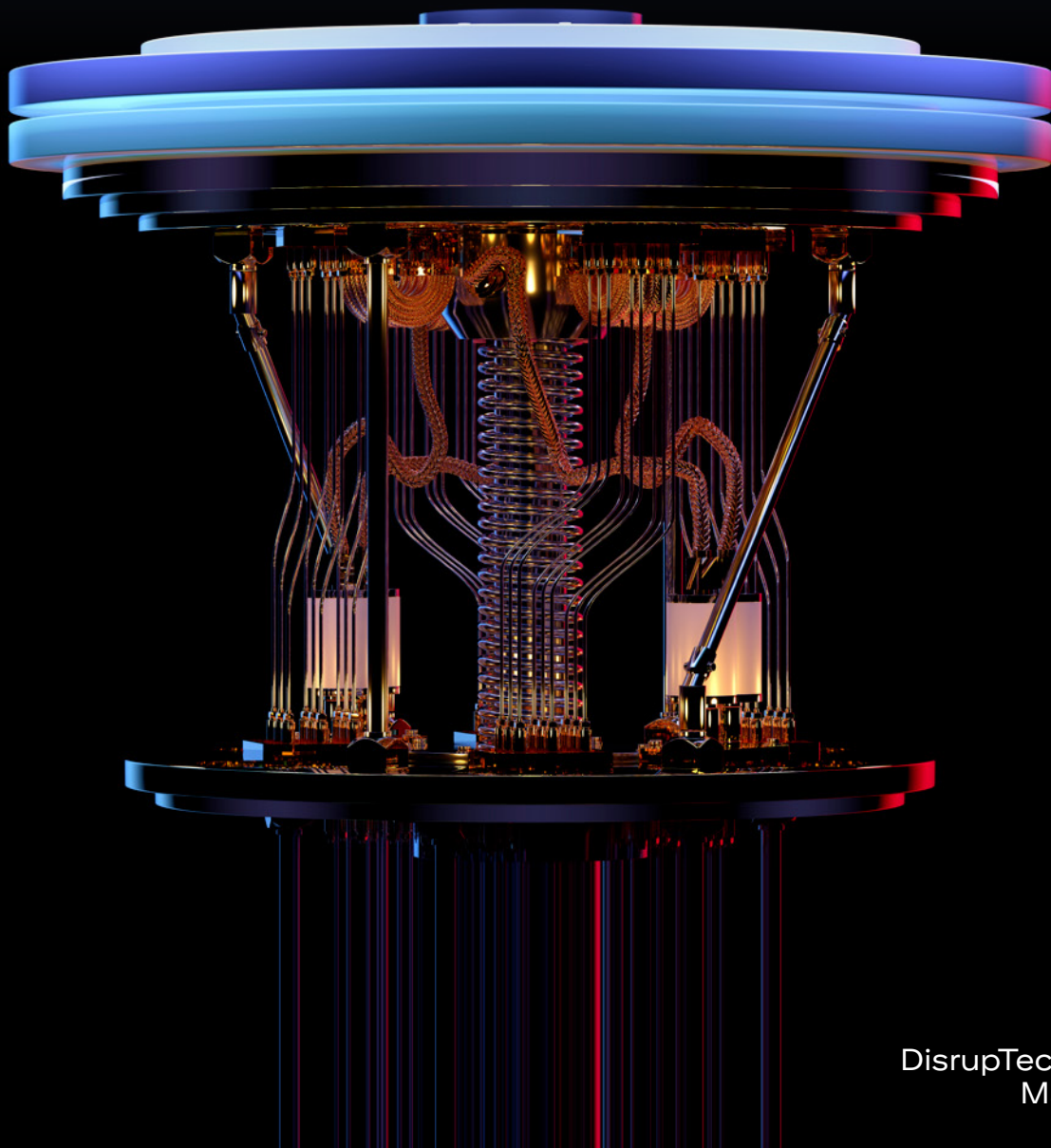


Supercharged

AI and the New Age of Disruption



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Foreword

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Technology has always had the power to reshape societies. But the current wave of disruption – driven by advances in artificial intelligence – is unfolding at dizzying pace and on an unprecedented scale.

