Bitcoin Keeps Dropping?

While Retail Panic-Sells,

Wall Street Is Buying Crypto Infrastructure

EXIO Research Institute | June 26, 2026

June 25, 2026, is not the day of a single event—it is a 24-hour period when five events happen simultaneously. Morning: Circle announced a partnership with Japan's largest brokerage, Nomura Securities, to enter the $440 billion/day foreign exchange settlement market (annualized ~$110 trillion). Noon: Uniswap and SparkDAO launched the stablecoin "FX Layer," completing the $150 million liquidity migration. Afternoon: Kraken reportedly negotiated to acquire a 15% stake in DeFi lending protocol Aave, valued at $385 million. Evening: SBI Holdings fully acquired Bitbank for $289 million, becoming Japan's largest exchange. Late at night: $2.5 trillion asset management giant Invesco submits a tokenized fund application to the SEC—target: stablecoin reserve market.

Meanwhile, Bitcoin fell below $58,000, hitting a 21-month low. BTC ETFs recorded record weekly net outflows. Crypto Twitter is discussing whether it's time to cut losses. This is not market chaos. This is five independent yet highly synchronized strategic moves—behind it lies the same decision clock and the same institutional layout rhythm. Five events, five tracks: five parallel deployments under the same macro logic.

I. Five Scalpels—Each Cut Precisely into the Future Pipeline of Crypto Finance

First Cut: Invesco → Stablecoin Reserve Fund

On the surface, a $2.5T asset management giant has applied for a tokenized money market fund to meet the reserve management needs of stablecoin issuers. Because the GENIUS Act and MiCA stablecoin provisions are expected to take effect between 2026 H2–2027 (the regulatory timeline is highly uncertain;

see Section IV Risk Assessment for details). If the current timeline goes smoothly, all compliant stablecoins must hold regulated reserve assets. USDC (~$55 billion) + USDT (~$120 billion), totaling ~$175 billion in reserve assets. Only the T-bill management fee is calculated at 5–10 bps, with annual revenue = $87.5 million–$175 million—and it continues to expand as the total market capitalization of stablecoins grows.

Invesco is not watching BTC price to decide when to enter. It is looking at the congressional legislative calendar. BTC $58K or $158K is irrelevant for a layout that will only generate income in 2027. Importantly: before the regulatory framework is established, if approved smoothly, become the first tokenized fund to receive SEC approval—so that when stablecoin issuers are required to "use regulated funds," Invesco is the first option on the shelf.

In 1993, State Street launched its first ETF (SPDR S&P 500). At that time, no one understood what an ETF was. Today, State Street manages $4.3T ETF assets. What Invesco is doing is the first crypto ETF—but the underlying asset is not stocks, but a reserve asset of stablecoins.

Second Cut: Kraken → Aave (and Maple)

On the surface, Kraken is negotiating to acquire a 15% stake in Aave and simultaneously launching an on-chain credit facility with Maple Finance. The Aave founder denied the equity sale—but this was actually a key signal: the negotiating table denied the equity terms but acknowledged the existence of an AAVE token buyback program. This indirectly confirms that some strategic capital arrangement is taking place between Kraken and Aave—Kraken cannot use its own name for on-chain lending. The SEC has already taken action against Kraken's staking-as-a-service. But it wants a revenue stream from DeFi lending—this sector is expected to generate ~$2 billion in protocol revenue by 2025.

So it designed an arbitrage structure for "compliant DeFi":

- Do not lend yourself → Earn economic income indirectly by holding Aave equity/tokens
- Do not directly operate protocols → Influence protocol compliance direction through governance voting
- Not crossing the "unregistered securities" red line → Using institutional credit facilities (Maple) to meet institutional lending needs

When CEXs can't directly do DeFi, but DeFi profits are too tempting to give up, what's the answer? The answer is—buy a part of a DeFi protocol and then "domesticate" it with your compliance team. When Google acquired YouTube in 2004, it said, "We don't make videos." When Facebook acquired Instagram in 2012, it said, "We don't make photos."

Third Cut: Circle × Nomura Securities → Japanese Corporate Forex

On the surface, Circle is partnering with Japan's largest brokerage to deploy stablecoin cross-border FX settlement as early as 2027, with a Japanese corporate foreign exchange market size of $440 billion per day. This is not "yet another stablecoin pilot." This is the first time a top TradFi broker has officially sided with stablecoins as the settlement layer.

