



2026 DIGITAL ASSETS STUDY

Trust and security take center stage

October 2026

A white rectangular button with the word "Begin" in blue text, set against a dark blue background with a glowing yellow light path.

Begin

Contents

Preface	3
The Digital Assets Study at five	5
Operational readiness and asset allocation continue to grow	10
A new focus on trust, security, and stability	19
Digital cash gains prominence in digital asset strategies	25
Conclusion	31

Preface

Five years ago, when we launched our first Digital Assets Study, the industry was still trying to determine whether digital assets represented a speculative frontier or a genuine transformation of financial markets.

Since then, we have tracked a remarkable evolution in sentiment, priorities, and preparedness. What began as a conversation dominated by cryptocurrencies and future possibilities has matured into a much more practical discussion about infrastructure, operations, and institutional adoption.

This year's findings suggest the market is entering a new phase. Confidence in the long-term role of digital assets continues to grow, with more institutions expecting them to become a mainstream part of investment activity over the coming years. At the same time, respondents report rising operational readiness and a greater willingness to integrate digital assets into core business functions.

What stands out most, however, is not simply growing adoption or readiness. It is the increasing emphasis on trust, security, and stability.

As digital assets become more institutional, the qualities investors value most are those that have long underpinned traditional financial markets: regulatory oversight, financial strength, operational resilience, cybersecurity, and robust risk management.

At the same time, the industry is expanding its view of what a digital ecosystem requires. Digital cash, tokenized deposits, and stablecoins are no longer peripheral considerations. They are increasingly seen as essential components of the infrastructure needed to unlock the full benefits of tokenized assets and modernize market operations.

Together, these findings paint a picture of an industry moving beyond experimentation and toward implementation. The findings also suggest that the next phase of growth will be defined less by technological possibility and more by the industry's ability to build trusted, scalable, and operationally resilient market infrastructure.

The opportunity remains significant, but its future will depend as much on trust and execution as on innovation itself. Whether institutions can translate growing confidence into widespread adoption will be one of the defining questions for the industry in the years ahead.



Angus Fletcher

Head of Digital Asset Solutions

The Digital Assets Study at five

Over the past five years, our research has documented a clear progression in institutional thinking. The conversation has evolved from understanding digital assets as an emerging concept to identifying the operational, regulatory, and market foundations required for adoption at scale.

2021-2022

Our first pulse survey of the industry’s views on and approach to digital assets was conducted at the end of 2021 and published in early 2022. Simply called “The State Street Digital Assets Study,” it took a similar form to that of the next four years, polling 300 senior executives from a global sample of asset managers and owners. Most respondents were planning to invest over the following one to two years. At the same time, there was a clear need for education, with most reporting that they did not yet have even a moderate understanding of blockchain or distributed ledger technology.

However, enthusiasm for digital assets was tempered by significant uncertainty about how the technology would evolve and how institutions could participate.

Several themes emerged early and have remained consistent throughout the five years that we have been publishing the study. While Bitcoin was the top investment case at that time, decentralized finance (DeFi) tokens representing other assets were seen as the greatest area of potential. In hindsight, the responses now seem dated. Non-fungible tokens, for example, ranked as the second most promising area of future growth.

In our first study, we observed that the digital economy could appear either as a promising new frontier or as a Wild West reminiscent of the early days of the internet.

We also argued that innovation and the highest standards of risk management and regulatory excellence must go hand in hand. Five years later, our respondents continue to echo that message.

2022-2023

The second survey, “**Building Trust and Security into Digital Architecture**,” marked the beginning of a broader shift toward questions of technological and operational readiness, an approach that subsequent studies have continued. Organizations began articulating clearer strategies for adapting to the growth of digital asset technology, whether by building new teams, incorporating specialists into existing functions, hiring talent, or forming strategic partnerships.

Their objectives also became more defined, with respondents increasingly focused on growth opportunities and operational efficiencies. We also received feedback from the wider industry, with asset managers and consultants concurring that the industry was “cooling on Bitcoin and other cryptocurrency assets” and focusing on “the tokenization of more traditional assets.”

2024

Our third study, “**Is Transformation Within Reach?**” marked the emergence of another recurring theme that has remained consistent across our surveys. “Nearly half of institutions say they are ready to trade digital assets on and off distributed ledgers and blockchains, provided they have the appropriate infrastructure,” we wrote at the time.

The findings highlighted that the onus was on the financial services and technology industries to bring working, scalable solutions to the buy side. It also revealed that organizations were beginning to appreciate the scale of the benefits this technology could deliver. “Across a wide range of core asset management business areas, from the front, middle, and back office, respondents to the third annual study said they expected major increases in their earnings and reductions in their cost of operations from integrating the technology into their processes.”

2025

Last year’s research marked something of a turning point for the industry in its expectations for market growth. The pace at which respondents expected DeFi technology to become a mainstream component of investment infrastructure, operations, and assets accelerated markedly from the previous survey. Expectations for digital asset allocations followed a similar trajectory.

However, this optimism was accompanied by a growing sense of realism as respondents increasingly expect these new methods and assets to coexist with traditional assets and market structures for the foreseeable future.

2026

This year's study builds on the themes that have shaped previous editions, particularly the combination of an increased pace of change and deeper understanding. It also introduces some new elements. Perhaps the most striking finding is the extent to which digital asset strategies are now becoming institutional priorities.

Not only are institutional investors seen as the primary clients for tokenized investments, respondents are increasingly emphasizing the importance of traditional institutional considerations like regulatory status and scale in choosing who to work with on both the financial services and technology sides of their partnership ecosystems.

Another key feature of this research is the growing focus on digital cash as an essential corollary of digital securities in realizing the promise of enhanced transparency, efficiency, and returns that the industry has been anticipating from this technology from the earliest iterations of this research.

Viewed together, the five editions of the Digital Assets Study tell a story of institutional maturation. The conversation has moved from understanding the technology, to preparing for adoption, to building the operational, regulatory, and liquidity foundations needed to support digital markets at scale. That progression provides important context for this year's findings and for the developments the industry may face next.



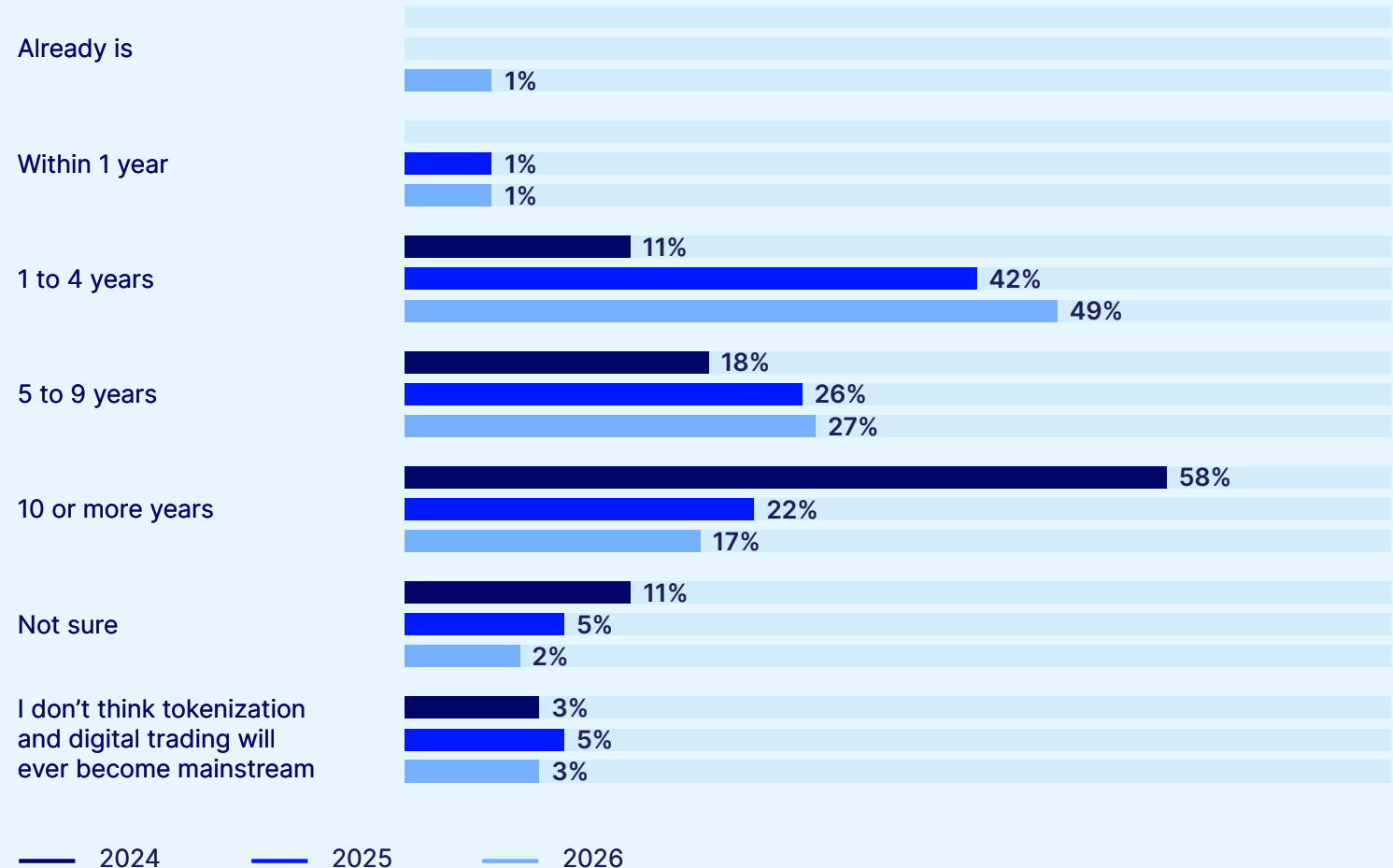
Operational readiness and asset allocation continue to grow