Unlike previous technological revolutions, which generally took decades, AI is firing change across industries, institutions and societies in real time. It's a challenge just to keep up.

Rudimentary task-based systems have already given way to powerful models that can reason, generate content, interact and learn from vast stores of data.

As these systems improve, they are set to change everything: from the way we work and create value, to how we make decisions and deliver services. It's no exaggeration to say they will fundamentally change our way of life and challenge long held notions about the norms of the human experience.

While AI is already reshaping sectors including healthcare, finance, education and media, the most profound implications likely still lie ahead. And they will probably emerge from possibilities we have yet to – or are only just beginning to – imagine.

Autonomous workflows, self-improving infrastructure, personalized digital ecosystems and AI-augmented human capabilities suggest a future in which the boundary between human and machine intelligence becomes increasingly fluid and blurred.

This presents enormous potential, including enhanced productivity, scientific breakthroughs and solutions to complex global challenges. But it also raises fundamental and profound questions about ethics, knowledge, governance, equity and trust. We will all wrestle with these issues in the coming months and years.

This report, which accompanies Citi's DisrupTech conference being hosted in London in March, focuses on a few areas of disruptive technology, taking in innovations themselves, but also the shifts they will drive. In doing so, it aims to provide a overview of the transformative forces at play and the considerations required to navigate this exciting and challenging new age of intelligence.



d=25' High Alert!

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Autonomous Driving and Humanoids

Two of the biggest technological shifts gaining momentum today are autonomous mobility and the rise of humanoid and physical AI-enabled robots. They represent a structural innovation cycle with far-reaching implications for productivity, demographics, capital allocation, labor markets and competition.

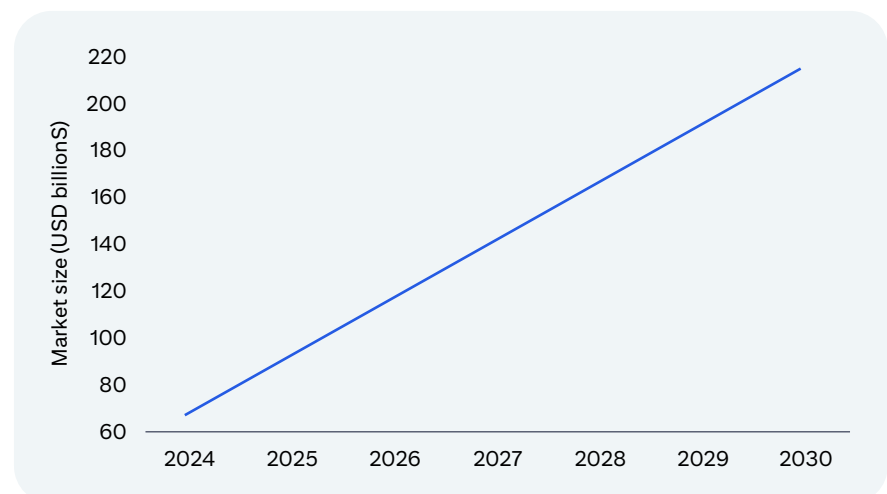
Autonomous Driving: From Assistance to Agentic

Autonomous driving is moving from advanced driver assistance systems toward agentic, action taking AI, capable of independently perceiving, deciding and completing complex tasks.

Three core forces are at work:

- AI sophistication and multimodal perception: The ability for AI to integrate vision, language, decision making, and motion control in real time is accelerating autonomy in mobility systems.
- Data availability and simulation: Virtual environments are increasingly crucial for training self-driving models at scale, shortening development cycles and improving safety.
- Policy, infrastructure and labor economics: Autonomous driving is seen as a potential solution for logistics inefficiencies, with labor substitution a key macroeconomic narrative.

Figure 1. Global autonomous vehicle market size (2024-2030)



Source: Grand View Research

While timelines remain a point of debate, investment is being driven by the conviction that autonomy will reshape supply chains, transportation networks and productivity, with the greatest focus on platforms that can convert agentic intelligence into real-world reliability.

