

Top **ten** surprises of 2025

6

Looking
back at
2025

1

The big stick returns, marking a harder edge to American trade policy

Washington's tariffs signalled that protectionism is no longer a tactical flourish but a central plank of United States (US) policy, aimed as much at reshaping supply chains as projecting geopolitical muscle. The scale and breadth of the measures have intermittently unsettled markets, raising questions about global price pressures, investment flows and the resilience of trading partners caught in the crossfire.



2

A surprisingly sturdy expansion in a fractured trade world

Escalating tariffs, disrupted global supply chains and rising input costs were expected to squeeze margins and dampen export volumes, with many forecasters pencilling in softer growth. Instead, domestic demand proved more durable than anticipated, buoyed by steady labour markets, resilient consumer spending and a faster-than-anticipated pivot by firms toward alternative suppliers.



3

Record polarisation pushes America into its longest shutdown

The record shutdown underscores that America's political machinery is straining under both division and mounting fiscal pressures. Markets had anticipated brinkmanship, but few expected a freeze of this duration, particularly given the economic stakes associated with delayed federal spending, stalled services and growing concerns over the US debt ceiling and potential default.



4

From anti-establishment outsiders to governing insiders

Parties born from street-level anger and anti-elite rhetoric now oversee treasuries, negotiate trade deals and set immigration policy. For markets, the real shock is that the same groups once dismissed as unprepared or too volatile now show a level of institutional staying power that makes them far harder to unseat through normal missteps, infighting or public backlash.



5

Strategic promiscuity redraws the global trade map

Faced with escalating tariffs, geopolitical tensions and weaponised supply chains, countries moved with unusual agility to ink new bilateral deals. Even long-standing alliances loosened their exclusivity in favour of flexible, multi-directional arrangements. The result was a trade landscape that shifted faster than most models anticipated, revealing a world far less anchored to traditional blocs, than policymakers or markets had assumed.



Top ten surprises of 2025

6

Looking
back at
2025

6

The value-added tax (VAT) hurdle that laid bare the coalition's fault lines

South Africa's (SA) Government of National Unity's (GNU) first real test came not from foreign sabre-rattling but from the arithmetic of its own budget. A proposed VAT hike ran aground on coalition fault lines, triggering an unexpected impasse that pushed the budget timetable into uncharted territory. The episode laid bare the inherent tension in coalition governance. The need to raise resources to fund critical services, while respecting political constraints and societal hardship is a balancing act the GNU may revisit.



7

A fortunate price mix lifts South Africa's (SA) terms of trade

A synchronised lift in gold and platinum prices, fuelled by safe-haven demand, geopolitical jitters and persistent supply deficits coincided with unexpectedly subdued global oil prices. The combination delivered a welcome terms-of-trade boost for SA, offering the rand a steadier footing than fundamentals alone would have suggested and acted as a quiet shock absorber, cushioning the blows from softer domestic activity and a hesitant global economic recovery.



8

A firmer rand renders a tough 3% pivot on the inflation target more tenable

Ordinarily, announcing a more ambitious inflation target risks unsettling investors, inviting questions about credibility and tightening expectations. Instead, the currency's firmer footing helped cushion the transition. A softer US dollar, buoyant precious-metal prices and subdued oil costs strengthened the rand and helped to cap imported inflation, creating precisely the macro backdrop needed to make the new target plausible rather than punitive.



9

Fiscal discipline pays off in a surprise credit rating upgrade

S&P Global's upgrade of SA's sovereign rating was anchored in a modest but meaningful fiscal improvement, aided by lower-than-expected debt-service costs as bond yields eased, a welcome revenue overrun and tighter spending execution, all against the backdrop of a fiscus long trapped between weak growth and widening demands. The move followed SA's removal from the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) greylist earlier in the year, an event largely priced in but still symbolically important for capital flows.



10

The long road to professionalising SA's law enforcement

The Police Commission has begun to shed light on systemic weaknesses within SA's law enforcement apparatus. Its investigations have highlighted persistent issues of corruption, resource misallocation and uneven accountability. Heightened perceptions of entrenched corruption and political interference in the justice system could scupper the African National Congress's (ANC) chances at the polls in the 2026 municipal elections, but it has created a clearer roadmap for restoring public trust.



Top ten trends for 2026 [↑] 5

Looking
ahead to
2026

1

The post-war liberal order continues its quiet unravelling

Populist surges are increasingly shaping government, with centre-right and far-right parties consolidating their grip on power. This brings pressure on judicial independence, media pluralism and central-bank autonomy. The world may look calmer, aided by quick, face-saving ceasefires as war fatigue sets in, yet feel more precarious as institutional guardrails are dismantled for geopolitical leverage, leaving politics more brittle beneath the surface.



2

Global central banks stop marching in step

Global growth and inflation will likely appear deceptively average, masking divergent macro stories and forcing central banks into opposing directions. China is expected to keep easing as deep industrial overcapacity generates powerful disinflation. In contrast, Japan will likely keep tightening to defend a fragile escape from deflation. Europe is set to remain cautious in reducing interest rates further as disinflation could have further to go, while the extent of US easing will hinge on lingering inflation risks.



3

Bond markets write the cheque for fiscal excess

The era of governments borrowing cheaply amid ultra-low yields and endless quantitative easing is drawing to a close, with public debt in advanced economies breaching 110% of gross domestic product (GDP). Bond markets, no longer passive buyers, are rewarding fiscal hawks while finally exacting a steep price for fiscal profligacy.



4

Politics' expanding grip on core institutions

With governments under pressure from slow growth, heavy debt loads and restless voters, independence at central banks, regulators and state entities will come under renewed strain. Politicians may push for looser monetary conditions or policy shifts to ease short-term pain, often at the expense of long-term credibility. For investors, this raises the risk of policy whiplash, higher volatility and distorted price signals as political calendars, rather than economic fundamentals, increasingly steer markets.



5

The global stakes of the 2026 US midterm elections

The 2026 US midterms will dominate the political calendar, shaping fiscal policy, trade priorities and regulatory risk for years to come. With Congress up for grabs, markets will scrutinise whether voters entrench divided government or hand either party a clearer mandate. A stronger Republican showing could accelerate the push for spending cuts, deregulation and tougher trade enforcement, while Democratic gains would bolster industrial-policy spending and a more interventionist regulatory stance.



Top ten trends for 2026 [↑] 5

Looking
ahead to
2026

6

The municipal test that could rewire SA's political map

Given fraying municipal capacity, collapsing service delivery and coalition chaos in key metros, voters are likely to treat these polls as a referendum on competence rather than ideology. The Democratic Alliance (DA) enters the race with momentum, expanding its track record into Gauteng's urban middle belt and parts of KwaZulu-Natal, encouraging further incremental inroads in metros and secondary towns, where service failures are most acute, subtly reshaping power dynamics ahead of the 2029 national contest.



7

The SA economy catches a quiet current, signalling an upward growth pulse

Fixed investment should gain traction as the private electricity build-out scales, rail and port reforms move from plans to execution, and early logistics partnerships ease bottlenecks. Households are likely to provide a steadier spending floor as inflation settles, real wages turn positive and interest-rate relief filters through. While unlikely to be a boom, it will mark a clear shift from the stagnation SA has endured.



8

Rating agencies likely to reward reform and fiscal prudence

Credit-rating agencies are likely to respond positively to the growing perception of credible fiscal management and incremental progress on economic reforms in SA, which together support growth and lower borrowing costs. While headline debt levels remain high and refinancing needs are still significant, tighter spending execution and revenue resilience are improving the debt-service outlook, giving ratings agencies reason to signal further upgrades.



9

With rand support and inflation in check, policy options are expanding

Headline inflation is expected to rise to around 3.5% in 2026; remaining within the new inflation target range of 3% ± 1%. Favourable terms of trade, alongside continued capital inflows and improving fiscal credibility, should help anchor the currency, lowering inflation risks. This stable backdrop would give the SA Reserve Bank (SARB) room for further modest monetary policy easing, without risking runaway inflation.



10

Treading between tariffs and trade alliances

SA must continue navigating rising US protectionism while deepening ties with multipolar partners. This pivot is gradually diversifying the export basket away from US-dependent sectors toward African and Asian markets, even as tensions with Washington persist over trade, geopolitical stances and tariffs. Meanwhile, SA's removal from the FATF's greylist in late 2025 has bolstered the country's credibility, reducing friction in cross-border transactions and attracting investment.

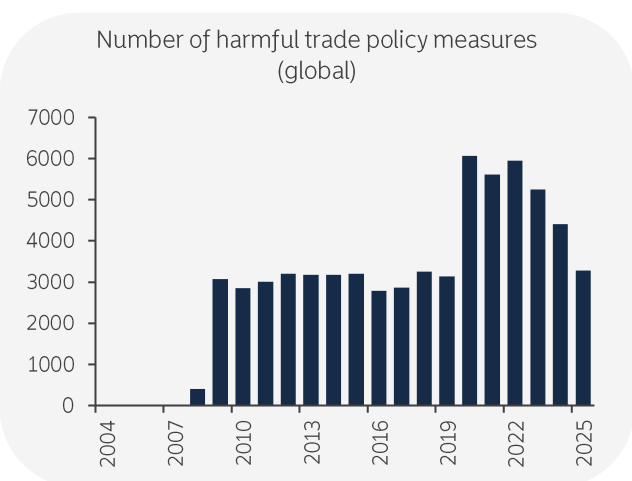


Looking back at 2025:

Economic surprise #1: The big stick returns, marking a harder edge to American trade policy

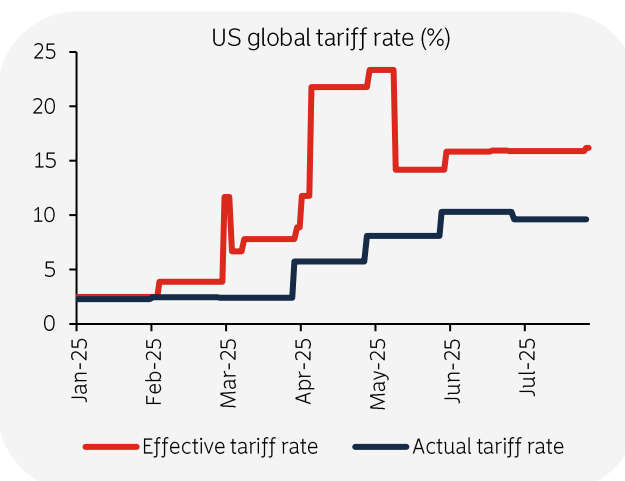
- Washington is again leaning heavily on tariffs, signalling that the shift toward a more defensive trade stance is now a settled feature of US policy rather than a temporary tactic. Measures that were once occasional negotiating tools have become part of a broader push to redirect supply chains and assert strategic priorities. While the number of new harmful trade policy measures introduced has reduced in recent years, the number remains structurally higher. Moreover, a number of bilateral trade deals have been negotiated in this new era of protectionist policies.
- The wider scope of tariffs has periodically unsettled markets, prompting renewed questions about the outlook for global inflation, the direction of investment flows and the ability of affected economies to cope with a more fragmented trading environment, particularly as actual tariff rates continue to lag effective rates.
- Higher tariffs have already started positively contributing to US government coffers but the share of customs duties to overall government revenues remains under 2%.