This year, a majority of respondents (51 percent) said they expected digital assets to be widespread and mainstream within five years, if not already so.

That figure was up from 42 percent in last year's research, which was itself a significant increase from 11 percent the year before (see [Figure 1](#)).

In addition to increasing expectations for overall industry growth in this market, institutions also reported high levels of readiness within their own organizations. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) said they already manage or distribute digital assets or have the provider relationships in place to do so should customer demand arise. This included 7 percent who reported managing a significant volume of digital assets (see [Figure 2](#)). A further quarter (25 percent) said they wanted to manage digital assets but lacked appropriate third-party arrangements or internal understanding, while 18 percent were still observing the development of the market before committing to such arrangements.

Figure 1: Timeline for digital assets to become mainstream



Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

Figure 2: Respondents' operational readiness for digital assets

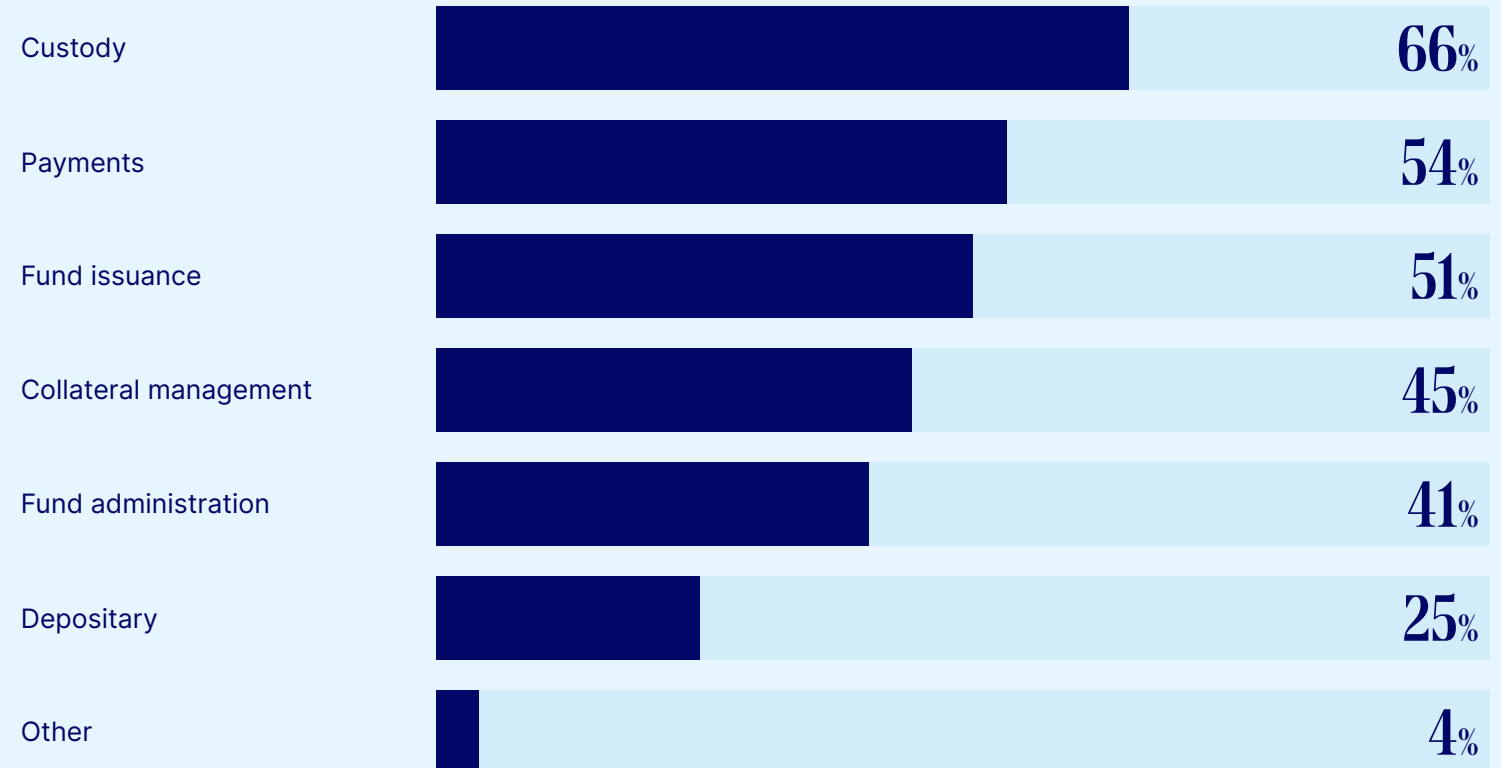


Stats are rounded up to the nearest whole number.

Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

Institutions anticipate significant changes to a wide range of investment operations, in as little as the next three years, with more than half saying their approaches to custody, payments, and fund issuance would be materially affected (see [Figure 3](#)). In terms of their own strategies, issuance and tokenization were the most important aspects of digital assets for respondents, followed by fund administration and custody (see [Figure 4](#)). Another crucial factor for respondents in achieving their digital asset strategies is the use of artificial intelligence (AI). The value of this innovation in areas like smart contract generation and code writing, cybersecurity, and data management and analysis makes it a powerful complementary technology to tokenization and blockchain. Most of our respondents (57 percent) described AI as either entirely critical or very important to their digital asset operations.

Figure 3: Operations most likely to be impacted by digital assets



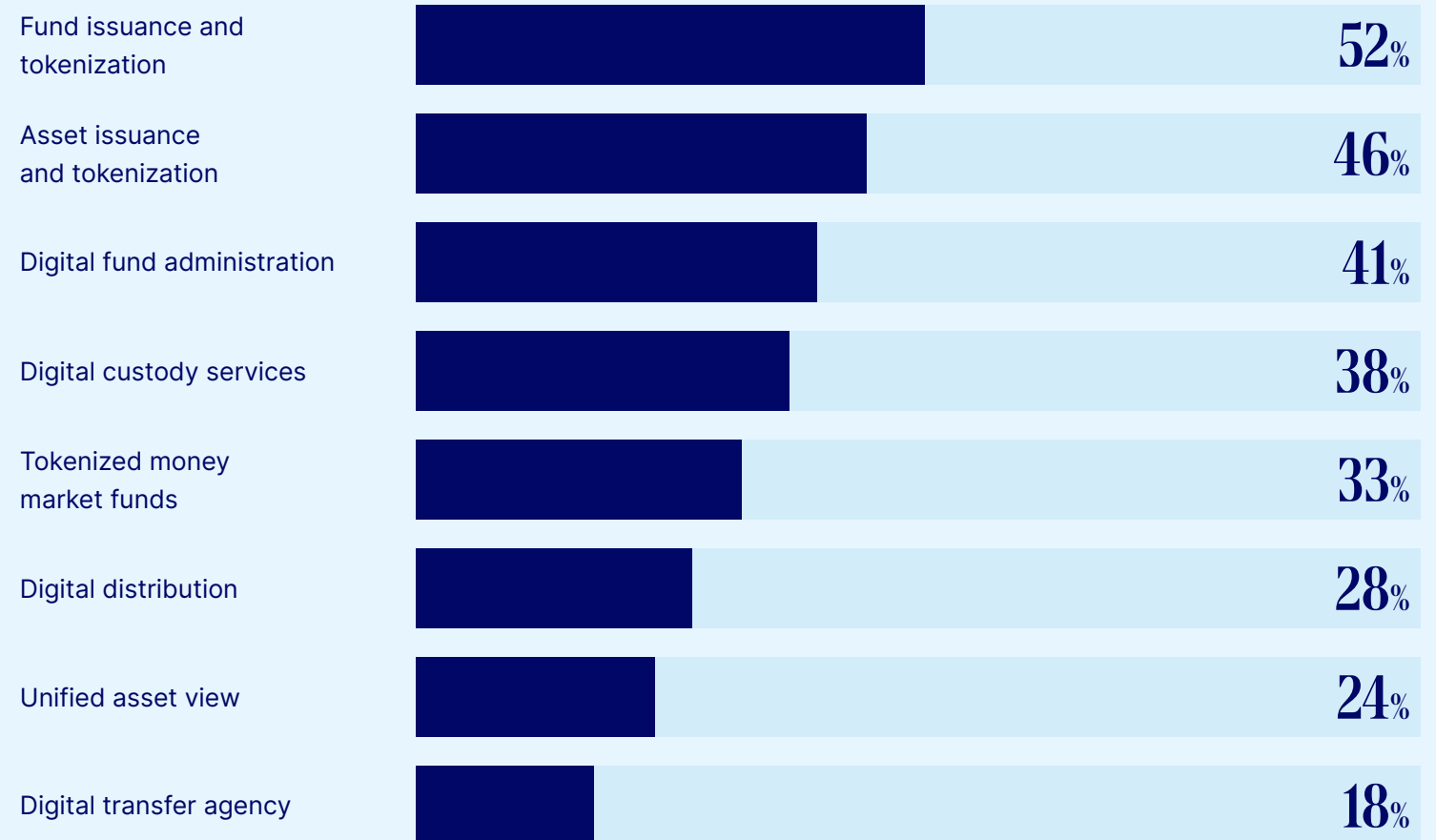
Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

