MACROMATRIX

Strategic Capital

Macro Landscape: Disinflation, Policy Discipline, and Strategic Capital Realignment

#17

Created by	Date Created	Issue Number
RCK Analytics	February 2026	17

Table of Contents

Recent macro data reflects moderating inflation at 2.4%, steady core investment, a data-dependent Fed at 3.50–3.75%, and a $36 billion U.S.–Japan pivot toward energy and critical minerals realignment.

Executive Overview

> ***Disinflation is moderating but uneven, with policy held at 3.50-3.75 percent and capital increasingly directed toward energy, infrastructure, and supply chain security. Early 2026 macro conditions reflect softer inflation, steady core investment activity, cautious central bank signalling, and geopolitically aligned capital flows.***

Recent macroeconomic data present a calibrated but complex U.S. and global economic backdrop. U.S. CPI for January 2026 printed at 2.4 percent year-over-year, down from 2.7 percent in December 2025, with core CPI at 2.5 percent and monthly inflation at 0.2 percent, reflecting moderating price pressures led by a 7.5 percent year-over-year decline in gasoline prices while shelter and food categories remained elevated.

December 2025 durable goods orders, released February 18, 2026, fell 1.4 percent month-over-month to USD 319.6 billion, driven by a 25.9 percent decline in non-defense aircraft orders; however, core capital goods excluding aircraft rose 0.6 percent, indicating continued business investment momentum entering Q1 2026.

FOMC minutes from the January 27–28, 2026 meeting confirmed the federal funds rate held at 3.50-3.75 percent, with explicit acknowledgment of inflation risks and no predefined timeline for returning to the 2 percent target.

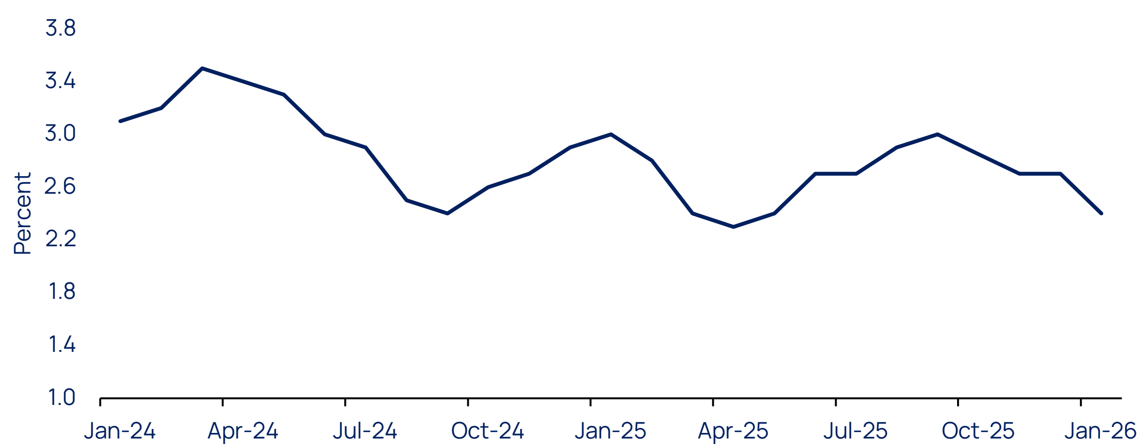
Concurrently, the USD 36 billion U.S.–Japan strategic agreement reallocates cross-border capital into LNG, oil, and critical minerals infrastructure, reinforcing energy security and supply chain realignment as core 2026 investment themes.

Inflation at 2.4% Amid Energy Declines and Sticky Shelter

CPI at 2.4% reflects easing inflation, with a 7.5% gasoline drop partly offset by sticky shelter and food

January 2026 U.S. Consumer Price Index (CPI) data released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that inflation rose 2.4 percent year-over-year, down from 2.7 percent in December 2025, marking the slowest headline pace since May 2025 and indicating ongoing disinflationary trends across the U.S. economy. Core CPI, which excludes food and energy, The CPI for all items increased 0.2 percent in January, reflecting mild price pressures at the start of the year, while the core CPI (excluding food & energy) rose 2.5 percent year-over-year in January, the lowest core reading since 2021 and aligning with market expectations of moderating inflation. Shelter costs remained the largest contributor to monthly gains, with energy prices declining (-0.1 percent over the year ended January 2026) largely due to a 7.5 percent year-over-year decrease in gasoline prices, which significantly pulled down overall inflation. Food prices climbed 2.9 percent year-over-year, with food away from home up 4.0 percent and food at home up 2.1 percent in January 2026, illustrating differentiated price experiences across consumer categories. The moderation from 2.7 percent to 2.4 percent year-over-year underscores deceleration in pricing pressures but also highlights continued variability across subcomponents, reinforcing the importance of disaggregated CPI analysis for accurate macro-economic and investment implications in inflation tracking, monetary policy assessment, and strategic portfolio positioning.

