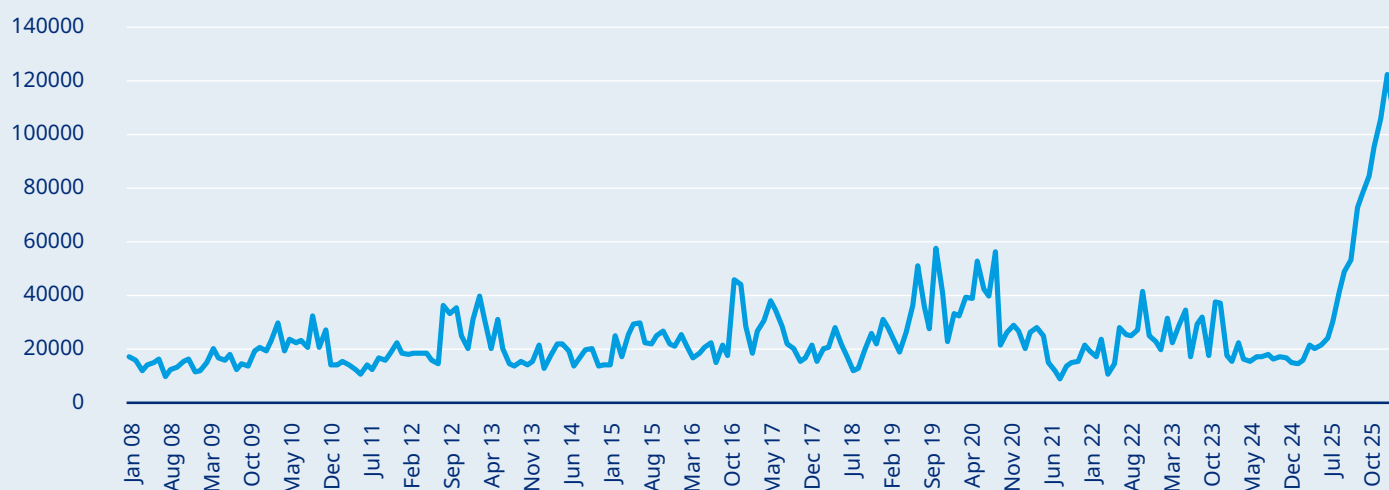
In recent years, the foundations of the global economy have begun to shift in ways that few could have anticipated even a decade ago. The assumptions that once anchored market confidence in the post-Cold War era, unencumbered trade, coordinated monetary policy, action on threats to environmental commons, information reliability and a broadly shared belief in the benefits of globalization, are no longer secure. Instead, the world is entering an age where regions are going their own way, institutions struggle to maintain legitimacy, and new rules of engagement are being written in real time. This we term the “Post Consensus”.

Powerful and intersecting forces from Artificial Intelligence (AI) to regionalization are reshaping the contours of global markets. AI is improving at a dizzying pace, solving complex problems while creating new vulnerabilities and dividing expert opinion on its ultimate impact. The emergence of human-grade artificial general intelligence

(“AGI”) in 2026, predicted by CEOs of two of the largest AI companies<sup>1</sup>, would be a pivotal moment in history; as we continue on to superhuman intelligence the ramifications are impossible to foresee.

Globalization is faltering as regional blocs solidify. Trade tensions are testing long-standing alliances, and geopolitical uncertainty has become a constant feature. Climate progress falters, for every two steps forward there is one backwards: an economic tipping point has been reached in clean energy supply and green mobility gains traction, however fires, deforestation and increased absolute use of fossil fuels are deeply concerning, whilst the divide between skeptics and those warning of cascading environmental crises widens. Societies are growing more polarized despite unprecedented advances in health and technology, and even in economics, confidence in growth coexists with fears of debt and monetary instability. Together, these dynamics mark the end of a predictable world and the emergence of one defined by complexity, contest, and transformation.

**Figure 1. Uncertainty has spiked per the World Uncertainty Index**



**Source:** World Uncertainty Index.com. The WUI is computed by counting the percentage of the word “uncertain” (or its variant) in the Economist Intelligence Unit country reports. GDP weighted average. January 2008 to October 2025.

This year's theme, Post Consensus captures a landscape in which the norms that guided portfolio construction, risk management, and strategic allocation for decades are being reconsidered, re-examined, and in many cases overturned.

