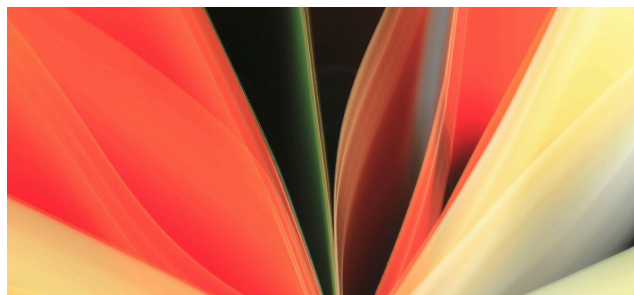


# Strategic: Go sustainable

## Go sustainable

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**Why?** 1) Sustainable investing can deliver competitive returns and alignment with sustainability goals. 2) While the Trump administration's shift in priorities may impact parts of the SI market, there are still opportunities. 3) We favor diversification across asset classes, exposure to less-policy-sensitive areas (like ESG leader equities), and exposure to private impact investments (subject to their unique risks).



Source: Pexels

CIO identifies a number of transformational innovations that look set to shape global equity markets in the years to come. Each is closely linked to sustainability. *Artificial intelligence*, *Power and resources*, and *Longevity*, which represent CIO's three Transformational Innovation Opportunities (TRIOs), are all themes that invest in companies addressing challenges and opportunities across varied fields like resource efficiency and food and water security to rising clean energy demand.

These topics align with the priorities driving the global sustainability transition, where investment momentum has been building. According to BloombergNEF (BNEF), global investment in the energy transition reached a new high of USD 2.1 trillion in 2024. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has reiterated that to remain on a net-zero pathway, annual clean energy investment must increase to USD 4.5 trillion by 2030. Financial gaps remain in other key climate areas, such as water usage. While investment in water-related technologies continues—PitchBook reports USD 196 million raised by the water tech sector in the first quarter of 2025—the World Economic Forum (WEF) identifies a USD 7 trillion global investment gap, which calls for private and public investments. Data from CDP further highlight the financial materiality of water risks, with at least USD 77 billion of corporate value at risk in supply chains, of which nearly USD 7 billion at immediate risk.

We therefore believe the secular case for investing in a diversified sustainable portfolio approach across equities, bonds, hedge funds, and private markets remains firm.

Nevertheless, greater investor caution has arisen over questions about how the Trump administration's policies may affect sustainable investing. While some sustainability-related policies may be rolled back in the years ahead, we do not anticipate wholesale changes to the fundamental case for sustainable investing and continue to see attractive growth opportunities.

All major asset classes, including equities, bonds, hedge funds, and private markets, offer sustainable options, which historically have shown similar return characteristics to traditional investments, though risk characteristics differ particularly for alternatives. We believe that the longer-term performance of diversified sustainable investing strategies will be driven more by investment fundamentals and the economic environment than by politics.

In stocks, we believe investors can consider the equities of companies that are demonstrating improvements or leadership in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles, as well as ESG engagement strategies.

ESG leader strategies aim to be sector-neutral, meaning global performance isn't driven by sector or country tilts. This may help navigate a US political environment where the performance difference between perceived policy winners and losers widens. ESG leaders have shown resilience through less favorable policy periods in the past.

ESG leaders, as an investment screen, correlate with growth and quality equity factors. So, they typically enjoy a

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valuation premium compared to benchmarks. This is also justified by consistent empirical research that shows a positive relationship between companies' management of sustainability issues and their financial performance (Friede, et al. 2015, Whelan, et al. 2021).

ESG improvers are companies that are demonstrating positive momentum in addressing ESG risks and opportunities. They are not yet "leaders," but their performance on various ESG criteria shows signs that they could become leaders in the future. Momentum is a well-known strategy in the investment industry. It consists of buying stocks that have an upward trending price and selling those that have had poor returns in recent months, based on the tendency of the price to move in the direction of the trend.