Humanoids and Physical AI: Prototype to Practical

Humanoids – robots designed to move, interact and perform tasks in human environments – are shifting rapidly from research prototypes to commercial platforms. Citi Institute analysis highlights projections of hundreds of millions of humanoids in the global workforce by 2050, supported by declining costs and rising capability. Their emergence has three important drivers:

- Technological readiness: Advanced AI now enables robots to see, learn, move, talk and act with greater dexterity. Some can perform fine motor tasks previously thought unattainable for machines.
- Demographic and labor pressures: Aging populations and persistent shortages in logistics, care, construction and hospitality amplify demand for robotic labor substitutes and complements.
- Economic scalability: As hardware and training costs fall, humanoids evolve from niche uses to general purpose labor platforms. Citi Institute¹ analysis points to a multi-trillion dollar humanoid market by mid century.

Figure 2. Robot unit number forecast by type



Source: Citi GPS

Investment is focused on the convergence of software-defined robotics, multimodal AI and low-cost sensing. The strategic implication is that humanoids may become as important to physical labor as the microprocessor was to computation, enabling entirely new industries and service models.

Autonomous driving and humanoids share a unifying theme: embodied AI migrating from digital environments into the physical world. The investment narrative now centers on which ecosystems – software, compute, simulation, safety and deployment platforms – will achieve scale advantages as autonomy permeates mobility, industry and daily life.

Related Reading from Citi Institute



[The Rise of AI Robots – Humanoids Are Coming for You](#) – A deep exploration of the growth trajectory for humanoids and physical AI.



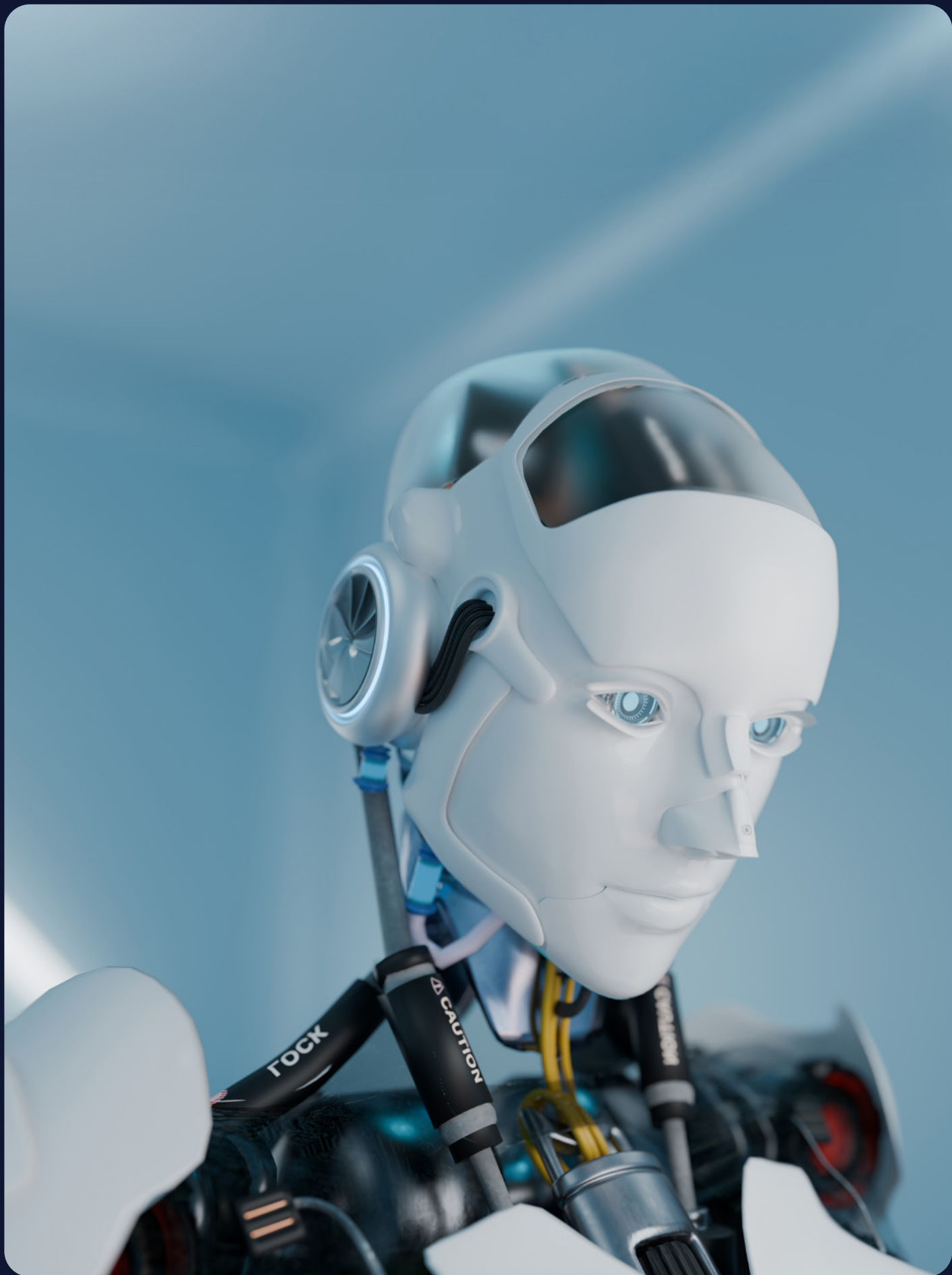
[The Rise of AI Robots \(Citi GPS Report\)](#) – Insights into the drivers of physical AI adoption and the macroeconomic forces behind robot labor.