Figure 1: Consumer Price Index



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

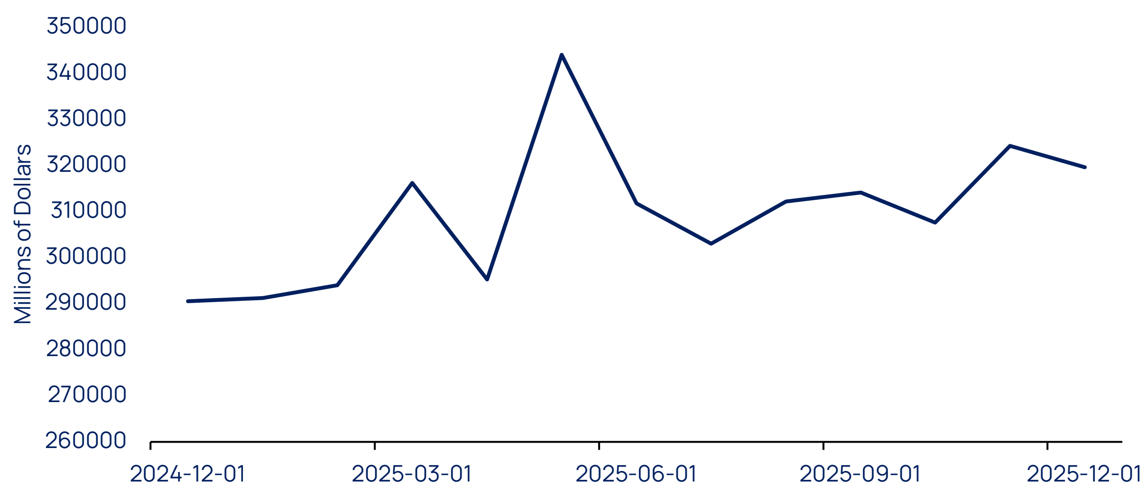
$320B Orders Show Core Capex Resilience

Durable goods fell 1.4% to $319.6B; core capex rose 0.6%, signaling steady investment despite aircraft swings

U.S. durable goods orders for December 2025, released on February 18, 2026, showed that new orders for manufactured durable goods fell 1.4 percent month-over-month to USD 319.6 billion, a smaller contraction than the 2.0 percent decline anticipated by analysts and following a 5.4 percent upward revision for November 2025.

The headline decline in December was driven principally by a 5.3 percent drop in transportation equipment orders to USD 113.5 billion, with non-defense aircraft orders down 25.9 percent, underscoring volatility in aerospace bookings. However, orders excluding transportation equipment rose 0.9 percent, signaling resilience in sectors less affected by lumpy aircraft demand, and non-defense capital goods excluding aircraft,

Figure 2: Manufactures' New Orders: Durable Goods



Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data

a key proxy for business investment, increased 0.6 percent, exceeding forecasted gains. On a year-over-year basis, December durable goods orders remain elevated compared to the prior year, illustrating persistent manufacturing demand amid broader economic dynamics.

This nuanced December 2025 reading highlights the importance of dissecting durable orders components, where headline contraction reflects sector-specific swings, while core investment indicators suggest steadier business capital allocation trends into Q1 2026.

$36B Energy & Critical Minerals Pact Recasts 2026 Capital Flows

The $36B pact channels capital into LNG and critical minerals, cementing energy security and supply chain realignment as 2026 priorities

On February 18, 2026, the United States and Japan announced a USD 36 billion strategic trade and investment framework centered on energy infrastructure, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and critical minerals supply chains. The agreement outlines coordinated Japanese capital deployment into U.S.-based LNG export facilities, upstream oil and gas development, and critical mineral extraction and processing projects, including rare earth elements and battery-related inputs. The USD 36 billion commitment combines private-sector investment, government-backed financing mechanisms, and export credit support structures, reflecting structured industrial policy alignment rather than tariff-based trade liberalization. The framework includes long-term LNG offtake arrangements and supply chain cooperation aimed at reducing concentrated mineral sourcing risk, particularly in strategically sensitive materials. From a macroeconomic perspective, the February 2026 agreement embeds cross-border capital flows into U.S. energy and resource infrastructure assets, reinforcing energy security priorities, supply chain localization, and geopolitically aligned industrial investment.

