



2026 KPMG US CEO Outlook



Introduction

CEOs are leading with conviction and a heightened sense of urgency to accelerate change within their organizations.

Our 2026 US CEO Outlook, which analyzed insights from 400 US CEOs, reveals that they see enormous opportunity ahead, particularly with AI. But they are also candid about the risks, the pace of change and whether their organizations are truly ready.

Leaders feel they are generating positive momentum with their continued investments in AI; and they feel optimistic about the growth prospects of their companies, industries and the US economy.

And, simultaneously, they feel uncertain about the state of the global economy. They anticipate that geopolitical tensions could affect their organization's prosperity, especially if the flow of oil in the Middle East remains constrained; and they are wary of the acceleration of cyber threats across multiple dimensions, as AI proliferates.

The focus on AI innovation has shifted from efficiency gains to how these investments will shape their business models, workforce and growth. While companies are bringing the technology into their day-to-day, their progress is slower than the pace of how quickly AI is developing. Today, only a handful of companies see AI agents as transformative for their business. Now is the time to think in new ways about the possibilities for AI-native work, businesses, products and services.

With new technologies comes a healthy dose of risk management. In a world where AI accelerates efficiencies and operational visibility, strengthening cyber is already paramount. C-suite leaders and boards are concerned about the increased volume and sophistication of AI-driven cyberattacks and their capabilities to quickly detect and remediate them. AI and cyber strategies have become inseparable. Leaders must build the governance and infrastructure that sets them up to win higher stakes under higher pressure.

The challenge extends beyond data and technology management. Organizations must also enable people and technology to work together seamlessly, invest in upskilling and hiring and rethink how skills are developed, including what should be learned before entering the workforce and what can be acquired through experience on the job.

Leaders want to move faster, especially on AI, but their operating models, cyber defenses, workforce and governance are tasked with keeping pace with the technology's evolution. Organizations that move boldly and execute with discipline will be best positioned to create lasting value.



Timothy J. Walsh
Chairman and CEO, KPMG LLP

Business outlook

Over the next three years, CEOs are confident in



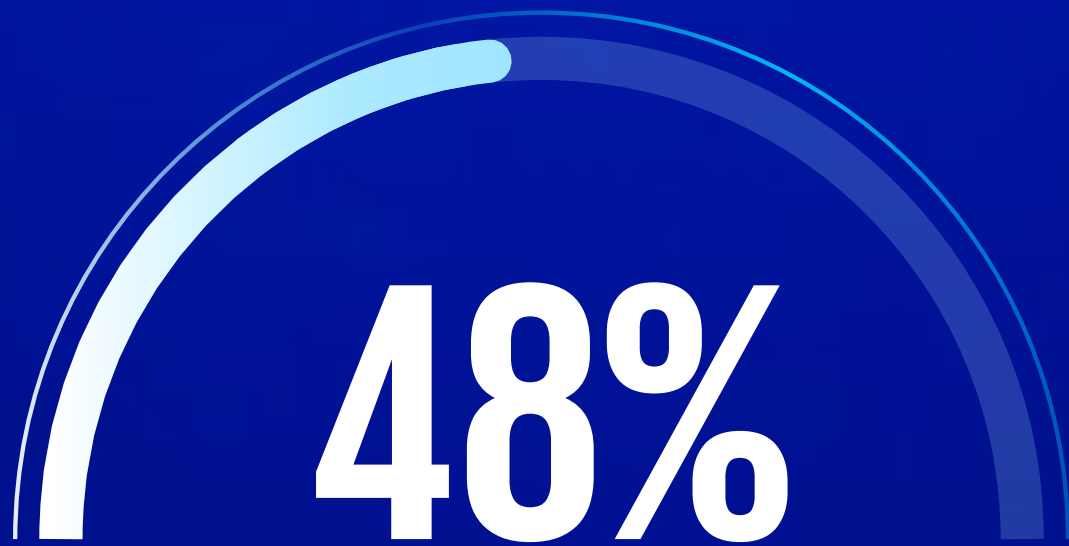
but confidence is more subdued when it comes to



of CEOs continue to report that inflationary pressures will impact their organization’s prosperity over the next three years.