Chart 1: A more protectionist environment is marked by a structurally higher level of harmful trade measures



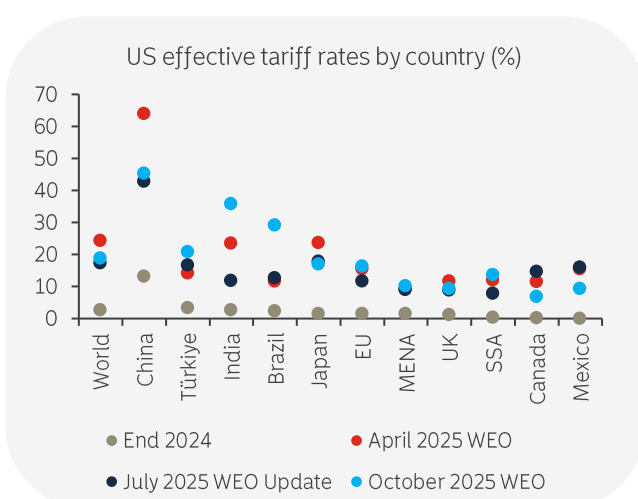
Source: Global Trade Alert, Momentum Investments

Chart 2: Actual tariffs have lagged the effective rates due to delayed payments, litigation and shipping times



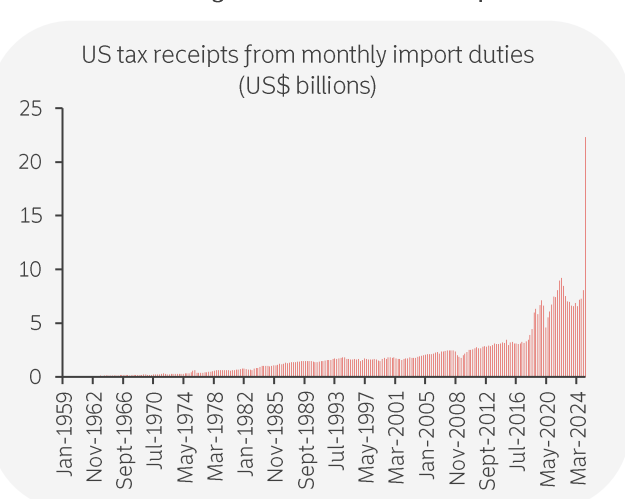
Source: International Monetary Fund (IMF), Momentum Investments, actual rate = duty paid on imports at customs as a share of the value of imports³

Chart 3: US effective tariff rates are lower than those announced on Liberation Day for some countries



Source: IMF, Momentum Investments, MENA = Middle East and North Africa, SSA = Sub-Saharan Africa, WEO = World Economic Outlook

Chart 4: Tariffs have driven a surge in import duties, but this won't be enough to arrest the US debt problem



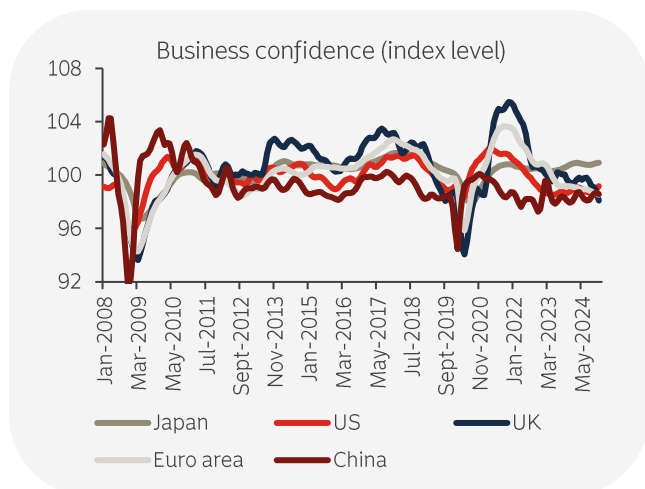
Source: Federal Reserve of St. Louis, Momentum Investments, data up to April 2025

Looking back at 2025:

Economic surprise #2: A surprisingly sturdy expansion in a fractured trade world

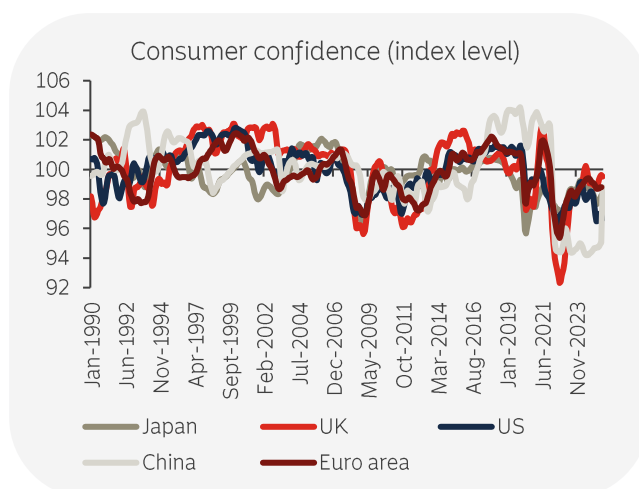
- Despite a more fragmented trading environment, growth held up better than many had expected, despite subdued business and consumer confidence measures. Trade volumes have additionally not dipped by as much as initially anticipated due to an increase in transshipments as China continues to circumvent direct trade routes into the US.
- Higher tariffs, supply chain snags and rising input costs appeared likely to erode corporate profitability and weigh on exports, leading forecasters to prepare for a softer growth patch. Yet a sharper slowdown failed to materialise. This shift in expectations has shown up strongly in the rise in expectations for 'no (economic) landing' in the Bank of America (BofA) Global Fund Manager Survey in recent months.
- Domestic demand remained firm, supported by stable employment, steady household spending and a quicker-than-expected shift by businesses toward new sourcing arrangements. While growth in the major regions remained firm in the second half of the year, growth is expected to have softened in the second half of 2025 as negative trade effects and the US government shutdown filtered into weaker economic activity.

Chart 5: A patchy recovery in business sentiment, but confidence remains in the doldrums



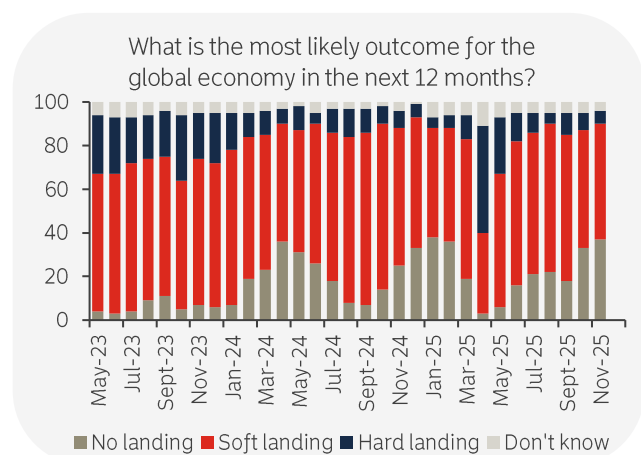
Source: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Momentum Investments

Chart 6: Consumers are feeling less gloomy, but not yet upbeat



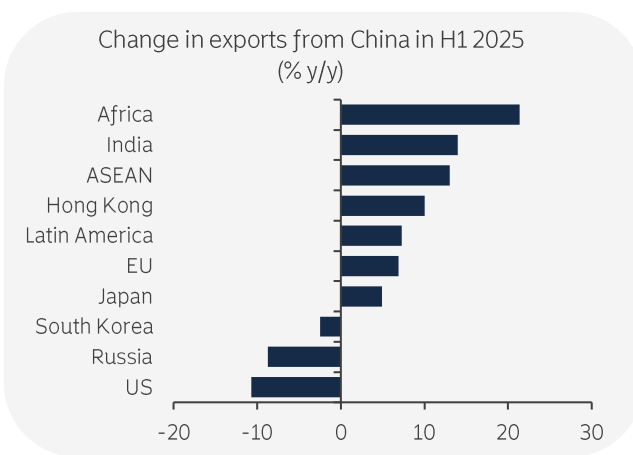
Source: OECD, Momentum Investments, data up to August 2025

Chart 7: Fund managers are increasingly factoring in the probability of 'no landing' in the global economy



Source: BofA, Momentum Investments

Chart 8: Trade redirection, including transshipments, has prevented a collapse in global trade volumes



