BlackRock.

2021 midyear outlook

BlackRock **Investment** Institute

Looking beyond the restart


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The restart of economic activity is real – and we remain pro-risk as it broadens. The more consequential question: What lies beyond? This juncture could be as critical as the shift to the neoliberal consensus in the 1980s. The post-global financial crisis (GFC) playbook won't work, in our view, as the historic monetary-fiscal collaboration to bridge the pandemic should lead to a higher inflation regime. This means we don't expect another decade-long bull market in stocks and bonds.

The powerful restart of economic activity after the Covid-19 shock is broadening. A restart is not a traditional business cycle recovery. You can only turn the lights back on once, so to speak. Fiscal stimulus and easy monetary policy have provided a bridge through the pandemic. We have estimated the U.S. has seen more than four times the stimulus of the GFC for less than one-quarter the economic shock. We see a wide range of macro outcomes as a result.

More relaxed attitudes toward debt and deficits are a major shift from the neoliberal consensus that ushered in a four-decade period of falling inflation and rates. New policy paradigms mean many central banks are now attempting to overshoot inflation targets to make up for past misses. Yet markets have not yet bought the narrative and are pricing in a more rapid lift-off in rates than what the Federal Reserve's new policy framework implies. This mismatch and resulting uncertainty could stoke volatility.

We expect a higher inflation regime in the medium term – as a result of a more muted monetary response than in the past. We see any bond yield rises driven by inflation, rather than policy hikes, making the unique environment that we have called ***the new nominal*** constructive for equities.

We are moderately pro-risk and look for opportunities from any turbulence to increase risk: Negative real, or inflation-adjusted, bond yields should support equities. We see potential for cyclical shares and regions to benefit from a broadening restart. We are turning positive on European equities and upgrading Japanese equities to neutral – and cut U.S. equities to neutral. Even if yields remain low, the direction of travel is up – and we remain underweight developed market (DM) government bonds.

Our second theme is ***China stands out***. Chinese assets play a key role in our strategic views in an increasingly bifurcated U.S.-China world. For the first time, we break out Chinese assets from emerging markets (EM) as distinct tactical allocations. We believe Beijing's focus on quality growth should bear fruit, keeping us tactically neutral on Chinese equities but heavily overweight strategically.

Our third theme is the ***journey to net zero***. The path to net-zero carbon emissions has a starting point and potential destination – but there is no clear roadmap yet for getting there. Some of the coming changes may be abrupt – and add to supply and demand disruptions among commodities. We see opportunities along the way, with private market financing playing a key role.

Looking beyond the restart

BlackRock investment professionals gathered (mostly) virtually again in June at our Midyear Outlook Investment Forum to debate what the macro and market landscape would look like beyond the economic restart. We recognized upfront that we are at a consequential juncture. There are many potential outcomes as vaccinations spread and countries gradually normalize activity.

We see the post-pandemic world as a very different one compared with the post-GFC landscape of deleveraging, sluggish growth, low inflation and constant policy support. That support helped herald a decade-long bull market in both risk assets and bonds. By contrast, fiscal and monetary support is ample now – and we believe U.S. growth should be back above its pre Covid-19 trend by the end of the year. This comes as the Fed is now implementing its new policy framework – and stoking market uncertainty. A mildly higher inflation regime in the medium term should support risk assets, in our view – but we see the potential for even higher inflation among a wide range of outcomes (page 4 and page 11).

Climate change and the journey toward a world of net-zero carbon emissions ran though many of our discussions (pages 7-8). Cheap and abundant energy has underpinned global growth for more than a century. Weaning economies off fossil fuels is going to be hard – and the process is only just beginning.

The investment needs for achieving net zero have important implications for certain commodities. We think it's important to distinguish between the near-term drivers of commodity prices – notably the economic restart – and the long-term green transition that likely will boost demand for certain commodities but not necessarily lead to an extended period of broad price gains – or a so-called "supercycle."

This year we launched our climate-aware return assumptions and strategic asset allocations for institutional investors to help clients prepare their portfolios now for the net-zero shift (page 12). We see twists and turns in the journey to a more sustainable world. If we get there, we expect an improved outlook for growth and risk assets versus a do-nothing scenario. The transition will affect the risk premia of *all assets*, in our view.

The new nominal

The powerful economic restart is broadening, with Europe and other major economies catching up with the U.S. We expect a higher inflation regime in the medium term – with a more muted monetary response than in the past.

Tactical implication: We go overweight European equities and inflation-linked bonds. We cut U.S. equities to neutral.

Strategic implication: We remain underweight DM government bonds and prefer equities over credit.

China stands out

Growth in China is starting to slow at the same time the policy stance is relatively tight. The regulatory crackdown on dominant companies is ongoing. We see these as key aspects of China's efforts to improve the quality of growth.

Tactical implication: We break out China from EM with a neutral stance on equities and an overweight to debt.

Strategic implication: Our neutral allocation to Chinese assets is multiples larger than typical benchmark weights.

Journey to net zero

There is no roadmap for getting to net zero, and we believe markets underappreciate the profound changes coming. The path is unlikely to be a smooth one – and we see this creating opportunities across investment horizons.

Tactical implication: We are overweight the tech sector as we believe it is better positioned for the green transition.

Strategic implication: We like DM equity and the tech sector as a way to play the climate transition.