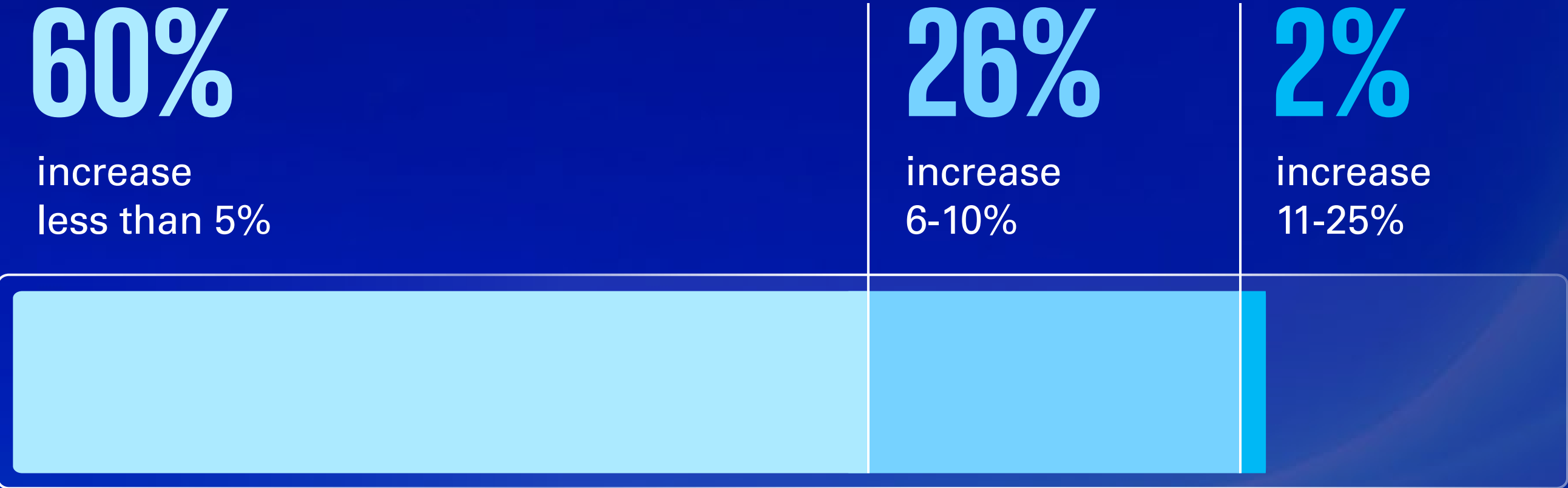
of CEOs indicate they have a high M&A appetite and will likely undertake acquisitions that have a significant impact to their overall organization.



plan to make acquisitions that will have a moderate impact to their organizations.

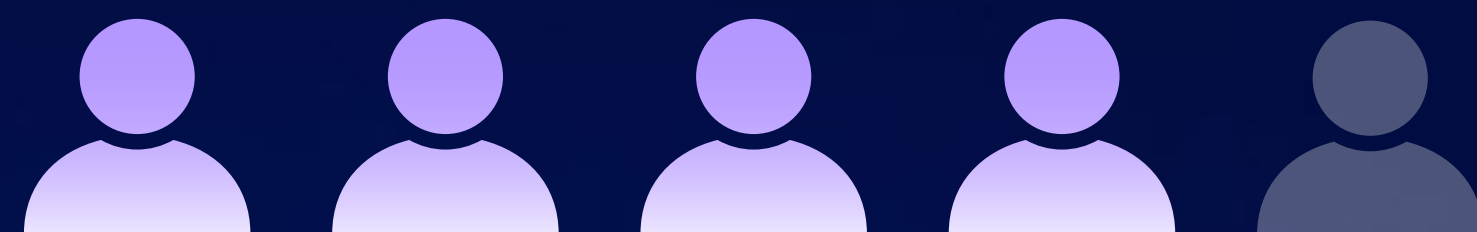


expect to increase their headcount over the next three years.

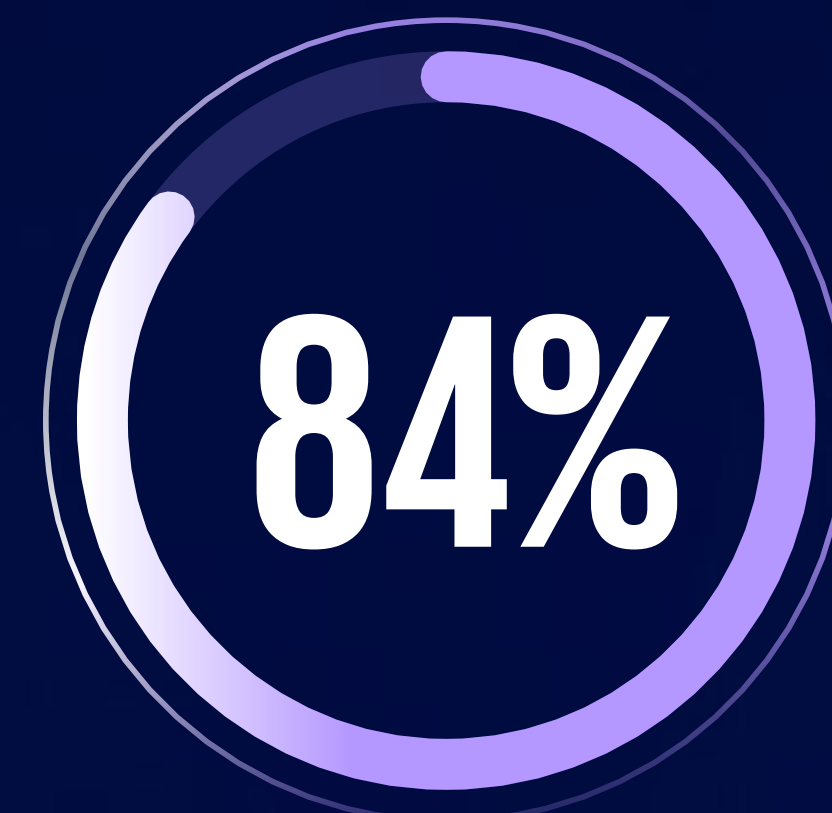


Artificial intelligence

4 out of 5



US CEOs report they have a clear view on how AI will disrupt current business models and strategy, and create new opportunities, and believe that their data readiness and quality will help them safely and effectively integrate AI into their business.



of CEOs report that AI is a top investment priority over the next three years despite ongoing economic uncertainty.



report they will spend at least 10% of their capital budget on AI in the next year.