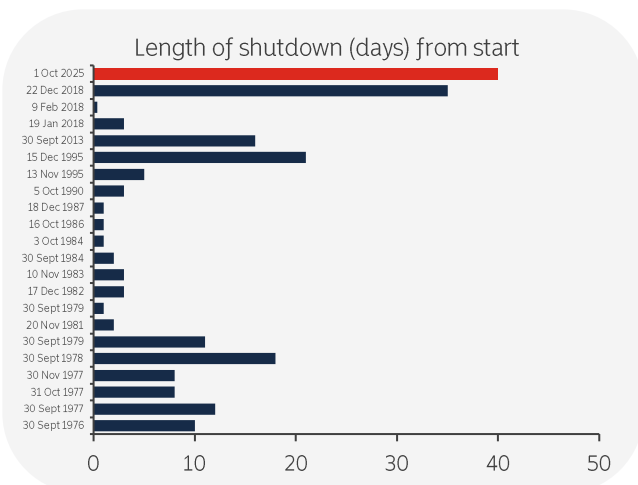
Source: General Administration of Customs (China), Momentum Investments, ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Looking back at 2025:

Economic surprise #3: Record polarisation pushes America into its longest shutdown

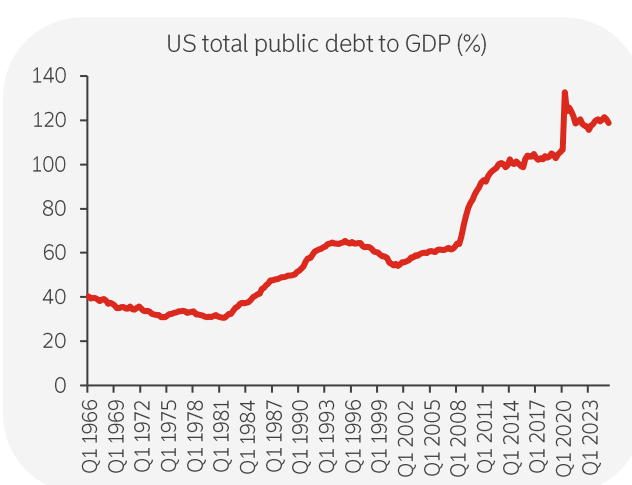
- America's latest, and longest, government shutdown has exposed how deeply political polarisation and fiscal pressures are now corroding the machinery of governance.
- Markets were braced for some end-of-deadline theatrics, but few anticipated a stoppage of this scale, especially with federal spending frozen, key public services idled and renewed concerns emerging over the debt ceiling and even the faint possibility of a technical default.
- The episode also casts a harsher light on America's long-term fiscal trajectory. Rising interest costs are consuming a growing share of federal revenue, while ageing-related pressures, from healthcare programmes to Social Security, are set to widen structural deficits absent meaningful reform.
- Against this backdrop, the intensifying partisan divide makes the prospects of durable fiscal consolidation ever more remote, raising the risk that future standoffs become more frequent, more disruptive and harder for markets to shrug off.

Chart 9: The longest US government shutdown in history disrupted the economy



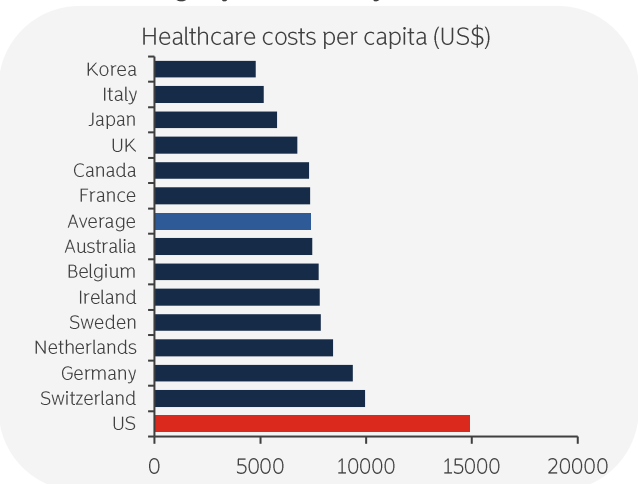
Source: US Congressional Research Service, Momentum Investments

Chart 10: Outsized US public debt has risen above US\$38 trillion



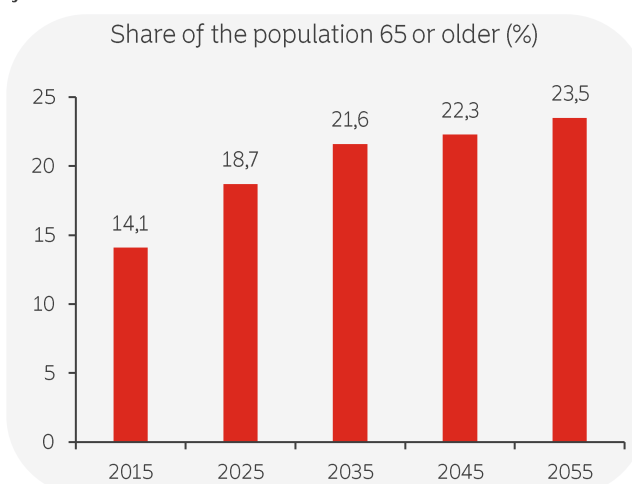
Source: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Momentum Investments, data up to Q2 2025

Chart 11: US per capita healthcare spending is almost twice the average of other wealthy nations



Source: Peterson Foundation, Momentum Investments

Chart 12: A demographic headwind is facing the US fiscus



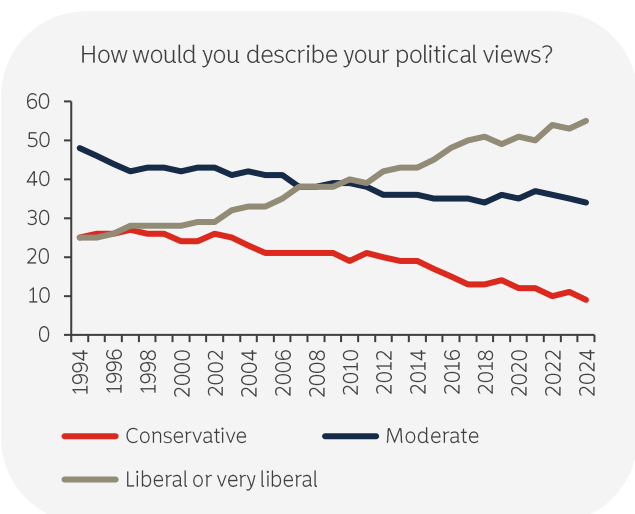
Source: Peterson Foundation, Momentum Investments

Looking back at 2025:

Economic surprise #4: From anti-establishment outsiders to governing insiders

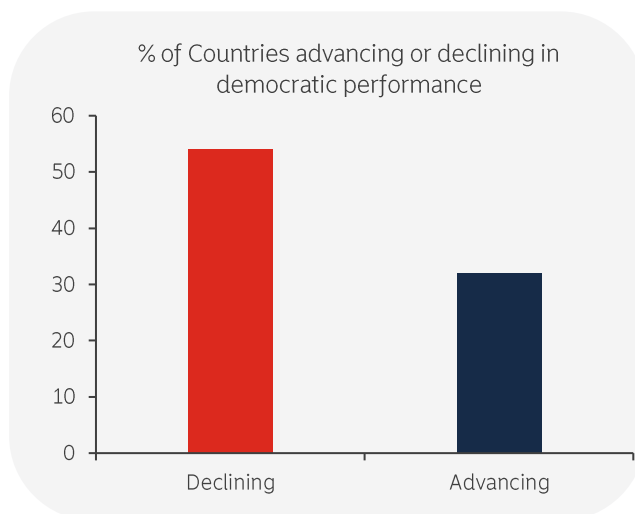
- Parties that once channelled frustration with political elites have moved from the electoral margins into the centre of government, drafting budgets, steering trade policy and reshaping migration rules.
- For investors, the surprise is not their arrival but their durability. Movements previously written off as inexperienced or inherently unstable have proved far more resilient in office than expected, less prone to burning out through internal rifts or voter remorse.
- Their entrenchment signals that the political realignment they represent is likely to persist rather than fade with the next electoral cycle. In America, record polarisation across the political spectrum leaves less room for across-the-aisle negotiation on key issues between the Republicans and Democrats in federal and state government.

Chart 13: Partisans have become increasingly politically polarised



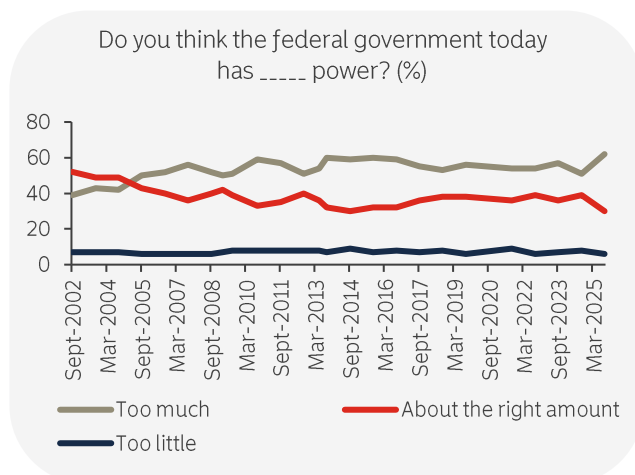
Source: Gallup, Momentum Investments

Chart 14: Global patterns show that democracy around the world continues to weaken



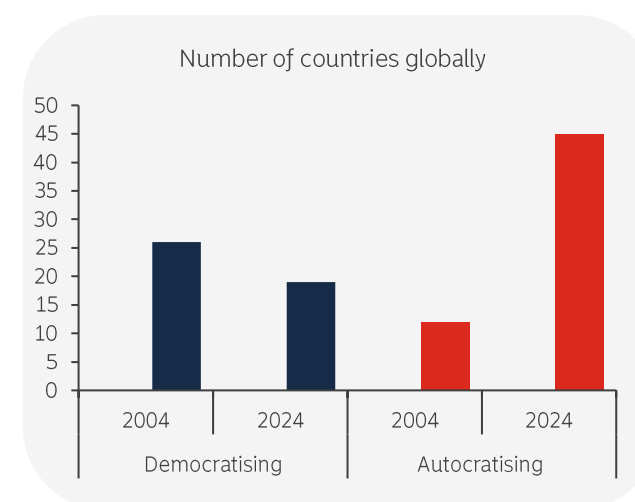
Source: International IDEA, Momentum Investments

