

Welcome back, U.S. economic data

November 18, 2025



TOP THREE TAKEAWAYS

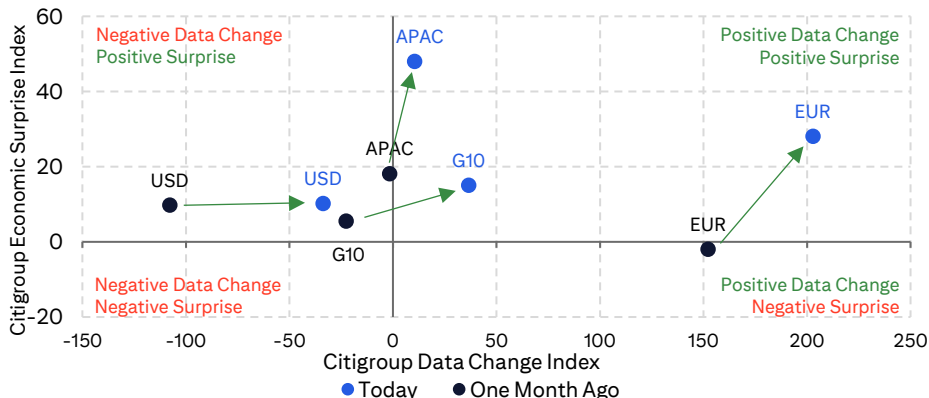
The return of delayed U.S. economic data will shape the December Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) rate decision. We caution about adding risk in rate-sensitive equities for now.

Improving global data, dovish policy settings, and resilient consumer activity support staying invested in equities, with a continued preference for high-quality, strong equity exposures.

Despite macro headwinds, China's structural drivers continue to strengthen the case for a strategic long-term allocation.

THIS WEEK IN CHARTS

Figure 1: The global growth picture has subtly improved.



LOOKING CLOSER

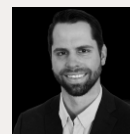
Most major regions are seeing economic data improvements and surprises to the upside. Our view of a recovery cycle since the 2022-23 contraction remain intact. Dovish monetary policy relative to economic performance lends additional support.

Source: Bloomberg as of November 17, 2025. A positive/negative economic surprise is the difference between actual released economic data and the consensus forecast from economists. Economic forecasts are using Bloomberg surveys. All forecasts are expressions of opinion and are subject to change without notice and are not intended to be a guarantee of future events.



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"We have faith that the U.S. market has breadth, but that doesn't mean we will step away from our overweight in Chinese equities."

U.S. economic data returns to the stage.

The resumption of federal economic data releases will provide key signposts ahead of the December FOMC rate decision amid recent hawkish market repricing. The schedule of delayed data releases is still taking shape, but the September employment report — set for release on Thursday — is the first major data point to be rescheduled. In the absence of official numbers, Fed funds futures repriced aggressively. Markets now assign 50-50 odds to a 25 basis points December rate cut versus a full cut priced in just a month ago.

Thursday's employment report matters, but it represents old news. Investors leaned heavily on ADP's monthly release and weekly report during the shutdown, which showed a 29,000 private payroll decline in September, a 42,000 rebound in October¹, and a decline of 2,500 per week in the four weeks ending November 1. The October employment report — originally due November 7 — has not yet been rescheduled. White House National Economic Council Director Kevin Hassett said the report will contain an update on nonfarm payrolls but not the unemployment rate.

Guidance from Fed officials about the path for monetary policy centers around the perceived risks to the labor market versus price stability. These two Fed mandates are seen to conflict with inflation above the 2% target, while the labor market is showing signs of weakening. The September consumer price index (CPI) report was published during the shutdown (as the data was needed for Cost-of-Living Adjustments for Social Security), but the revised date for the October CPI has not yet been published.

Other important economic reports to be rescheduled include the advance release of third-quarter GDP and income, spending, and PCE prices data for September and October. The Fed's communication window closes on November 29, raising the stakes for every data point between now and then.

Bottom line: Given the Fed's aversion to hawkish market surprises, the FOMC will likely deliver a rate cut if upcoming data reports indicate further weakness. However, a message of caution with respect to further policy easing has grown louder in recent weeks. This modestly hawkish shift in rhetoric aligns with the market's reduced pricing of 50% chance for a December cut and the move higher in longer-end yields since the October meeting. We remain underweight duration to guard against additional moves higher in longer-term rates, and we remain negative on adding risk in rate-sensitive equities for now.

While U.S. macro uncertainty dominates headlines, the global growth picture has quietly improved.

Citi's Global Economic Data Change Index turned positive in November and sits +2.7 standard deviations above its long-run mean, while our Global Economic Surprise Index sits at its highest level since April 2024. Data across G10² economies have strengthened for three consecutive months—a notable shift. Trade dynamics and geopolitics will continue to inject volatility, but the underlying recovery from the 2022-23 contraction appears intact.