The math is simple:

- SWIFT cross-border payment: costs 50–100 bps, settled from T+1 to T+3
- Stablecoin FX: Cost ~0 bps (on-chain gas + liquidity pool fees), instant settlement
- Japan's corporate FX market is $440 billion/day × 250 trading days = $110 trillion/year

Even though Circle-Nomura only captures 0.1% of the market share, its settlement volume reaches $110 billion per year—directly from the fee profit pool of SWIFT brokers. Nomura chose USDC instead of issuing its own token. As Japan's largest brokerage, Nomura is fully capable of issuing its own stablecoin. But it chose to partner with Circle—which means it judges that in the compliant stablecoin sector, "issuing tokens" is less valuable than "accessing." This is the classic payment network model: Visa does not issue tokens, but it owns the payment network.

Same day comparison: Uniswap + Spark DAO's $150 million "FX Layer" migration—a direct collision of two rails:

- TradFi pipeline: Circle-Nomura, compliance-first, licensed entity → regulated market
- DeFi Network: Uniswap-Spark, open-first, on-chain liquidity pools → borderless market

Which railroad passes first will determine the infrastructure landscape for cross-border payments over the next five years. Currently, both trains are accelerating—and they may cross at some station.

Fourth Cut: SBI → Bitbank — Financial Group's "Eat Up Exchanges" Strategy

On the surface, SBI acquired Bitbank for $289 million, making it Japan's largest exchange. SBI's territory already covers — trading (Bitbank), stablecoins (SBI VC Trade obtaining Japan's first stablecoin license), tokenization (in partnership with BOOSTRY), and blockchain infrastructure (SBI's multi-chain validator nodes). This is the "financial holding company" model of the digital asset era. It's not about buying a single exchange to trade crypto—it's about building a regulated, full-stack digital asset financial group.

Implications for the Asia-Pacific market:

- SBI model + OKX-ICE joint venture = two templates for the Asia-Pacific exchange landscape

- The independent survival space of pure exchanges is disappearing—players with licenses + traditional financial networks are eating up the market
- This is not competition between exchanges. This is a strategic game between financial groups and technology platforms. Exchanges are key nodes among them.

Fifth Cut (Hidden): Market Makers' Routine Hedging Before and After Option Expiration

On the surface, BTC fell below $58K, the ETF recorded a historic net outflow, and $10 billion in options expired.

The facts go far beyond the price figures:

1. Market makers' monthly hedging routine: On the last Friday of each month, market makers are motivated to manage spot exposure in delta hedges, allowing more options to expire out-of-the-money. PCE inflation hits a three-year high + ETF outflows provide exactly the focus of market attention. But the market structure itself also faces real pressures—the two are not mutually exclusive.

2. But the crowd base of panic is real: Deutsche Bank reports confirm "new institutional headwinds"—liquidity siphoning in the AI sector (Micron profits surging nearly 14-fold, SK Hynix sending $29 billion to the US) is drawing blood from crypto ETFs.

3. The direction after the $10 billion option expiration is the real signal:

- After expiration, holding $58K and seeing both volume and price rise → Short squeeze starts = market maker hedging operation ends
- Breaking below after expiration with no rebound → True bear market deepening = early miners' prediction of $44K may not be a joke

Of these five cuts, the first four have nothing to do with BTC prices. Only the fifth cut is price-driven—and it may have been artificially manufactured.

II. The Chess Game: Why Must These Five Events Be Read Together?

They Share a Hidden Logic: Synchronization of Three Clocks

Clock	What's Ticking	Who's Watching
Regulatory	GENIUS Act / MiCA / Japan Stablecoin Act	Invesco, Circle, SBI
Technology	L2 maturity / On-chain liquidity	Uniswap-Spark, Kraken

Clock	What's Ticking	Who's Watching
Price	BTC $58K / ETF outflows / Retail panic	Crypto Twitter, Retail

The first four cuts are driven by the "regulatory clock" and the "technical clock." Only the fifth cut is driven by the "price clock." This means: while you're staring at BTC prices to decide whether to enter, Invesco at $2.5T and Japan's largest brokerage are already acting on another calendar. For those watching BTC prices to judge whether to enter, Invesco at $2.5T and Japan's largest brokerage are already acting on another calendar. This is an independent decision made by two types of market participants across different information environments and time dimensions—retail focuses on the price clock, while institutions focus on regulatory and technical clocks. The two have formed the current market "split" characteristic.