Institutional investors have emerged as the primary target market for managers planning to distribute digital assets. A substantial majority (82 percent) said they planned to sell to institutions, compared with 45 percent targeting digitally native retail investors.

ETFs and traditional long-only mutual funds received the highest “very important” ratings among the options for managing and distributing digital assets (see [Figure 5](#)). Most respondents (84 percent) were planning to launch these products as tokenized versions of existing funds or products, such as new tokenized share classes.

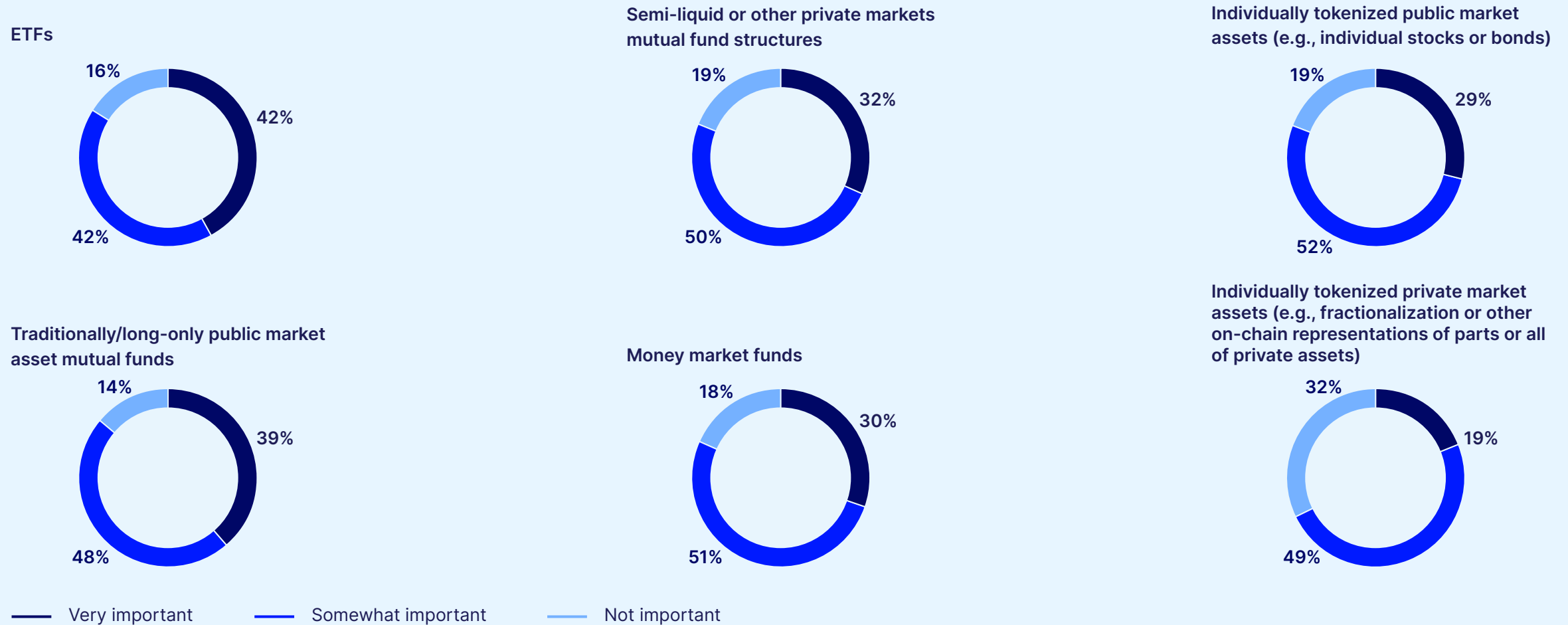
Nearly half (49 percent) are considering digitally native fund or asset launches, while 46 percent expect to distribute third-party digital assets or products through their own platforms or networks.

Figure 4: Most important digital assets priorities



Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

Figure 5: Most important methods for managing and distributing digital assets



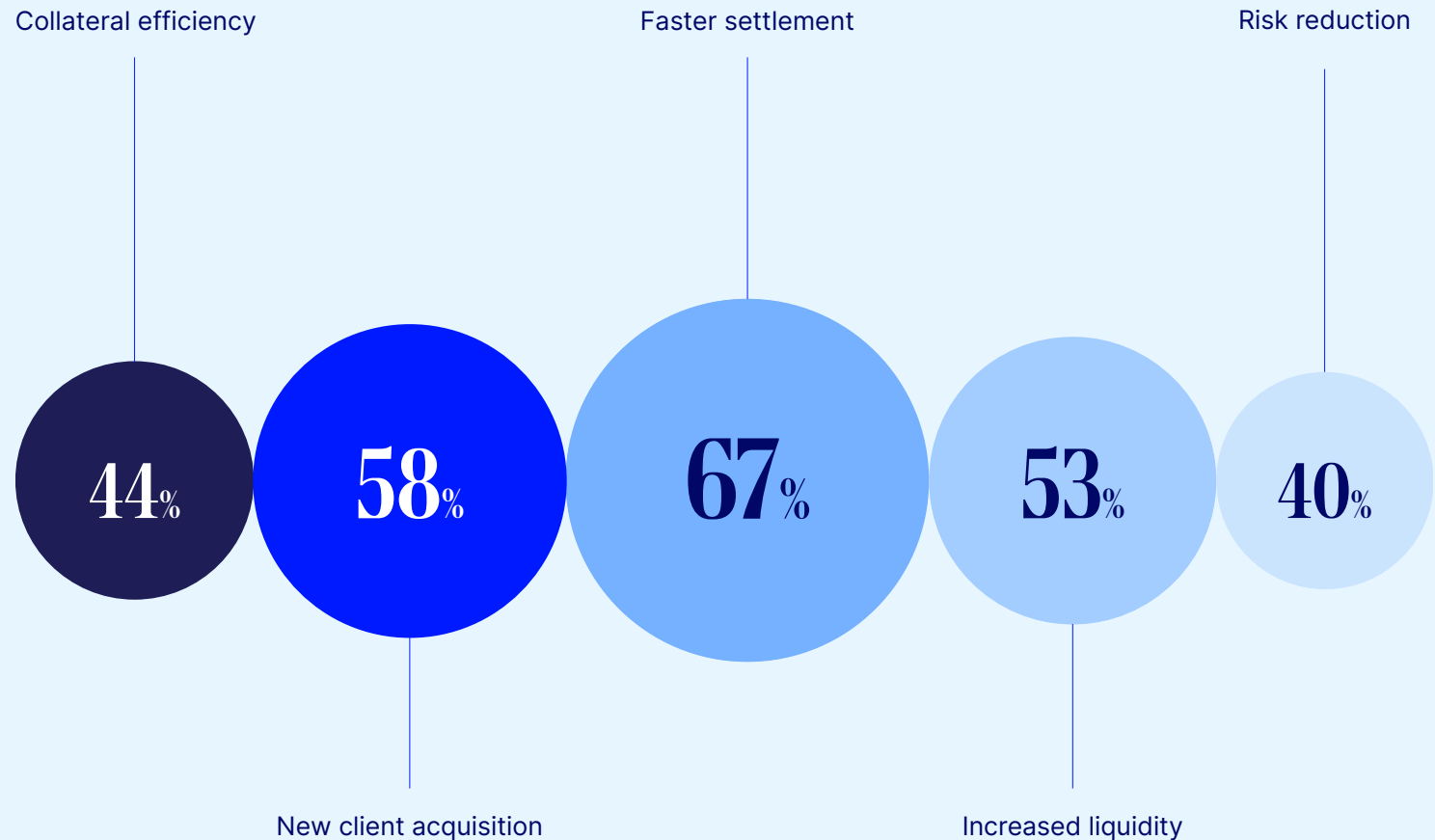
Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

Cost reductions and efficiencies emerged as the most important benefit of digital assets. More than 53 percent of respondents identified cost reductions and efficiencies as the greatest expected benefit of the shift to digital assets.

