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Shipping Trends

2026

Shipping industry perspectives on key economic, geopolitical, sustainability, technology, and regulatory trends.

June 2026

Foreword

The global shipping industry today operates in an increasingly complex environment shaped by geopolitical tensions, evolving trade patterns, regulatory change, the energy transition and rapid technological advancement. Against this backdrop, shipping companies must balance long-term strategic investments with heightened uncertainty and market volatility.

To better understand how shipping industry leaders are navigating these challenges, Deloitte Greece conducted its second Shipping Trends Survey. Gathering the views of shipping executives from across the shipping industry, the survey provides valuable insights into the trends, priorities, and challenges that are expected to shape the industry in the years ahead.

The findings reveal an industry that remains fundamentally resilient and commercially disciplined. Executives continue to favor practical, value-driven solutions to decarbonization, while awaiting greater regulatory clarity and supporting infrastructure. Similarly, digital technologies and AI are viewed not as ends in themselves, but as essential tools for improving operational performance, regulatory compliance and commercial decision-making.

We hope this report offers valuable perspectives on the evolving priorities of the shipping industry and contributes to the ongoing dialogue on how industry can strengthen its resilience, embrace innovation and successfully navigate the transition towards a more sustainable and competitive future.

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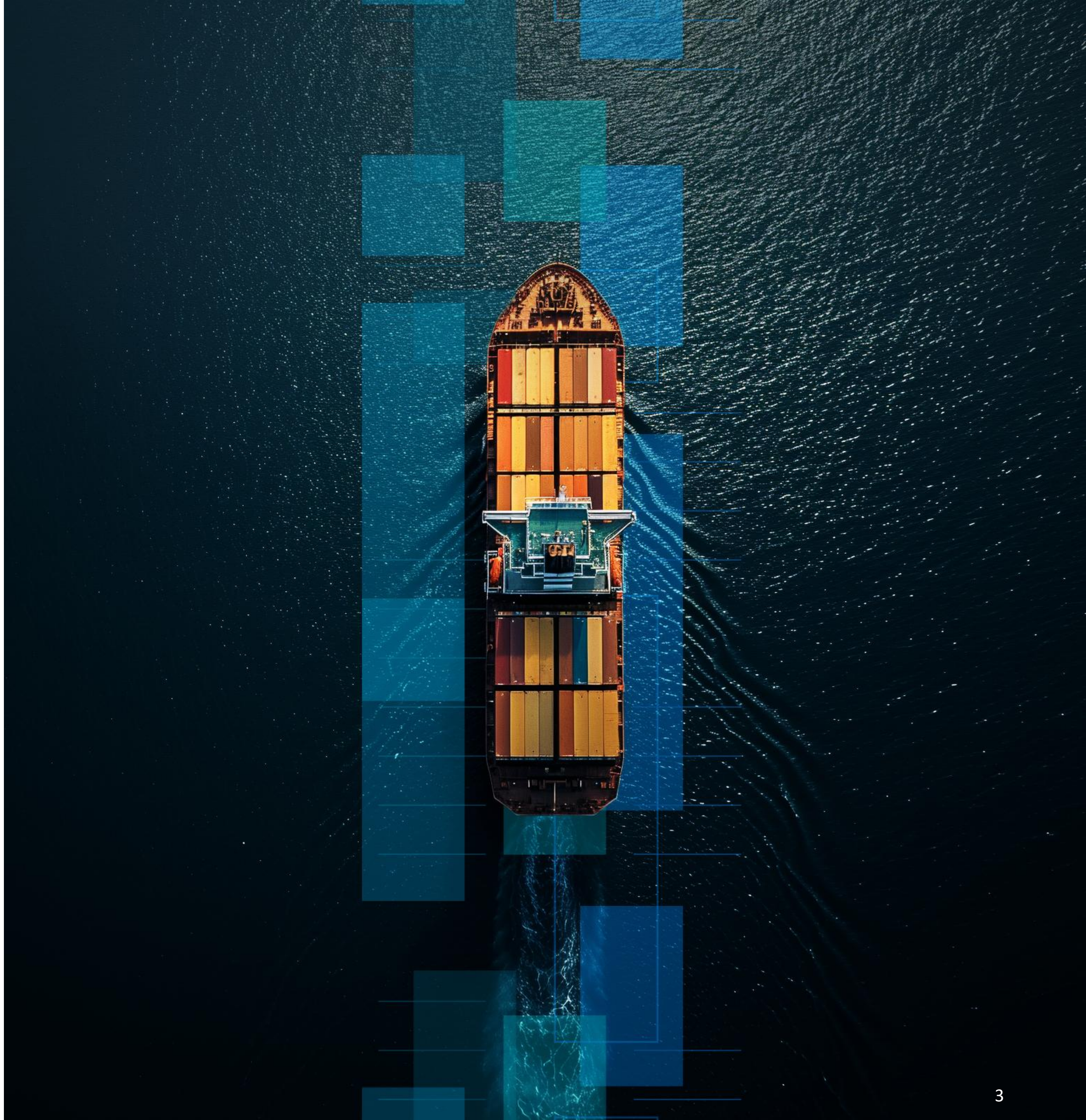
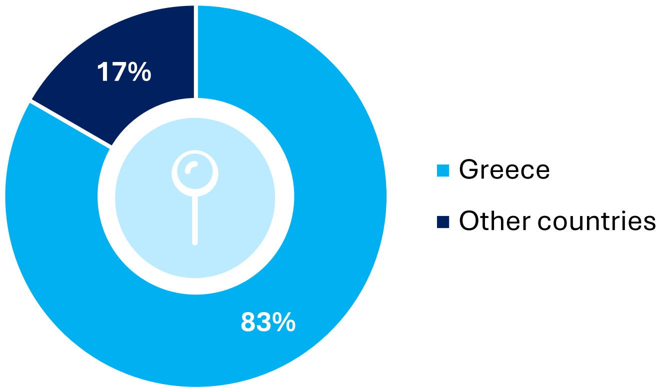
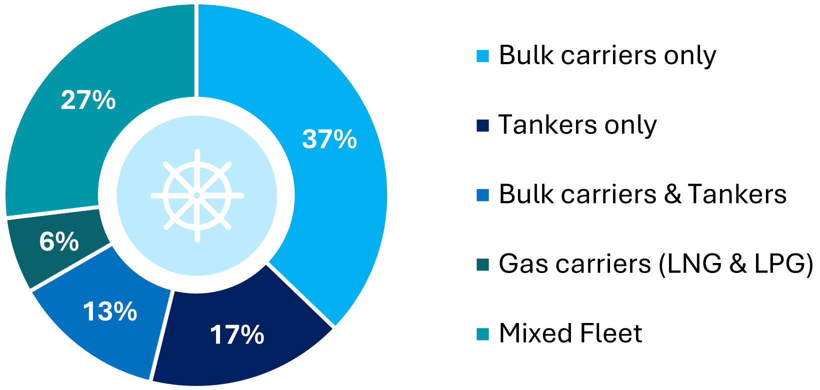
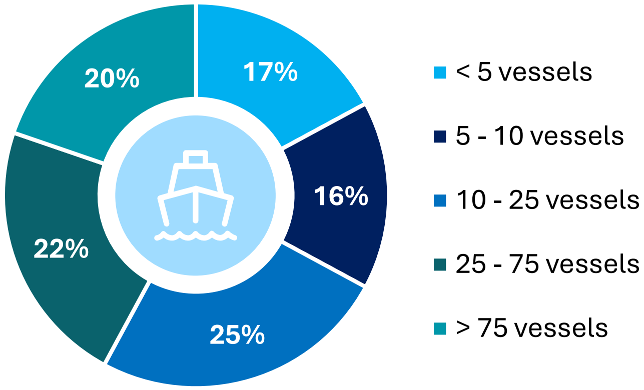


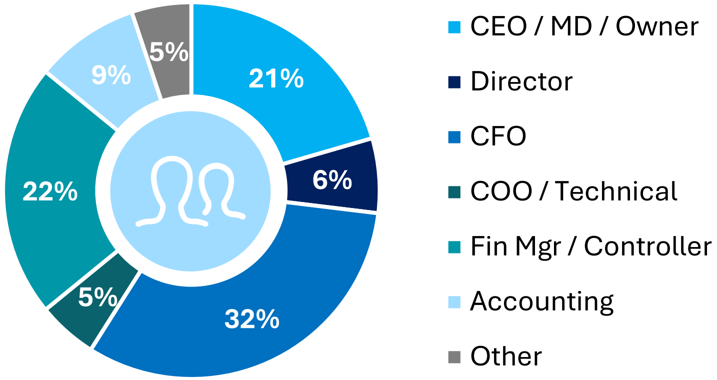
2026 Shipping Trends | Survey Demographics

- The Shipping Trends survey identifies the perspectives, priorities and concerns of the shipping industry
- First run: Posidonia 2024
- **Second run: Posidonia 2026**
- Audience: Mainly Deloitte clients (Greece and international network)
- Anonymous submissions with demographic info
- Responses represent the key market segments in terms of fleet size and vessel types