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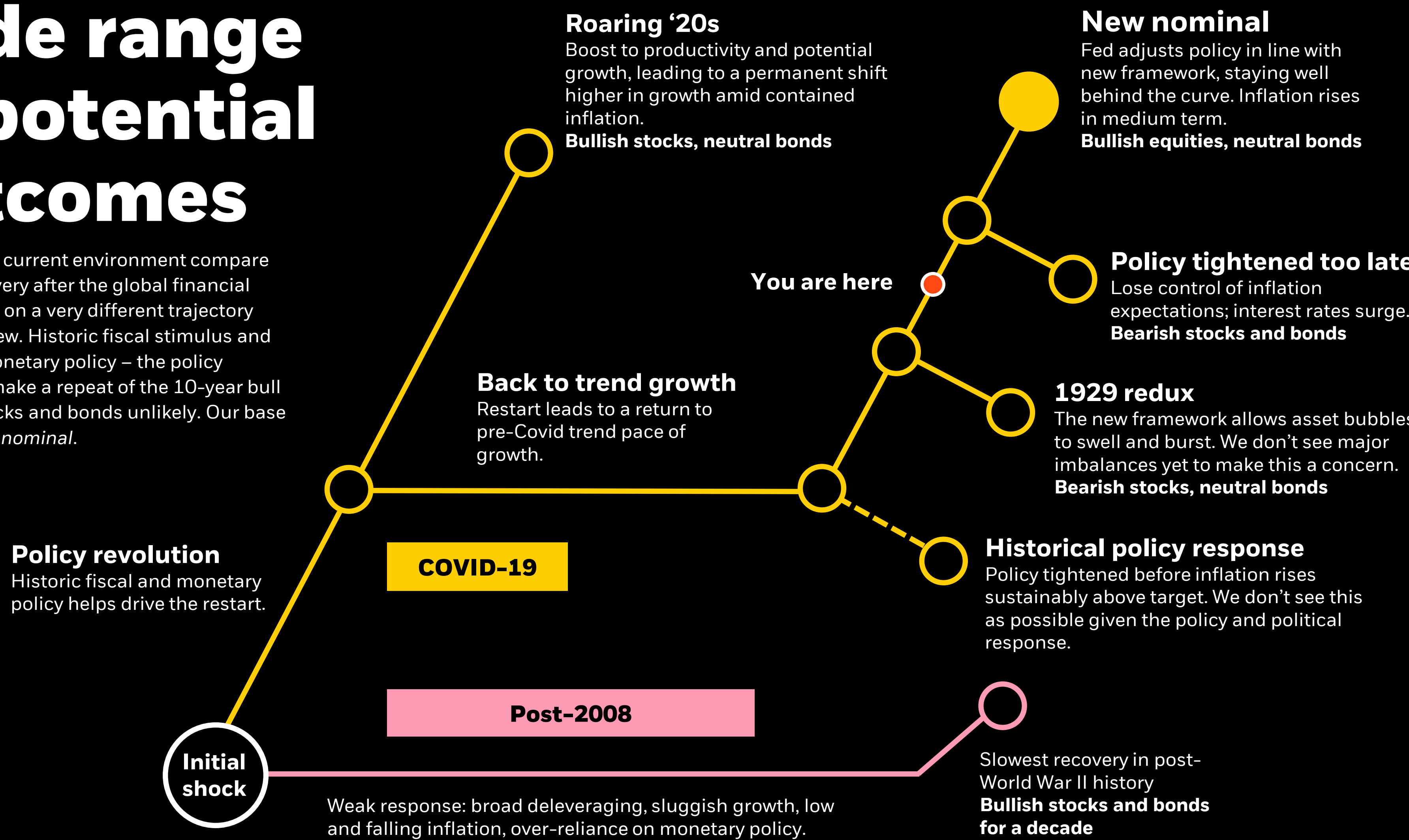
Wide range of potential outcomes

How does the current environment compare with the recovery after the global financial crisis? We are on a very different trajectory now, in our view. Historic fiscal stimulus and innovative monetary policy – the policy revolution – make a repeat of the 10-year bull market in stocks and bonds unlikely. Our base case: the *new nominal*.



Sources: BlackRock Investment Institute, July 2021. Notes: The schematic shows hypothetical macro and policy outcomes now compared with the sluggish outcome following the GFC. These are our views on the implications for equities and government bonds as of July 2021. For illustrative purposes only. There is no guarantee that any forecasts made will come to pass.

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Theme 1

The new nominal

We have seen our *new nominal* theme play out through the vaccine-led economic restart this year – a restart that is now broadening globally.

The *new nominal* is about government bond yields being less sensitive than in the past to higher inflation expectations and actual inflation, keeping nominal long-term yields low and real yields negative. Despite being questioned, this narrative has largely unfolded in 2021: the rise in long-term yields has been mainly driven by higher market pricing of inflation, with real yields remaining pinned well in negative territory.

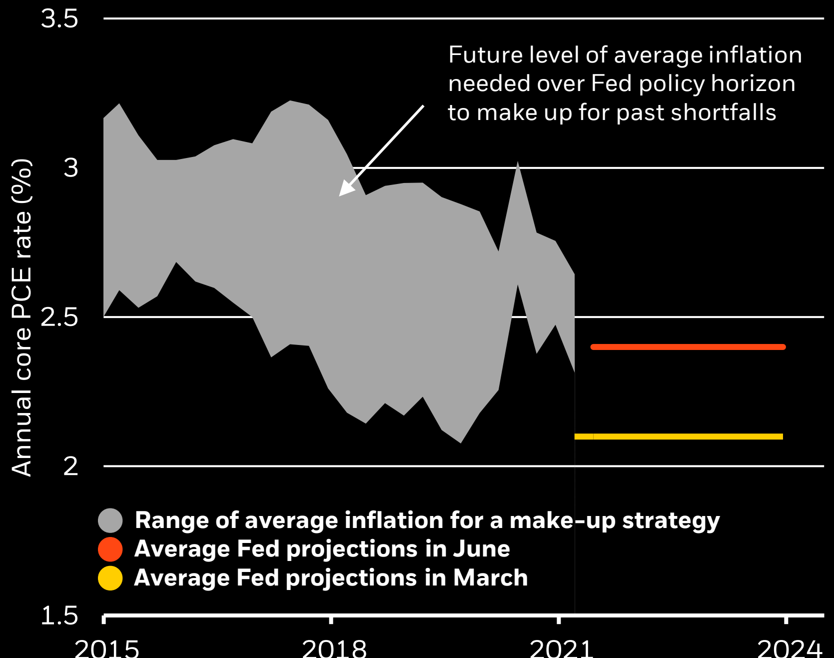
The Fed's new policy framework is a key reason why. The *Only getting into the inflation zone* chart shows how much work the central bank has to do to achieve its new goal of letting inflation run above target to make up for past shortfalls. The shaded region shows how high the Fed would need to let average inflation over the next two years run to make up for previous shortfalls. This level of inflation is higher than even recent-decade highs reflected in market pricing.

