Market Talks
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The Crypto Landscape: Altcoins, Categories and Memecoins

How many cryptocurrencies really exist, how the market is divided between bitcoin and everything else, the main categories, and why most new tokens disappear

10 min read 8 quiz questions with answer key

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The Crypto Landscape: Altcoins, Categories and Memecoins

IN ONE SENTENCE

Crypto contains thousands of actively traded coins and millions of dead tokens, but most of its value sits in bitcoin, ether and stablecoins, and every other coin belongs to a category with its own purpose and risks.

Thousands of coins, millions of tokens

Every cryptocurrency other than bitcoin is called an **altcoin**, short for alternative coin. How many are there? It depends on what you count.

CoinGecko, one of the largest data sites, listed about **17,400** coins with an active market and a passed listing review in June 2026. CoinMarketCap, which counts every token it detects on the blockchains it tracks, dead or alive, counted about **52.8 million**. The gap tells the real story: creating a token is easy, as Lesson 4 showed, but very few tokens ever attract real users or real money.

For a beginner, the useful conclusion is simple. A coin being listed somewhere proves nothing. The ones that matter are a small group with real markets, real use and a track record.

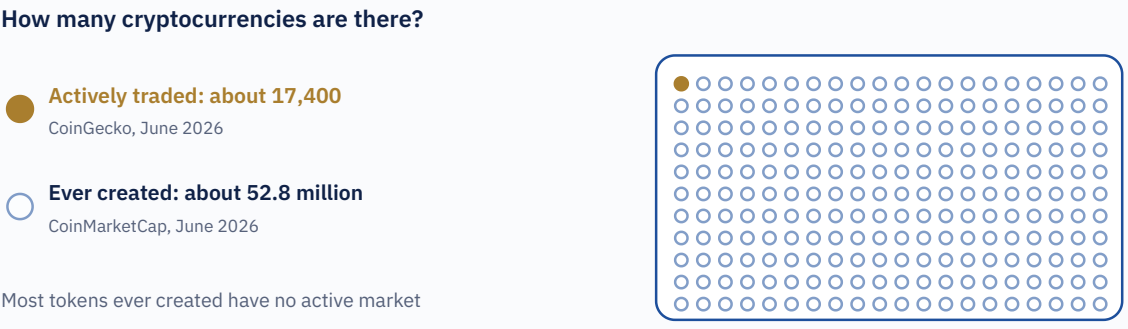


Figure 1. Data sites count very different numbers. CoinGecko lists coins with an active market; CoinMarketCap counts every token it has detected, most of them dead. The dots are only an illustration: the real active share is even smaller.

Bitcoin dominance: who holds the value

The total value of the crypto market is the sum of every coin's market capitalization: its price multiplied by the number of coins in circulation. Lesson 8 explains market cap in detail.

Bitcoin dominance is bitcoin's share of that total. In early November 2026 it was about **60%**. Ether was about 11%, stablecoins about 12%, and every other coin together shared what was left, under a fifth of the market.

Dominance moves in cycles. In January 2018, during a wild boom in new tokens, it fell to about 33%, its lowest level ever. When bitcoin dominance falls for months while altcoins outperform, traders call it an **altseason**. When fear returns, money usually flows back to bitcoin and stablecoins, and dominance rises.

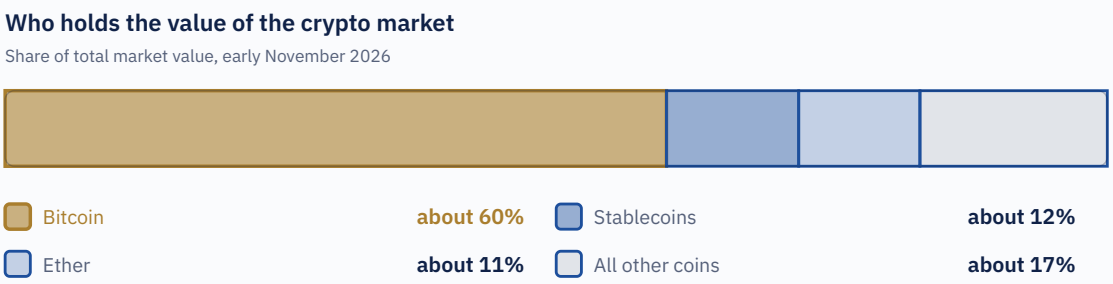


Figure 2. Bitcoin held about 60% of the total crypto market value in early November 2026. All altcoins except ether and stablecoins shared under a fifth. Figures are rounded.