Yet disruption does not solely spell risk. Periods of uncertainty and dislocation often open the door to opportunity for investors with the flexibility and foresight to recognize where value is shifting. The challenge and the opportunity, in a Post Consensus world is to move beyond yesterday's assumptions, to identify the new sources of resilience and innovation, and to position capital to benefit not only from enduring uncertainty but also from the transformative forces that are remaking the global economy.

Through the course of this paper, we outline some of the key themes and opportunities we see over the next five years and beyond. To make sense of this evolving landscape, we categorize our themes as follows:

- **Regime changes** One-off, enduring shifts in conditions.
- **Super-cycles** Classic economic super-cycles (debt and commodity cycles) and the super-cycle of socioeconomic paradigms (Kondratieff waves or Strauss-Howe saecula<sup>2</sup>).
- **Megatrends** Multi-decade transitions gradually reshaping the world.

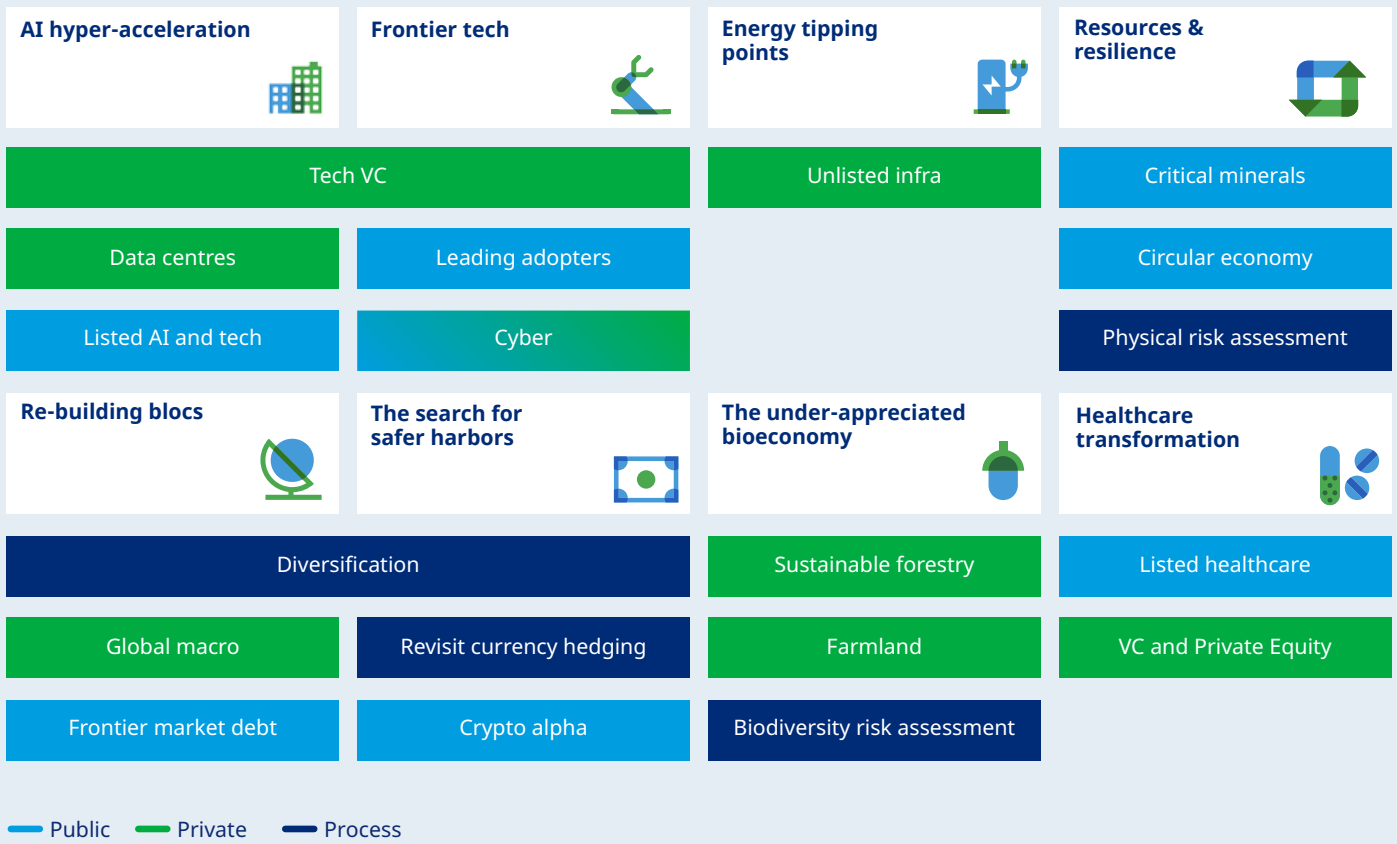
This year the report is divided into eight sections pulling out a selection of our underlying investment themes that play out across different timeframes and pathways but are set to have a profound effect on investor portfolios. These are:

**Figure 2. 2026 themes**

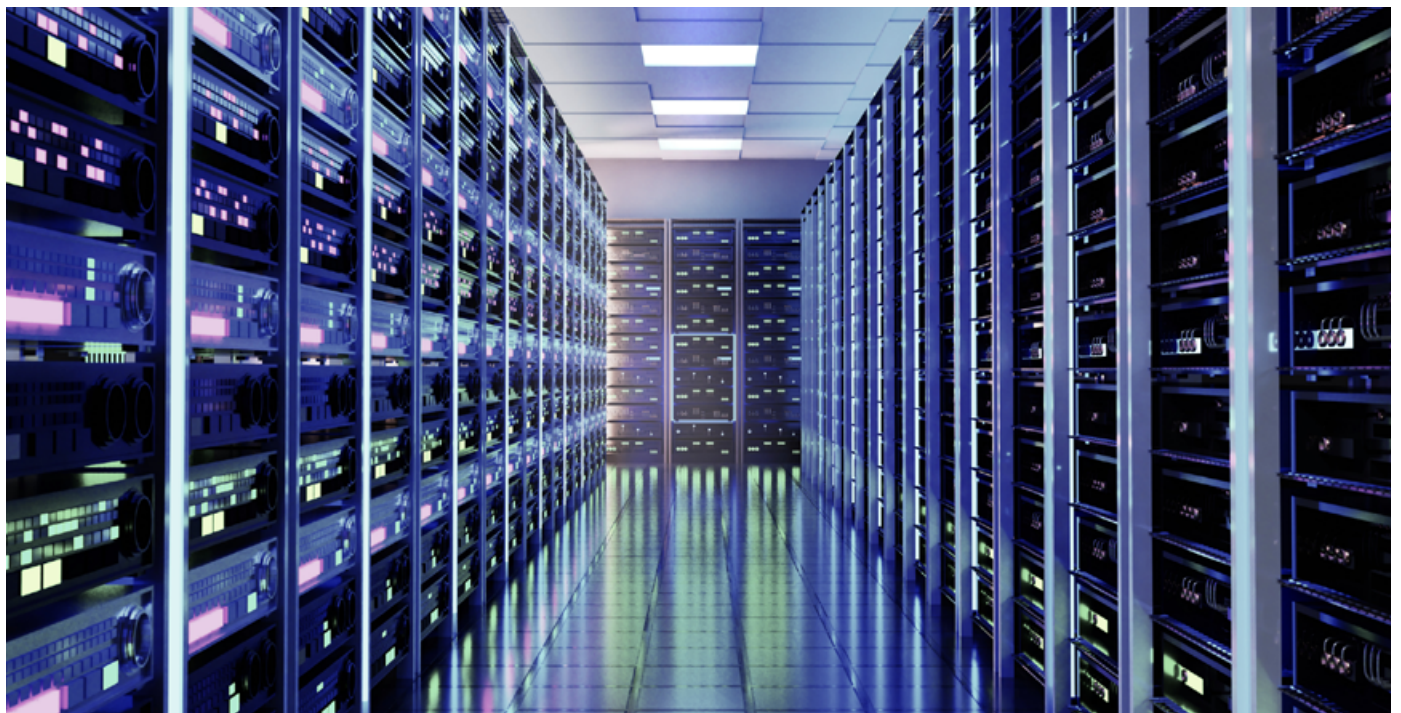


Source: Mercer, November 2025.

Figure 3. 2026 opportunities



Source: Mercer, November 2025.



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# Appendix

## Lead Authors

### **Matt Scott**

matt.scott@mercer.com

### **Ursula Niederberger**

ursula.niederberger@mercer.com

### **Nick White**

nick.r.white@mercer.com

## Contributing Authors

### **Steven Keshishoghli**

steven.keshishoghli@mercer.com

### **Lovey Sidhu**

lovey.sidhu@mercer.com

## Analyst

### **Tomi Adeleye**

tomi.adeleye@mercer.com

## Endnotes

- 1 Elon Musk of xAI and Dario Amodei of Anthropic.
- 2 Kondratieff waves are long-term economic cycles driven by major technological innovations, c. 50-60 years in length. Strauss-Howe saecula are historical cycles characterised by institutional strengthening, then weakening, crisis, and then institutional reinvention.

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