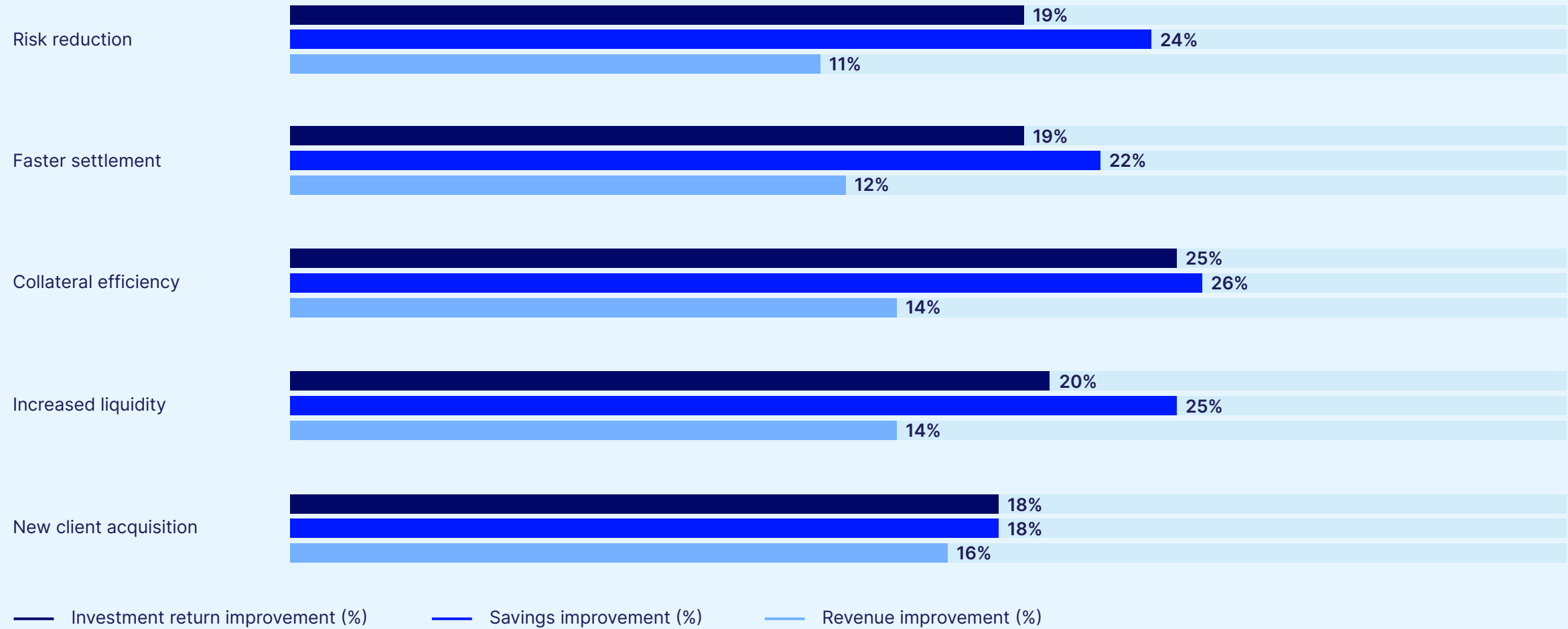
Another 26 percent cited revenue growth, while 20 percent selected investment returns. Faster settlement, new client acquisition, and increased liquidity were viewed as the primary drivers of those benefits (see [Figure 6](#)).

Anticipated savings were significant, ranging from 18 percent to 26 percent across the areas measured. Expected improvements in investment returns ranged from 18 percent to 25 percent, while anticipated revenue growth was lower, ranging from 11 percent to 16 percent (see [Figure 7](#)).

Figure 6: Main benefits of digital assets



Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

Figure 7: Extent of digital assets benefits

Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

While respondents show significant intent to adopt digital assets and are considering the necessary operational developments, actual and expected future allocations remain low. Current average allocations across all digital asset classes are around 11 percent and are expected to rise to 17 percent over the next three years. The equivalent figures for last year were 7 percent, rising to 16 percent. The contrast between preparedness and allocation levels suggests that many institutions continue to build capabilities ahead of large-scale capital deployment.

Respondents were split on cryptocurrencies, as distinct from tokenized real-world assets, as part of their ongoing strategies. Approximately a quarter (26 percent) described “the ability to manage and/or distribute cryptocurrencies through wrappers” as “very important,” while a little over a fifth (22 percent) said it was not important. The rest (52 percent) described crypto as “somewhat important.”

The findings suggest that digital assets are moving toward a phase of broader institutional adoption. Expectations for mainstream acceptance continue to rise, supported by growing operational readiness and increasing investment in the infrastructure, partnerships, and capabilities required to participate in digital asset markets. Institutions anticipate significant impacts across core investment operations, particularly in areas such as custody, payments, fund administration, issuance, and tokenization, with tokenized funds emerging as a preferred route to market.

At the same time, the findings highlight a gap between ambition and implementation. While current allocations remain relatively modest, institutions expect meaningful growth over the coming years, reflecting confidence in the long-term role of digital assets within investment portfolios. Together, these results point to an industry that is laying the foundation for wider adoption, with operational preparedness and product innovation advancing ahead of large-scale allocation shifts.



A new focus on trust, security, and stability

The growing importance of institutional investors within digital asset markets is reshaping expectations for how the industry will evolve.

Notably, a fifth of respondents (20 percent) now believe that a fully on-chain digital environment will never entirely replace the hybrid one in which certain traditional rails and operations continue to exist. When we first asked this question two years ago, only 3 percent felt this was the case and last year 14 percent said the same. A further 38 percent expect such a transition to take more than 10 years.

This shift comes with an increasing desire to see the regulation of digital asset markets and infrastructure resemble current structures. For example, when asked what single factor would most “accelerate your digital assets strategy,” more respondents (28 percent) opted for “regulatory clarity” than any other option (see [Figure 8](#)).