Chart 15: Americans perceive that the government has too much power



Source: Gallup, Momentum Investments, data up to September 2025

Chart 16: A global trend of autocratisation is sweeping across nations



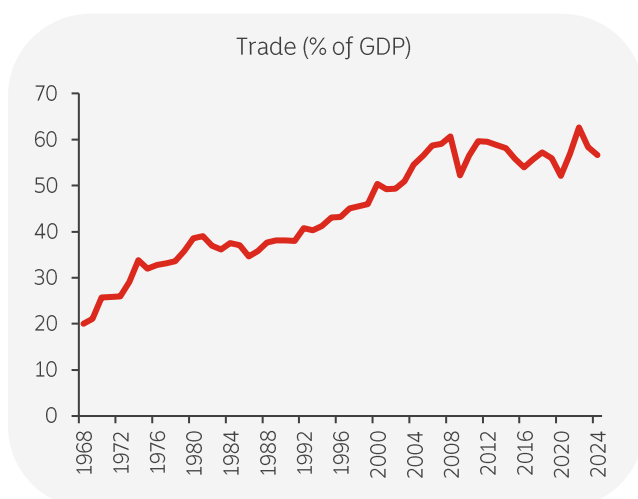
Source: V-dem, Momentum Investments

Looking back at 2025:

Economic surprise #5: Strategic promiscuity redraws the global trade map

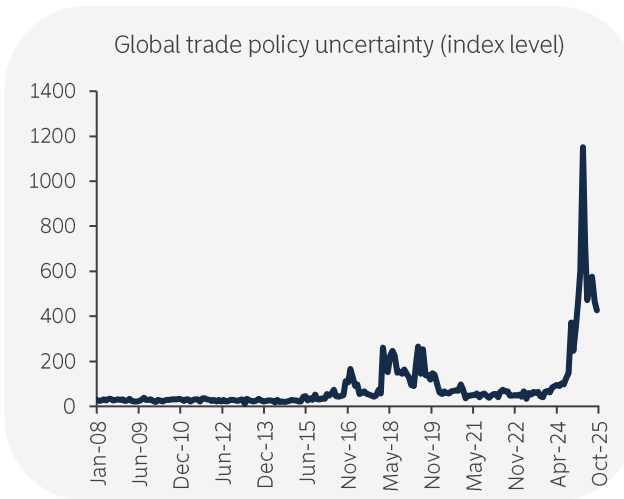
- Countries, confronted with rising tariffs, geopolitical friction and the growing use of supply chains as leverage, responded with an uncommon burst of deal-making, preventing a steeper drop off in the global trade to GDP ratio.
- Governments that once relied heavily on familiar partnerships began striking agreements across a wider range of counterparts, diluting the exclusivity of old alliances in favour of more flexible, opportunistic arrangements.
- The pattern that emerged was a trade system reshaping itself far more quickly than many analysts had predicted, exposing how loosely the global economy is now tethered to the traditional blocs that long defined it.
- Consequently, the global trade policy uncertainty index partly retraced an earlier spike reached during the announcement of Liberation Day tariffs in April 2025.

Chart 17: Global trade share of GDP has largely moved sideways



Source: World Bank, Momentum Investments

Chart 18: The global trade policy uncertainty index has retraced from its earlier peak



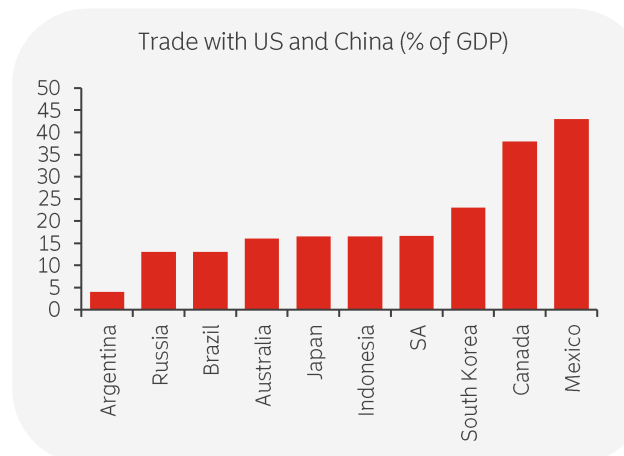
Source: SARB, Bloomberg, Momentum Investments

Chart 19: Countries are embarking on more bilateral and free trade agreements



Source: IMD World Competitiveness Centre, Momentum Investments

Chart 20: Trade ties with the US and China are meaningful but are diversifying



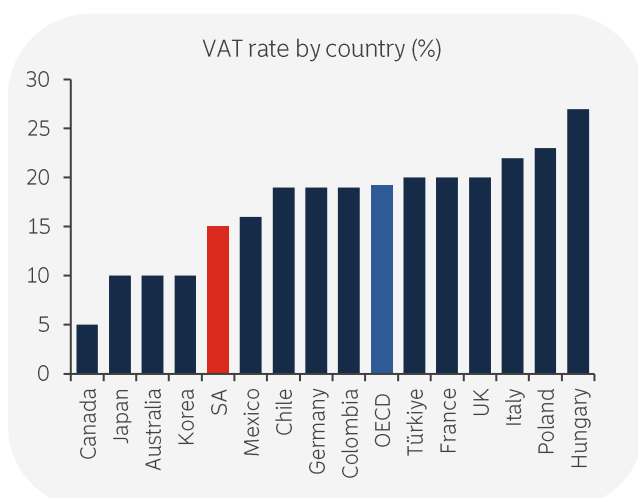
Source: Bloomberg, Momentum Investments

Looking back at 2025:

Economic surprise #6: The VAT hurdle that laid bare the coalition's fault lines

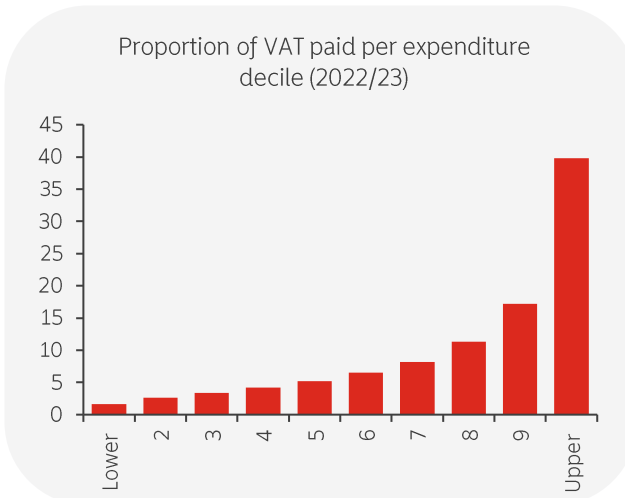
- SA's GNU encountered its first major stumbling block not over foreign policy or security matters, but over managing levers to further the fiscal consolidation path.
- Plans to raise VAT collided head-on with differing priorities inside the coalition, producing an impasse that knocked the budget process off its usual course. National Treasury supported their initial view to raise VAT by comparing SA's lower VAT rate to the typical OECD economy, while noting that the case to raise personal income taxes or corporate income taxes would be much harder to ratify.
- The stand-off highlighted the structural tensions of shared governance, including the imperative to secure revenue for essential public services sits uncomfortably alongside political sensitivities and the reality of strained household finances. It is a delicate equilibrium to balance, but it is one the GNU is likely to confront more than once as fiscal pressures deepen.

Chart 21: SA's VAT rate is comparatively lower compared to global peers



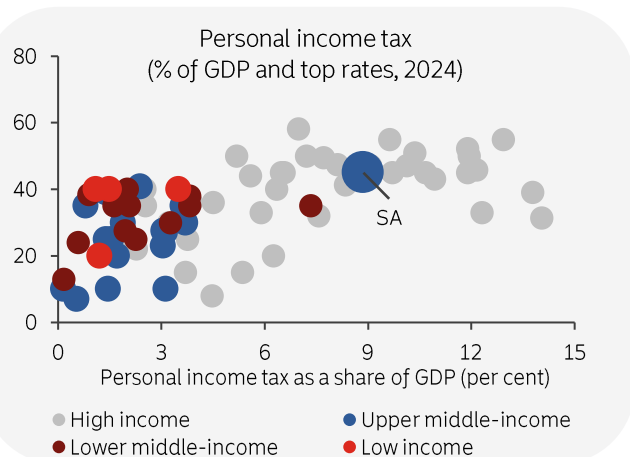
Source: OECD, Momentum Investments

Chart 22: The VAT burden is borne out by the higher expenditure deciles in SA



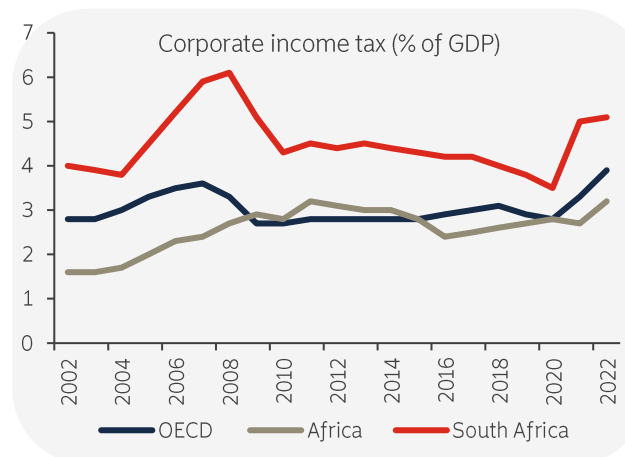
Source: Treasury, Momentum Investments

Chart 23: Little room to lift SA's marginal personal income tax rate based on global peer rates



Source: Treasury, Momentum Investments

Chart 24: SA's corporate income tax rate is already high when compared to our peers