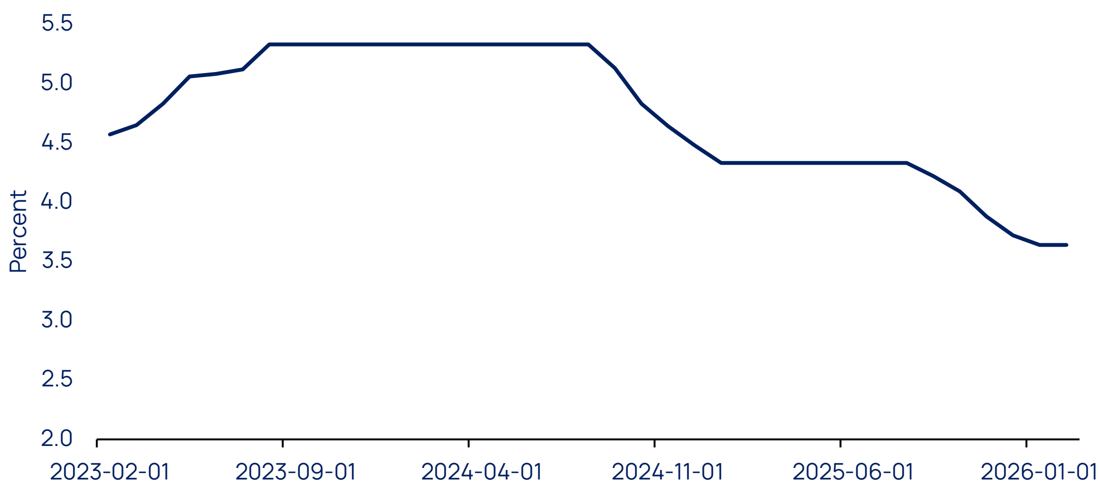
For institutional allocators, infrastructure investors, and private capital platforms, the deal underscores state-supported capital formation in hydrocarbons logistics and critical mineral processing as a defined 2026 strategic investment theme.

Fed Holds at 3.50–3.75% as Inflation Delays Easing

Geopolitical tensions, oil above $69 per barrel, and U.S. yield volatility are reshaping global inflation and capital flows

The Federal Open Market Committee's minutes from the January 27-28, 2026 meeting, made public on February 18, 2026, reveal a nuanced shift in U.S. monetary policy guidance that underpins current financial conditions and investor expectations. The FOMC unanimously maintained the federal funds rate at 3.50 percent–3.75 percent, a range set after three cuts in late 2025, reflecting a deliberate policy pause to assess evolving macro signals rather than immediate action. Most officials judged persistent inflation above the 2 percent target as a meaningful risk, cautioning that progress toward the inflation goal could be "slower and more uneven than generally expected," and several participants stressed that further rate cuts would be appropriate only if

Figure 3: Fed Funds Effective Rate



Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data

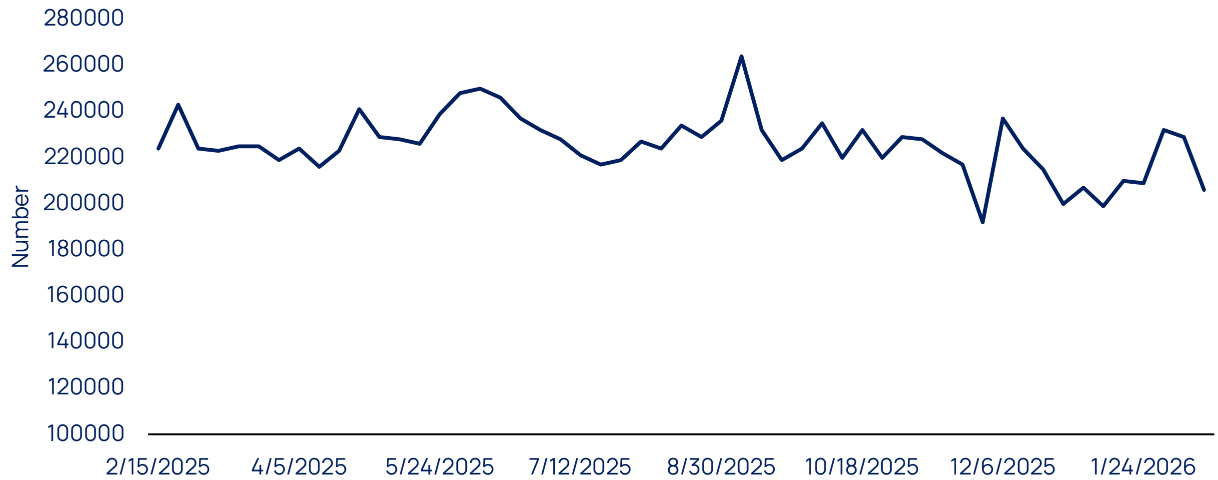
inflation data clearly declines toward target. Contrasting views emerged within the Committee, with two officials dissenting in favor of another quarter-point cut and several others noting that if inflation remains above target, "upward adjustments" to the federal funds rate could become appropriate, introducing the prospect of future tightening. The minutes also dropped explicit reference to a specific timeline for inflation returning to 2 percent, a subtle recalibration that underscores the Committee's heightened caution on inflation trajectory. This complex blend of steady policy, divided expectations on rate direction, and emphasis on incoming data underscores continued uncertainty in U.S. monetary policy transmission and sets the stage for heightened market sensitivity to upcoming inflation readings and labor market indicators.