[The Citi Institute Podcast: The Autonomous Edge \(Agentic AI\)](#) – Discussion of autonomous, action taking AI systems relevant to the evolution of self directed machines, including mobility applications.



[The Citi Institute Podcast: The Rise of AI Robots](#) – Dialogue on simulation, dexterity, and global robotics ecosystems.



Building the Next Generation of AI Companies

Across global markets, a new wave of AI driven software players is emerging, reshaping the digital economy. Several themes define the ambitions, constraints and market sentiment around these firms.

Integrated and agentic AI platforms

One defining theme is the shift from narrow, specialized AI tools toward broad platforms capable of reasoning across text, images, audio and structured data. Enterprises are moving away from isolated AI deployments and toward integrated systems that combine generative, agentic and domain-specific intelligence. This capability – where models can ingest and combine diverse inputs – is accelerating the pace at which new uses emerge and scale.

Agentic AI, in particular, is seen as a breakthrough, enabling autonomous task execution, higher order decision making and self-improving workflows that expand far beyond traditional productivity gains.

Investment in computing infrastructure

AI's explosive rise is underpinned by massive investments in compute infrastructure, networking and data pipelines. Analysis from Citi Research suggests that capital expenditure on AI infrastructure is already surpassing hundreds of billions of dollars annually, easing earlier capacity bottlenecks and improving return on investment as enterprise deployments shift from pilots to production.²

The infrastructure race is not only about raw computing power – it involves designing architectures that support reliable reasoning, model fine tuning and continuous improvement.

AI is also accelerating a rethink of the enterprise technology stack – much like cloud computing and SaaS did in the previous era. Businesses are redesigning workflows around AI native tools, automating routine tasks, augmenting decision making and embedding real time intelligence into customer facing and operational systems.

As organizations adopt AI across functions – from operations to treasury to customer service – it becomes clear that success will require the ability to combine scale with rigorous governance, data quality and structured change management.

Responsible AI at Scale

Across global institutions, responsible AI frameworks are becoming essential as deployments scale across tens of thousands of employees and across markets. Organizations are building guardrails into design, training and execution to ensure transparency, risk controls and safe outputs. These governance structures will become competitive differentiators as AI systems move into even higher-stake environments.

Of course, success is not built on technology alone – it requires large scale workforce adoption, training and cultural change. AI “champions” need to be embedded across organizations, while continuous user feedback loops and upskilling can accelerate adoption in global enterprises.