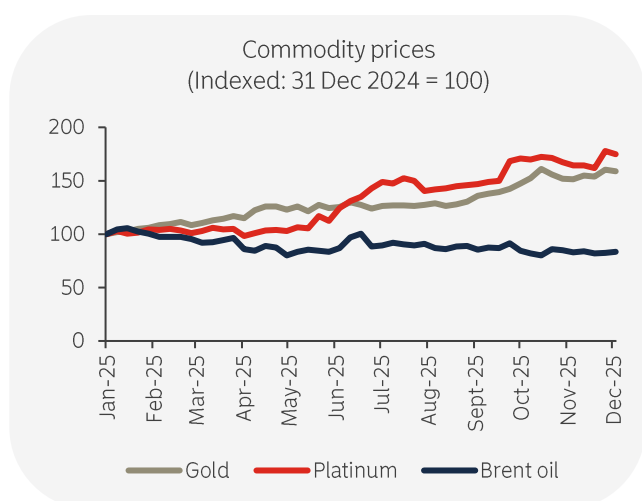
Source: Treasury, Momentum Investments

Looking back at 2025:

Economic surprise #7: A fortunate price mix lifts SA's terms of trade

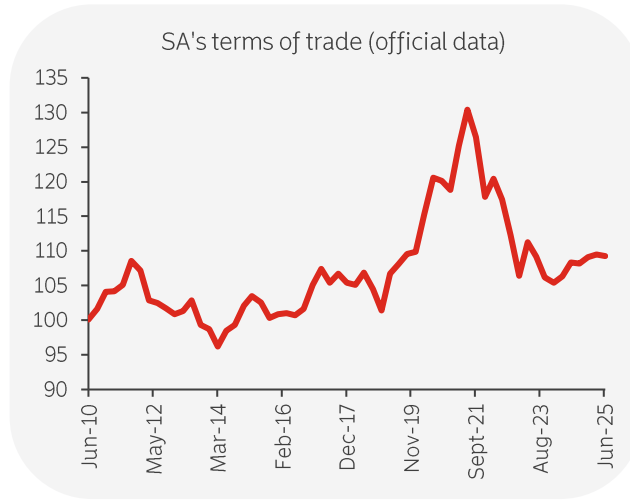
- A well-timed upswing in key commodity prices gave SA an unexpected external windfall.
- Gold and platinum benefited from a mix of safe-haven buying, geopolitical unease and lingering supply tightness, while global oil benchmarks remained softer than anticipated.
- Together, these shifts nudged the country's terms of trade in a favourable direction, lending the rand more support than underlying economic conditions may have warranted. The improvement also worked quietly in the background as an economic stabiliser, offsetting some of the drag from weaker domestic momentum and a patchy global recovery.

Chart 25: Gold and platinum prices lifted in 2025, while oil prices remained contained



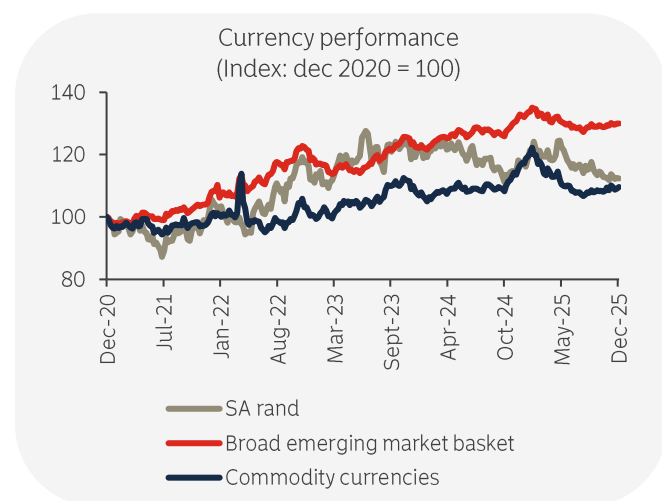
Source: Bloomberg, Momentum Investments

Chart 26: SA's terms of trade received a welcome boost and acted as a positive driver of the rand



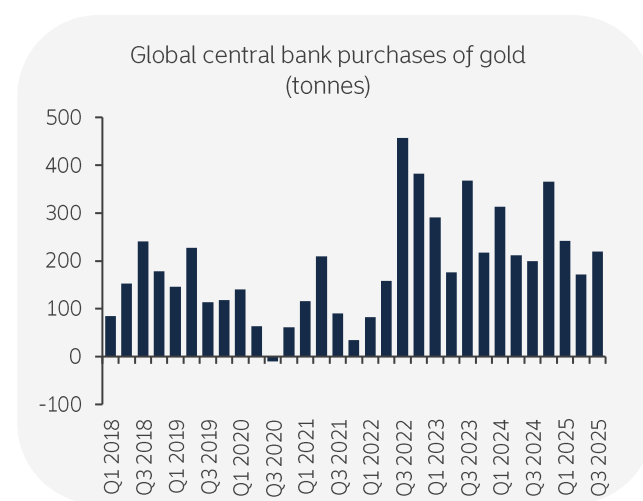
Source: Bloomberg, SARB, Momentum Investments

Chart 27: The rand performed better than typical commodity-related currencies



Source: Bloomberg, Momentum Investments, commodity currencies include = Australian dollar, Brazilian real, New Zealand dollar, Canadian dollar and Russian rouble

Chart 28: Global central bank demand for gold slowed relative to history but remained firm



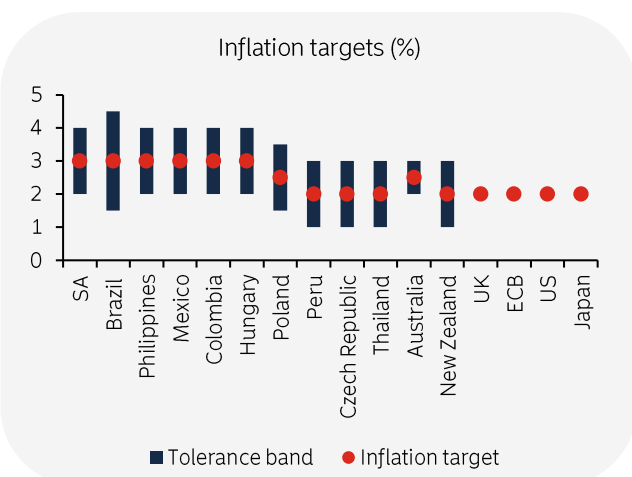
Source: Bloomberg, Momentum Investments

Looking back at 2025:

Economic surprise #8: A firmer rand renders a tough 3% pivot on the inflation target more tenable

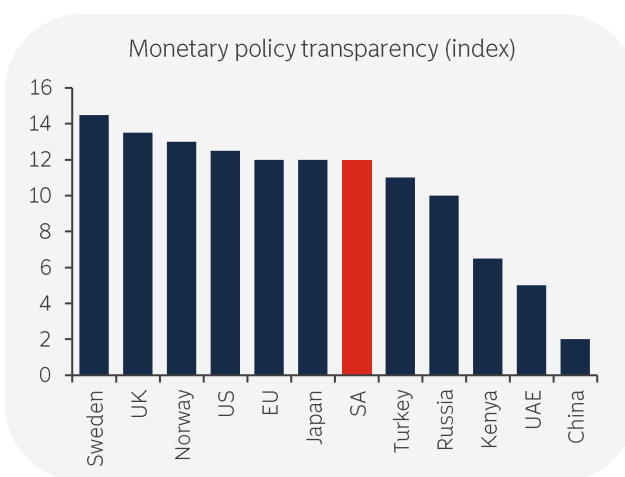
- Under normal circumstances, shifting to a stricter 3% inflation target would risk rattling markets and prompting doubts about policy resolve.
- This time, however, the external environment did much of the heavy lifting. A stronger rand, supported by a weaker dollar, firm precious-metal prices and relatively soft global oil prices, helped contain imported cost pressures.
- That combination provided an unexpectedly supportive setting, making the revised target appear more achievable rather than an overreach.
- A lower inflation target should allow for less volatile inflation, an improvement in purchasing power, an increase in housing affordability for consumers, a less stringent funding environment for corporates and a lower government borrowing costs, in time.

Chart 29: SA's previous inflation target was higher than its peer group but now looks more aligned



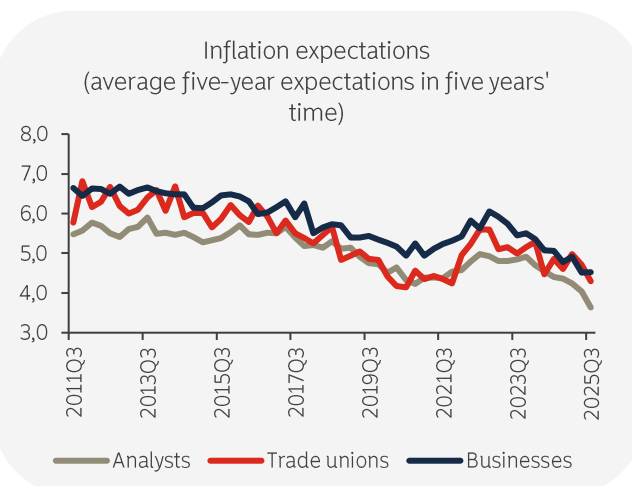
Source: Daily Maverick, Prescient, Momentum Investments, ECB = European Central Bank