History Will Not Repeat Itself, But It Will Rhyme

What happened during the 2000–2002 dot-com bubble burst?

- The Nasdaq fell 78%. Pets.com bankruptcy. Retail investors are panicking.
- During the same period: Google was raising funds. Amazon is expanding its logistics center. Verizon lays fiber optics—these "infrastructure assets" built from the ruins, then spent ten years becoming the underlying pipeline of the internet.

2008 Financial Crisis:

- Lehman Brothers went bankrupt. S&P 500 halved. The entire market is selling off.
- During the same period: BlackRock acquired iShares at a low price (now the world's largest ETF platform). JPMorgan absorbed high-quality assets following Bear Stearns' bankruptcy.

2026 Crypto Bear Market:

- BTC $58K. Record ETF outflows. Retail investors are discussing cutting losses.
- During the same period: Invesco ($2.5T) is seizing the regulatory advantage of tokenized funds. Nomura Securities is building a stablecoin FX pipeline. SBI completed the acquisition of Japan's largest exchange.

Every painful period in financial markets is a moment when future infrastructure ownership shifts from "speculators" to "institutions." Crypto is not an exception. Crypto is the next case to happen.

III. Who Is Losing? — Three Bets That Are Being Debunked

Bet 1: "BTC Will Go On Its Own, Decoupling from TradFi"

The mainstream narrative over the past three years is: Bitcoin is digital gold, an uncorrelated asset, independent of macro cycles. When the AI sector surged (Micron profits soared, SK Hynix built a $29 billion factory in the US), BTC ETFs saw significant net outflows—the funds didn't disappear, but migrated. BTC is not digital gold; it is currently a high-beta technology asset. At least at the institutional allocation level, crypto and AI/Chip are using the same pool of dollar liquidity.

Deutsche Bank's report put it more bluntly: Bitcoin's drop below $60,000 reflects "new institutional headwinds." In other words, institutional funds flow in and out of BTC is two-way—ETFs make BTC easier to buy and easier to sell.

Bet 2: "DeFi Will Grow from the Margins and Eat Up CeFi"

Total TVL for DeFi in 2026 is expected to shrink significantly. After a security breach at KelpDAO's cross-chain bridge, Aave deposits were leaked. Meanwhile, Kraken (CeFi) is in talks to acquire a share of Aave (DeFi leader). DeFi doesn't grow from the edge—it will be acquired internally by CeFi, integrated, and then re-emerged in the form of "compliant DeFi." This is not a failure of DeFi. This is the success of DeFi as a technology + the failure of DeFi as an independent organization.

Technology is too valuable to be operated by independent small teams. Regulatory pressure is too great, and the DAO structure cannot cope. So the answer isn't "DeFi will win" or "CeFi will win"—the answer is "CeFi acquires DeFi technology and users, then repackages it within its own compliance framework." Kraken → Aave is the first public case of this narrative. It won't be the last.

Bet 3: "Stablecoins Are a Niche Crypto Tool"

Tether's net profit for 2025 will surpass most Wall Street banks, and Circle is on the path to IPO. Now, Nomura Securities is pushing USDC into Japan's $110 trillion annual corporate forex market. Stablecoins are not crypto tools. It is the next-generation protocol layer for payment networks—just as SWIFT replaced teleprinters in the 1970s, and stablecoins are replacing SWIFT in the 2020s. The difference is: SWIFT has been used for decades. Stablecoins could achieve the same switch within a decade—because the economic benefits of bypassing SWIFT are too great.

This is what Invesco is betting on: if stablecoins become the global payment layer, who will manage the reserve assets behind these stablecoins? Invesco wants to be the answer—just like BNY Mellon is the custodian of traditional securities.

IV. Core Judgments of EXIO Research Institute

Ownership of crypto finance infrastructure is underway—in blunt terms—a quiet, systematic shift from "crypto natives" to "TradFi institutions." BTC's price is the background noise behind this shift, not the main plot.

Three Specific Judgments

1. This Autumn (Q3 2026) Is a Window for Laying the Ground, Not a Time to Buy the Dip

The premise of "bottom-fishing" is that when the price hits the bottom, it will rebound. But the five events we saw said: "Whether prices come back or not, we are building pipelines."