When asked about the impact agents are having on their organization,



43%

report moderate impacts with targeted use cases, and



39%

report significant improvements in efficiency or growth with agents,



but right now only

9%

report that agents are transformational.

When it comes to their organization's ability to keep pace with the speed of AI development and its impact on business operations, workflows, and the workforce,

64%

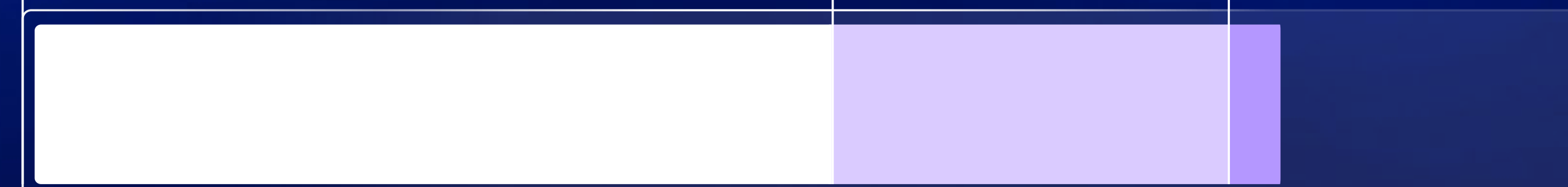
of CEOs are confident they are moving at the right pace or ahead of the curve.

32%

are cautiously optimistic.

4%

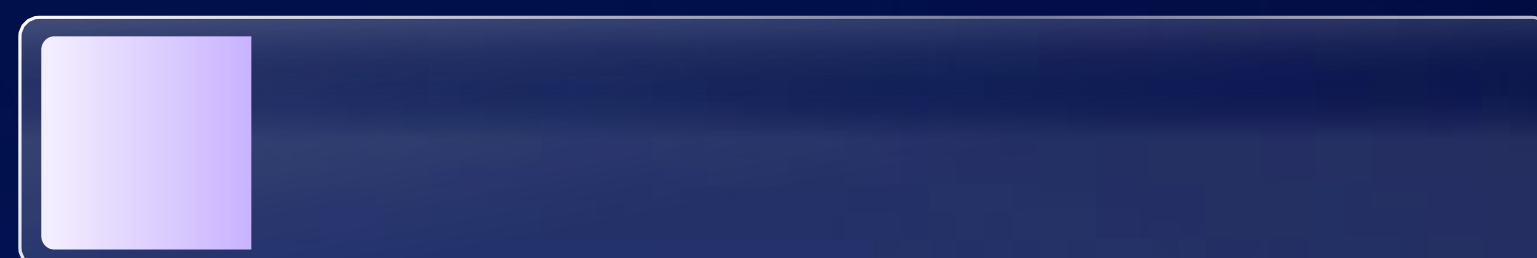
are concerned and struggling to keep up.



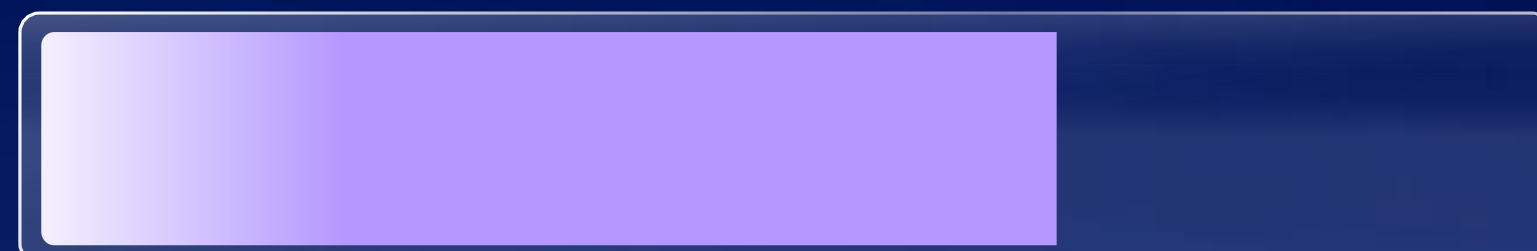
Artificial intelligence

Importantly, most CEOs anticipate a return on AI investments in less than three years.

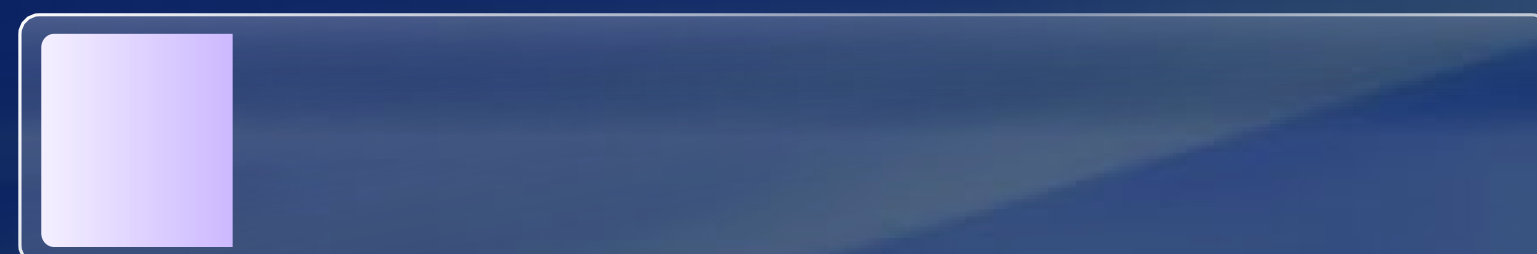
14% expect returns in just six months to one year.