Chart 30: The SARB's level of credibility ranks high on a global scale



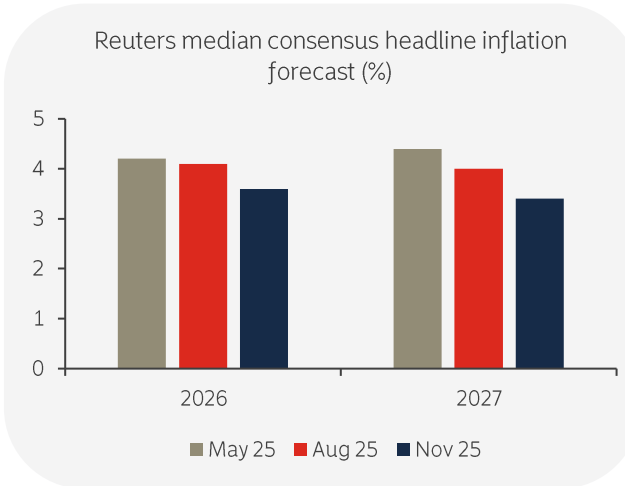
Source: Berkeley Economics (University of California), Momentum Investments, EU = European Union, UAE = United Arab Emirates

Chart 31: Inflation expectations have moderated across the board



Source: Bureau of Economic Research (BER), Momentum Investments

Chart 32: Analysts reduced their inflation forecasts over time for 2026 and 2027



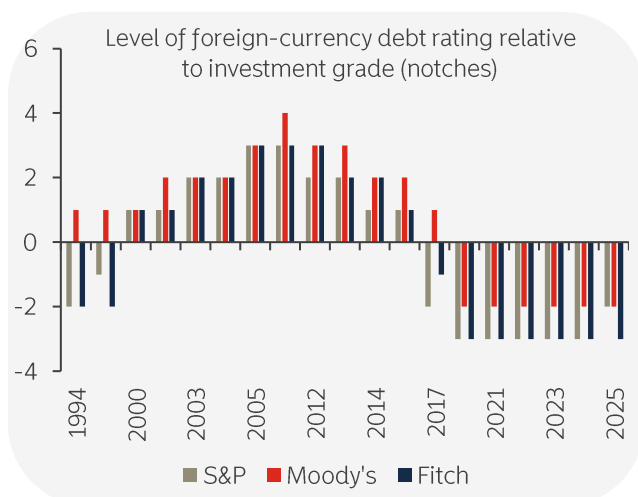
Source: Reuters, Momentum Investments

Looking back at 2025:

Economic surprise #9: Fiscal discipline pays off in a surprise credit rating upgrade

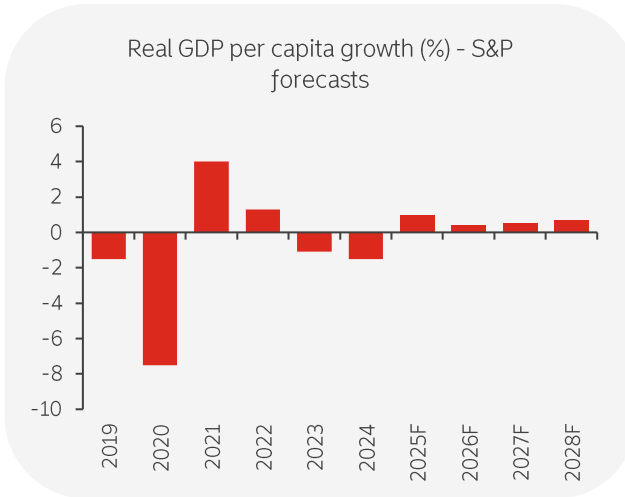
- S&P Global's unexpected lift to SA's sovereign rating reflected a gradual strengthening of the country's public finances. It is incremental and the total quantum of debt remains large, but the improvements have been enough to shift the needle. Moody's, nevertheless, kept SA's sovereign rating and outlook unchanged at the December 2025 review, citing ongoing caution around growth, reform and fiscal dynamics.
- Softer government bond yields, which rallied in part due to the SARB targeting a lower level of headline inflation, have already trimmed government's debt-service costs.
- Government revenue outperformed earlier projections made in the national budget and spending controls held more firmly than in previous years, offering rare relief to a budget that has long struggled under the weight of weak growth and rising obligations.
- The decision to upgrade SA came on the heels of the country's removal from the FATF greylist, a development largely anticipated by markets but still meaningful in signalling a cleaner operating environment for cross-border capital.

Chart 33: S&P Global lifted SA's foreign currency credit rating to BB with a positive outlook



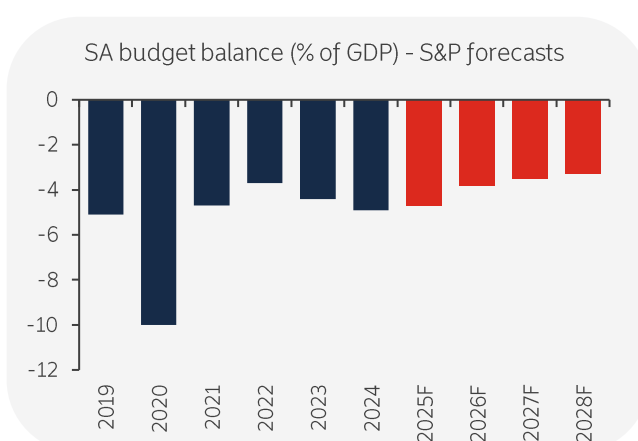
Source: S&P Global, Fitch, Moody's, Bloomberg, Momentum Investments

Chart 34: S&P Global expects an improvement in SA's GDP per capita



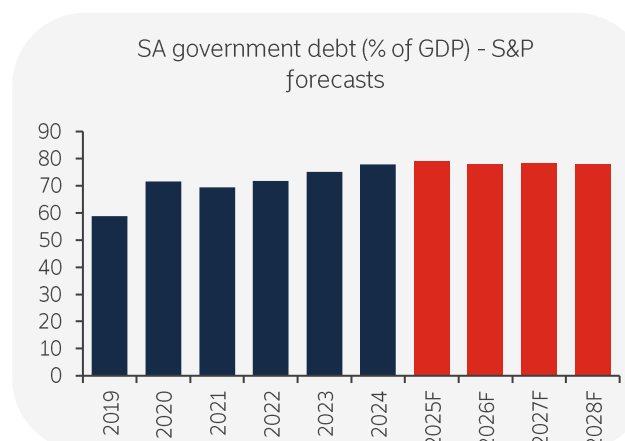
Source: S&P Global, Momentum Investments

Chart 35: S&P Global expects SA's fiscal deficit ratio to reach negative 3.3% of GDP by 2028



Source: S&P Global, Treasury, Momentum Investments

Chart 36: S&P Global expects SA's debt-to-GDP ratio to reach 77.9% of GDP by 2028



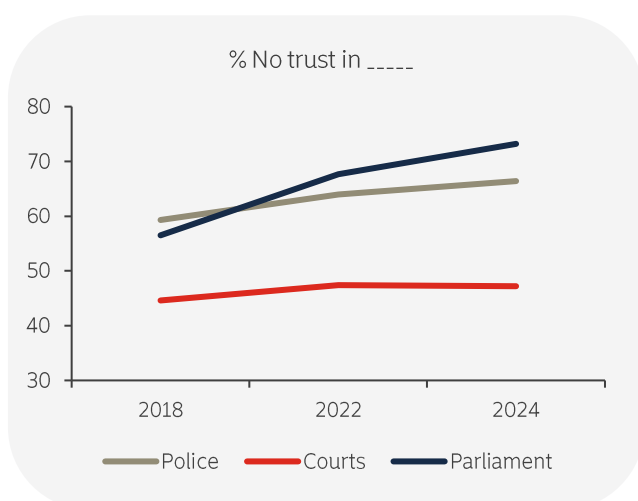
Source: S&P Global, Treasury, Momentum Investments

Looking back at 2025:

Economic surprise #10: The long road to professionalising SA's law enforcement

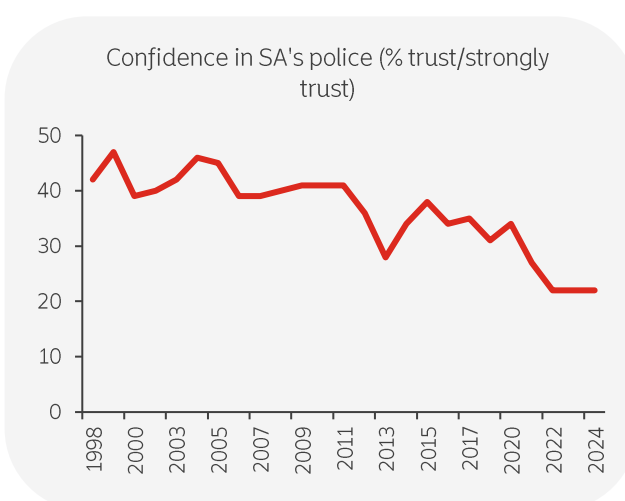
- The Police Commission's work has begun to expose the depth of the structural flaws in SA's law-enforcement system. Its findings point to long-running problems, including corruption, weak oversight and chronic misallocation of resources, which have eroded the effectiveness of policing and undermined public confidence.
- The political ramifications are not trivial. Perceptions of interference and uneven accountability could weigh on the ANC ahead of the 2026 municipal elections, costing them votes, particularly in more urbanised areas.
- Yet the inquiry has at least offered a more coherent outline of what reform would require, providing a starting point for rebuilding credibility in institutions that have been allowed to drift for too long, leading to a structural decline in citizen trust in institutions like the police force.