For institutions, the difference between "positioning" and "bottom-fishing" is:

- Bottom-fishing = betting on price direction
- Positioning = betting on industry structure

What Invesco does is to position itself, not to buy BTC at the bottom.

2. By 2027, What Directional Outcomes Will Today's "Split" Show?

Q3 2026 Positioning	Possible 2027 Outcome
Invesco tokenized fund approved	First regulated stablecoin reserve custodian
Circle-Nomura FX launched	Stablecoin settlement layer for Japan corporate FX
SBI-Bitbank integration complete	Japan's largest compliant crypto financial group
Kraken-Aave relationship established	First CeFi-DeFi hybrid architecture

If half of these four things succeed, the crypto finance map in 2027 will be completely different from today—and the protagonist on that map is not the person discussing whether to cut losses at $58K on Crypto Twitter today.

3. The Biggest Risk Is Not How Much BTC Will Fall—It's That Regulation Hasn't Been Implemented on Schedule

All the "why now" analyses in this report are based on a common premise: the GENIUS Act / MiCA / Japan's stablecoin law will be implemented in H2 2026–2027.

If the parliament is delayed, the EU member states are at odds, and Japanese bureaucrats are delaying—

- Invesco's fund approval will be postponed
- Circle-Nomura's product deployment will lack a legal basis
- SBI's integration will slow down due to regulatory uncertainty

The irony of this risk is that if regulation is delayed, BTC prices may rebound (because the "hit" boot hasn't fallen) — but infrastructure deployment will stall. In other words, short-term price good news could be bad news for long-term infrastructure. Conversely, if regulation accelerates (for example, the GENIUS Act suddenly enters fast track), BTC may continue to be under pressure in the short term (clear regulation = rising compliance costs = shadow market squeezed)—but infrastructure deployments will explode. This is a truly counterintuitive judgment.

V. Industry Landscape Outlook

Industry Structural Observations

The digital asset industry is undergoing a shift from directional exposure to the accumulation of value along the infrastructure value chain—this is an observation at the market structure level. The common direction of the five events is that value accumulation is shifting from the Layer 1 protocol layer to the middleware and service layers—stablecoin reserve management, compliant lending facilities, cross-border settlement networks, and regulated trading platforms form new value capture nodes.

Within this observation framework:

- BTC's position in institutional portfolios is undergoing a repricing. ETF capital outflows and the siphoning effect of capital in the AI/semiconductor sector indicate that institutional investors are still rebalancing across asset classes. BTC is correcting from "uncorrelated alternative assets" to "high-beta technology exposure," and this repricing process is not yet complete. This is a market structure observation and does not constitute a prediction of BTC price direction.
- There is new institutional interest in the stablecoin and RWA infrastructure sectors. Invesco's entry indicates that once the regulatory framework is established, regulated on-chain reserve

management could become one of the most predictable revenue tracks in the digital asset industry. This is a market structure observation and does not constitute a preference judgment for any sector or asset.

- The trend of Asia-Pacific exchange consolidation is accelerating. The SBI-Bitbank transaction reflects a compelling trend: in the Asian market, group players with banking licenses and traditional financial relationships are expanding their market share structurally advantageously, while independent exchanges face greater competitive pressure. This is an observation of the industry competitive landscape.

Implications of the Industry Landscape

The boundaries between DeFi and CeFi are disappearing—but in ways that have been contrary to market expectations. The industry had previously widely assumed that DeFi protocols would erode the market share of centralized platforms from the margins. The current observed direction is the opposite: CeFi platforms are integrating DeFi protocols into their ecosystems through equity investment and credit facilities.

The Kraken-Aave negotiations—regardless of the final form—represent a noteworthy structural form in the digital asset industry: centralized platforms gain the economic rights and governance influence of decentralized protocols, while protocols retain technical autonomy but accept some degree of compliance constraints. This "hybrid architecture" may become a more common organizational form in the industry between 2026 and 2028. This is an industry structure observation and does not constitute a judgment of any company or protocol.