Alternative indicators inside the U.S. remain resilient despite the government data blackout. We remain fully invested in equities due to the steady improvement in global growth, despite focusing on the K-shaped divergences across markets, economic contributors, and consumers. Dovish monetary settings relative to underlying economic data also reinforce this stance. However, central banks may increasingly struggle to balance easier policy with inflation that runs above target across most developed markets. As mentioned above, this creates ongoing risks for rate-sensitive segments, especially small caps and unprofitable tech.

Bottom line: Global growth momentum has strengthened over the past three months, supported by easier monetary policy relative to economic conditions. We see room for continued cyclical upside and measured risk-taking – focusing on high-quality, fundamentally strong equity exposures.

¹ ADP® National Employment Report, October 2025

² The G10 includes: Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States.

The return of U.S. economic data will give markets the signals they need to judge the Fed's next move. But with labor softness colliding with still sticky-inflation, the macro picture remains noisy, and investors should stay nimble as each release has the potential to shift the policy path.

The long-term strategic story of Chinese equities

We remain optimistic about the long-term outlook for Chinese equities as the country's structural investment themes continue to outweigh softer cyclical data. The focus on innovation to accelerate the digital and intelligent transformation of services is top of mind following communications from the Fourth Plenum. We see the focus on applying AI across the "real economy" as a potential productivity boost that may reshape industries, assist with scaling, and redefine profitability.

Notably, Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) China's sector composition looks materially different from a decade ago. The index shifted from "old economy" sectors toward asset-light, technology-driven business models. For example, the technology sector's weighting nearly doubled—from 13.1% in 2015 to 25.0% today. Bottom-up earnings trends are also improving in critical sectors; three-month rolling earnings-revision ratios continue to rise across Information Technology, Communication Services, and Financials.

Historically, volatile economic growth, limited fiscal support, and government intervention in profitable industries made the global investment community wary of Chinese equity exposure. Today, emerging market funds remain underweight China and present a potential source for follow-on investment if China's strategic plans come to fruition. There is now growing acknowledgement that the largest components of the Chinese markets have both strong secular tailwinds (AI and other tech advancements) and government policy support. Despite this shift, most global portfolios have not meaningfully increased their China exposure. Still, interest continues to build, reflected in nearly \$50bn USD of inflows to China-focused emerging market equity funds year-to-date.

Bottom line: The macro headwinds for Chinese equities will likely persist in the near-term. However, we believe positive structural forces—AI penetration, technology leadership, and targeted policy support—reinforce a strategic, longer-term allocation to the region.

WHAT HAPPENED

WHAT'S AHEAD

U.S.

- Automatic Data Processing (ADP) weekly employment was weak in late October, but jobless claims continue to show no evidence of rising layoff activity in early November.
- National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) small business optimism declined in October, but hiring plans remained firm and pricing expectations were still elevated.

GLOBAL

- Germany's Zentrum für Europäische Wirtschaftsforschung (ZEW) investor survey showed weaker expectations
- The UK reported soft employment data
- China retail sales, industrial production, and fixed assets investment were weak
- Brazil's consumer price index (CPI) rose by less than expected

ECONOMIC DATA

U.S.

- Pending schedule of U.S. data releases that were delayed by the government shutdown
- September jobs data

GLOBAL

- Japan Q3 GDP and October consumer price index (CPI)
- Global purchasing managers indexes (PMI) for early November
- UK consumer price index (CPI) for October

U.S.

- Senate and House passed funding measure to reopen the government until January 30.
- More hawkish Fed-speak pushed December rate cut expectations down to <50% from ~63% at the start of the week.

GLOBAL

- UK unexpectedly scraps plan to raise income tax rates
- Switzerland strikes deal with U.S. to lower tariff rate to 15%

POLICY

U.S.

- Additional Fed policymaker guidance on the December 10 rate decision
- October Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) minutes

GLOBAL

- Economic stimulus package details for Japan expected late in the week
- People's Bank of China (PBoC) loan prime rate decision (no change expected)

U.S.

- Momentum stocks continued unwind
- Breadth improvement with retirement savings plan (RSP) outperforming the S&P 500

GLOBAL

- UK gilts, GBP, Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) 100 dropped around government credibility and fiscal concerns

MARKETS

U.S.

- Retail earnings in the spotlight
- Earnings per share (EPS) and revenue beat rates above historical standards but magnitude of earnings beats a bit smaller

GLOBAL

- Continue to monitor market leadership, breadth, setup into year-end

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High quality (very strong)	Aa	AA	AA
Upper medium grade (Strong)	A	A	A
Medium grade	Baa	BBB	BBB
Not Investment Grade			
Lower medium grade (somewhat speculative)	Ba	BB	BB
Low grade (speculative)	B	B	B
Poor quality (may default)	Caa	CCC	CCC
Most speculative	Ca	CC	CC
No interest being paid or bankruptcy petition filed	C	D	C
In default	C	D	D

¹ The ratings from Aa to Ca by Moody's may be modified by the addition of a 1, 2, or 3, to show relative standing within the category.

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- potential lack of diversification and resulting higher risk due to concentration of trading authority when a single advisor is utilized;
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- less regulation and higher fees than mutual funds; and
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