What matters for risk assets is the expected path of policy rates. We believe the market has been too eager to read hawkish intent into the Fed's statements where there is none. We expect the Fed to start normalizing policy rates in 2023, a much slower pace than market pricing for lift-off in 2022 indicates. The market's lack of confidence in the Fed's commitment to its new framework poses a risk of tighter financial conditions in the near term. We would anticipate this uncertainty to dissipate over time – assuming the central bank regains control of its narrative – paving the way for us to lean even more tactically pro-risk.

Importantly, this year's rise in long-term yields has not been about expectations for a higher policy rate path. It has been partly driven by a revival of investors demanding a premium for the risk of holding long-term government bonds, known as the term premium. See page 11. Surging public debt levels to fund the policy revolution have created a fragile equilibrium, in our view: the *new nominal* cannot last forever – and we don't see a repeat of the decade-long, post-GFC bull market.

Only getting into the inflation zone

Average Fed inflation projections vs. average make-up, 2015-2023



Sources: BlackRock Investment Institute, with data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and Federal Reserve, June 2021. Notes: The chart shows the range of future PCE inflation levels over the Fed's policy horizon, which we set at two years, that would be needed on average to make up for past inflation undershoots of the Fed's 2% target. The undershoot is calculated as the average actual core PCE inflation over the previous two to five years. The red and yellow lines show the average of Fed forecasts of annual core personal consumption expenditure inflation in Q4 2021, Q4 2022 and Q4 2023 from its quarterly Summary of Economic Projections.

We have seen the *new nominal* play out this year but believe it is only just getting started given the shift in monetary policy frameworks to foster higher inflation.

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Theme 2

China stands out

China is already a distinct pole of global growth. We believe it is time to also treat it as an investment destination separate from EM and DM. China's economy has come through the Covid-19 shock stronger than global peers, just as it did after the GFC. China quickly bounced above its pre-pandemic growth trend, and policymakers have shifted to tighten policy and refocus on stabilizing leverage, with growth now slowing.

This stands in contrast to the DM policy revolution where historic fiscal and monetary policy has meant a surge in debt to record levels. China is pursuing a more orthodox policy, partly to reduce risks in the financial system but also to make itself a more attractive investment destination. So far it's working. China has seen a surge of inward investment that began last year, partly due to investors seeking positive real yields not available in the DM world. This is what we call China's quality revolution – prioritizing the *quality* of growth over quantity –and it ties in directly with its ambitions to reach net-zero emissions by 2060.

China also stands in sharp contrast to large EM countries. Chinese policymakers are taking a hawkish stance because of the focus on long-term objectives.

We could see times when markets become concerned that China's policy setting might be excessively tight. That points to downside risks in the short term. The story could not be more different in many other EMs. The debt hangover from the Covid-19 policy response is likely to further hamper growth. Any tightening of financial conditions would make financing this debt for EM tougher. A period of austerity is likely to ensue, exacerbating political divides and stoking populism.

We break out Chinese equities and government debt as a standalone part of our tactical views. China is pushing through reforms that could weigh on the quantity of growth in the near term but potentially improve the *quality* in the long run. This why we are tactically cautious on equities but positive on a strategic basis. We like Chinese government bonds on both a tactical and strategic basis for their relatively attractive yields.

China cools from sharp bounce back

China industrial production and exports, 2019-2021

Sources: BlackRock Investment Institute, China National Bureau of Statistics and China Customs, with data from Haver Analytics, July 2021. Note: The chart shows seasonally adjusted Chinese industrial production and exports rebased to 100 at January 2019.

China's economy has come through the Covid-19 shock stronger than global peers, just as it did after the global financial crisis – and is prioritizing the quality of growth over quantity.

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Theme 3

Journey to net zero

The journey to net zero on carbon emissions has a clear starting point and potential destination – but there is no clear roadmap, and we see many turns along the way.

Certain commodities, such as copper (electric vehicles and charging stations) and lithium (batteries), will see increased demand from the drive to net zero.

Yet we think it's important to distinguish between the near-term drivers of commodity prices – notably the economic restart – and the long-term transition that will likely drive some of these prices.

Crude oil prices are a case in point. Recovering demand, coupled with a lack of investment in new supply, is pushing up prices. This may be short-lived as the transition to net zero leads to peak demand. There will likely be a longer-lasting need for metals such as copper. The *Commodity divergence* chart shows a gap opening between the two, unlike the near lockstep rise in the 2000s – which is why a commodity "supercycle" is not how we'd view it.

For all the talk of a green transition and the ambitions for the next few decades, it is only just starting – and the infrastructure needs are huge (page 8). Some of the coming changes may be abrupt – and add to supply and demand disruptions among commodities. That's why it now matters on a tactical, not just strategic, horizon.

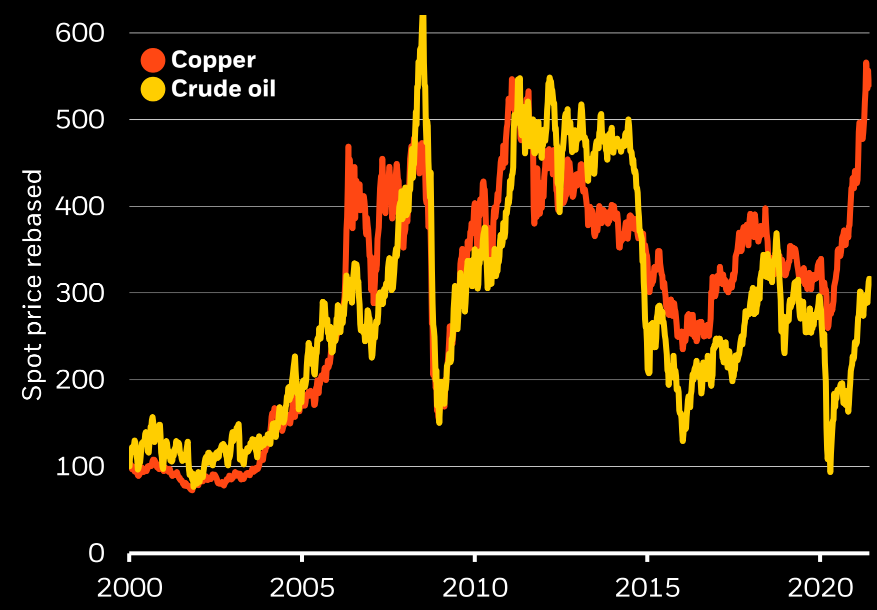
Our climate-aware return assumptions (see page 12) assume net zero to be achieved. Yet knowing the desired endpoint is not sufficient. We don't think the green transition will be a smooth one – and that will create opportunities along the journey.