For builders and protocol teams, the core strategic question is: in an environment where regulatory compliance costs continue to rise, should protocols be integrated or operate independently? Being integrated means giving up some autonomy but gaining institutional distribution channels; operating independently means retaining control but bearing increasingly higher compliance and security costs. Events in Q2 2026 show the market is rewarding the former—Invesco chose Superstate instead of self-developing, Nomura chose Circle instead of self-developing, Kraken chose to invest in Aave instead of proprietary lending.

Key Risk Factors

The investment thesis in this report faces the following core risks:

- Regulatory timeline risk (high impact / moderate probability): If the GENIUS Act faces substantial delays in Congress (postponed to after H2 2027), or if there are disagreements at the member state level over MiCA stablecoin terms, revenue recognition schedules for projects like Invesco and Circle-Nomura will be significantly delayed. It is worth noting that regulatory delays may benefit BTC prices in the short term (a mirror of "bearish exhaust" trades), but in the medium term, they harm capital returns on infrastructure investments.

- Macro liquidity risk (high impact / realized): PCE inflation hitting a three-year high, delayed rate cut expectations, and a strong DXY have all constituted real liquidity pressures on digital assets. If Q3 inflation data continues to exceed expectations, the tail risks of the Fed being forced to maintain or even raise rates cannot be ignored. In this scenario, BTC may test $44K (early miners' year-end bottom estimate), and ETF outflows could accelerate further.
- Security incident risk (moderate impact / persistent): Recent DeFi cross-chain bridge security vulnerabilities and their impact on deposits in related protocols have once again exposed DeFi security vulnerabilities. Security incidents at the infrastructure layer not only affect individual protocols but may also delay institutional adoption timelines—TradFi participants reassess custody and settlement risks after security incidents.
- Geopolitical risk (moderate impact / to be watched): The attack on shipping in the Strait of Hormuz reminded the market that energy price shocks could be transmitted through inflation channels to all risk assets, including digital assets.

Potential Positive Catalysts for 2026 H2–2027

Timeframe	Catalyst	Affected Sectors
2026 Q3	Post-BTC options expiry short squeeze signal	BTC / ETF flows
2026 Q3-Q4	SEC feedback on Invesco tokenized fund	RWA / Tokenization
2026 Q4	Japan stablecoin regulatory framework details	Stablecoin FX / APAC exchanges
2026 H2–2027 H1	GENIUS Act congressional vote	All sectors
2027	Circle-Nomura FX product launch	Stablecoins / Cross-border payments
2027	Additional TradFi asset managers follow with tokenized funds	RWA infrastructure

References

CoinDesk / The Block / The Defiant / Crypto Briefing (2026-06-25)

CoinDesk / Decrypt / Crypto Briefing / BeInCrypto (Aave founder denies claim) (2026-06-25)

CoinDesk / Tech Times / TradingView / The Block (Uniswap-Spark) (2026-06-25)

Decrypt / Finextra / Cointelegraph (2026-06-25)

CoinDesk / Bloomberg / CNBC / Deutsche Bank (2026-06-23–25)

Deutsche Bank (via CoinDesk)

CoinDesk — Bitcoin plunges to new multi-year low of $58,000, but a short squeeze setup emerges (2026-06-25)

https://www.coindesk.com/markets/2026/06/25/bitcoin-plunges-to-new-multi-year-low-of-usd58-000-but-a-short-squeeze-setup-emerges

Bloomberg — Bitcoin's woes could be compounded by $10 billion options expiry (2026-06-25)

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-06-25/bitcoin-s-woes-could-be-compounded-by-10-billion-options-expiry

CoinDesk — Circle and Nomura join forces to target a $440 billion daily foreign exchange market in Japan (2026-06-25)

https://www.coindesk.com/markets/2026/06/25/circle-and-nomura-join-forces-to-target-a-usd750-billion-daily-foreign-exchange-market-in-japan

CoinDesk — Kraken in talks to buy 15% stake in DeFi lender Aave at $385 million valuation (2026-06-25)

https://www.coindesk.com/business/2026/06/25/kraken-in-talks-to-buy-15-stake-in-defi-lender-aave-at-usd385-million-valuation

Deutsche Bank (via CoinDesk) — Bitcoin's recent drop below $60,000 signals Fed, ETF and AI pressures (2026-06-23)

https://www.coindesk.com/markets/2026/06/23/bitcoin-s-recent-drop-below-usd60-000-signals-fed-etf-and-ai-pressures-deutsche-bank