Chart 37: Increasing level of citizen distrust in the police, courts and parliaments



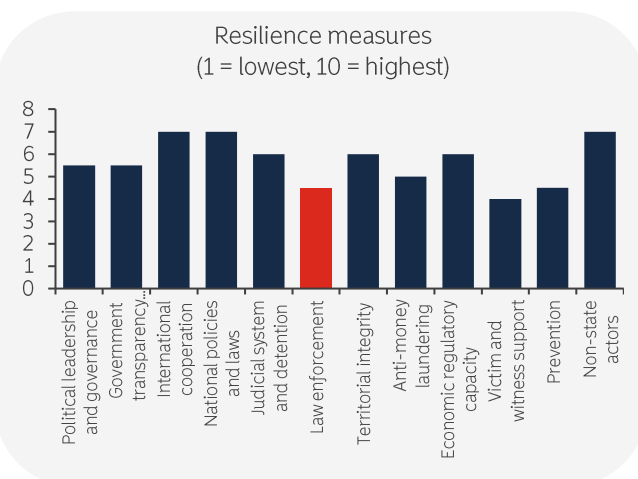
Source: Afrobarometer, Momentum Investments

Chart 38: Citizen trust in police has been in structural decline since the late 90s



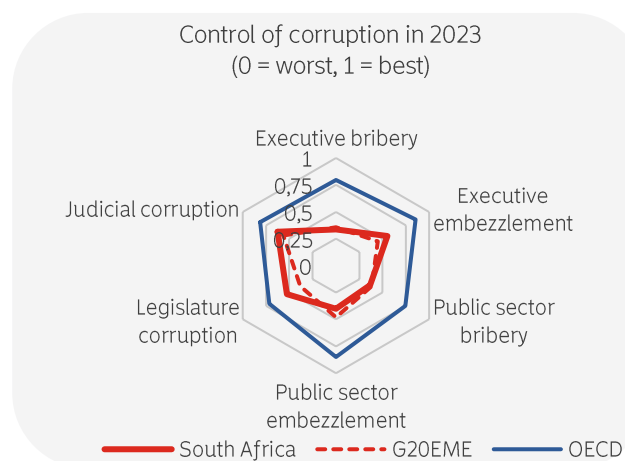
Source: Human Sciences Research Council, Momentum Investments

Chart 39: SA's resilience in crime prevention is particularly low



Source: ENACT Africa, Momentum Investments

Chart 40: SA needs to further address corruption and government deficiencies



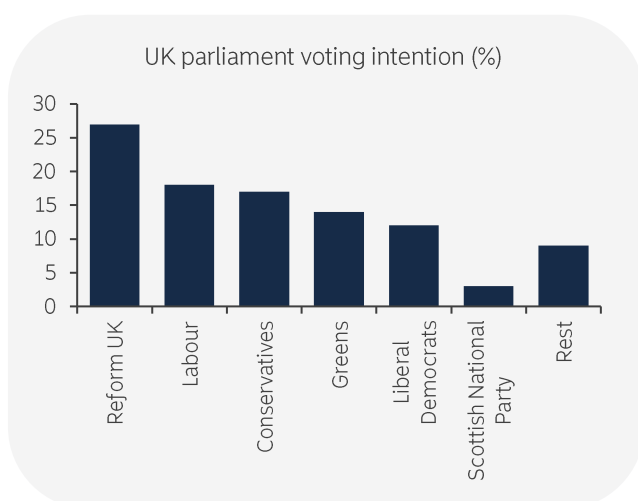
Source: OECD, Momentum Investments, EME = emerging market economies

Looking ahead to 2026:

Economic trend #1: The post-war liberal order continues its quiet unravelling

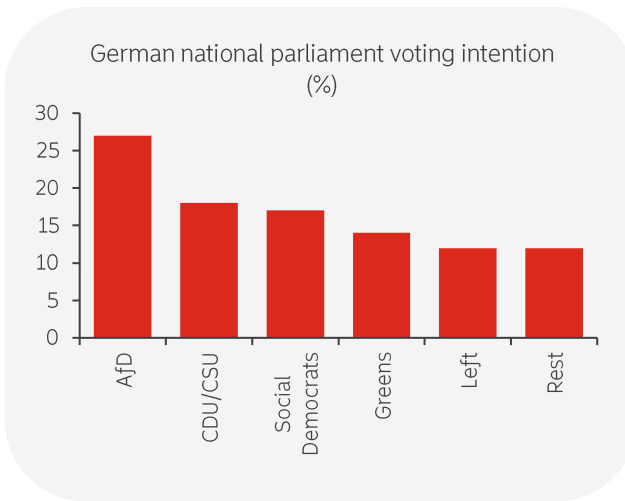
- The architecture of the post-war liberal order is loosening piece by piece, even if the shifts are quieter than the headlines suggest.
- A growing number of governments are being steered by populist or hard-right formations, and their consolidation in office is placing steady strain on institutions once considered untouchable. Courts, public broadcasters and central banks are feeling the pressure as political leaders test the limits of independence in pursuit of short-term advantage.
- On the surface, the world can appear calmer. Brief ceasefires and negotiated war pauses offering the impression of stability as conflicts drag on. Yet the underlying landscape is more fragile. As long-standing institutional safeguards are weakened or repurposed for geopolitical bargaining, the system becomes more vulnerable to shocks, leaving global politics more brittle than the momentary lulls in tension might imply.

Chart 41: Polls in the UK show centrist parties under strain



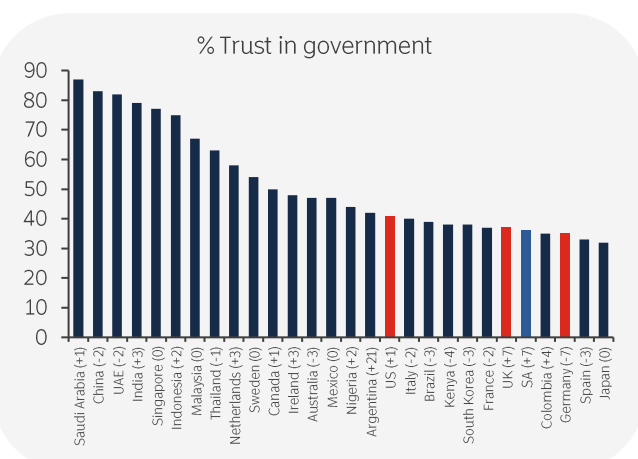
Source: Politico (07 December 2025), Momentum Investments

Chart 42: Polls in Germany show the far right making gains



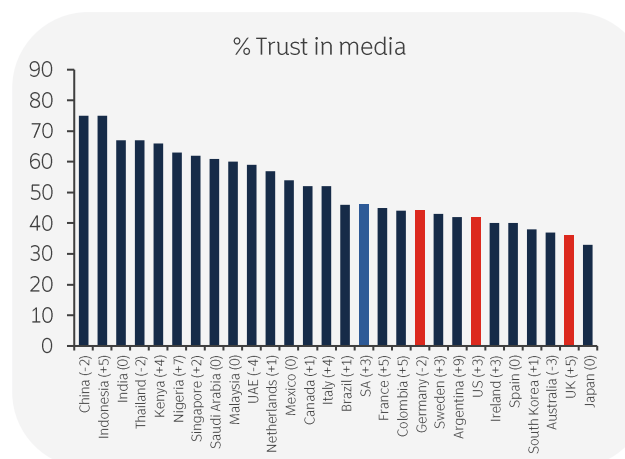
Source: Politico (07 December 2025), Momentum Investments

Chart 43: Citizens' trust in governments operating in democracies are falling behind



Source: 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer, Momentum Investments, numbers in brackets = shift between 2024 and 2025

Chart 44: Citizens' trust in media is dropping in response to trends like fake news



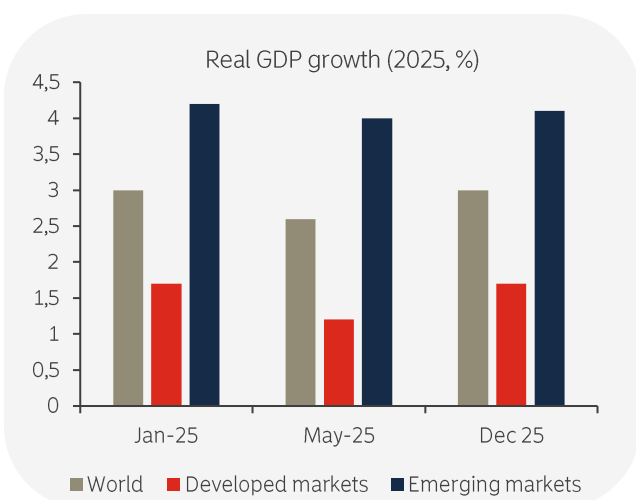
Source: 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer, Momentum Investments, numbers in brackets = shift between 2024 and 2025

Looking ahead to 2026:

Economic trend #2: Global central banks stop marching in step

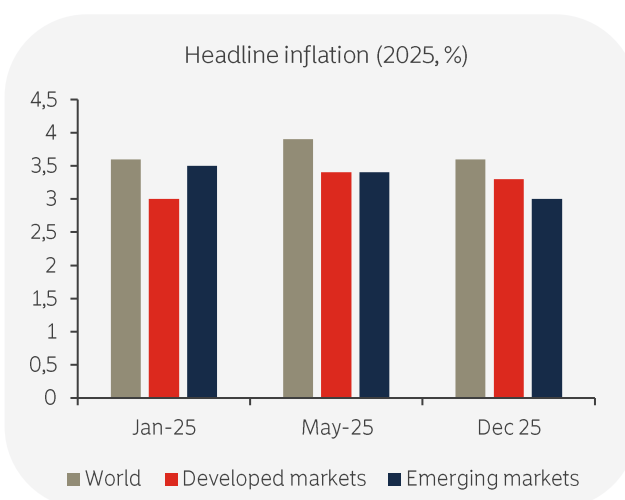
- Global headline figures may suggest an unremarkable year, but the apparent calm conceals widening divergences beneath the surface. With growth and inflation moving along increasingly different trajectories, central banks are drifting out of sync.
- China is set to maintain an easing bias as excess industrial capacity continues to exert powerful disinflationary pressure. Japan, by contrast, is likely to tighten further to safeguard its tentative exit from decades of price stagnation. In the Eurozone, policymakers are still wary that disinflation has possibly not fully run its course, and as such another one or two more cuts cannot be fully excluded. In the US, the pace and depth of any easing will depend on whether residual inflation pressures prove persistent. The result is a monetary landscape no longer defined by coordinated cycles, but by an uneven mix of domestic constraints and region-specific risks. Meanwhile, a highly divided monetary policy committee at the Bank of England continue to debate persist price pressures and job market concerns.
- Futures markets and overnight indexed swap spreads are indicating three cuts in the US by the end of 2026, no shift in interest rates in the Eurozone, two cuts in the UK and two hikes in Japan.