"Net zero is not about tinkering around the edges. The pace of capital stock turnover required is unprecedented."

Paul Bodnar
Global Head of Sustainable Investing, BlackRock

Commodity divergence

Brent crude oil and copper spot price, 2000-2021



Sources: BlackRock Investment Institute, with data from Refinitiv Datastream, July2021. Note: chart shows the spot price of London Metal Exchange (LME) copper and Brent crude oil rebased to 100 at the start of 2000.

There is no clear roadmap for the transition to a net-zero carbon emissions world. We know the starting point and desired endpoint – but we don't think the journey will be smooth.

Forum focus

Infrastructure

A rebuild of global infrastructure will be critical to achieving a net-zero carbon world in coming decades. The Paris climate accord underscores global efforts – both public and private – to reorient investments and put this new or refitted infrastructure in place.

The Biden administration has proposed major infrastructure investments, not only to fund the green transition but also to make up for years of underinvestment in traditional infrastructure such as roads, bridges, rail and ports.

The switch to renewable energy will require multiples more of wind turbines and solar panels. The anticipated growth in electric vehicles is reliant on investment in the distribution grid and charging stations. Widespread adoption of smart meters requires metering infrastructure. And centralized heating systems for homes and buildings will require an overhaul of boiler systems. With stretched public finances and an estimated $15 trillion global funding gap, according to the 2018 G-20 Global Infrastructure Outlook, we see private capital playing a key role.

We see significant opportunities over the coming years, not only in DMs but in China and Asia-Pacific more broadly. In renewable energy, capital is mostly flowing to operating assets in countries more advanced in building capacity, such as the UK. That opens up opportunities across both public and private markets at the growth end of new renewable energy buildouts, such as Asia.

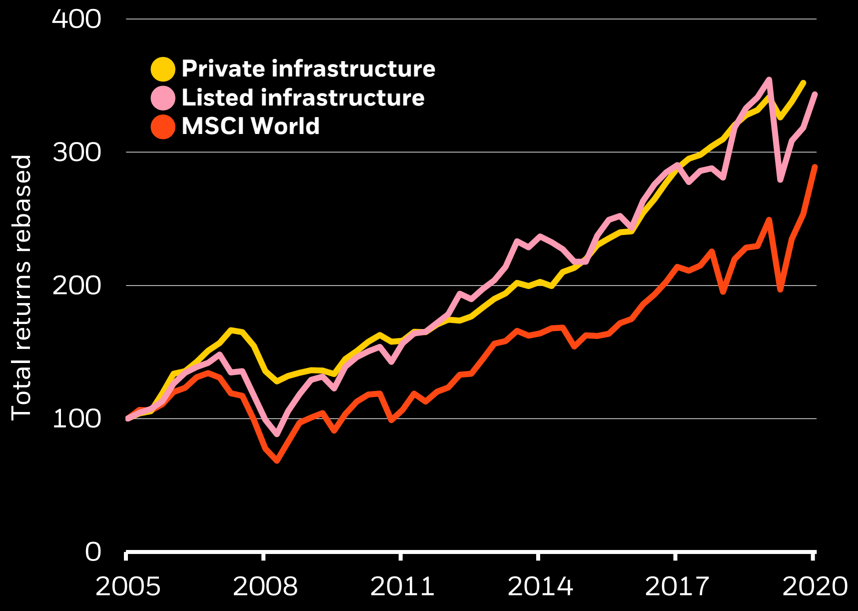
Infrastructure has become a crowded place, pushing up valuations. Greater government support could relieve some of that pressure. Private markets in this area may offer potential to add value and diversification. Yet they can be complex and are not suitable for all investors. A lack of historical data also warrants caution.

"The energy transition is driven by four Ds: decarbonization, decentralization, digitalization and demographics."

Anne Valentine Andrews
Global Head of Real Assets, BlackRock Alternative Investors

Infrastructure returns

Infrastructure returns vs MSCI World, 2005-2020



Past performance is not a reliable indicator of current or future results. Sources: BlackRock Investment Institute, with data from Bloomberg, December 2020. Notes: The chart shows total returns rebased to 2005. Private infrastructure returns are represented by the Cambridge Private Market Infrastructure Index. Listed infrastructure returns are represented by the FTSE Developed Core Infrastructure 50/50 Index. Indexes are unmanaged. Index performance returns do not reflect any management fees, transaction costs or expenses. It is not possible to invest in an index.

Achieving net-zero will require massive investments in global infrastructure in the coming decades.

Forum focus

Corporate margins

Markets are expecting a sharp global rebound in corporate profit margins as the economic restart gathers pace. Consensus estimates from Refinitiv data point to net corporate margins hitting their highest level in over two decades in the U.S. and returning to pre-GFC levels in Europe and Asia. See the *Margin recovery* chart. There may even be upside to these estimates as operational leverage boosts bottom lines, in our view. Yet the outlook looks more challenging beyond the next couple of quarters.

The big drivers of rising profit margins in recent years –stagnant input and labor costs, decreasing interest expense and historically low tax rates – look at risk of going into reverse. Input and labor costs are on the rise amid rising inflation and supply shortages in many sectors. Financing costs are rising again, albeit from low levels. And corporate tax hikes are on the table in the U.S., as well as a coordinated push for a global minimum tax that would reduce the ability of multinationals to shift profits to low-tax jurisdictions.