The main categories

Most altcoins fit into a handful of categories. Knowing the category tells you what a coin is supposed to do and what drives its value:

- **Smart contract platforms (Layer 1s):** blockchains that host apps, such as ETH, SOL and ADA.
- **Layer 2s:** networks that scale Ethereum, such as ARB and OP.
- **Stablecoins:** USDT, USDC and others, covered in Lesson 6.
- **Exchange tokens:** coins linked to an exchange and its ecosystem, such as BNB.
- **DeFi tokens:** tokens of lending and trading apps, such as UNI and AAVE.
- **Infrastructure and oracles:** services other projects depend on, such as LINK.
- **Payment coins:** coins focused on moving money, such as XRP and LTC.
- **Privacy coins:** coins that hide transaction details, such as XMR. Some exchanges and countries restrict them.
- **Memecoins:** coins driven by community and humour, such as DOGE, SHIB and PEPE.

- **Real-world assets (RWA):** tokens that represent bonds, funds, gold or other traditional assets.

Categories also make news together. When one AI token or one gaming token jumps, others in the same category often follow.

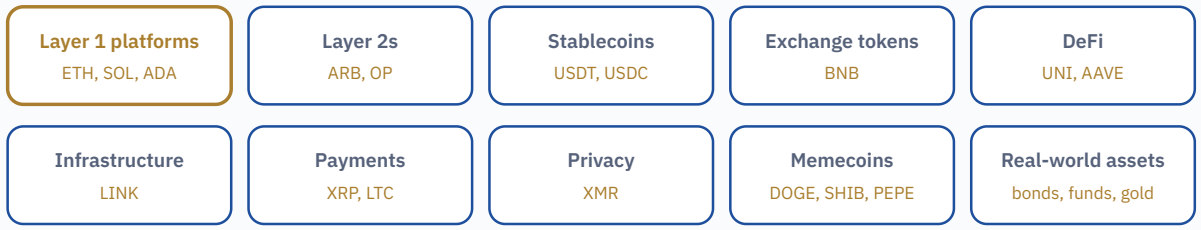


Figure 3. The main categories of crypto assets, with well known examples.

Memecoins: jokes with market caps

The first famous memecoin, **Dogecoin**, was created in December 2013 as a joke about the crypto craze, with a Shiba Inu dog as its mascot. It went on to become one of the largest cryptocurrencies by market value, helped by internet communities and celebrity posts.

Since then, launching a memecoin has become almost effortless. Platforms such as **pump.fun** on Solana let anyone create and list a token in a minute. According to CoinGecko Research, about 18.7 million tokens were launched on pump.fun between January 2024 and June 2026. About 80% of them were dead within 24 hours, and only about 4.6% were still around after 90 days. Surviving is not the same as being valuable, so the share that made anyone money is smaller still.

Memecoins have no product to measure. Their price depends almost entirely on attention, which can disappear as fast as it arrived. Many are also set up so that their creators or early buyers can sell into the excitement, a pattern covered in Lesson 14.

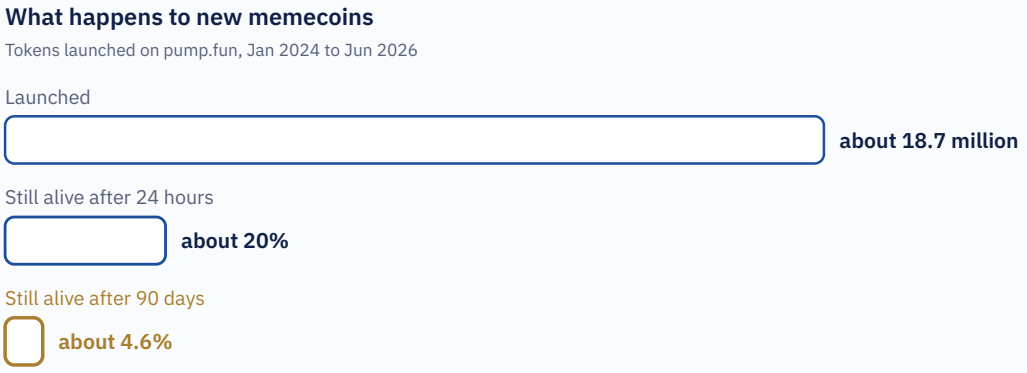


Figure 4. Of about 18.7 million tokens launched on pump.fun, about 80% died within 24 hours and about 4.6% lasted 90 days (CoinGecko Research, June 2026).