Figure 8: Most important factors for accelerating digital asset strategies

Share of respondents

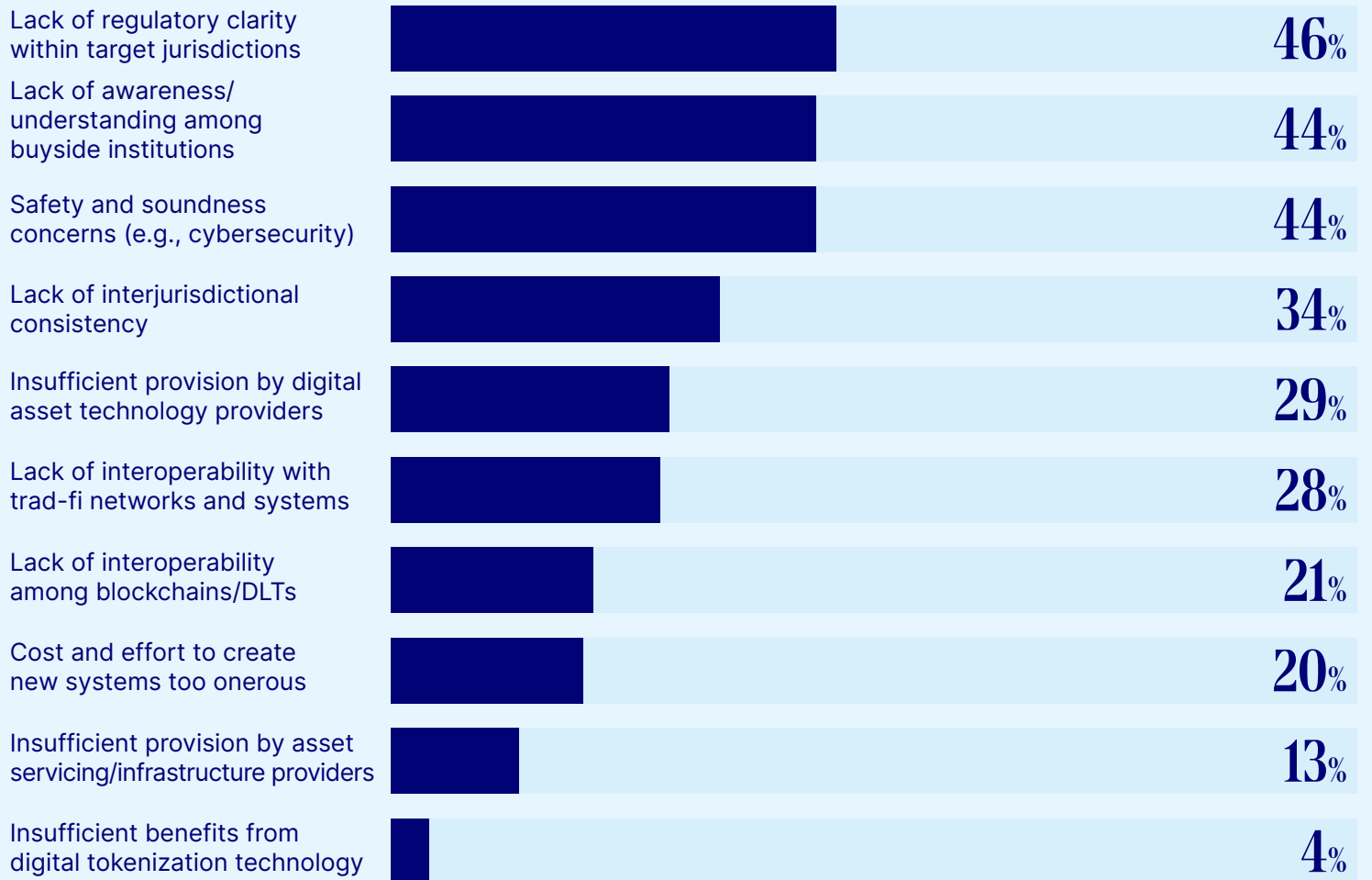


Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

“Lack of regulatory clarity within our target jurisdictions on the treatment of digital assets and investment operations and systems” was the most commonly cited barrier to digital asset adoption, with 46 percent placing it among their top three barriers. Lack of interjurisdictional consistency in the treatment of digital assets and investment operations and systems was also a prominent concern for 34 percent of respondents (see [Figure 9](#)).

Perhaps most significantly, when asked which characteristic they valued most in a digital asset service provider, respondents overwhelmingly selected “experience being governed by an appropriate regulatory regime” (69 percent), followed by cybersecurity (54 percent), and capitalization and financial strength (47 percent) (see [Figure 10](#)).

Figure 9: Barriers to institutional digital assets adoption



Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

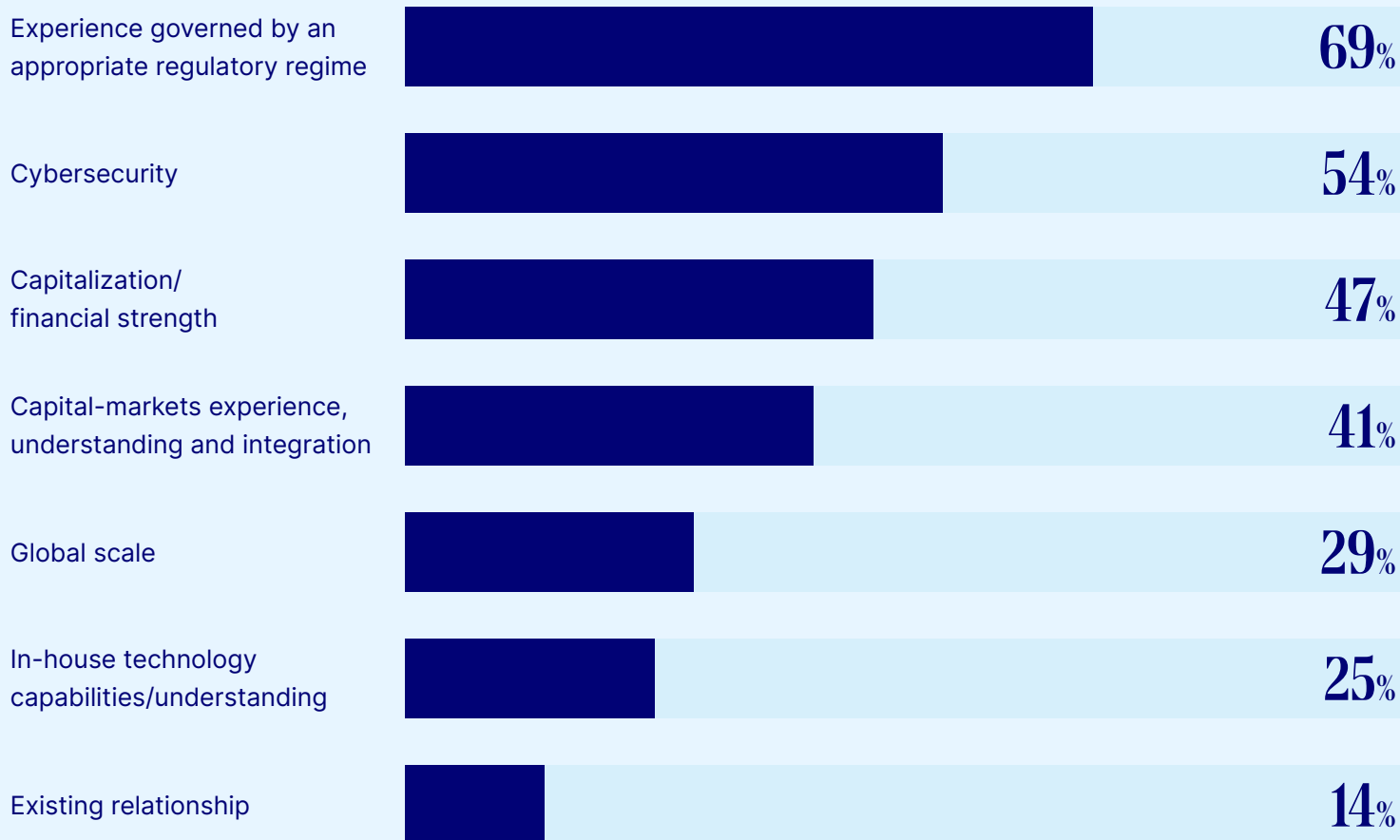
Cybersecurity's prominence is particularly noteworthy given that 60 percent of respondents would like to use public permissionless blockchains to conduct digital asset transactions. Nearly as many (59 percent) plan to use private blockchains, while 42 percent plan to use public permissioned blockchains.

These findings suggest that institutions are not seeking an entirely new financial system. Rather, they are looking to extend many of the same principles that underpin traditional markets into digital ones.

A notable feature of this focus on regulation, scale, and maturity is that it shows little variation across regions or types of organization.

Appropriate regulatory regime experience, for example, was the most important feature of a digital asset service provider in North America (73 percent), Asia Pacific (APAC) (67 percent), and Europe (64 percent). The same was true among asset managers (69 percent), asset owners (70 percent), and wealth managers (67 percent). Cybersecurity and financial strength were also consistently important across regions and institution types.