As adoption reaches critical mass, AI driven productivity gains are expected to contribute significantly to economic growth, though benefits depend on effective integration, not just availability of tools.

The rapid global rollout of AI capabilities across dozens of countries reflects both the scalability of modern AI platforms and the competitive pressure to build AI-first operating models. Expansion across regions demonstrates that AI companies of the future will likely be truly global – defined not just by innovation hubs but by broad deployment reach and local relevance.

Related Reading from across Citi



[Evolution of AI at Google and Citi](#) – on multimodal AI and enterprise governance.



[The AI Revolution – Unlock Your Potential](#) – on generative + agentic AI in investment management and organizational strategy.



Citi Research: [AI: The Information Era's Apex Technology](#) – on AI industry economics, infrastructure investment, and long term forecasts.



Citi Research: [E48: Productivity & The AI Revolution](#) – on macro implications and productivity cycles in AI adoption.

Global Themes in AI Infrastructure and Advanced/Quantum Computing

The global build out of AI-ready infrastructure and the accelerating maturation of advanced and quantum computing are game changing for the technological and economic landscape.

Three interlocking themes dominate sentiment and long-term strategic positioning: the physical limits of classical computing and the need for new architectures, the infrastructural intensity of AI scale-up and the disruptive trajectory of quantum capability.

Classical Computing Approaches Physical Limits

For half a century, classical computing broadly followed Moore's Law by doubling the number of transistors per chip every two years. But those gains are now plateauing as transistor miniaturization nears its physical threshold. Citi Institute analysis highlights that computing is "at an inflection point",³ with classical architectures no longer delivering the step function efficiency needed for emerging workloads such as large-scale AI training and high-fidelity simulations.

This stagnation is pushing governments and enterprises to diversify computing roadmaps toward specialized accelerators, neuromorphic designs and quantum-adjacent hybrid systems. The shift is structural, with long-term implications for global infrastructure spending, supply chains and the tech strategies of nations.

AI models require enormous energy, compute, connectivity and storage capacities. The resulting infrastructure stack – from data centers and high bandwidth networks to specialized chips and power systems – is increasingly viewed as critical national infrastructure. Market sentiment seems to be shaped by expectations that compute scarcity and energy or capital, will be the primary constraint on AI progress.

Quantum Computing Moves From Theory to Practice

Quantum computing is now transitioning from scientific experimentation to commercially meaningful development. Citi Institute has outlined how quantum systems are advancing at a "*doubly exponential*" rate, potentially enabling tasks that exceed classical limits in optimization, simulation, machine learning and cryptography.

Recent Citi Institute reports (see related reading) have emphasized:

- Quantum’s capacity to transform industries like logistics, drug discovery, materials science and cybersecurity.
- The rapid timeline toward logical qubits and fault tolerant architectures, with some forecasts suggesting quantum systems may be powerful enough to challenge existing encryption standards within a few years.
- The policy urgency around post-quantum cryptography, as regulators globally begin mandating readiness and migration planning.

This creates a dual track narrative: quantum as both a catalyst for economic value creation and a driver of systemic cybersecurity risk that requires immediate attention.

Convergence: Hybrid Systems and Quantum Enhanced AI

The next wave of innovation will likely emerge from hybrid models that integrate classical compute, accelerators, and quantum subsystems. This convergence positions quantum not as a replacement but as a capability multiplier for AI and other compute-intensive applications.

Strategically, this is pushing corporates, markets and governments toward long horizon investments in talent, R&D and security frameworks designed to operate in a post classical computing world.

Related Reading from across Citi



[Quantum Computing: Moving Quickly From Theory to Reality](#) – Citi GPS, foundational framing on limits of classical computing and quantum’s growth trajectory.



[Future of Quantum in Finance](#) – Citi Institute Future of Finance Forum – quantum risk, post quantum cryptography, and regulatory responses.



Citi Research: [E47: Quantum Computing – Closer Than You Think?](#) (Podcast) Explores hybrid computing, industry applications, and milestones toward fault tolerance.



[Citi Institute Future of Finance Forum 2025](#) – Broader context on AI and frontier technology infrastructure shaping global finance.