Chart 45: Markets expect growth in emerging markets to be more than double that of developed markets



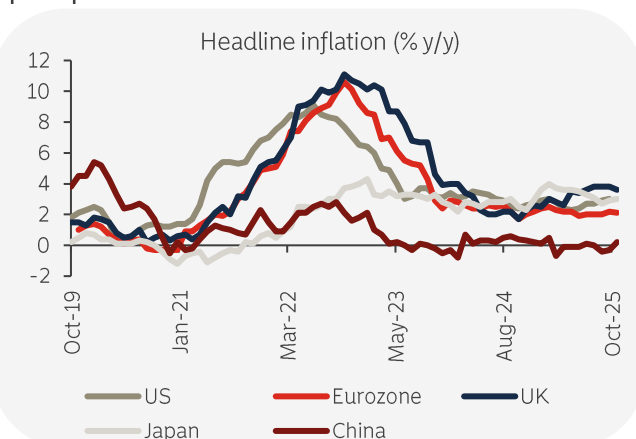
Source: Bloomberg, Momentum Investments

Chart 46: Markets' expectations of inflation softened in the second half of the year



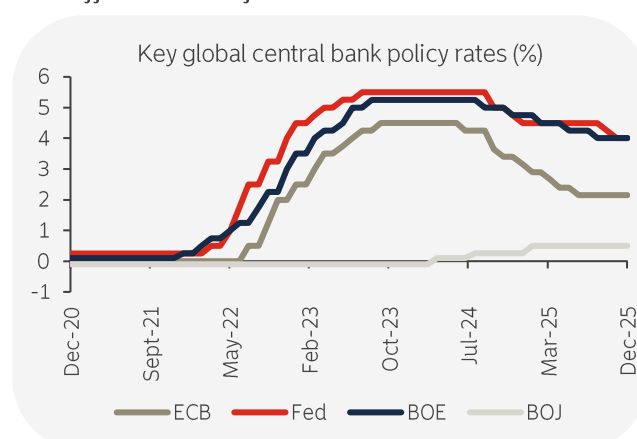
Source: Bloomberg, Momentum Investments

Chart 47: China still grappling with near-deflation, while price pressures remain in the UK



Source: Bloomberg, Momentum Investments

Chart 48: Central bank policy divergence growing in line with differentiated inflation trends



Source: Bloomberg, Momentum Investments, Fed = Federal Reserve, BOE = Bank of England, BOJ = Bank of Japan

Looking ahead to 2026:

Economic trend #3: Bond markets write the cheque for fiscal excess

- The period in which governments could rely on ultra-low borrowing costs and abundant central-bank purchases is fading fast.
- Debt ratios in advanced economies have climbed past 110% of GDP, and investors are no longer treating fiscal slippage with benign indifference. Instead, bond markets are differentiating more sharply. Countries demonstrating credible budget discipline are seeing more favourable financing conditions, while those continuing to run large deficits are finding that the bill for past excesses is finally coming due.
- French government bond yields ran higher in 2025 as debt neared 120% of GDP given years of lavish government spending. This follows on two years of government instability making it difficult to pass a budget through a fractured parliament.

Chart 49: Fiscal deficits are set to widen across developed economies

Looking ahead to 2026:

Economic trend #4: Politics' expanding grip on core institutions

- Governments facing weak growth, rising public liabilities and increasingly impatient electorates are likely to more heavily influence institutions once treated as technocratic domains.
- Central banks, regulators and state-owned entities may find themselves nudged toward decisions that prioritise political timelines rather than economic logic, whether through pressure to keep monetary policy looser for longer or to adjust regulatory stances that cushion short-term discomfort.
- For markets, the risk is a more erratic policy environment. Shifts driven by electoral considerations tend to blur price signals, heighten volatility and complicate the task of interpreting macro trends.
- As institutional autonomy is tested, investors may need to place greater weight on political incentives when assessing the durability of policy choices once assumed to be shielded from such interference.

Looking ahead to 2026:

Economic trend #5: The global stakes of the 2026 US midterm elections

- The 2026 US midterms loom as a pivotal moment for global markets, given their potential to reset the trajectory of American fiscal choices, trade policy and regulatory ambition.
- With control of Congress genuinely contestable, investors will be watching closely to see whether the electorate extends the current gridlock or delivers a more decisive balance of power.
- A Republican advance would likely sharpen the focus on spending restraint, deregulation and more forceful trade measures. A Democratic tilt, by contrast, would reinforce Washington's interventionist industrial strategy and a heavier regulatory hand.
- For the rest of the world, the election is less a domestic political event than a determinant of how predictable, or volatile, the US policy environment will be over the next several years.

Looking ahead to 2026:

Economic trend #6: The municipal test that could rewire SA's political map

- The 2026 SA municipal elections are shaping up less as an ideological contest and more as a judgment on basic governance. Years of deteriorating local capacity, chronic service failures and unstable coalitions in major metros have made competence the core ballot question.
- That backdrop gives the DA an opening. The party has been widening its footprint in Gauteng's urban middle corridor and in parts of KwaZulu-Natal, positioning it to make further incremental gains in municipalities where frustrations over water, waste management and infrastructure breakdowns run deepest.
- If those shifts materialise, the implications will stretch beyond local boundaries. A meaningful redrawing of urban political loyalties would alter the balance of power heading into the 2029 national election, signalling that municipal performance is becoming a central driver of SA's broader political realignment.
</

Looking ahead to 2026:

Economic trend #7: The SA economy catches a quiet current, signalling an upward growth pulse

- Growth initially disappointed expectations in 2025 as fixed investment failed to ignite due to persistent political uncertainty. Nonetheless, growth in SA should post at a slightly firmer 1.6% in 2026 (from a projected 1.2% in 2025) helped by a mix of cyclical relief and incremental structural gains.
- Firming corporate sector credit growth for renewable energy and working capital requirements furthermore sends a welcome growth signal. Fixed investment should gain further traction as the private electricity build-out scales, rail and port reforms move from plans to execution, and early logistics partnerships ease bottlenecks.
- Households are likely to provide a steadier spending floor as inflation settles, real wages turn positive and interest-rate relief filters through. Moreover, a healthier terms-of-trade position creates a clearer runway for growth to edge higher. While unlikely to be a boom, it will mark a clear shift from the stagnation SA has endured, with growth expected

Looking ahead to 2026:

Economic trend #8: Rating agencies likely to reward reform and fiscal prudence

- Rating agencies appear increasingly inclined to acknowledge SA's steadier fiscal footing and the gradual, even if uneven, advance of reforms. While S&P Global reaffirmed its confidence in the incremental gains made in fiscal prudence and economic growth by leaving SA on a positive outlook, Moody's exercised a higher level of caution.
- Although Moody's acknowledged economic resilience and reform progress, they remained wary of structural hurdles. But markets have taken note of firmer expenditure control and revenue outcomes that have held up better than expected, both of which are beginning to ease pressure on the state's hefty interest bill. Further expected evidence of fiscal consolidation and improvements in energy and logistics nonetheless leave market participants cautiously optimistic over a favourable move in ratings in 2026.
- Debt levels remain elevated and refinancing demands are still sizeable, but the trajectory is looking less precarious than in recent years. In this context, agencies have more grounds to indicate a shift in their outlooks, reflecting the view that improved policy execution is slowly reducing sovereign risk.

Looking ahead to 2026:

Economic trend #9: With rand support and inflation in check, policy options are expanding

- SA enters 2026 with a more forgiving macro backdrop.
- Inflation is set to drift higher from a projected 3.3% in 2025 toward 3.5% in 2026, comfortably inside the new 3% ± 1 percentage-point target band. Although the rand remains well behaved, there are, admittedly, still lingering upside threats to inflation posed by medical aid tariffs and electricity charges. As inflation expectations increasingly become more forward-looking, hinging on the new target, rather than tied to the consumers' previous price experience, inflation should drop further to an expected 3.3% average in 2027 and 2028, in our view.
- A still-supportive terms-of-trade position, steadier capital inflows and firmer fiscal signals have helped keep the rand on a more even keel, limiting imported price pressures. If

Looking ahead to 2026:

Economic trend #10: Treading between tariffs and trade alliances

- SA finds itself having to steer carefully between a more protectionist US and the expanding gravitational pull of emerging economic blocs. Washington's tariff escalation, coupled with sharper scrutiny of strategic imports, continues to complicate access for several SA exporters, with diplomatic tension over geopolitical alignments adding another layer of uncertainty.
- Yet the global trading environment is also opening new avenues. Deepening commercial links within Africa, helped by the slow but tangible rollout of the African Continental Free Trade Area, are widening markets for manufactured goods and services. At the same time, stronger ties with India, Southeast Asia and parts of the Middle East are shifting the composition of SA's export basket toward regions less exposed to US policy swings.
- The country's removal from the FATF greylist in late 2025 has further eased transactional bottlenecks, allowing for a more diversified set of commercial relationships by improving the operating environment for banks and corporates engaged in cross-border trade and investment.

The information used to prepare this document includes information from third-party sources and is for information purposes only. Although reasonable steps have been taken to ensure the validity and accuracy of the information contained herein, Momentum Metropolitan Life Limited does not guarantee the accuracy, content, completeness, legality or reliability of the information contained herein and no warranties and/or representations of any kind, expressed or implied, are given to the nature, standard, accuracy or otherwise of the information provided.

Neither Momentum Metropolitan Life Limited, its affiliates, directors, officers, employees, representatives or agents (the Momentum Parties) have any liability to any persons or entities receiving the information made available herein for any claim, damages, loss or expense, including, without limitation, any direct, indirect, special, incidental, punitive or consequential cost, loss or damages, whether in contract or in delict, arising out of or in connection with information made available herein and you agree to indemnify the Momentum Parties accordingly. For further information, please visit us at momentum.co.za. Momentum Investments is part of Momentum Metropolitan Life Limited, an authorised financial services and registered