Figure 10: Most important characteristics of digital asset service providers

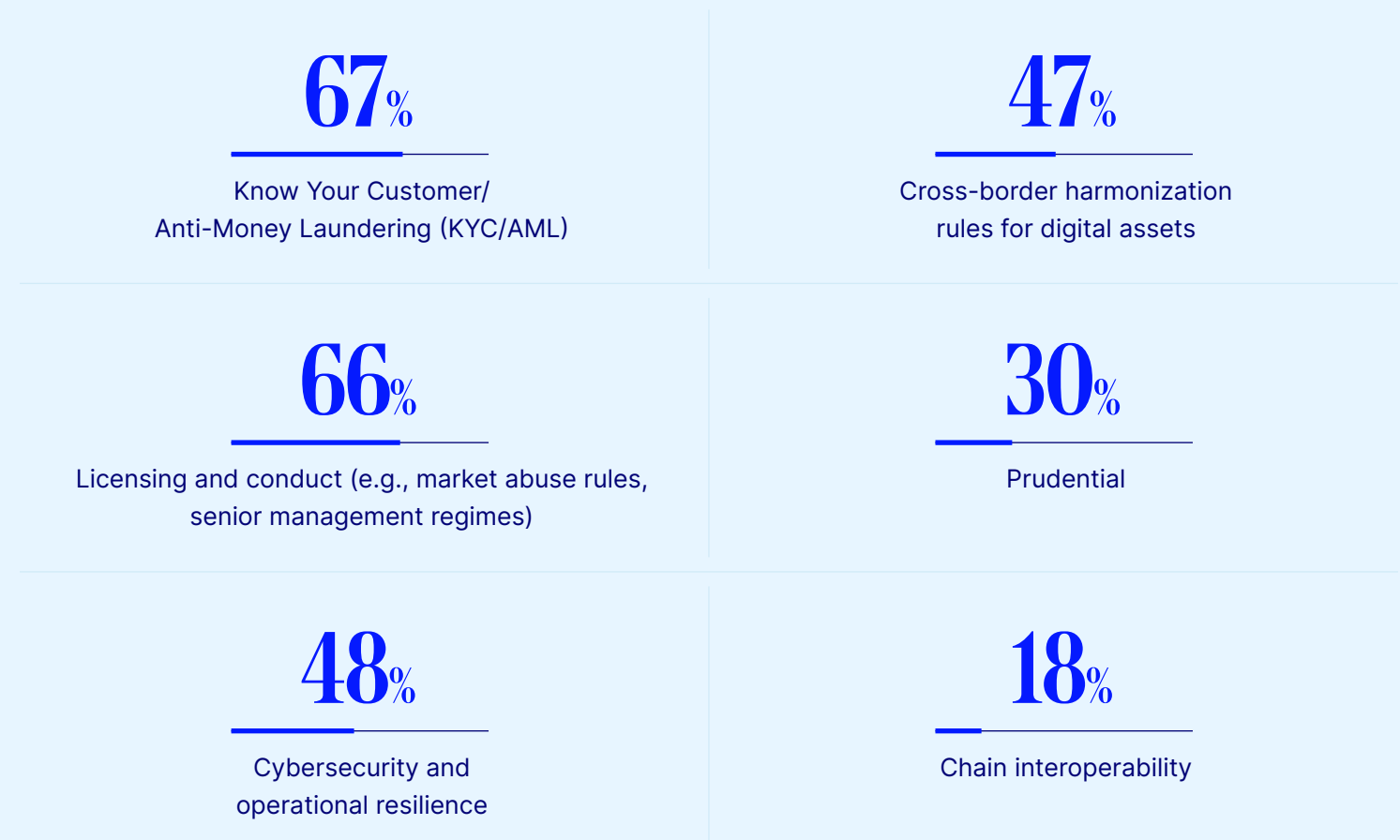


Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

When evaluating jurisdictions for digital assets activity, respondents placed the greatest emphasis on Know Your Customer/Anti-Money Laundering (KYC/AML), licensing and conduct (for example, market abuse rules, senior management regimes), and cybersecurity and operational resilience (see [Figure 11](#)).

The United States topped the list of best jurisdictions for managing digital assets, with 53 percent of respondents describing it as “advanced.” While regional preferences influenced responses, the US performed strongly across all regions, ranking among the top three jurisdictions for Asian and European respondents, who otherwise favored markets in their own region (Switzerland and the EU for European respondents and Singapore and Hong Kong in APAC).

Figure 11: Most important regulations for choosing a digital assets market



Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

As digital assets mature, institutional priorities are increasingly shifting from innovation alone toward trust, security, and market stability. The findings suggest that investors do not see the future as a wholesale replacement of traditional financial infrastructure, but rather as a hybrid ecosystem in which digital and conventional market structures coexist.

This evolution is reinforcing the importance of regulatory clarity, operational resilience, and governance, with institutions placing the greatest value on service providers that demonstrate regulatory expertise, financial strength, and robust cybersecurity capabilities.

Importantly, these priorities remain remarkably consistent across regions and investor types, highlighting a broad consensus on the foundations required for wider adoption. As digital assets move further into the mainstream, success is likely to depend not only on technological innovation, but also on the industry's ability to deliver the same levels of trust, oversight, and stability that underpin traditional financial markets today.

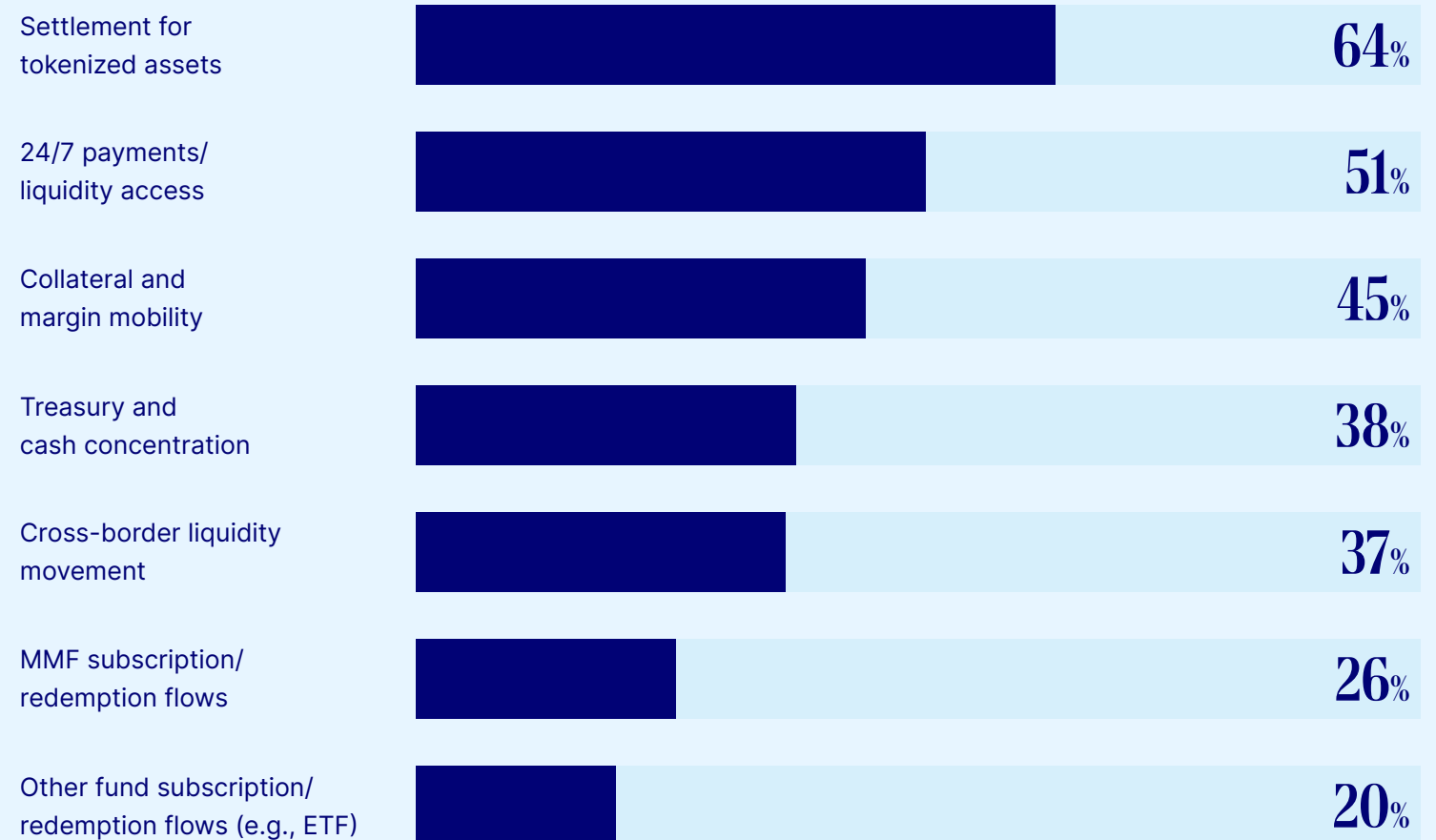


Digital cash gains prominence in digital asset strategies

Very few respondents, just 12 percent, said digital cash was not important to their digital asset strategy, and more described it as “very important” (45 percent) than “somewhat important” (43 percent).