2026 Shipping Trends | Key Findings

Geopolitics & Global Economy

- Geopolitical disruptions remain the #1 factor impacting shipping
- Shipping is resilient: Responses indicate high or moderate readiness to deal with worsening economic conditions and market volatility
- Concerns about ability to manage major supply chain shock
- Still, one third of survey participants view the current environment as neutral or even positive for business

Structural & Operational Challenges

- Chronic overcapacity & freight rate pressure is the #1 long-term financial threat (ranking higher than geopolitics)
- Seafarer shortage highlighted as the #1 operational challenge

Technology & Investment

- AI & Advanced Analytics and IoT are priority investments areas
- Financial barriers (upfront cost, uncertain ROI) remain the top obstacle to technology adoption
- Declining confidence in ability to deal with cybersecurity threats

Regulatory & Compliance

- Responses indicate most shipping companies are well prepared to comply with regulatory requirements
- Sanctions compliance viewed as a critical risk by many companies due to trade lanes, customers or counterparties

Decarbonization & Sustainability

- Emissions reduction and compliance with regulatory requirements considered much less critical than in 2024
- Industry is pragmatic: Slow steaming and retrofits once again identified as the preferred short-to-medium-term solutions for reducing carbon emissions
- Changing perceptions vs. 2024 on Net Zero fuels: Electric propulsion and Nuclear gaining, Green Ammonia losing ground
- Visibility remains low: No dominant fuel emerging, uncertainties over regulation and infrastructure availability
- Growing pessimism on achieving IMO 2050 target

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Chapter

Geopolitics & Global Economy

2026 Shipping Trends | Geopolitics & Global Economy

- Shipping industry in constant crisis: Covid, Ukraine, Suez, Houthis, Trade Sanctions and now Hormuz
- As expected, geopolitics remain the factor most impacting shipping, ranked in 1st or 2nd place by 85% of survey participants
- Global economic conditions came second, ranked as 1st or 2nd most important factor by 6 out of 10 survey participants
- The US – China strategic rivalry, new for the 2026 survey, ranked third in importance
- Worth noting that energy transition & decarbonization dropped to 7th place, reflecting the change in shipping industry priorities

Ranking of factors impacting the global shipping industry in the short to medium term

2026	2024	
#1	#1	Geopolitical disruptions
#2	#2	Global GDP / economic conditions
#3		US–China strategic rivalry
#4	#5	Access to funding
#5	#4	Interest rates
#6	#6	Cost of newbuilds
#7	#3	Energy transition & decarbonization
#8	#7	Climate-related disruptions

TOP

85% Geopolitical disruptions **Ranked as #1 or #2**

59% Global economy **Ranked as #1 or #2**

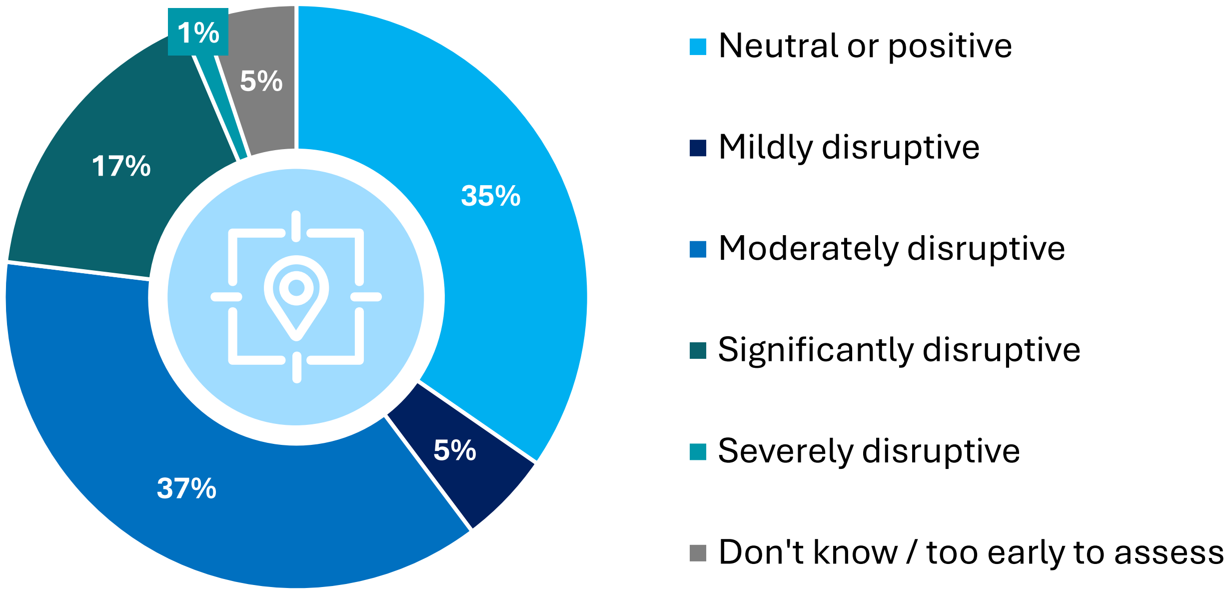
44% US–China strategic rivalry **Ranked in Top 3**

40% Energy Transition & Decarbonization **Ranked as #7 or #8**

BOTTOM

- 35% of survey participants believe that the current geopolitical environment has a neutral or even positive impact on their companies
- 42% consider the geopolitical environment mildly or moderately disruptive
- Only 18% assess the geopolitical environment as significantly or severely disruptive
- This finding suggests that a significant share of shipping companies view geopolitical disruption not only as a risk but also as a source of commercial opportunity. Longer trade routes, shifting cargo flows and stronger freight rates may offset the negative effects of geopolitical uncertainty for well-positioned operators

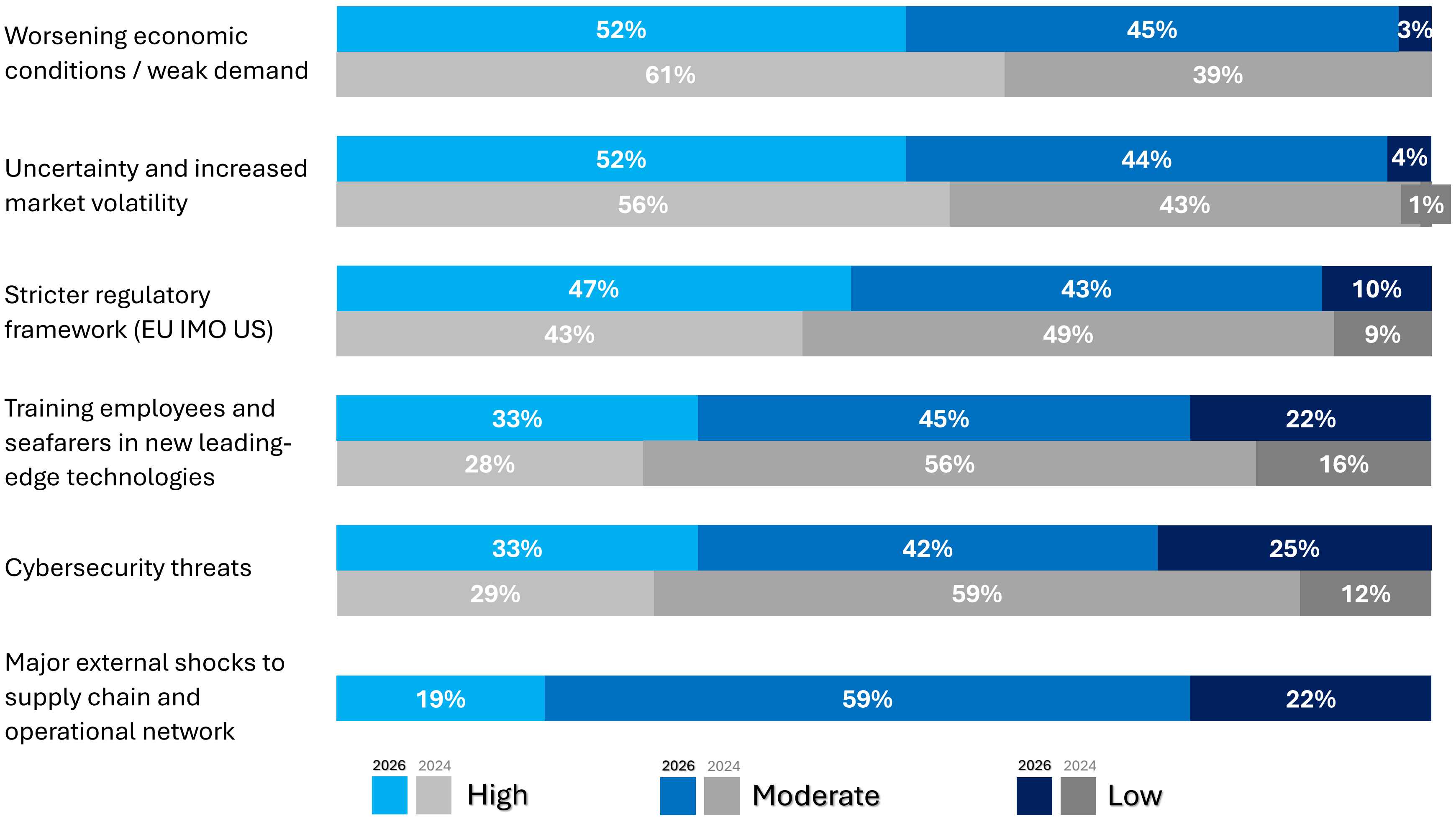
Current geopolitical environment's impact on your company