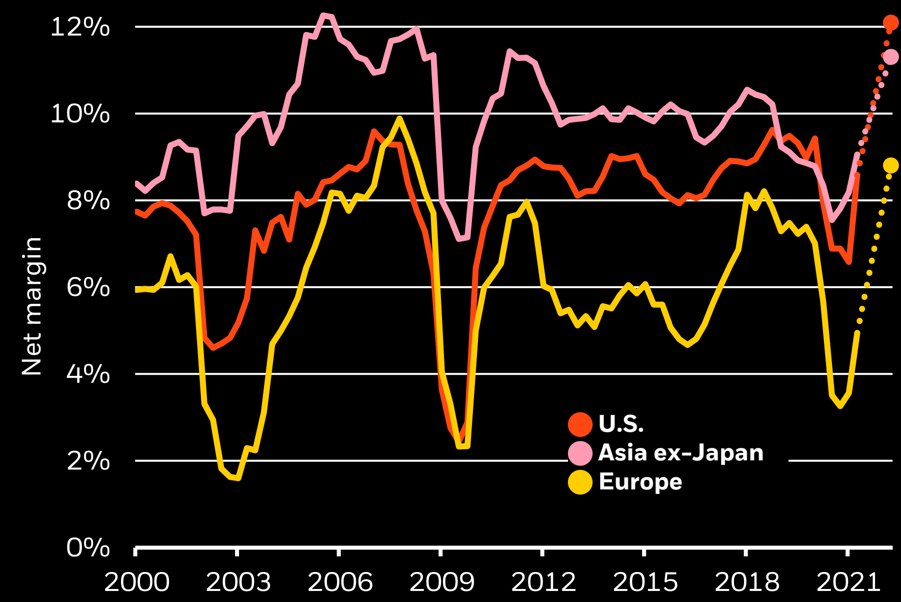
We remain overweight equities on a strategic basis, as we see valuations as reasonable after taking into account the expected path of interest rates. But we believe a backdrop of rising cost pressures makes it key to differentiate across regions, sectors and companies.

Tech companies, pharma and luxury goods makers are among those that look well positioned to pass on higher costs and maintain or even expand their relatively high margins. Labor-intensive industries, such as retail and leisure, are likely to face margin pressures on the back of rising wages, in our view.

“For margins to keep grinding higher, we’ll need revenue growth to more than offset rising cost pressures.”

Kate Moore
Head of Thematic Strategy, Global Allocation

Margin recovery
Net profit margins and 12-month forward estimates, 2000-2022



Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Indexes are unmanaged and do not account for fees. It is not possible to invest directly in an index. Sources: BlackRock Investment Institute, with data from Refinitiv, June 2021. Notes: The chart shows the trailing net profit margins for Datastream Global U.S., Europe and Asia ex-Japan equity indexes. Dotted lines show 12-month forward aggregate analyst estimates.. Forward looking estimates may not come to pass.

The forces that have buoyed margins over the past 15 years – declining input costs, debt servicing costs and tax rates – could be on the cusp of reversal in the medium term.

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Forum focus

Geopolitics

Market concern about geopolitical risk has eased significantly since the change in U.S. administration. This is reflected in our BlackRock geopolitical risk indicator (BGRI) – which monitors market attention to the top-10 risks we track – sitting around four-year lows. See the *Fading attention* chart and our revamped *Geopolitical risk dashboard* for more.

Geopolitical risks have faded as a market driver with intense focus on the economic restart and inflation dynamics – yet we believe it's worth tracking specific geopolitical risks as any flareups could catch investors off guard, particularly when market attention is low.

U.S.-China relations are at the front of our radar, and reflected in two of our top-10 risks: *Global technology decoupling* and *U.S.-China strategic competition*. The pandemic has exacerbated tensions across nearly every dimension of the U.S.-China relationship. Among the potential flashpoints is Taiwan. We do not see a military showdown as an imminent threat, but believe the risk will increase as the decade wears on.

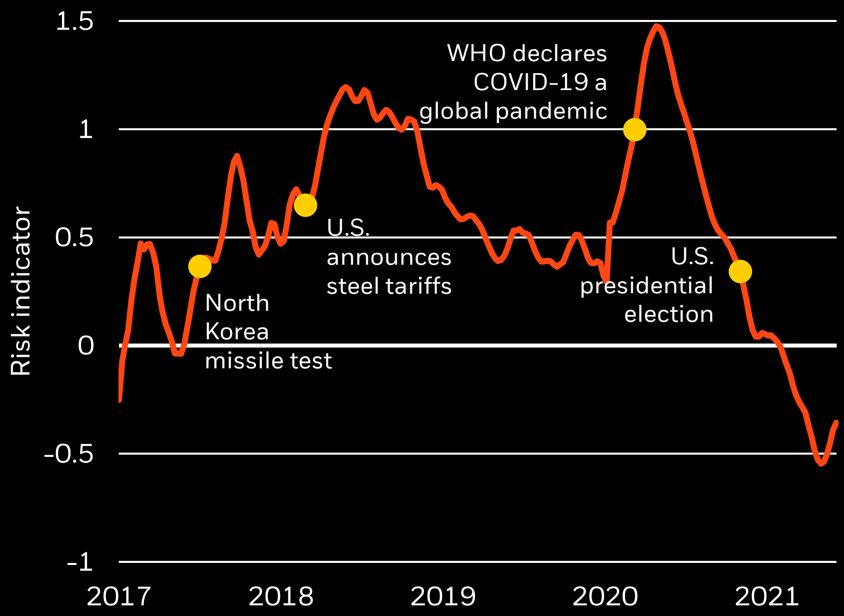
The pandemic has also accelerated a decoupling of the global tech sector as countries seek to address supply chain vulnerabilities and heightened reliance on critical technologies. The U.S. and China are both focused on reducing tech interdependence – even as financial integration deepens. This is why we see a need for dedicated exposures to both poles of global growth.

Cyber security is another risk markets may underappreciate. Attacks on critical infrastructure are increasing in scope, scale and sophistication, and the U.S. is facing an epidemic of "ransomware." Repeated attacks could cause significant damage and sustained disruption, spilling over to financial markets and the real economy.

"Cyber has reached an inflection point; it's not just a national security risk now, but a business and economic one."

Tom Donilon
Chairman – BlackRock Investment Institute

Fading attention
BlackRock Geopolitical Risk Indicator, 2017-2021



Source: BlackRock Investment Institute, with data from Refinitiv, July 2021, Notes: We identify specific words related to geopolitical risk in general and to our top risks. We then use text analysis to calculate the frequency of their appearance in the Refinitiv Broker Report and Dow Jones Global Newswire databases. We then adjust for whether the language reflects positive or negative sentiment, and assign a score. A zero score represents the average BGRI level over its history. A score of one means the BGRI level is one standard deviation above the five-year average. We weigh recent readings more heavily in calculating the average.