Within engagement strategies, we believe investors should diversify into sectors beyond climate that exhibit strong economic fundamentals and have a proven ability for engagement on sustainability to drive higher profits and real-world change. While we acknowledge that this approach has faced challenges from shifting regulations and a bias toward small- and mid-cap companies that have historically suffered in times of economic uncertainty, we reiterate that this remains the only public market strategy with impact investing potential. As the practice broadens in the industry, investors explicitly seeking impact investing goals should remain critical of manager selection, ensuring engagement is targeted and accountable.

In fixed income, we like bonds issued by multilateral development banks (MDBs) or those with stated green intentions, as well as credit strategies with an active approach.

MDBs are supranational financial institutions backed by multiple sovereign governments, with the purpose of supporting economic, social, and environmental development, mostly in emerging countries.

They have strong fundamentals, appealing yields, and resilience to weakening in the credit quality of their member countries, so they do not trade at a credit risk premium over benchmark government bonds like US Treasuries in USD or German Bunds in EUR. They do, however, offer some extra yield over government debt given lower market liquidity for the largest institutional investors. This ranges from 5 to 30 basis points (bps) across the cycle depending on the bond tenor and overall market volatility. Investors can continue to benefit from MDB bonds' stability and diversification effects in their portfolios, in our view.

In alternatives, risk-tolerant investors can consider sustainable hedge funds. Such funds incorporate ESG factors into their investment processes, aiming to exploit market inefficiencies related to ESG issues. They thus may offer differentiated investment opportunities.

And in private markets, we believe impact investments in climate technology that aim to help companies meet their decarbonization commitments, reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions, and drive the overall transition to a low-carbon economy represent a significant investment opportunity. Renewables play a critical role in decarbonization and in meeting the growing global energy demand. According to the IEA, renewables currently account for 35% of the global energy mix, a figure projected to rise to 46% by 2030. This growth is largely driven by improved cost efficiency, with renewables achieving cost competitiveness with fossil fuels since 2015. Globally, renewables dominate new capacity additions, while oil and gas have contributed minimally to recent growth. Solar energy remains highly attractive due to technological advancements that have substantially reduced manufacturing costs. Additionally, the scalability of solar energy offers lower long-term costs, further enhancing its appeal. Despite earlier concerns over tariffs on solar panel imports and the phase-out of federal tax credits, investment appetite for renewables remains robust. Surging power demand and tightening supply-demand dynamics have driven a notable recovery in infrastructure deal activity in the first half of 2025, with renewables standing out as a key driver of this rebound. Recent policy developments—such as the passage of the OBBBA (One Big Beautiful Bill Act) and the US Treasury's safe harbor update—are likely to provide projects with greater demand visibility through the end of 2030.

Outside the US, policy support remains strong, particularly in Europe and Asia, where favorable regulations continue to drive new investments in renewable energy.

Nonetheless, private market investors need to consider risk factors like leverage, potential defaults, and concentration risks. Investing in private market vehicles also requires a tolerance for illiquidity and comes with limited disclosure and control over holdings.

For those looking to invest in climate tech, CIO sees opportunities in funds focusing on early-stage and growth-stage companies, providing the capital needed to scale their technologies and bring them to market. We believe such funds have the potential to deliver venture-like returns, while also generating measurable environmental impact.

Moreover, investors can explore co-investment opportunities, which allow them to invest alongside experienced fund managers in specific deals. This approach provides access to high-quality assets and the ability of seasoned investors, enhancing the potential for strong returns. Additionally, secondary markets offer liquidity options for investors looking to exit their positions or rebalance their portfolios.

**Non-traditional asset classes are alternative investments that include hedge funds, private equity, private credit, real estate, and managed futures (collectively, alternative investments).** Interests of alternative investment funds are sold only to qualified investors, and only by means of offering documents that include information about the risks, performance and expenses of alternative investment funds, and which clients are urged to read carefully before subscribing and retain. **An investment in an alternative investment fund is speculative and involves significant risks.**

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In addition to the risks that apply to alternative investments generally, the following are additional risks related to an investment in these strategies:

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## Appendix

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