2026 Shipping Trends | Geopolitics & Global Economy

- Practically all survey participants declared high or moderate readiness to deal with worsening economic conditions and with increased market volatility, highlighting the resilience of the shipping industry
- Readiness to deal with stricter regulatory requirements roughly at the same level as 2024
- Compared with the 2024 survey we notice declining confidence in the ability to deal with cybersecurity threats: 25% expressed low confidence, twice as many as in 2024 (12%)
- Only 19% are highly confident that their companies are ready to deal with major shocks to supply chains

Readiness in dealing with shipping industry challenges



Chapter

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Structural & Operational Challenges

2026 Shipping Trends | Structural & Operational Challenges

- Survey participants identified chronic overcapacity and persistent freight rate pressure as the greatest threat to the financial sustainability of their companies
- Geopolitical disruption and the massive capital requirements needed for decarbonization and fleet renewal tie for second place. Increasing regulatory complexity and compliance costs ranks lower as a threat
- Results suggest that shipping executives are more concerned about profitability than uncertainty. Sustained earnings pressure limits companies' ability to fund fleet renewal and reduces their resilience to broader challenges, including geopolitical disruptions and regulatory requirements

Structural challenges posing the greatest long-term threat to financial sustainability *(multiple answers)*

87%
Chronic overcapacity and persistent freight rate pressure

79%
Geopolitical disruption to key trade routes

79%
Massive capital requirements for decarbonization and fleet renewal

75%
Increasing regulatory complexity and compliance costs

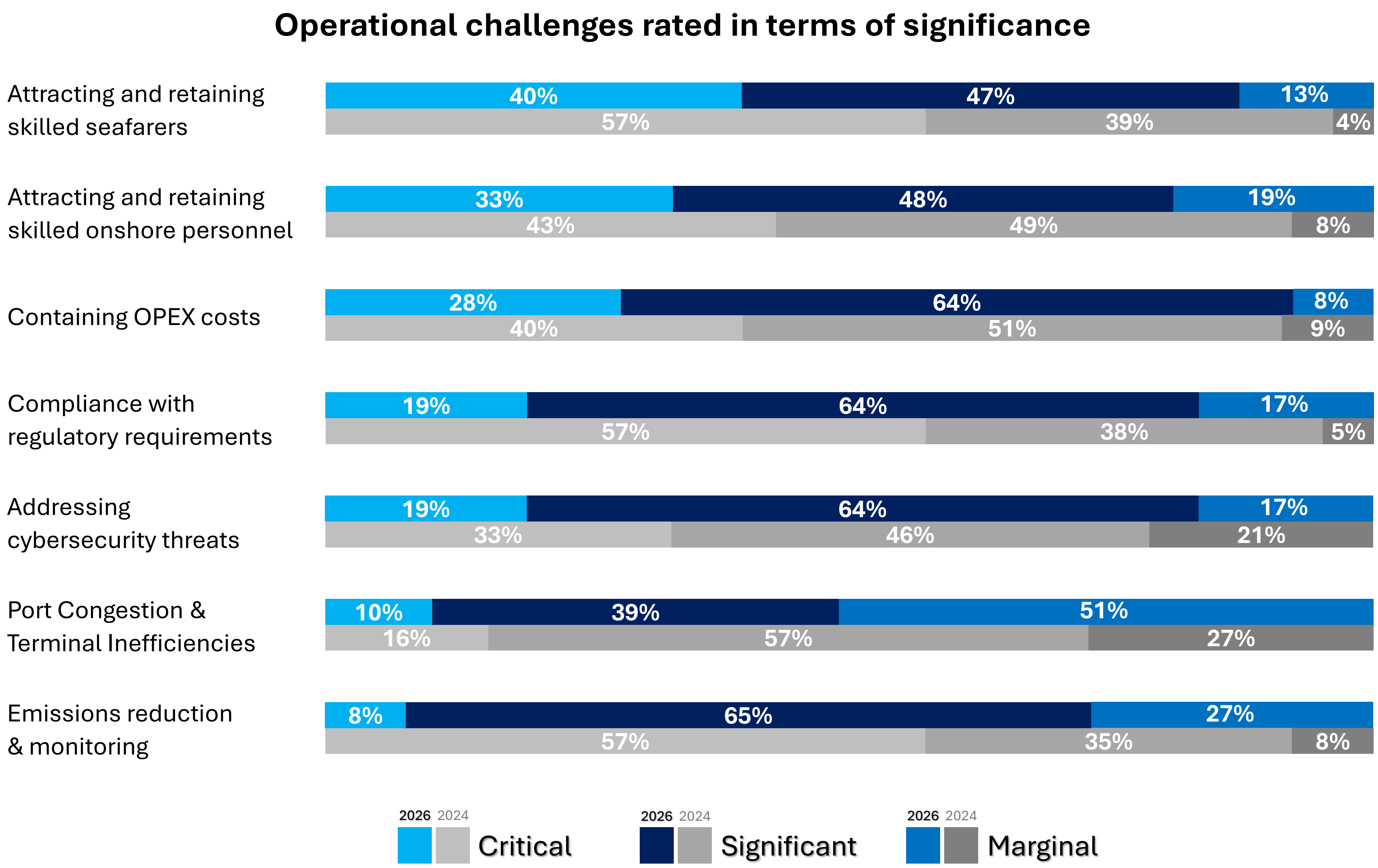
69%
Shortage of qualified seafarers and maritime professionals

61%
Accelerating technological disruption requiring continuous investment

2026 Shipping Trends | Structural & Operational Challenges

- Survey participants identified attracting and retaining skilled seafarers as the most critical operating challenge they are facing. Attracting and retaining skilled onshore personnel ranks second
- Containing operating expenses remains a significant operational challenge, ranking in third place
- A major shift compared to 2024 is that regulatory compliance and emissions reduction have fallen sharply down the industry's list of immediate concerns:

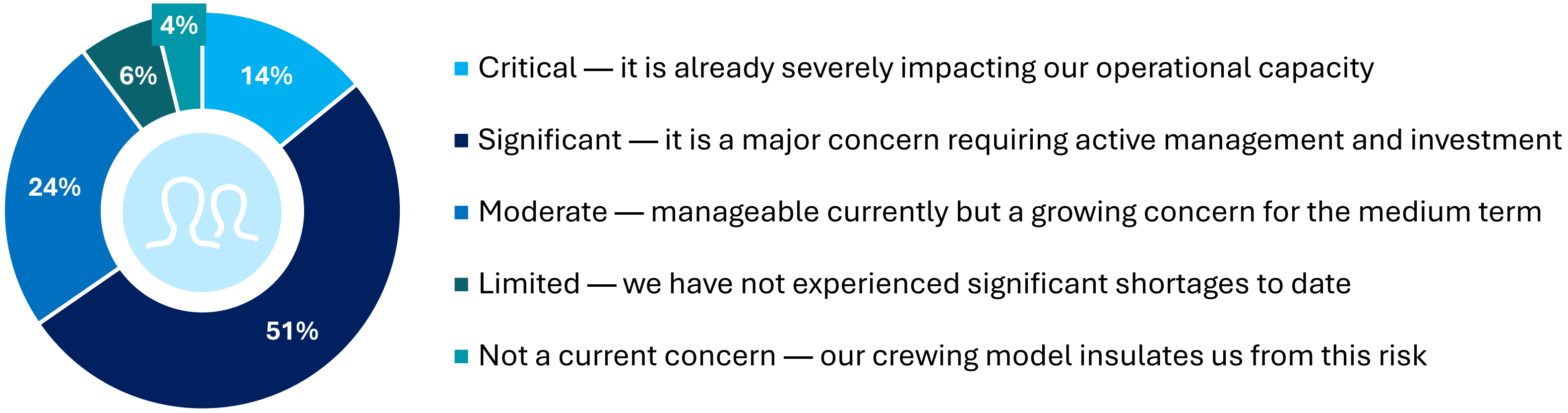
  While 57% of participants considered both issues critical in 2024, only 19% now view regulatory compliance as critical and just 8% say the same for emissions reduction