Whereas previous studies found interest in digital money primarily as an asset class, respondents now increasingly view it as a practical tool. Sixty-four percent identified settlement for tokenized assets as a priority use case, while 51 percent cited continuous access to payments and liquidity. Significant minorities also plan to use digital cash across a range of other applications (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Digital cash use cases



Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

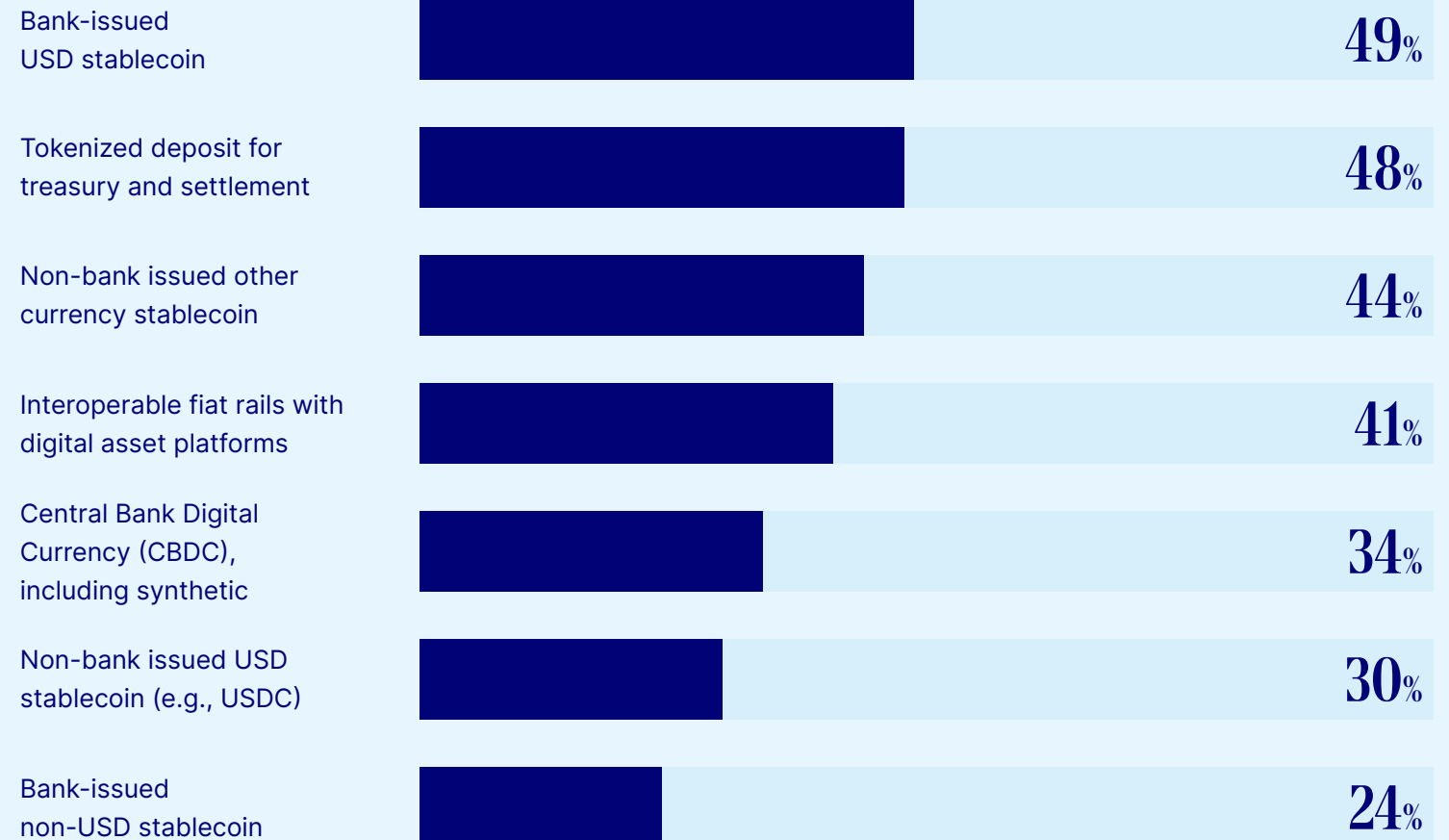
Bank-issued US dollar stablecoins and tokenized deposits were the preferred digital cash types, selected by 49 percent and 48 percent of respondents, respectively (see [Figure 13](#)).

More broadly, confidence in institutions' ability to realize these benefits was lower than for digital assets. Only around a quarter of respondents (24 percent) are either using or able to use digital cash, while a further 46 percent expect to have that capability within a year (see [Figure 14](#)).

In our [last Digital Digest](#), we highlighted the growing adoption of tokenized money market funds (TMMFs), particularly for collateral and liquidity management. Those priorities were also reflected in our survey findings.

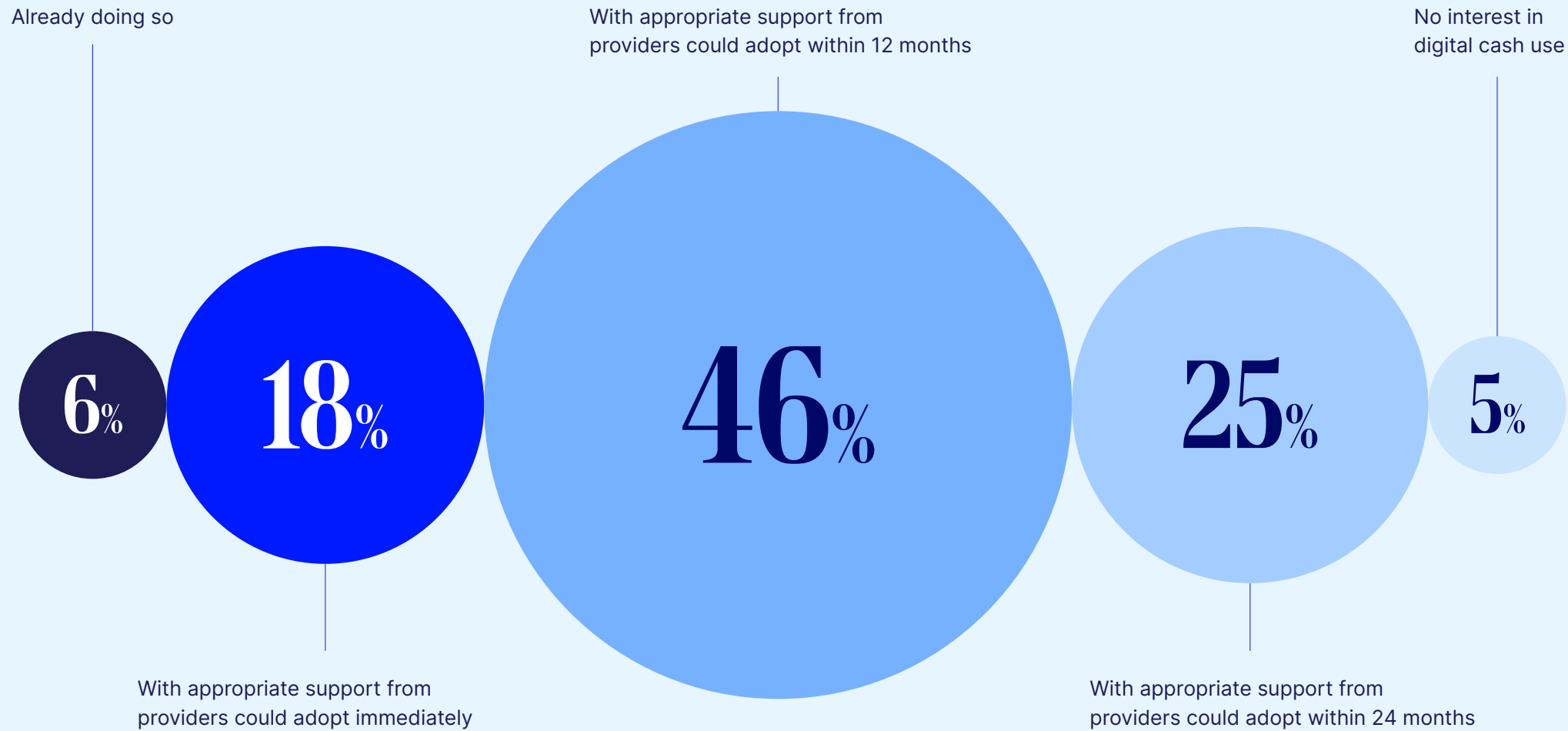
When asked about their plans for TMMFs, 43 percent identified intraday liquidity as a priority use case, while 36 percent cited collateral for derivatives (see [Figure 15](#)).