AI, Digital Defense and the Future of Conflict

Artificial intelligence and digital technologies are redefining the global security landscape, transforming not only how conflicts are fought but how states deter adversaries and strengthen national resilience. Several themes stand out in shaping policymaker thinking, investor sentiment and long-term defense innovation trajectories.

Hybrid Warfare as the New Baseline

Contemporary conflicts are increasingly “hybrid,” combining conventional military assets with cyber operations, information manipulation and economic pressure. According to the Citi Institute’s analysis, modern warfare extends “far beyond traditional military power,” requiring states to develop resilience across physical, digital, and societal domains. This evolution places AI enabled threat detection, rapid decision support systems and integrated command networks at the center of future defense planning.

A crucial theme in global defense thinking is the tension between adopting cutting edge technologies and maintaining proven legacy systems. A Citi Institute podcast⁴ underscored the need for a “layered, cost effective defense model” rather than reliance on any single transformative technology or “golden bullet”. As AI permeates targeting, surveillance, logistics and autonomous platforms, defense planners emphasize redundancy, interoperability and multi-domain flexibility. This balanced approach reduces systemic vulnerabilities that could arise from over-centralization on digital systems alone.

Cyber warfare has become a primary battleground, influencing not only the security sector but also corporate strategy and national economic planning. The Citi Institute podcast [Hybrid Warfare, AI and Leadership in an Age of Disruption](#) highlights the rise of cyber threats as integral to modern conflict, requiring persistent investment in digital infrastructure, secure data architectures, and AI driven intrusion detection systems. As geopolitical tensions intensify, information dominance – the ability to secure communications, disrupt adversary networks and control strategic narratives – becomes a decisive competitive edge.

With great power rivalry resurging, governments are shifting from counterinsurgency-focused postures toward conventional deterrence and alliance interoperability. The Citi Institute podcast stresses renewed emphasis on NATO readiness and strategic preparedness in response to evolving global threats. AI-driven modeling, wargaming and predictive threat assessment tools are increasingly central to this recalibration, informing defense allocations and shaping public policy debates around sustainable long-term security spending.

Ethical, Political, and Societal Considerations

Beyond technology, national resilience is shaped by political will and public support for sustained defense modernization. The Citi Institute podcast highlights the challenge of motivating leaders and societies to invest in ethically grounded AI development and robust defense ecosystems in an era of rapid technological disruption.⁵ Issues such as autonomous weapons governance, data sovereignty, and civilian military technology spillovers will influence both regulatory frameworks and investment climates.

Overall, AI and digital defense represent structural, long duration themes transcending industry boundaries. They are reshaping global risk patterns, capital allocation priorities and geopolitical power dynamics – making them essential focus areas for investors evaluating long-term strategic exposure.

Related Reading from Citi Institute



[Hybrid Warfare, AI and Leadership in an Age of Disruption](#) – A comprehensive exploration of hybrid conflict, defense innovation, and the evolving military landscape.

Reinventing Classifieds and Marketplaces – the AI Revolution

AI is reshaping classifieds and marketplaces from static listing boards into adaptive, intent-driven matchmakers.

Agentic discovery is fragmenting the top of the funnel: AI assistants increasingly curate, compare and transact on behalf of users, shifting traffic away from traditional SEO led flows toward conversation and task-driven interfaces. This rewires acquisition economics, weakens brand primacy and raises the stakes for inventory accessibility via open APIs and structured data.⁶

Against this backdrop, quality, trust and safety become core differentiators. Generative systems can amplify both discovery and deception; expect a simultaneous arms race between attackers (e.g., fraud, synthetic content, fake reviews) and platform defenses (multimodal detection, provenance and automated moderation). Platforms that demonstrate fewer losses and quicker problem resolution, supported by strong governance and transparent AI systems, are likely to attract more interest.

In high consideration categories (autos, real estate, jobs, services), AI won't just rank listings; it will normalize attributes, auto draft listings, compare valuations, simulate outcomes, and pre qualify both sides. Successful platforms will look to compress the journey from intent to verified transaction – integrating identity, financing, insurance, logistics, and dispute resolution.