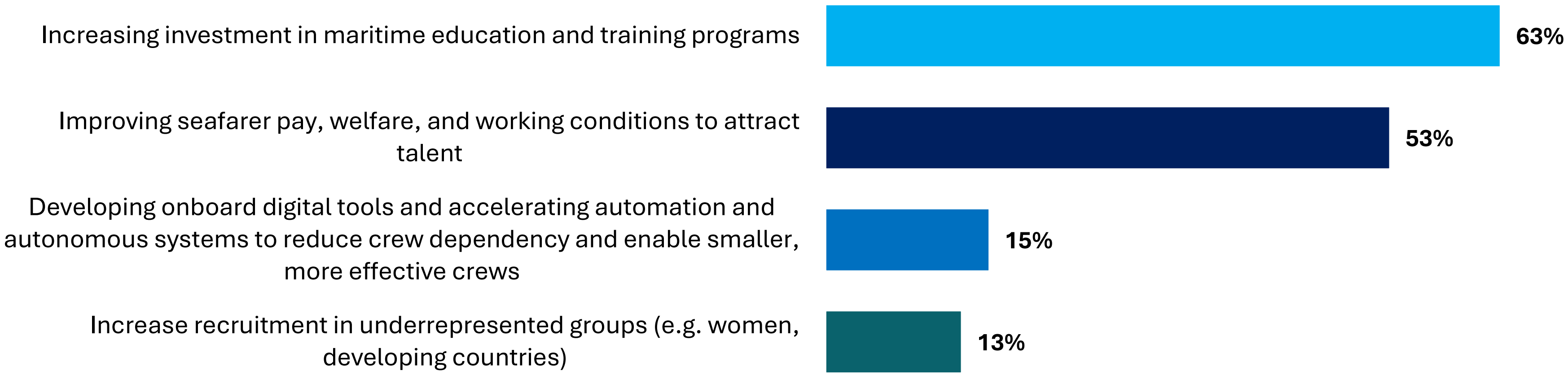
2026 Shipping Trends | Structural & Operational Challenges

- More than half of survey participants consider the shortage of seafarers and maritime professionals as a significant challenge to their company. An additional 14% view this as a critical issue with severe impact in operations
- When asked for the most effective response to the seafarer shortage, the predominant answers were:
  - to increase investment in education and training programs (63% of participants), and;
  - to improve pay, welfare and working conditions in order to attract seafarers (53% of participants)

Shortage of seafarers and maritime professionals as a challenge to your company



Most effective response to the seafarer shortage *(multiple answers)*



Chapter 3

Decarbonization & Sustainability

2026 Shipping Trends | Decarbonization & Sustainability

- Slow steaming and energy efficiency retrofits were once again selected as the preferred short-to-medium-term solutions for reducing carbon emissions, same as in 2024
- Blended fuels were the next most likely solution, with 7 percentage points (pp) increase in favorable opinions since 2024. LNG gained ground as a transitional fuel (+8 pp)
- Results suggest that shipping executives continue to rely on practical, cost-effective decarbonization solutions while waiting for greater certainty regarding alternative fuels, infrastructure, and long-term regulatory frameworks
- To this extent, AI-assisted voyage optimization is now viewed as a likely transitional solution by 69% or participants

Likelihood of alternative short-to-medium-term solutions for the transition to net-zero

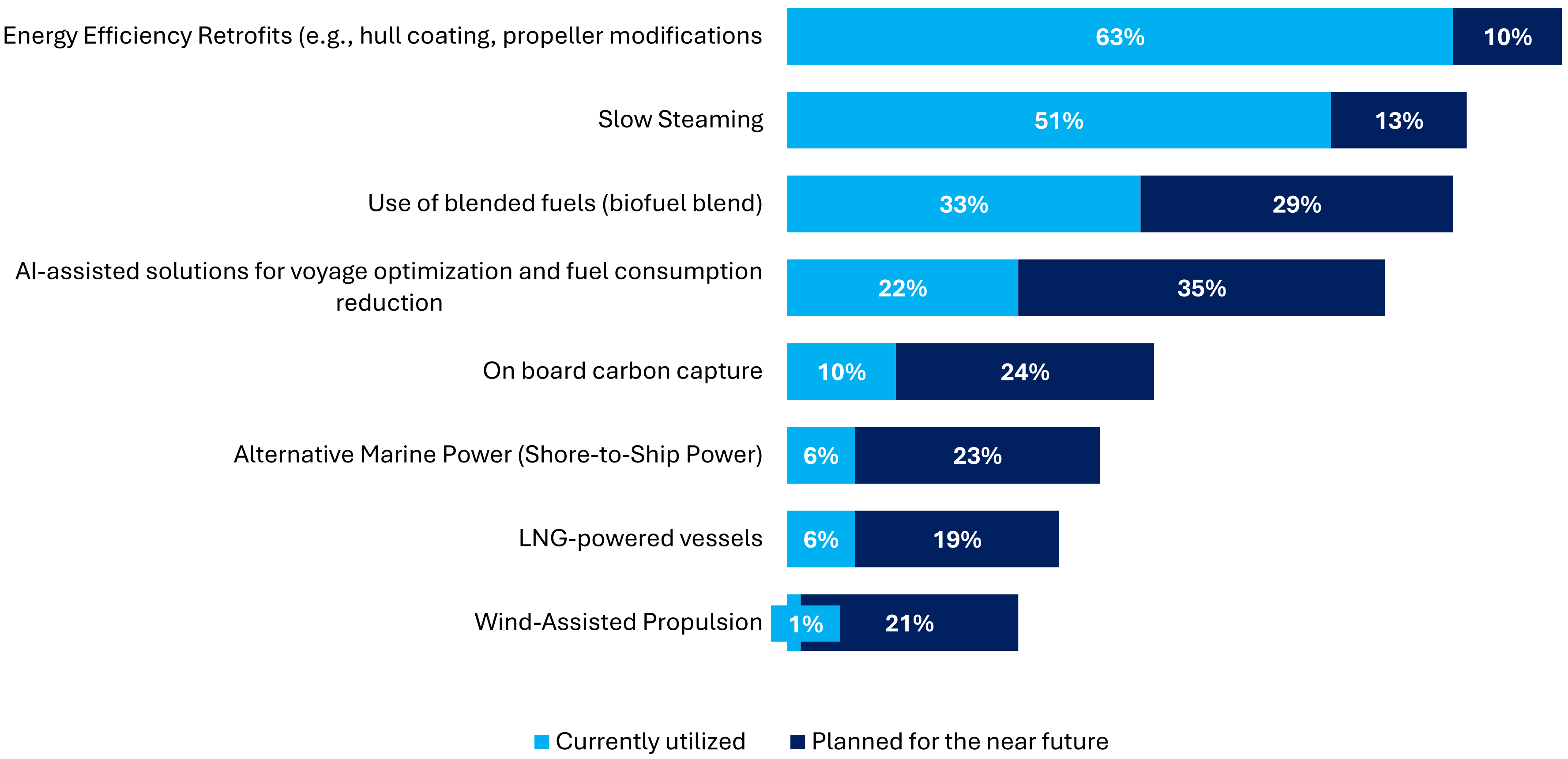
Solution	2024	2026	Change
Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) as transitional fuel	54%	62%	+8 pp
Use of blended fuels (biofuel blend)	70%	77%	+7 pp
Carbon capture technologies	71%	59%	-12 pp
Speed optimization / Slow Steaming	89%	87%	- 2 pp
Energy Efficiency Retrofits	90%	91%	+1 pp
AI-assisted solutions	58%	69%	+11 pp
Wind-Assisted Propulsion	New for 2026	18%	
Alternative Marine Power (Shore-to-Ship Power)	New for 2026	37%	

pp: percentage points

2024 2026 Very likely & Likely

- Consistent with the replies in the previous questions, energy efficiency retrofits and slow steaming appear to be already widely utilized
- Over 30% of survey participants said their companies use blended fuels, with another 30% planned
- Shipping companies seem willing to utilize innovative technologies in the near future, such as AI solutions, on board carbon capture and wind-assisted propulsion

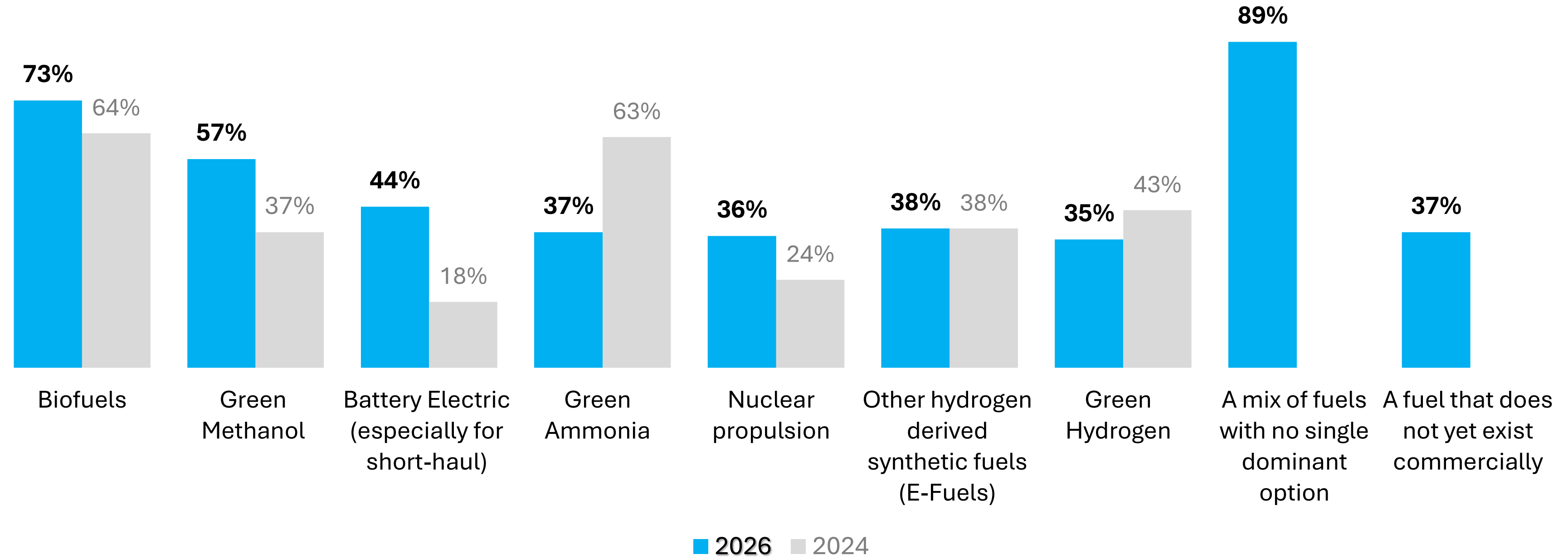
Solutions currently utilized or planned by your company to reduce carbon footprint