68% expect to see returns in one to three years.



13% predict returns in three to five years.



The top benefits of implementing AI across their organization include:



increased efficiency and productivity such as enhanced decision-making and data analysis capabilities



improved threat detection and security posture



increased profitability and growth

Managing AI's impact on costs and margins

1 out of 2

report that managing costs of implementing AI is either mostly or very challenging.

88% are prioritizing realized AI value over strict adherence to token budgets.



of CEOs believe the rising cost of AI will fundamentally reshape corporate margins more than labor costs over the next five years.

Navigating risks around the corner



predict that, in the next three years, the major business disruption risk for their organization will stem from a lack of reliable AI access and advancement, not from cyberattacks or supply chain breakdowns.



are increasing their focus on internal data governance and control when it comes to AI and data sovereignty shaping their organization's AI strategy.

Talent and AI

CEOs appear more confident in their workforce strategy and the ability for workers to adopt AI.

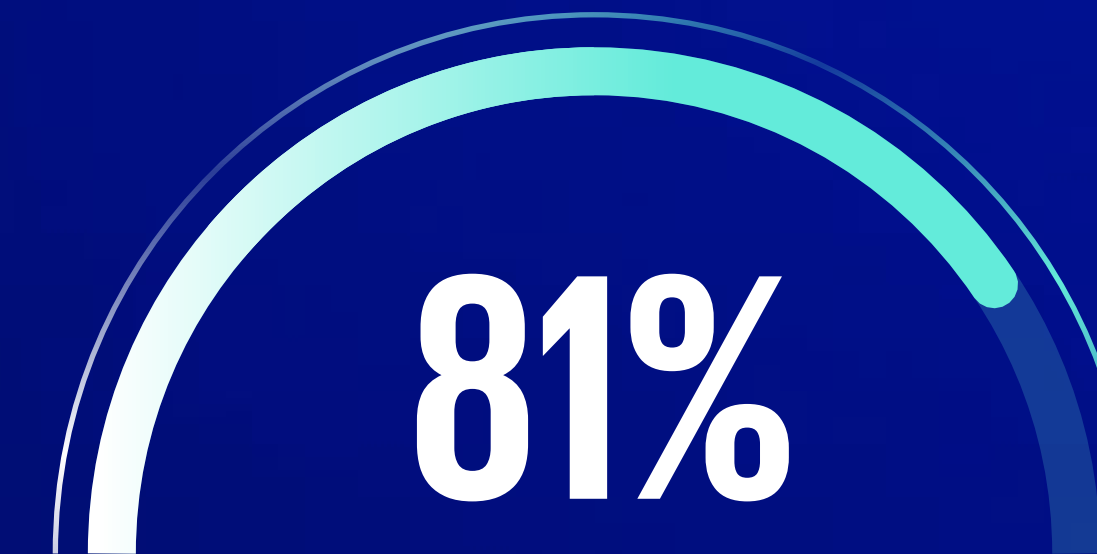
CEOs report they expect to increase, not decrease, headcount in the coming years.

When asked to identify the biggest workforce challenge their organization is facing, the top choices included:

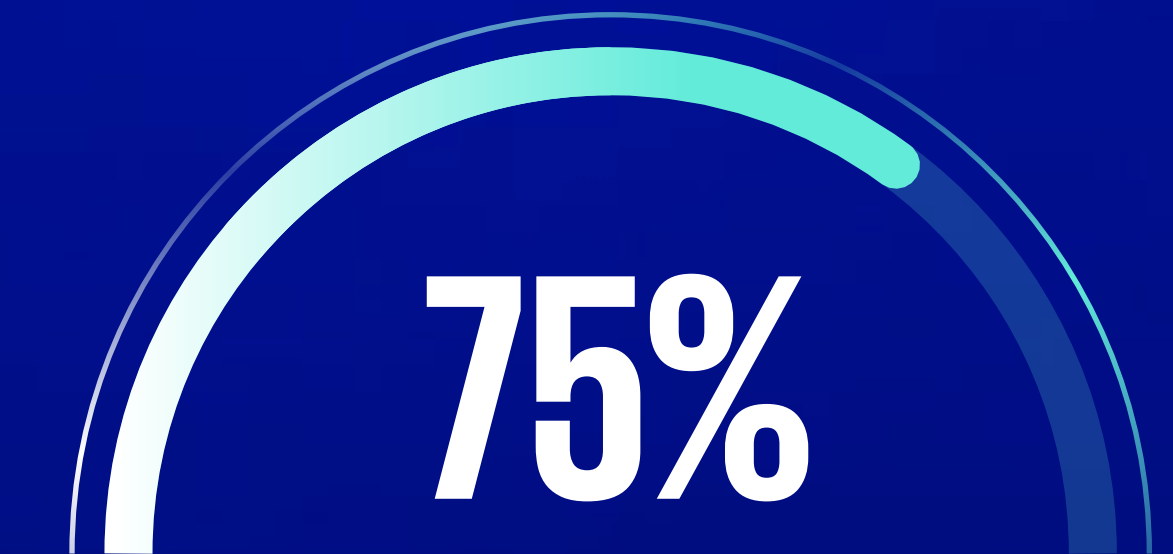
60% skills gap in the workforce

55% upskilling and training employees on AI systems

49% attracting and retaining talent



say the integration of AI has made their organizations rethink how they train and develop their employees.



say the integration of AI has made them rethink the skills required for entry-level roles.