If AI interfaces become new gatekeepers, marketplaces face a prisoner's dilemma: partner with agents for near term reach at the risk of brand erosion, or resist and risk demand leakage. The likely equilibrium is coopetition – structured data feeds, affiliate economics, and attribution standards that preserve some pricing power while meeting users where they are. Category exposure will vary: high frequency, low consideration goods may see faster agentic disintermediation; regulated or complex categories should reward platforms that wrap AI around trust, compliance, and fulfillment.⁷

Finally, governance and talent are gating factors. Effective AI deployment in marketplaces hinges on data quality, model risk management and cross-functional AI literacy – areas repeatedly highlighted in institutional AI programs and thought leadership. Firms need to institutionalize “responsible AI” with transparent controls, while aligning product, risk and policy functions to sustain scale.

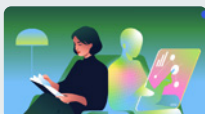
Related Reading from Citi Institute



[The AI Revolution – Unlock Your Potential](#) (podcast): enterprise adoption lessons, agentic use cases, and governance frameworks – useful templates for marketplace operators.



[Evolution of AI](#) (podcast): on multimodal platforms and responsible AI – relevant to building trustworthy discovery and moderation pipelines.



[Agentic AI: Finance & the ‘Do It For Me’ Economy](#) (Citi GPS): broader perspective on agentic systems reshaping intermediation – concepts applicable to marketplace search and transaction flows.



The Future of Payments

The global payments landscape is entering a period of profound structural change, driven by the rapid emergence of generative and agentic AI, the modernization of payment infrastructure and the convergence of digital assets with real time financial networks. Across markets, sentiment is shaped by a growing recognition that AI is not only an efficiency tool but a transformational force capable of reimagining how money moves, how financial institutions compete and how value is created in a digitized economy.

One of the big themes is the shift from AI as a productivity enhancer to AI as a market shaping catalyst. Citi Institute publications have highlighted that generative and agentic AI are moving beyond automating routine processes to enabling autonomous decisioning, advanced analytics, and programmable financial workflows. This evolution is accelerating the electronification of financial markets, boosting front-office capabilities, and opening new revenue-frontier opportunities for financial institutions that successfully integrate AI at scale. The implications for payments are significant: AI-driven systems are beginning to support instantaneous transaction routing, real-time fraud detection and intelligent treasury operations.

Concurrently, digital assets and tokenized forms of money – including stablecoins and tokenized deposits – are reshaping the foundations of payment rails. Insights from industry research emphasize the transition from fragmented, batch-based systems to API-driven, cloud-native infrastructures that enable 24/7 settlement, embedded finance, and fully programmable payments. This structural modernization aligns with AI adoption: as payments become more software defined, AI agents can autonomously manage liquidity, cash forecasting and cross-border transfers.

A related structural trend is the emergence of the “Do It For Me” economy, where intelligent AI agents act on behalf of consumers and enterprises. These agents are expected to drive a new era of commerce in which purchasing, negotiating and transacting are increasingly automated. Agentic AI could supercharge knowledge-based financial roles, while simultaneously raising the bar on governance, compliance and cyber resilience – critical areas for payment networks operating across borders and regulatory regimes.

The competitive landscape is equally dynamic. Surveys suggest that financial institutions expect more competition from digital native challengers leveraging AI-first operating models. Market participants anticipate further redistribution of revenue pools in cross-border payments, with institutions that lag in AI and infrastructure modernization facing market-share erosion. The strategic imperative is clear: institutions must integrate AI not as a bolt-on but as a core capability embedded across payment flows, product design and risk management.

Finally, AI's influence is also macroeconomic. Analysis from Citi Banking⁸ projects that AI-enabled automation and optimization could lift global banking industry profitability over the coming years, reinforcing investor conviction that payments and financial infrastructure are entering a sustained innovation cycle powered by data, automation and intelligent agents.

Taken together, the next decade of payments is expected to be characterized by autonomous finance, tokenized money, always-on settlement and AI-augmented decisions – a convergence likely to redefine competition across the global financial system.