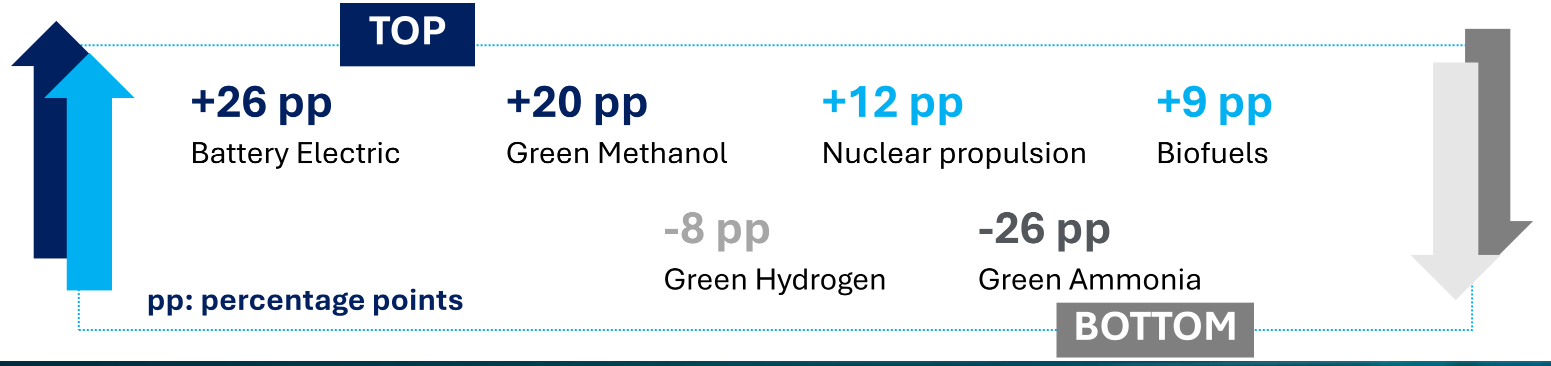


2026 Shipping Trends | Decarbonization & Sustainability

- Compared to the 2024 survey we notice important shifts in opinion for which fuels could drive the shipping industry to Net Zero
- Big gains for Battery-powered propulsion (+26 pp), as it now appears a viable option for short-sea vessels, and Nuclear (+12 pp) due to positive developments in SMR (Small Nuclear Reactor) technology
- Green Methanol viewed much more favorably (+20 pp) as it moves from concept to reality and more likely to be available at scale, while Green Ammonia seems to have fallen out of favor (-26 pp) as safety challenges are becoming more apparent
- Visibility remains low: 89% of survey participants believe there will not be a single dominant fuel; 37% consider likely that the fuel of the future does not exist today

Views on alternative "Fuels of the Future"
("likely" and "very likely" responses)



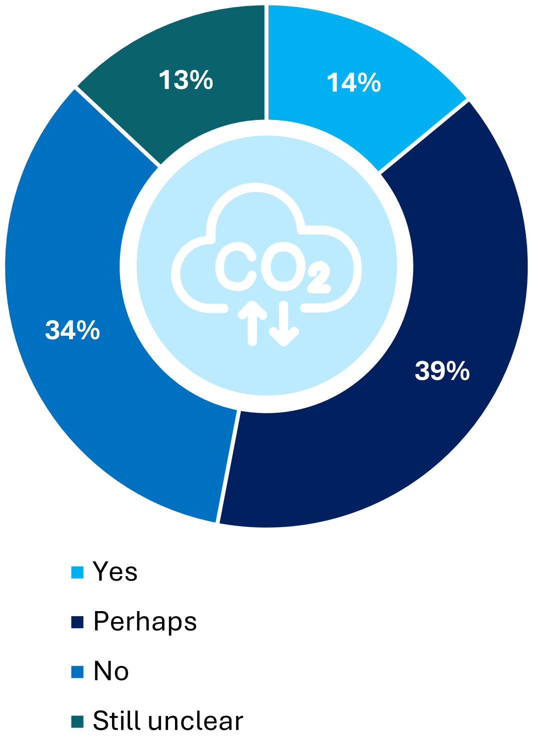


2026 Shipping Trends | Decarbonization & Sustainability

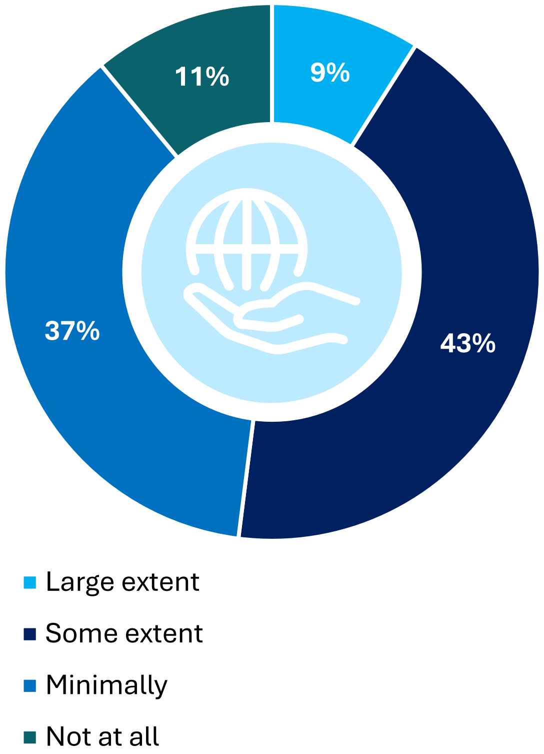
- Opinions vary on the "first mover advantage" for shipping companies adopting alternative fuels. Only 14% of survey participants see a competitive advantage. More than a third are skeptical, and another third sees no advantage at all

- Sustainability performance, on the other hand, is considered a more important factor. Survey participants believe it influences, to a large or at least some extent:
  - the decisions of charterers and brokers when selecting shipping companies (52% of responses), as well as;
  - the investment or funding decisions of financiers and investors (66% of responses)

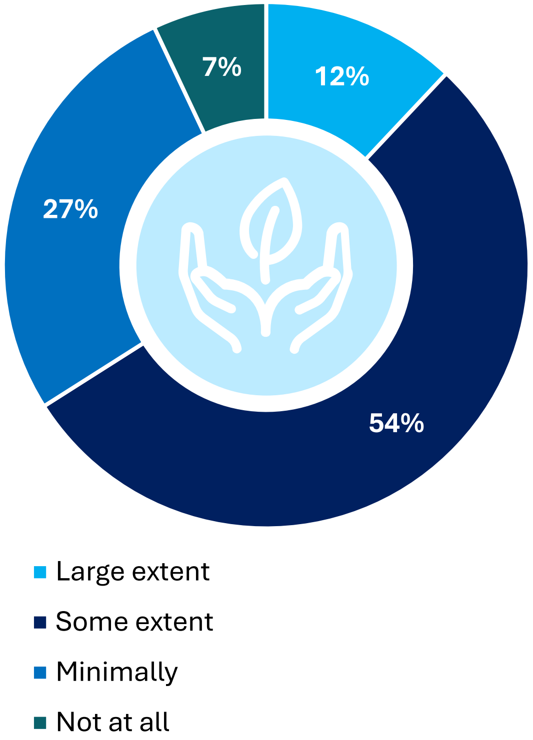
Competitive advantage for shipping companies leading the adoption of alternative fuels



Sustainability influence on charterers / brokers' selection of shipping companies



Sustainability influence on investors / financiers' investing / funding decisions