Geopolitical risks have faded as a market driver with focus on the economic restart and inflation dynamics – but specific risks are worth monitoring: any flareups could catch investors off guard.

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Strategic views

Playing the new nominal

We prefer tilting toward equities over credit and government bonds on a strategic basis, even after the strong rebound seen since the equity market's lows of March 2020. A key reason for staying the course on our strategic asset views: we see our *new nominal* investment theme – that calls for a more muted response of interest rates to higher inflation than in the past.

The *new nominal* has been key to our pro-risk tactical investment views. Yet taken alongside the powerful, joint monetary-fiscal policy revolution that has dominated the Covid-19 response, it has significant implications for our strategic views as well.

We see the equity risk premium – our preferred gauge of equity valuations that accounts for changes in interest rates – as in-line with historical averages. This suggests the asset class is not overvalued. By contrast, credit spreads are near historically tight levels, as shown on the *Equities over credit* chart.

Do higher long-term yields signal bad news for equities? We don't agree with this narrative. Rising yields should not matter for equity valuations if they are due to the return of term premia – the compensation investors demand for holding riskier longer-term bonds – rather than expectations of a higher policy rate path. We believe higher term premia in a backdrop of a strong economic restart do not challenge equity valuations.

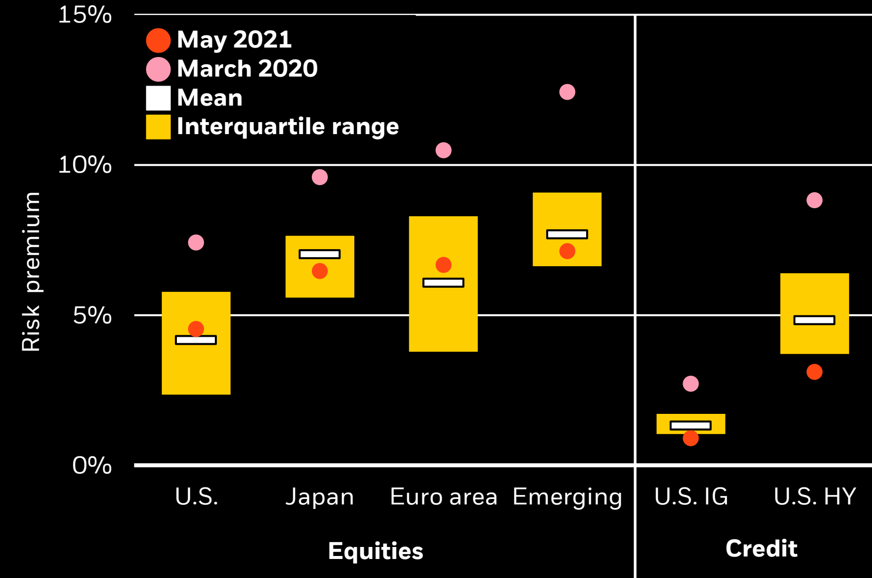
The *new nominal* also impacts private assets. Historical comparisons do not take into account a prolonged period of low interest rates. We see valuations supported in such an environment.

> **Even after the recent Fed shift, we're still in a very different policy and rates regime. That's a reason we still like equities.**

Rupert Harrison
Head of Research, Diversified Strategies, BlackRock Multi-Asset Strategies and Solutions

Equities over credit

Equity risk premium and credit spreads, current vs historical



Past performance is not a reliable indicator of current or future results. Indexes are unmanaged and not subject to fees. You cannot invest directly in an index. Source: BlackRock Investment Institute, with data from Refinitiv Datastream, May 2021. The chart shows the equity risk premium and historical ranges since 1995 for major equity regions based on MSCI indices and the credit spreads for the U.S. Investment Grade and High Yield markets based on Bloomberg Barclays indices. We calculate the equity risk premium based on our expectations for nominal interest rates and the implied cost of capital for respective equity markets. Credit spreads are calculated by taking the difference between the credit market yields and the corresponding government bond yields.

The interaction of monetary and fiscal policy is critical. We see a strong incentive for policymakers to keep interest costs low to manage surging debt burdens that were necessary to cushion the impact of the Covid shock.

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Preparing for the green transition

Climate risk is investment risk, and we see it as a historic investment opportunity at the same time. Our capital market assumptions (CMAs) – the long-run return expectations that form the core input to building portfolios – reflect the impact of climate change on the investment landscape. This is one of a set of actions we are taking to prepare investors for the transition to a net-zero emissions economy by 2050 or sooner.

We do not believe tackling climate change comes at a net loss to global economic activity. In fact, we see the physical damages that may result if nothing is done to combat climate change as detrimental to global growth. We see a green transition to a low-carbon economy improving the outlook for growth and risk assets relative to a no-action scenario.

Understanding the implications for strategic portfolios warrants taking a more granular view than ever. We now use sectors as the relevant unit of investment analysis.

We don’t believe market prices yet reflect the coming changes. This suggests that assets positioned to benefit from the transition may have higher returns during the transition. We also see climate change issues impacting corporate fundamentals by reshaping business models.

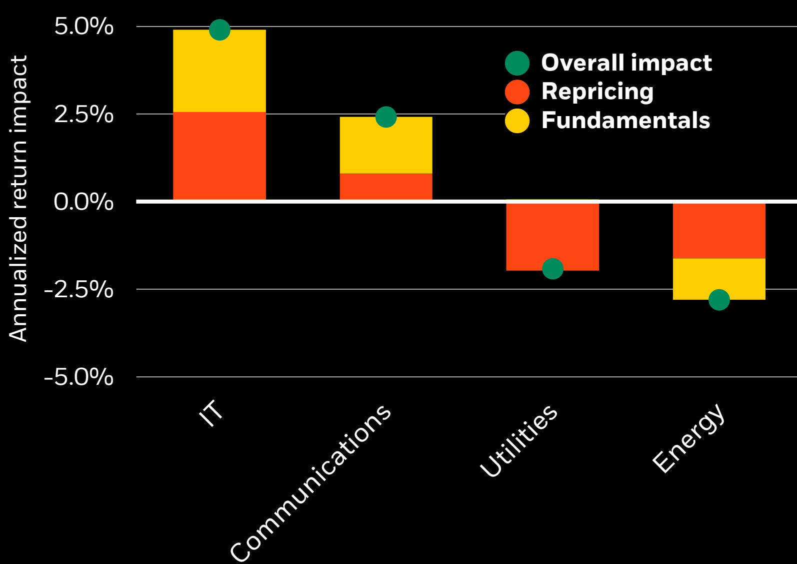
The impact of misjudging the climate transition could be as high as a 7% annualized return differential over five years between the technology and energy sectors – those most likely to be affected by the transition, in our view. See the *Seeing green* chart. This is a significant difference in a world of low expected returns.