When asked about how their long-term workforce strategies (two to five years) are changing in response to AI, CEOs are:

86% | redesigning roles, career paths, and team structure to reflect human-AI collaboration

83% | focusing on retaining and retraining high-potential talent

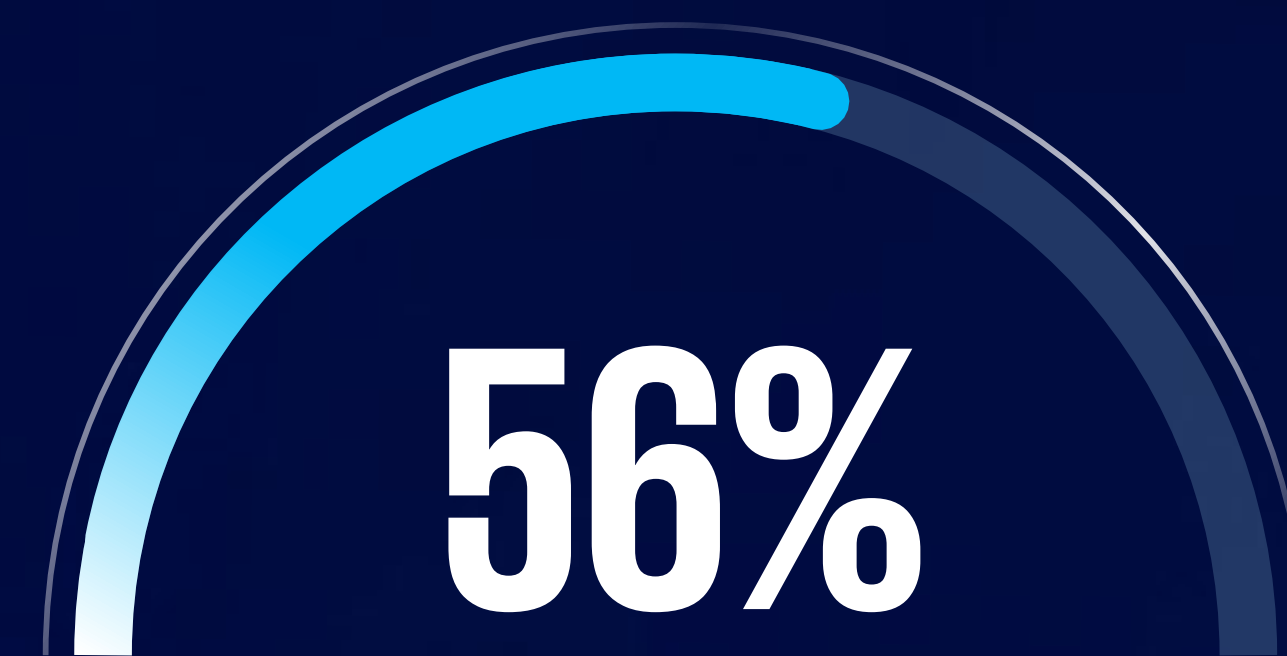
79% | hiring new talent with AI and tech capabilities