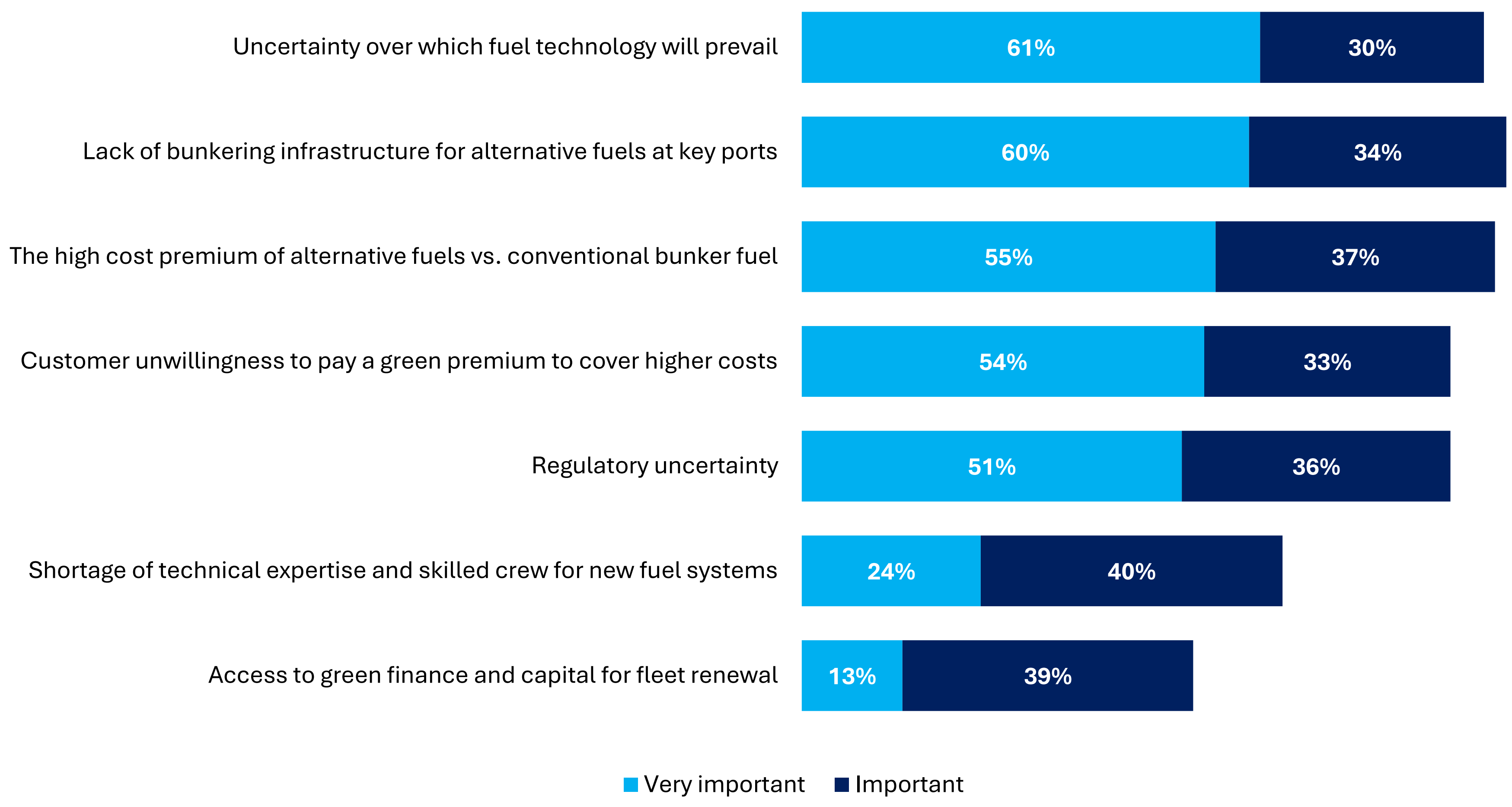


Responses to this question reveal that the reasons shipping executives are reluctant to accelerate fleet decarbonization can be traced mainly to:

- Uncertainties over regulation, fuel technologies and infrastructure availability
- Adverse financials, both in terms of higher cost of alternative fuels and in terms of customers' unwillingness to cover higher costs

We can infer that the shipping industry's decarbonization challenge is increasingly about creating the regulatory certainty, infrastructure, market demand, and economic incentives needed to make the new, cleaner technologies commercially viable at scale.