Cooling Global Uncertainty with Range-Bound Jobless Claims

Uncertainty surges, labor holds steady

In the latest, initial jobless claims declined to 206,000, down from roughly 228,000 the prior week, marking a 23,000-weekly drop.

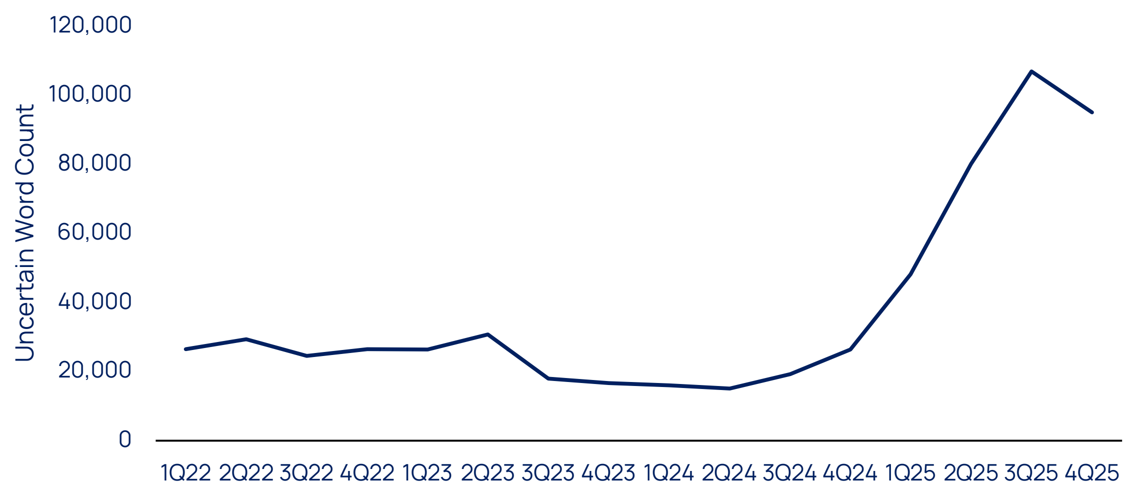
Figure 4: **Initial Jobless Claims**



Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data

In 2025Q4, the World Uncertainty Index moderates slightly from the 2025Q3 peak but remains at historically elevated levels, indicating uncertainty is easing marginally yet still structurally high.

Figure 5: **World Uncertainty Index**



Source: World Uncertainty Index

Work With Us

RCK Analytics is a global provider of high-quality investment research, investment banking support, PE/VC insights, data science and engineering solutions, market research, analytics, and assurance services. We serve a diverse client base including investment firms, PE/VC funds, asset managers, hedge funds, investment banks, consulting firms, and corporates across sectors. Backed by a skilled team, we deliver data-driven insights and strategic support to help clients make informed decisions and drive financial outcomes.

Our capabilities extend to deal origination support, financial due diligence, valuation analysis, portfolio monitoring, and advanced data analytics, enabling clients to enhance decision precision and operational efficiency. Our team focuses on delivering measurable outcomes through insight-driven strategies, helping clients strengthen investment theses, improve capital allocation, and unlock long-term value across dynamic global markets.

RCK ANALYTICS

Website: www.rckanalytics.com

Phone: +91 72194 74999

M-109, City Avenue Corporate Park, Wakad,
Mumbai-Bangalore Highway, Pune, India – 411 057