53% | planning for workforce reduction in some areas

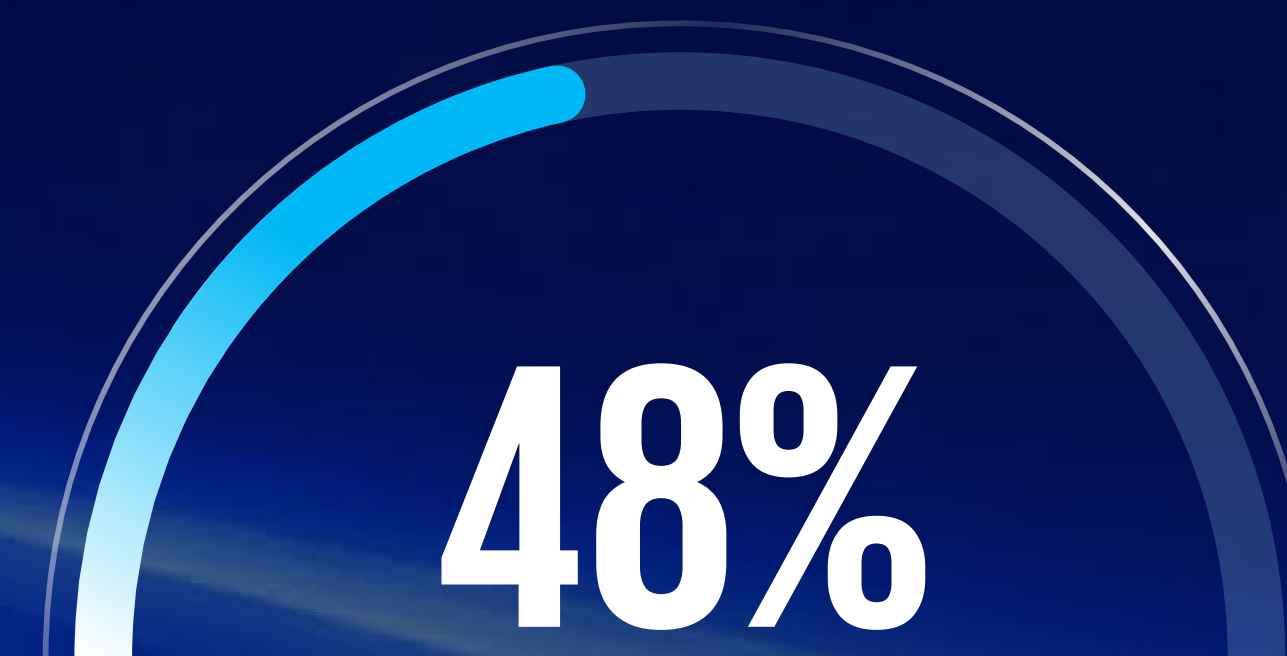
Cybersecurity



of CEOs anticipate cybercrime and cyber insecurity will impact their organization's prosperity over the next three years—higher than inflationary pressures, geopolitical concerns, the pace of technology change and other risks.



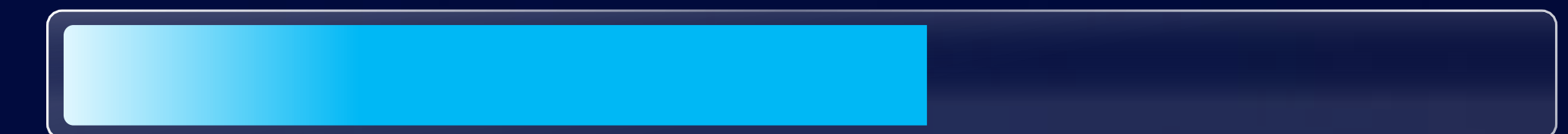
of CEOs name cybersecurity as a challenge when implementing AI within their organization—more often than ethical challenges, data readiness, managing costs, and translating AI investment into ROI.



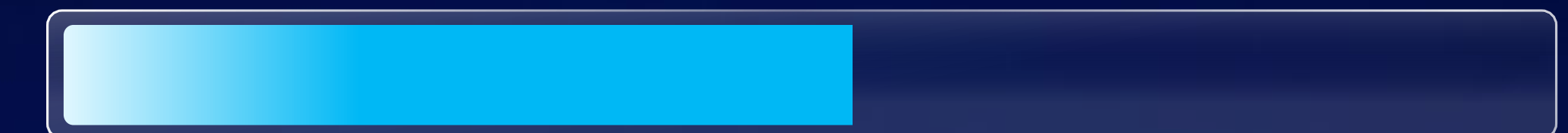
of CEOs report they are increasing investment in cybersecurity over the next three years to mitigate business risks—again, the highest level of all risks.

When it comes to cyber risk specifically, CEOs are extremely concerned about:

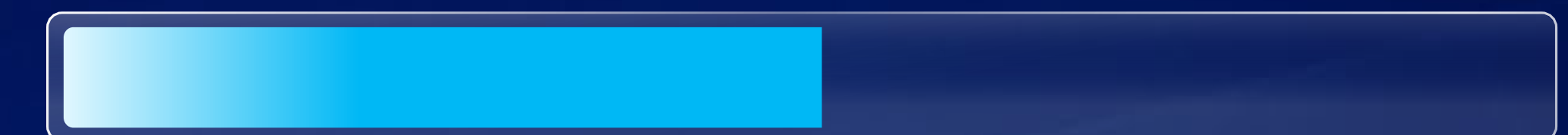
58% identity theft and data privacy



53% vulnerability to cyberattacks



51% fraud detection and prevention

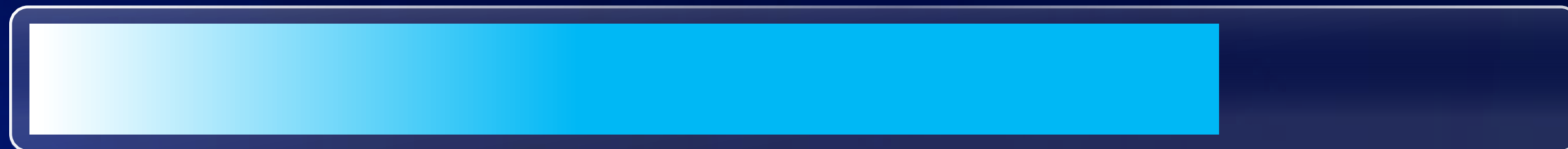


but note that these areas are a top leadership priority and plans are in place to mitigate these risks.