Narratives and rotation

Crypto markets move in waves of stories, called **narratives**: DeFi in 2020, NFTs in 2021, memecoins on Solana in 2024, AI tokens and real-world assets after that. Money rushes into the theme of the moment, then moves on.

Many traders also describe a typical order in which money flows during a strong market. It often starts with bitcoin, moves to ether, then to large altcoins, and finally to small coins and memecoins as excitement peaks. This **rotation** is a loose pattern seen in past cycles, not a rule, and it has not repeated the same way every time.

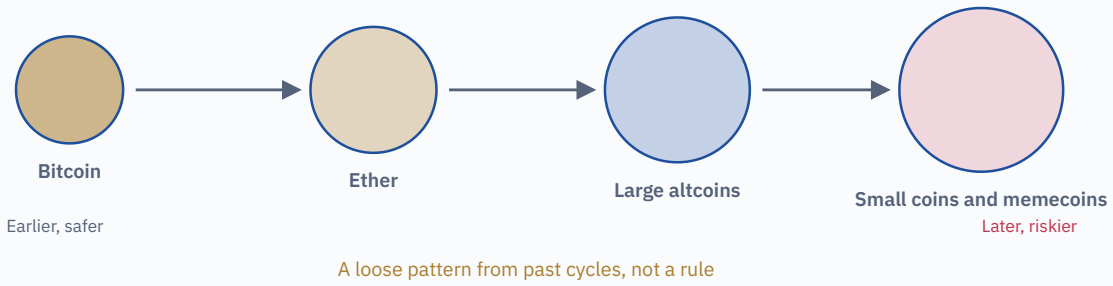


Figure 5. A typical rotation in strong markets, as described by many traders: money moves from bitcoin towards ever riskier coins. It has not repeated exactly in every cycle.

ANALOGY: THE PARTY THAT FILLS UP ROOM BY ROOM

Think of a party in a big house. The first guests gather in the main hall, the safest and most comfortable room. As more people arrive, the crowd spills into side rooms, then the kitchen, then the garden. By the time the garden is packed and loud, the party is usually near its peak, and when people start leaving, the garden empties first.

First questions to ask about any coin

Before you trust any altcoin, ask a few basic questions:

- **What does it actually do?** Can you explain its purpose in one sentence?
- **Is it a coin or a token, and who controls it?** Lesson 4 showed why this matters.
- **How is its supply set?** How many coins exist, and how many more will be released? Lesson 8 covers this.
- **Where does it trade, and how much?** A coin that trades only on one small exchange with little volume is hard to sell. Lesson 9 covers exchanges.
- **Is anyone using it?** Real users and real fees are a stronger sign than social media buzz.

- **How did it do in the last downturn?** Many altcoins have lost 80% or more of their value in past bear markets, and many never came back.

Why this matters for traders

- **Altcoins usually move more than bitcoin, in both directions.** When bitcoin rises 10%, many altcoins rise more. When it falls, they often fall harder. Position size should reflect that.
- **Watch bitcoin dominance.** The BTC.D chart on TradingView shows whether money is flowing into bitcoin or out to altcoins. Rising dominance in a falling market usually means altcoins are under the most pressure.
- **Liquidity is thin in small coins.** A large order in a small coin can move its price sharply, and in a panic there may be few buyers at any reasonable price.
- **Narratives fade.** Coins that lead one cycle often lag the next. Chasing last year's winners is a common and costly habit.

Key terms

Altcoin	Any cryptocurrency other than bitcoin.
Bitcoin dominance	Bitcoin's share of the total value of the crypto market.
Altseason	A period when altcoins outperform bitcoin for months and bitcoin dominance falls.
Memecoin	A coin or token driven mainly by community, humour and attention rather than a product.
Narrative	A popular theme that drives money into a group of coins for a period, such as DeFi or AI.
Rotation	The movement of money from one part of the market to another, for example from bitcoin to altcoins.
Real-world assets (RWA)	Tokens that represent traditional assets such as bonds, fund shares or gold.