The green transition will play out at the industry and sector level, warranting a granular asset allocation.

Natalie Gill
Portfolio Strategist, BlackRock Investment Institute

Seeing green

Five-year expected return differential in green transition vs no-action



This information is not intended as a recommendation to invest in any particular asset class or strategy or as a promise - or even estimate - of future performance. Sources: BlackRock Investment Institute, with data from Refinitiv Datastream and Bloomberg, July 2021. Notes: The chart shows the estimated difference in U.S. dollar expected returns over the next five years from April 2021 for four sectors of the MSCI USA Index in our base case of a “green” transition (policies and actions taken to mitigate climate change and damages, and to limit temperature rises to no more than 2 degrees Celsius by 2100) vs. a no-climate-action scenario. The estimated sectoral impact is based on expected differences in economic growth, corporates earnings and asset valuations across the two scenarios. See here for our paper on climate-aware long-term asset return expectations.

The debate about sustainable investing has broadened. Rather than talking about the downsides, we are focused on return potential and alpha.

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Directional views

Staying pro-risk

The broadening economic restart, coupled with global central banks' resolve to maintain easy financial conditions, keeps us moderately pro-risk. We favor equities over credit and government bonds on both a strategic and tactical investment horizon. In our tactical views, we lean further into cyclicality by upgrading Europe to an overweight and upgrading Japan to neutral. We take a more selective approach on U.S. equities. We trim our overall stance to neutral and favor sectors with the potential to deliver consistent earnings growth. In fixed income, we add to our underweight in U.S. Treasuries, primarily on valuations, and prefer TIPS instead, where the recent pullback presents an opportunity to add exposure. We see the higher yields on Chinese government bonds relative to DM peers as appealing. We cut high yield to neutral following the asset class' strong performance.

On a strategic horizon, we prefer equities over credit and government bonds. We like DM and China within equities, helped in part by the impact of incorporating climate change in our return expectations. We prefer inflation-linked bonds to DM nominal government bonds as portfolio ballast. The lower-for-longer environment boosts the appeal of private markets for eligible investors, in our view. We maintain a higher allocation to equities than we would through typical periods of rising inflation as we believe the policy revolution has diminished the risk of a sharp rise in discount rates hitting valuations across asset classes.

Directional views

Strategic (long-term) and tactical (6-12 month) views on broad asset classes, July 2021

Asset	Strategic view	Tactical view	
Equities	+1	+1	We keep our overweight equities on a strategic horizon. We see a better outlook for earnings amid moderate valuations. Incorporating climate change in our expected returns brightens the appeal of developed market equities given the large weights of sectors such as tech and healthcare in benchmark indices. Tactically, we stay overweight equities as we expect the restart to re-accelerate and interest rates to stay low. We tilt toward cyclicality and maintain a quality bias.
Credit	-1	Neutral	We stay underweight credit on a strategic basis as valuations are rich and we prefer to take risk in equities. On a tactical horizon, we are neutral credit following the tightening in spreads in investment grade and high yield.
Govt Bonds	-1	-1	We are strategically underweight nominal government bonds given their diminished ability to act as portfolio ballasts with yields near lower bounds. Rising debt levels may eventually pose risks to the low rate regime. Tactically, we prefer inflation-linked bonds – particularly in the U.S. relative to the euro area on valuations. We add to our underweight on U.S. Treasuries on expectations of gradually rising yields.
Cash		Neutral	We are moderately pro-risk and keep some cash to potentially further add to risk assets on any market turbulence.
Private Markets	Neutral		We believe non-traditional return streams, including private credit, have the potential to add value and diversification. Our neutral view is based on a starting allocation that is much larger than what most qualified investors hold. Many institutional investors remain underinvested in private markets as they overestimate liquidity risks, in our view. Private markets are a complex asset class and not suitable for all investors.

Underweight | Neutral | Overweight | ● Previous view

Note: Views are from a U.S. dollar perspective, July 2021. This material represents an assessment of the market environment at a specific time and is not intended to be a forecast of future events or a guarantee of future results. This information should not be relied upon by the reader as research or investment advice regarding any particular funds, strategy or security.

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Tactical views

Getting cyclical

We have upgraded our stance on European and Japanese equities to overweight and neutral, respectively. The chart shows how cyclical sectors in Europe such as technology and financials – that comprise about a fourth of the overall benchmark index in terms of market capitalization - have lagged U.S. peers since last March. We believe these sectors could be well positioned to play catch up as the restart broadens beyond the U.S.

The same has been true for the EM world. Yet we are more cautious on EM equities and local currency debt on a tactical horizon, and have downgraded both to neutral. The reasons: U.S. dollar volatility amid greater uncertainty around Fed policy, and the risk of slower growth in China.

In the near term, we see U.S. large cap equities as exposed to risks of higher taxes and tighter regulations – and trim our overall view on U.S. equities to neutral. We see potential in small- and mid-cap U.S. companies amid a vaccine-led domestic rebound in activity.