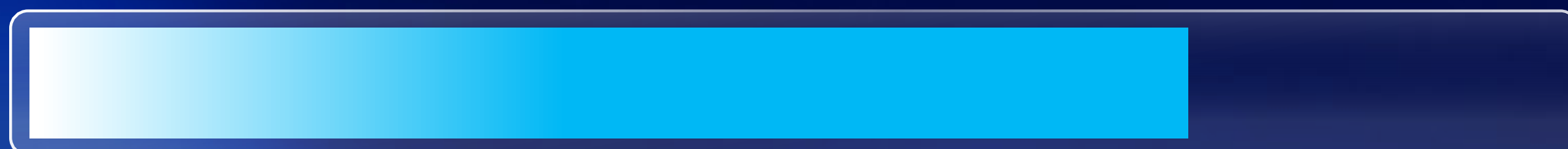
Cybersecurity

When asked what is causing them to accelerate their cybersecurity investments, CEOs identified a range of reasons including:

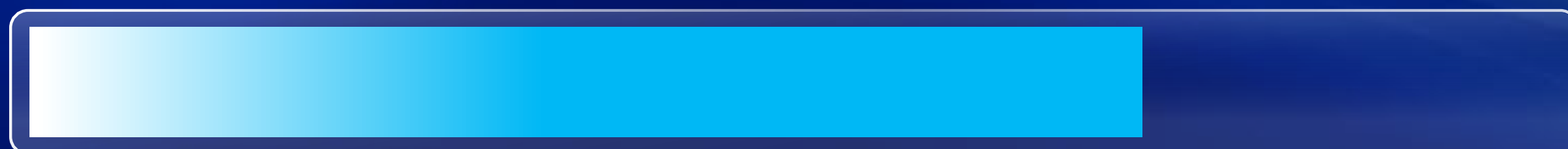
78% AI-powered social engineering and targeted attacks



76% AI-assisted malware or phishing attacks



73% data and privacy risks associated with the deployment of AI agents

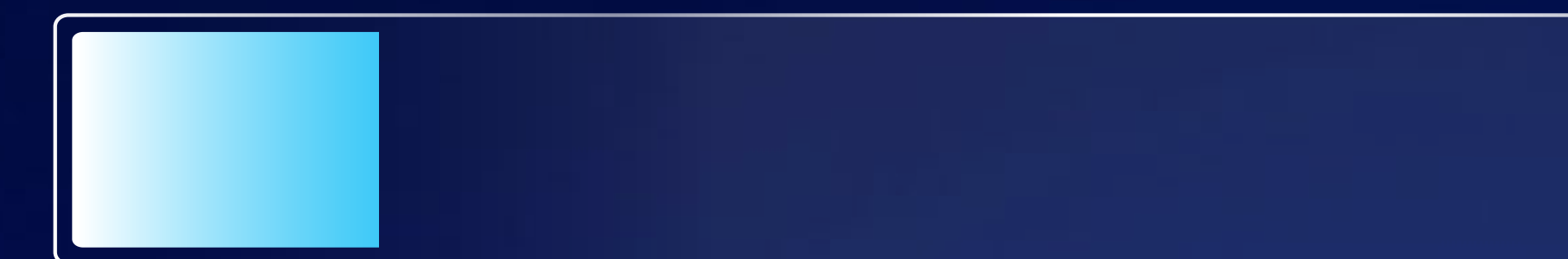


Quantum computing capabilities are accelerating, but investment and attention are growing more slowly.



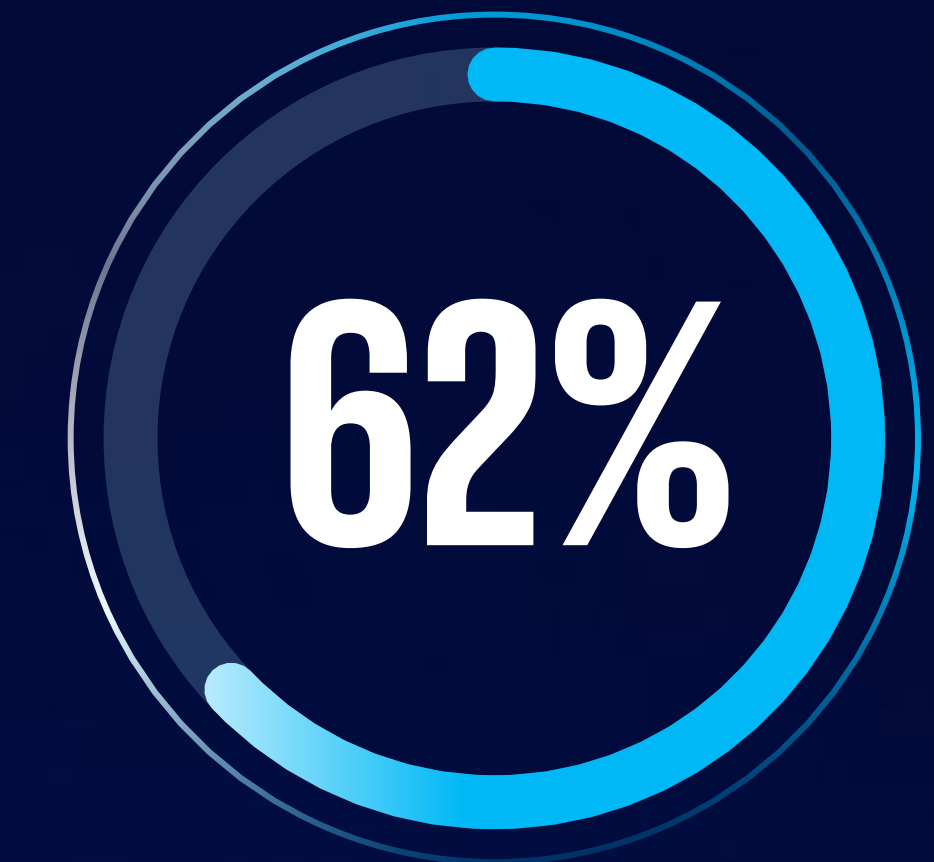
34%

of CEOs report quantum computing attacks against encryption are driving cybersecurity investments.