Key takeaways

1. CoinGecko listed about 17,400 actively traded coins in June 2026, while CoinMarketCap had detected about 52.8 million tokens in total, most of them dead.
2. Bitcoin held about 60% of the crypto market in November 2026, with ether and stablecoins around 11% and 12%.
3. Altcoins fall into categories such as Layer 1s, Layer 2s, stablecoins, exchange tokens, DeFi, infrastructure, payments, privacy, memecoins and real-world assets.
4. About 80% of pump.fun tokens died within a day and only about 4.6% lasted 90 days.
5. Money tends to move in narratives and rotations, but these are loose patterns, not rules.
6. Before trusting a coin, ask what it does, who controls it, how its supply works, where it trades and whether anyone uses it.

Test yourself

Circle one answer for each question. The answer key with explanations is on the next page. You can also take this quiz online at markettalks.info and see your score instantly.

1. What is an altcoin?

- A Any cryptocurrency other than bitcoin
- B A coin that has been hacked
- C A stablecoin backed by gold
- D A coin that only trades on one exchange

2. Why is CoinMarketCap's count of 52.8 million tokens so much larger than CoinGecko's 17,400 coins?

- A CoinGecko is out of date
- B CoinMarketCap counts every token it detects, including dead ones, while CoinGecko lists only actively traded coins
- C CoinMarketCap counts each coin twice
- D CoinGecko only counts bitcoin forks

3. What does a bitcoin dominance of 60% mean?

A 60% of people own bitcoin
B Bitcoin's price rose 60%
C Bitcoin makes up 60% of the total value of the crypto market
D 60% of bitcoin has been mined

4. Which coin belongs in the infrastructure and oracle category?

A DOGE
B LINK
C USDC
D XMR

5. According to CoinGecko Research, roughly what share of pump.fun tokens died within 24 hours?

A About 5%
B About 25%
C About 50%
D About 80%

6. What usually drives a memecoin's price?

A Its fee revenue
B Attention and community excitement
C Its gold reserves
D Its mining difficulty

7. What is an altseason?

A The months when bitcoin is halved
B A period when altcoins outperform bitcoin and bitcoin dominance falls
C A season when exchanges list new coins
D A yearly event when altcoins are taxed

8. In a strong market, what is the typical rotation many traders describe?

A. Small coins first, bitcoin last

B. Bitcoin first, then ether, then large altcoins, then small coins and memecoins

C. Stablecoins first, then gold

D. All coins rise at exactly the same time

Answer key

1 A

Any cryptocurrency other than bitcoin

Altcoin means alternative coin. Everything except bitcoin falls into this group, from ETH to the smallest memecoin.

2 B

CoinMarketCap counts every token it detects, including dead ones, while CoinGecko lists only actively traded coins

Creating a token is easy, so millions exist. Only a small fraction have an active market.

3 C

Bitcoin makes up 60% of the total value of the crypto market

Dominance is bitcoin's share of the combined market capitalization of all cryptocurrencies.

4 B

LINK

Chainlink's LINK supplies outside data to smart contracts. DOGE is a memecoin, USDC a stablecoin and XMR a privacy coin.

5 D

About 80%

About 80% were dead within a day, and only about 4.6% survived 90 days.

6 B

Attention and community excitement

Memecoins have no product to measure, so their prices rise and fall mainly with attention, which can vanish quickly.

7 B

A period when altcoins outperform bitcoin and bitcoin dominance falls

In an altseason, money rotates from bitcoin into altcoins for months. These periods have come and gone with past cycles.

8 B

Bitcoin first, then ether, then large altcoins, then small coins and memecoins

Money often starts in the largest, safest asset and spreads outward as excitement grows. It is a loose pattern, not a rule.

SOURCES

- CoinLaw, How many cryptocurrencies are there (CoinGecko, CoinMarketCap and CoinGecko Research data): https://coinlaw.io/how-many-cryptocurrencies-are-there-statistics/
- TV Hub, Bitcoin dominance (November 2026): https://www.tv-hub.org/guide/bitcoin-dominance
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- CryptoRank, Pump.fun graduating tokens: https://cryptorank.io/news/feed/542eb-pump-fun-graduating-tokens-break-to-1-15-of-new-launches

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Up next: Lesson 8 Market Cap, Supply and Tokenomics Basics

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