Concerns when considering accelerating a company's decarbonization strategy



Chapter

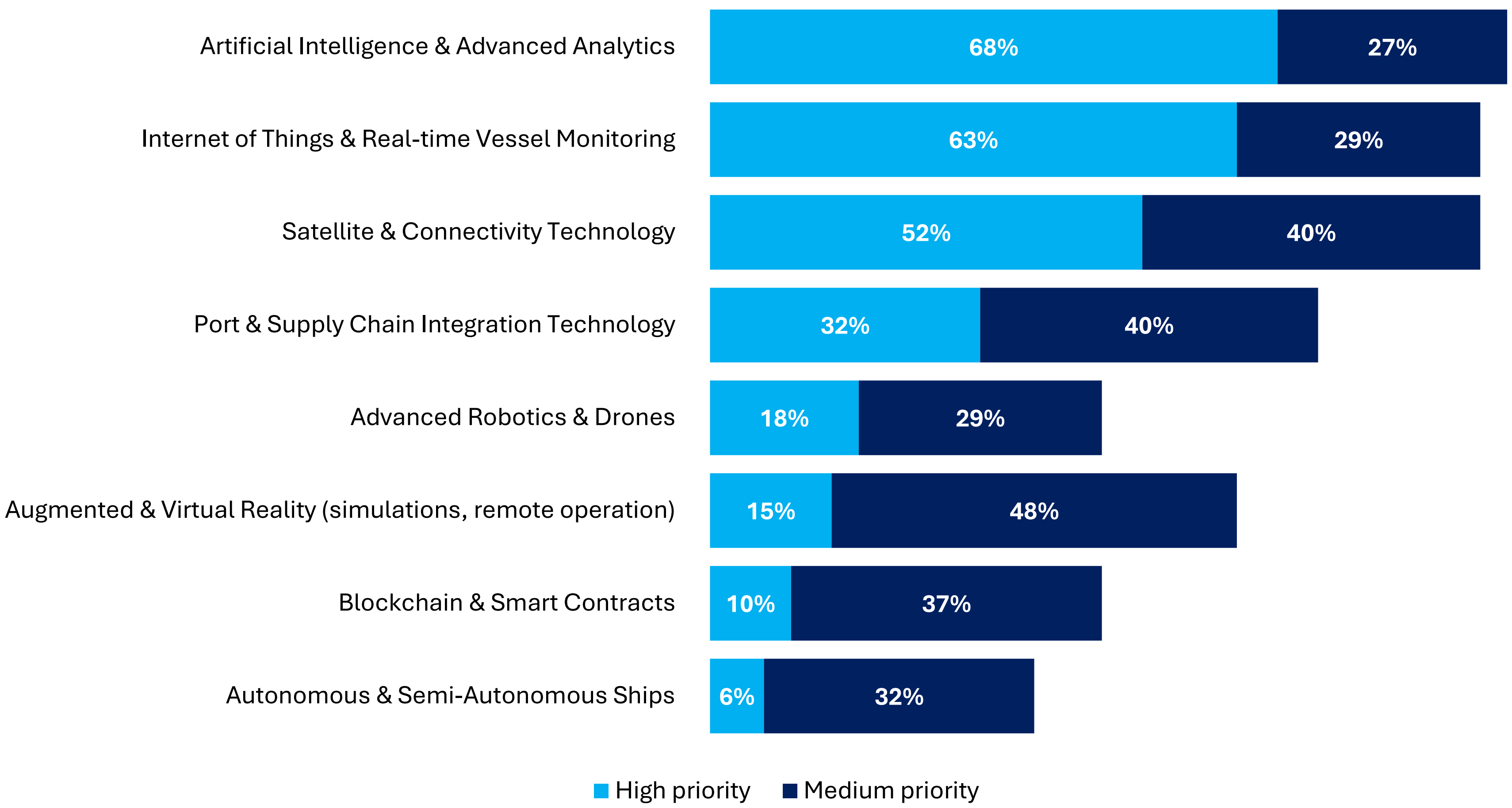
4

Technology & Investments

2026 Shipping Trends | Technology & Investments

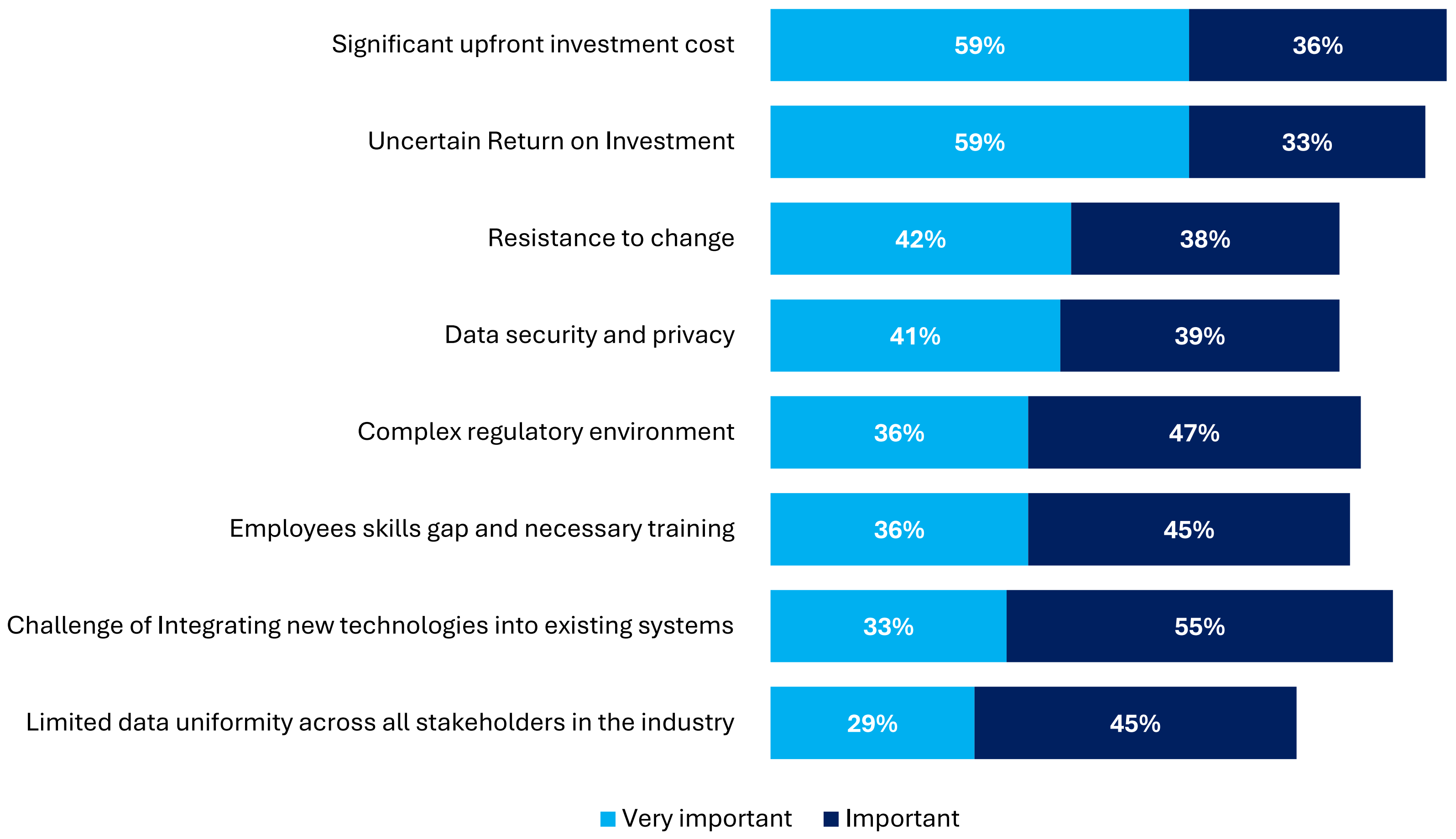
- Survey results show an almost unanimous view (>90% of participants) that AI & Advanced Analytics, IoT & real-time vessel monitoring and Satellite & Connectivity Technology should be priority investment areas
- Port & supply chain integration technology is an emerging area for investment
- Less mature technologies, such as Advanced Robotics & Drones, Blockchain & Smart Contracts, and Autonomous & Semi-Autonomous Ships, were given low investment priority
- These findings suggest that shipping executives appear to be prioritizing technologies that generate measurable operational benefits today, while deprioritizing technologies that are immature, or lack a compelling business case

Leading-edge technologies investments prioritization



- The survey underlined that financial considerations (upfront investment cost and uncertain Return on Investment) represent the most important barrier to adoption of leading-edge technologies
- Results are broadly in line with the 2024 Survey. The main variations observed are related to the human factor, and may be attributable to actual experience on the field:
  - Resistance to change is now viewed by 80% of participants as a very important or important barrier, up from 71% in 2024
  - Employee skills gap is still considered a very important or important barrier by 82% of participants, however this is lower than the 2024 result (89%)

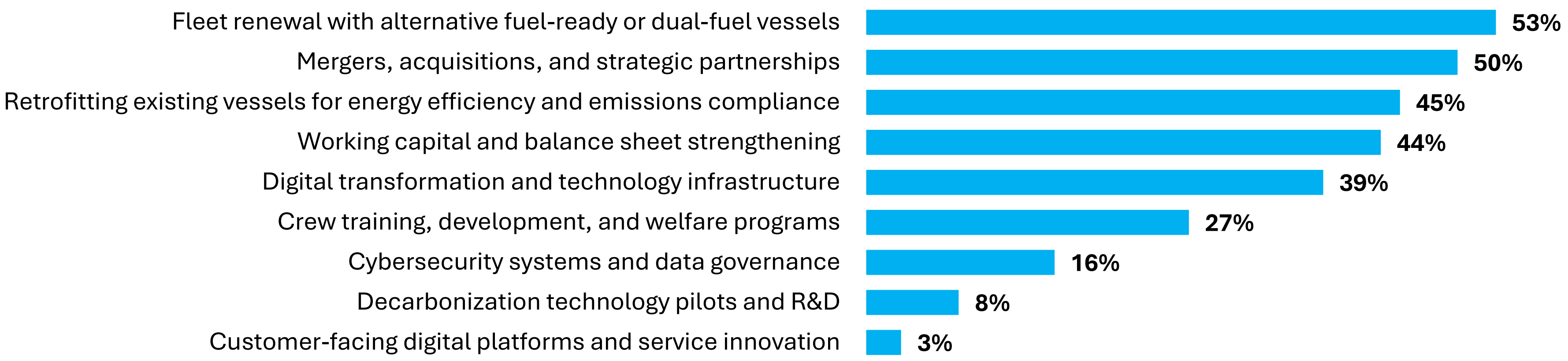
Barriers to adoption of leading-edge technologies



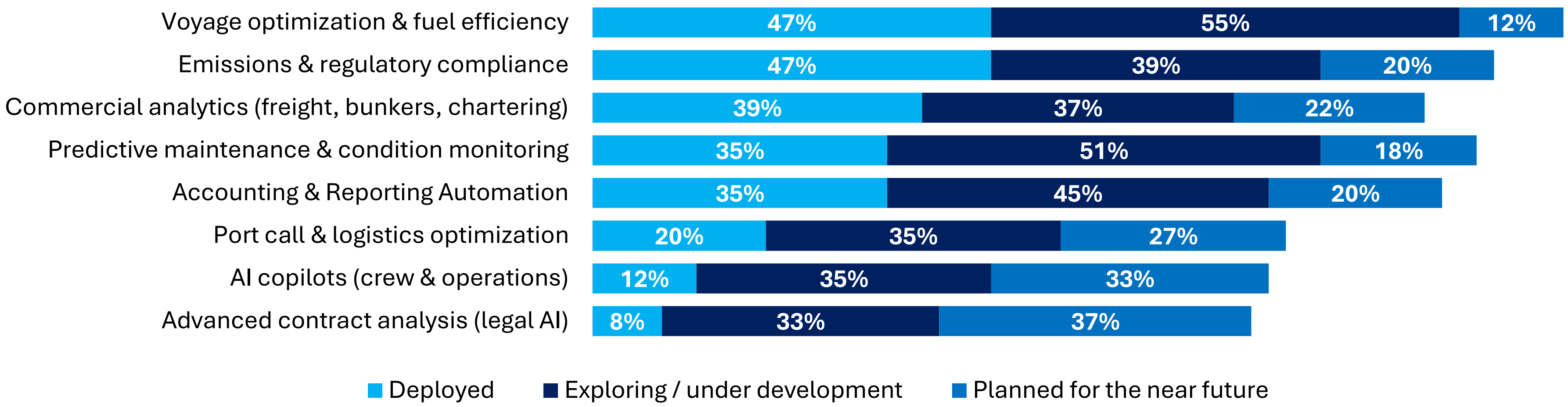
2026 Shipping Trends | Technology & Investments

- Fleet renewal, retrofits, M&A deals, and the working capital and balance sheet strengthening required to support them, have been identified as top investment priorities
- Less than 40% identified Digital Transformation and Technology Infrastructure (which includes AI solutions) as a top investment priority for their companies.
- AI investment priority areas are Voyage Optimization/Fuel Efficiency and Emissions/Regulatory Compliance, followed by Commercial Analytics, Predictive Maintenance and Accounting & Reporting Automation.
- Results indicate that shipping companies prioritize investments that preserve and enhance their core assets, while deploying AI in areas where it delivers immediate operational, commercial, and regulatory benefits.