20%

also report increasing investment to comply with US executive orders mandating transitions for Post-Quantum Cryptography by 2030–2031.



are aware of risks from quantum computing on encryption but do not yet consider it a priority.

Only 4%

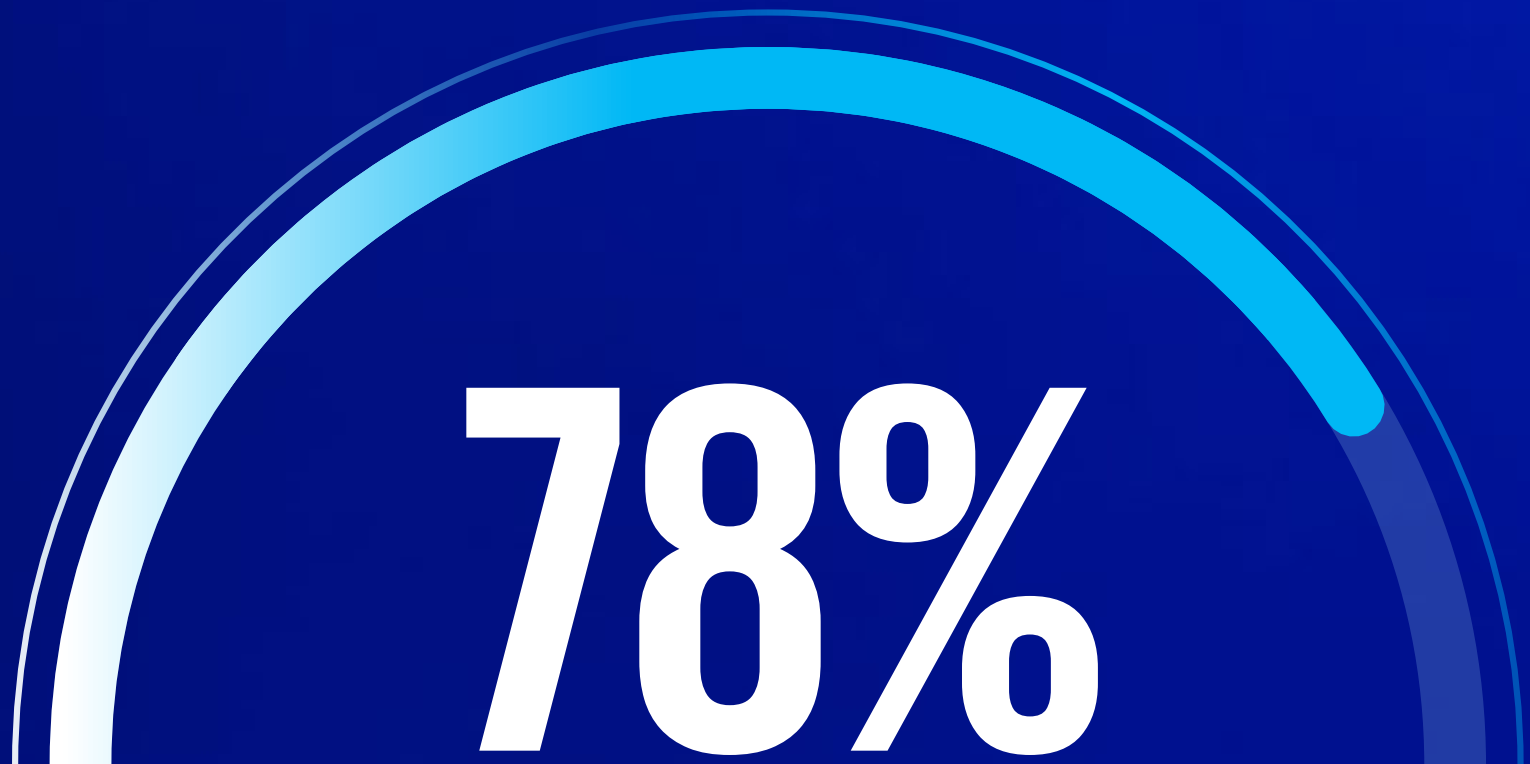
have plans in place to mitigate these risks.

Supply chain

A semi-circular gauge with a blue arc indicating 79% completion.

79%

of CEOs anticipate geopolitical conflicts and tensions will impact their organization's prosperity over the next three years.

A semi-circular gauge with a blue arc indicating 78% completion.

78%

say regionalization (nearshoring/ friend-shoring) has become more important than cost optimization in supply chain decisions in light of geopolitical events this year.

A semi-circular gauge with a blue arc indicating 39% completion.

39%

report that their top strategy to improve supply chain resilience over the next 12 months is prioritizing the improvement of end-to-end visibility through data, AI, or digital.



About the 2026 KPMG US CEO Outlook

The 2026 KPMG CEO Outlook features insights from more than 1,300 CEOs at large companies globally, including 400 in the United States, on the key challenges and opportunities in driving business growth. All US respondents have annual revenues over US\$500 million and more than one-third of the companies surveyed have more than US\$10 billion in annual revenues.

Due to rounding, the numbers in this report may not add up to exactly the total sum presented.

GenAI was utilized in the creation of many of these images.

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