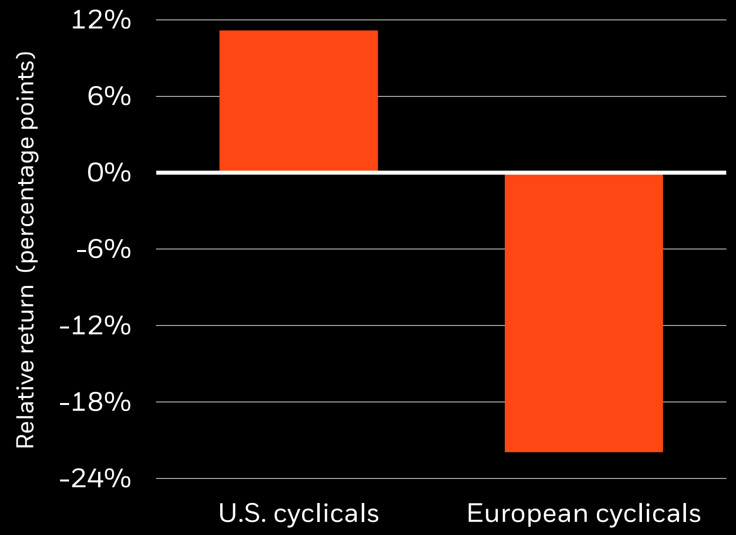
We see China warranting a standalone view distinct from broader EMs. We introduce an overweight stance on Chinese government bonds due to attractive yields, and a neutral on Chinese equities. We overweight the asset class on a strategic basis, but see near-term risks amid a regulatory crackdown on dominant companies and slower growth due to tighter policy.

We are taking advantage of the pullback in U.S. inflation breakevens to return to an overweight on Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities (TIPS). We find TIPS particularly attractive relative to inflation bets in the euro area where the outlook for inflation remains sluggish.

We also like other inflation-linked exposures, such as commodities and real assets. We prefer TIPS to nominal U.S. Treasuries, where we increase our underweight by one notch. We see the rally in U.S. Treasuries, which has taken yields below 1.5% as of late June, as overdone. This sets the scene for yields to climb gradually higher from current levels, in our view.

Switching exposures

Relative returns of U.S. and European cyclical sectors since March 2020



Past performance is not a reliable indicator of current or future results. Indexes are unmanaged and not subject to fees. You cannot invest directly in an index. Sources: BlackRock Investment Institute and MSCI, with data from Refinitiv Datastream, July 2021. Notes: The chart shows the average relative returns of high-beta sectors within the MSCI USA and MSCI Europe indexes vs. the MSCI World index since the March 2020 equity market trough. A beta of 1 indicates that the sector moves in line with the broader MSCI World. We consider sectors with a beta significantly greater than 1 to show the ones with the greatest sensitivity to cyclicality. The index proxies and betas of the sectors shown are as follows: MSCI USA Materials (1.16), MSCI USA Financials (1.11)., MSCI USA IT (1.25), MSCI Europe IT (1.23) and MSCI Europe Financials (1.21).

We lean further into cyclicality to capture potential upside as the broadening pickup in economic activity boosts corporate earnings expectations.

Tactical granular views

Six to 12-month tactical views on selected assets vs. broad global asset classes by level of conviction, July 2021

Equities	View	Commentary
United States	Neutral	We turn neutral U.S. equities. We see U.S. growth momentum peaking and expect other regions to be attractive ways to play the next leg of the restart as it broadens to other regions, notably Europe and Japan.
U.S. small caps	+1	We stay overweight U.S. small-caps. We see potential in this segment of the U.S. equity market to benefit from the cyclical rebound in domestic activity brought about an accelerated vaccination rollout.
Europe	+1	We upgrade European equities to overweight on the back of the broadening restart. We see a sizeable pickup in activity helped by accelerating vaccinations. Valuations remain attractive relative to history and investor inflows into the region are only just starting to pick up.
UK	Neutral	We turn neutral UK equities following their strong performance. We see the market as fairly valued and prefer European equities.
Japan	Neutral	We upgrade Japanese equities to neutral. We see a global cyclical rebound helping boost earnings growth in the second-half of the year. The country's virus dynamics are also improving.
China	Neutral	While overweight on a strategic basis, we see near-term risks. Growth is slowing at the same time as policy stance is tight – and may not respond in a timely way as authorities focus on the quality of growth. The anti-monopoly clampdown is ongoing.
Emerging markets	Neutral	We downgrade EM equities to neutral. We see more uncertainty on the U.S. dollar outlook due to a risk premium from Fed communication. Many EMs have started tightening policy, showing less policy support and a greater risk of scarring.
Asia ex-Japan	Neutral	We downgrade Asia ex-Japan equities to neutral. The anti-monopoly clampdown in the heavyweight Chinese tech sector and broader geopolitical risks dampen the outlook, in our view.

Fixed income	View	Commentary
U.S. Treasuries	-2	We add to our underweight on U.S. Treasuries, primarily on valuations. We see the balance of risks tilting toward gradually higher yields as markets continue to price in the economic restart, especially given the pullback in yields in recent months.
Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities	+1	We turn overweight U.S. TIPS. We believe the recent pullback in the asset class presents an attractive opportunity, particularly on a relative basis against European inflation breakevens as the outlook for euro area inflation remains sluggish.
German bunds	Neutral	We are neutral on bunds. Although the ECB may begin tapering this year given inflation dynamics, we see little room for a substantive change in policy in the near term.
Euro area peripherals	Neutral	We are neutral euro area peripheral government bonds despite recent outperformance given stability in ECB policy, low volatility in peripherals and better value elsewhere.
China government bonds	+1	We initiate a view on Chinese government bonds with an overweight. We see the relatively stability of interest rates and the carry on offer as brightening their appeal.
Global investment grade	-1	We remain underweight investment grade credit. We see little room for further yield spread compression and favor more cyclical exposures such as Asian fixed income.
Global high yield	Neutral	We downgrade high yield to neutral after the asset class' strong performance. Spreads are now below where we see high yield as attractively valued. We prefer to take risk in equities.
Emerging market – hard currency	Neutral	We are neutral hard-currency EM debt. We expect it to gain support from the vaccine-led global restart and more predictable U.S. trade policies.
Emerging market – local currency	Neutral	We downgrade to neutral and see more uncertainty on the U.S. dollar outlook due to a risk premium from Fed communication. Many EMs have started tightening policy, showing less policy support and a greater risk of scarring, in our view.
Asia fixed income	+1	We are overweight Asia fixed income. Outside of China, we like Asia sovereigns and credit for their yield and income given the region's fundamental outlook.

Underweight **Neutral** **Overweight**

● Previous view

Past performance is not a reliable indicator of current or future results. It is not possible to invest directly in an index. Note: Views are from a U.S. dollar perspective. This material represents an assessment of the market environment at a specific time and is not intended to be a forecast or guarantee of future results. This information should not be relied upon as investment advice regarding any particular fund, strategy or security.

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