Related Reading from across Citi



[The AI Revolution – Unlock Your Potential](#) (Citi Institute Podcast)

– Deep dive on the synergy of generative and agentic AI in financial markets.



[Future of Payments Survey](#) –

Insights on competitive dynamics, market share pressures, and infrastructure transformation from Citi Banking.

What's Next for Neobanks?

The global neobank sector is entering a defining phase in which scale, profitability, regulatory sophistication and technological differentiation increasingly determine long-term viability.

After a decade characterized by explosive customer growth and venture-funded expansion, the market is shifting toward “profit or perish”, as investor focus moves away from pure user acquisition toward sustainable economics. This pivot has emerged against a backdrop of tightening funding conditions and a more demanding regulatory climate across major financial markets and centers.

Monoline digital interfaces are giving way to full-service financial ecosystems. Neobanks are expanding beyond simple payments into credit, insurance, investments and embedded finance, leveraging cloud native architectures that permit rapid feature deployment and near zero marginal costs.

This evolution is particularly evident in emerging markets, where mobile first consumers and gaps in traditional financial infrastructure continue to propel extraordinary digital adoption.

As smartphone penetration and digital public infrastructure deepen, emerging market neobanks are positioning themselves to capture large segments of previously underserved populations.

Another major driver is the scaling impact of AI, including generative AI, which is increasingly embedded across onboarding, risk scoring, customer service and hyper personalization.

A recent Citi Institute report *Stablecoins: Web3 to Wall Street*⁹ highlights that the integration of AI and data driven intelligence is now central to competitive differentiation, with AI enabled features becoming essential as customer expectations rise.

Meanwhile, the shift toward open banking architectures and API driven interoperability continues to blur the boundaries between banks, fintechs and platform companies.

Neobanks' digital-first operating models could position them well in this environment, enabling partnerships in payments, lending and treasury where speed and data connectivity potentially offer structural advantages.

Regulatory developments are simultaneously raising barriers to entry and creating opportunities. In jurisdictions such as the U.S., licensing has become more stringent, reducing the number of new entrants. Yet globally, regulators are increasingly supportive of digital finance innovation, especially in Asia and Europe, enabling new business models built around real-time payments, open data sharing and tokenized financial infrastructure.

And then there's the emergence of digital money formats, including tokenized deposits and bank issued digital tokens. While stablecoins have catalyzed the shift to "always on" money, institutional market structures may ultimately favor regulated, tokenized banking deposits that integrate seamlessly with existing financial architecture.

This evolution has the potential to redefine liquidity management, settlement, and cross border financial flows – an area where digital only institutions may gain an early edge.

Together, these forces point to a future in which neobanks that achieve operating scale, sophisticated risk management, deep product diversification and advanced technology capabilities emerge as systemic competitors. Those unable to adapt to the convergence of regulation, capital discipline and technology acceleration risk being sidelined.

Related Reading from Citi Institute



[Beyond Stablecoins: Why Bank Tokens Could Boom](#)
– Explores how tokenized deposits may reshape digital finance and real time transaction flows.



Endnotes

- 1 www.citigroup.com/global/insights/the-rise-of-ai-robots
- 2 <https://www.citigroup.com/global/insights/ai-the-information-era-apex-technology>, August 2025
- 3 <https://www.citigroup.com/global/insights/quantum-computing>
- 4 <https://www.citigroup.com/global/insights/hybrid-warfare-ai-and-leadership-in-an-age-of-disruption>
- 5 <https://www.citigroup.com/global/insights/hybrid-warfare-ai-and-leadership-in-an-age-of-disruption>
- 6 https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/business%20functions/quantumblack/our%20insights/the%20state%20of%20ai/november%202025/the-state-of-ai-2025-agents-innovation_cmyk-v1.pdf
- 7 <https://www.ocstrategy.com/en/article/generative-ai-and-the-future-of-classifieds/>
- 8 <https://www.citigroup.com/global/insights/future-of-payments-survey>
- 9 <https://www.citigroup.com/global/insights/stablecoins-2030>

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