Top investment priorities over the next 3–5 years *(multiple answers)*



Areas of investment in Artificial Intelligence



Chapter 5

Regulatory & Compliance

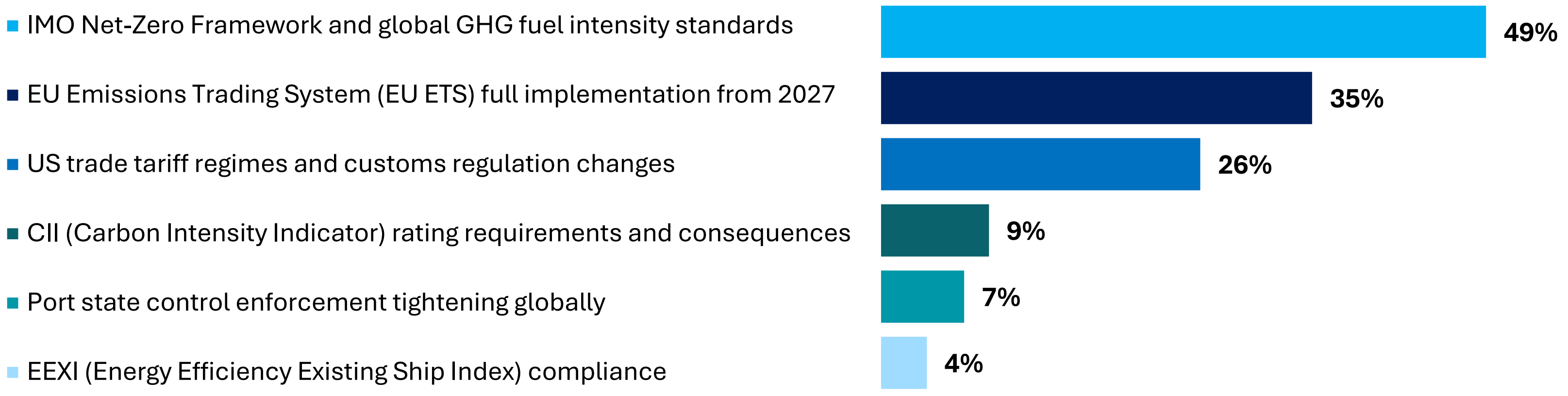
2026 Shipping Trends | Regulatory & Compliance

- Survey participants identify the IMO Net-Zero Framework and global Green House Gas (GHG) fuel intensity standards as the regulatory developments with the greatest expected impact on their companies in the medium run, with the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) implementation ranking second.

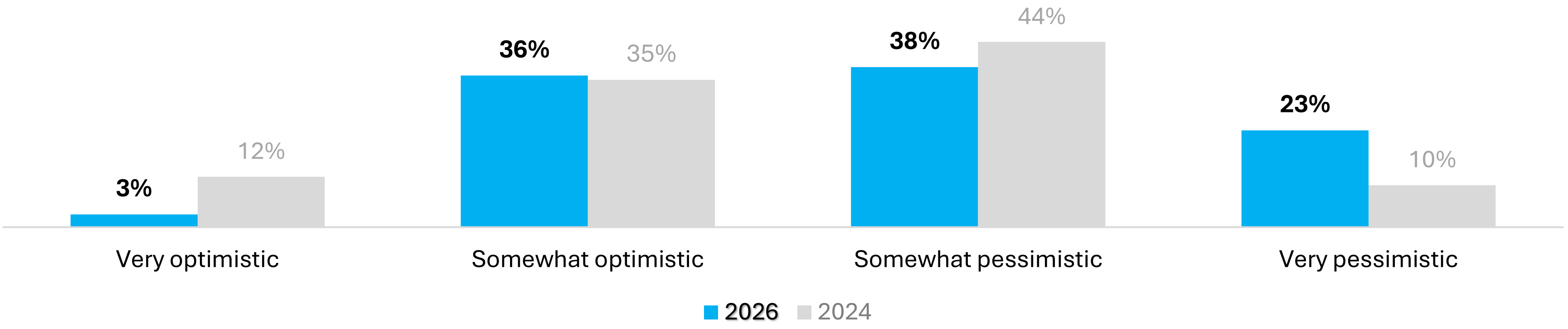
- Since the 2024 survey, views in relation to the IMO net-zero target has shifted, with only a small minority remaining very optimistic, and roughly 1 in 5 survey participants now being very pessimistic.

- Overall, 39% of respondents are now optimistic or very optimistic, down from 47% in the 2024 survey

Which regulatory development will have the greatest impact on your company over the next 3 years? ***(multiple answers)***



How optimistic are you that the shipping industry will reach the IMO target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050?

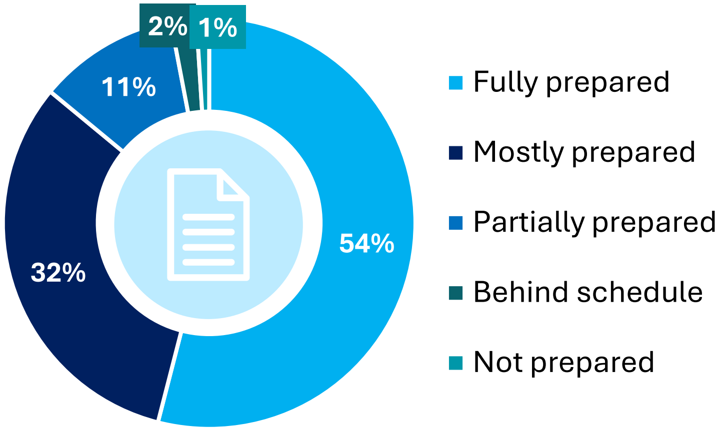


2026 Shipping Trends | Regulatory & Compliance

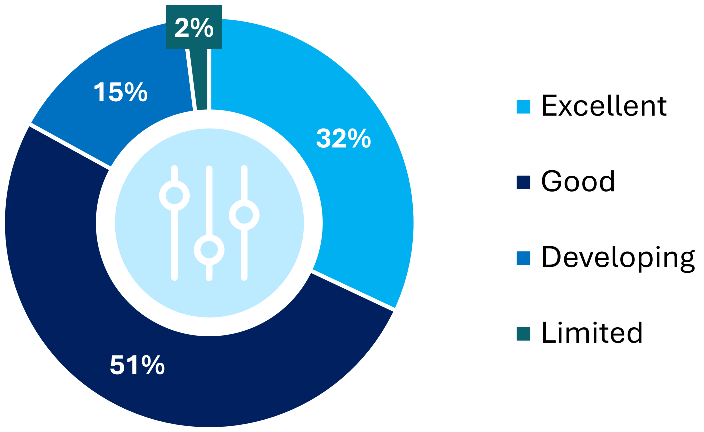
Participants in the survey appear well prepared to comply with regulatory requirements:

- 86% of participants declare that their companies are fully or mostly prepared to comply with the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) and FuelEU Maritime requirements
- 83% of participants declare that their companies are well prepared to measure, report and verify greenhouse gas emissions
- Sanctions compliance is viewed as critical or very significant by almost 60% of participants, due to the trade lanes, customers or counterparties of their companies. Only 5% declared low exposure to operational and legal risks

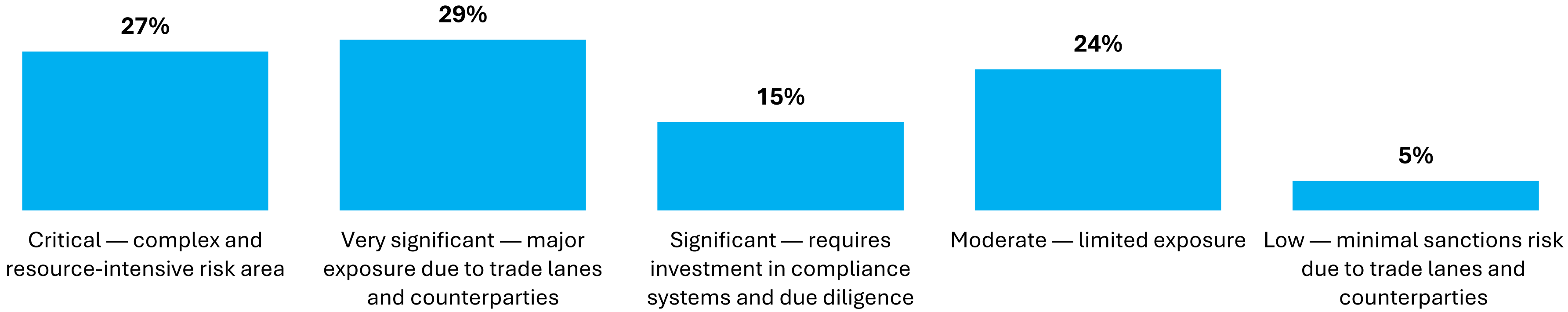
Preparation to comply with EU ETS and FuelEU Maritime



Capability to accurately measure, report and verify greenhouse gas emissions



Significance of sanctions compliance as an operational and legal risk



Chapter 6

Leadership

- We closed the Survey by asking participants to select up to 3 critical leadership capabilities for a shipping executive
- The clear winner, selected by 76% of participants, is Strategic vision and ability to navigate uncertainty
- Second place (54%) went to Financial acumen and capital allocation discipline – an unexpected choice that reflects the finance-heavy composition of our sample
- Crisis management ranked third (38%), clearly a very desirable leadership capability in the uncertain and volatile shipping operating environment
- Digital literacy and ability to lead technology-driven transformation was selected by 29% of participants, which reveals the shipping industry's need for technical-savvy leaders able to implement the leading-edge technologies that will shape the future of shipping

Leadership capabilities considered most critical for shipping executives over the next decade ***(multiple answers)***

81%
Strategic vision and ability to navigate uncertainty and disruption

56%
Financial acumen and capital allocation discipline in a capital-intensive transition

41%
Crisis management and operational resilience under geopolitical and environmental stress

29%
Digital literacy and ability to lead technology-driven transformation

22%
Cultural leadership and ability to drive organizational transformation

13%
Customer relationship management and commercial innovation

5%
Collaborative leadership across industry alliances, partnerships, and ecosystems

3%
Regulatory intelligence and ability to engage effectively with governments and international bodies

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