Figure 13: Preferred digital cash types

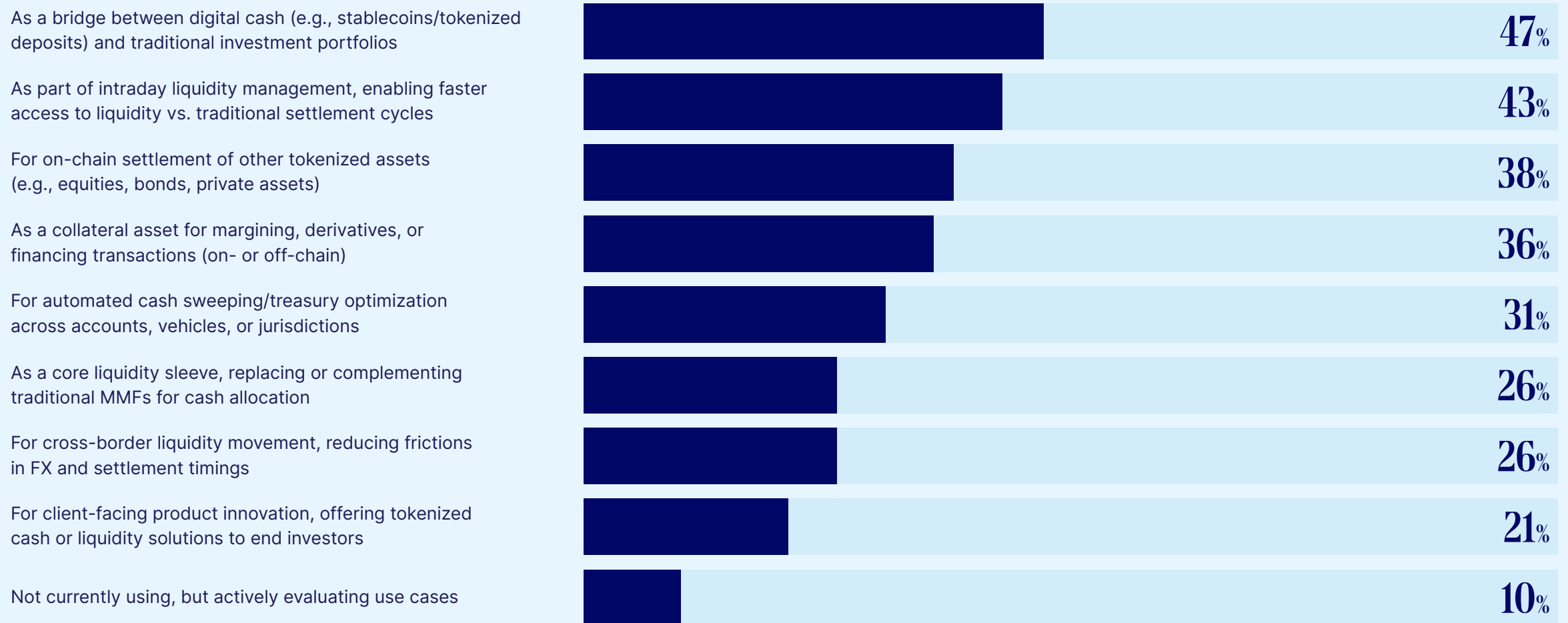


Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

Figure 14: Digital cash preparedness



Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

Figure 15: Tokenized money market fund use cases

Source: State Street 2026 Digital Assets Study

These findings suggest that digital cash is evolving from a complementary concept to a foundational component of institutional digital asset strategies. While discussions around tokenization have often focused on securities and investment products, respondents increasingly recognize that many of the anticipated benefits, particularly around settlement efficiency, liquidity management, and operational automation, depend on the availability of suitable digital cash solutions.

Although digital cash preparedness currently lags broader digital asset readiness, institutions appear to be actively working toward adoption, with most expecting to develop capabilities within the next one to two years. This gap suggests that while many institutions have made progress in preparing for tokenized assets, the supporting cash and settlement infrastructure is still catching up.

The growing interest in tokenized money market funds reinforces this trend. Whether as vehicles for liquidity management, collateral optimization, or the transfer of value between digital and traditional markets, these products are emerging as important bridges between existing investment infrastructure and future digital ecosystems. Together, these findings indicate that the future of digital assets will be shaped not only by the evolution of tokenized securities, but also by the cash and liquidity infrastructure that enables them to operate at scale.



Conclusion

Five years into our annual digital assets research, the direction of travel is becoming clearer. Institutions continue to raise their expectations for the role digital assets will play in investment management, while taking tangible steps to prepare through investments in technology, provider relationships, operational capabilities, and new products. Operational readiness is rising, anticipated allocations continue to grow, and a majority now expect digital assets and tokenized markets to become mainstream within the foreseeable future.

Yet the most important story emerging from this year's research is not simply one of growth. It is one of maturation. As digital assets become more institutional, the priorities of market participants are increasingly centered on the same attributes that have long underpinned successful financial markets: trust, regulatory certainty, resilience, security, and scale. Respondents are seeking innovation, but they are also looking for the governance, oversight, and infrastructure that can support adoption at institutional levels.

The growing focus on digital cash highlights a similar trend. Market participants increasingly view settlement, liquidity, and payments as essential components of a functioning digital ecosystem, rather than secondary considerations. The development of digital securities and digital money appears increasingly interconnected, with each helping to unlock the value of the other.

Taken together, the findings suggest the industry is moving beyond the question of whether digital assets matter and toward a more practical challenge: how to implement them at scale.

The opportunity remains significant, but realizing it will depend on the industry's ability to combine technological innovation with the institutional foundations of trust, security, and operational excellence. If that balance can be achieved, the coming years may mark the transition of digital assets from an emerging innovation to an established part of the global financial system. The pace at which institutions translate readiness into implementation will be one of the most important indicators to watch in the years ahead.



State Street Corporation
One Congress Street, Boston, MA 02114-2016

www.statestreet.com

The material presented herein is for informational purposes only. The views expressed herein are subject to change based on market and other conditions and factors. The opinions expressed herein reflect general perspectives and information and are not tailored to specific requirements, circumstances and/or investment philosophies. The information presented herein does not take into account any particular investment objectives, strategies, tax status or investment horizon. It does not constitute investment research or investment, legal, or tax advice and it should not be relied on as such. It should not be considered an offer or solicitation to buy or sell any product, service, investment, security or financial instrument or to pursue any trading or investment strategy. It does not constitute any binding contractual arrangement or commitment of any kind. State Street is not, by virtue of providing the material presented herein or otherwise, undertaking to manage money or act as your fiduciary.

You acknowledge and agree that the material presented herein is not intended to and does not, and shall not, serve as the primary basis for any investment decisions. You should evaluate and assess this material independently in light of those circumstances. We encourage you to consult your tax or financial advisor.

All material, including information from or attributed to State Street, has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable, but its accuracy is not guaranteed and State Street does not assume any responsibility for its accuracy, efficacy or use. Any information provided herein and obtained by State Street from third parties has not been reviewed for accuracy. In addition, forecasts, projections, or other forward-looking statements or information, whether by State Street or third parties, are not guarantees of future results or future performance, are inherently uncertain, are based on assumptions that, at the time, are difficult to predict, and involve a number of risks and uncertainties. Actual outcomes and results may differ materially from what is expressed herein.

The information presented herein may or may not produce results beneficial to you. State Street does not undertake and is under no obligation to update or keep current the information or opinions contained in this communication.

To the fullest extent permitted by law, this information is provided "as-is" at your sole risk and neither State Street nor any of its affiliates or third party providers makes any guarantee, representation, or warranty of any kind regarding such information, including, without limitation, any representation that any investment, security or other property is suitable for you or for others or that any materials presented herein

will achieve the results intended. State Street and its affiliates and third party providers disclaim any warranty and all liability, whether arising in contract, tort or otherwise, for any losses, liabilities, damages, expenses or costs, either direct, indirect, consequential, special or punitive, arising from or in connection with your access to and/or use of the information herein. Neither State Street nor any of its affiliates or third party providers shall have any liability, monetary or otherwise, to you or any other person or entity in the event the information presented herein produces incorrect, invalid or detrimental results.

To learn how State Street looks after your personal data, visit: <https://www.statestreet.com/utility/privacy-notice.html>. Our Privacy Statement provides important information about how we manage personal information.

No permission is granted to reprint, sell, copy, distribute, or modify any material herein, in any form or by any means without the prior written consent of State Street.

©2026 State Street Corporation and/or its applicable third party licensor. All rights reserved.

9156298.1.1.GBL.

Expiration date: October 1, 2028

