

May 2020

# REOPENING OPTIMISM

LPL Research's monthly global review and look forward

## **Investment Takeaways**

As May began, investors continued to try to reconcile the strong rebound in stocks with the devastating economic damage from COVID-19. Given the strength of the rally since the March lows, in our view, the risk of a correction in the short term has risen, supported by our *Road to Recovery Playbook*. Our intermediate- to long-term outlook for stocks remains positive.

- Our equities recommendation remains overweight. Optimism around the re-opening of the US and global economies, coupled with massive fiscal and monetary stimulus, suggest a full retest of the March 23 lows may be unlikely. At the same time, however, stocks may be pricing in a V-shaped recovery that may be difficult to achieve, and a pullback appears likely.
- Our year-end 2020 fair value target for the S&P 500 Index of 3,150–3,200, based on a price-to-earnings multiple (PE) of 19 on \$165 in normalized index earnings per share (EPS), in our view is reasonable, although the timing around achieving that level of earnings is very uncertain.\*
- We favor large cap stocks for their greater potential resilience during the recession and recommend balanced exposure between growth and value styles in equity allocations where suitable.
- China has led the way out of the global crisis and supported emerging market equities, which
  we find attractively valued relative to developed markets.
- Our fixed income view remains underweight. While Federal Reserve (Fed) policy and current economic uncertainty may limit the risk of yields moving substantially higher, a likely second-half economic recovery may continue to support riskier assets as we look out a full year.
- We favor a blend of high-quality intermediate bonds with a modest underweight to US
   Treasuries and an emphasis on short-to-intermediate maturities with sector weightings tilted toward mortgage-backed securities.
- We have downgraded our views of the financials and industrials sectors and upgraded our consumer staples view to better position our lineup for the challenging near-term economic environment.
- We have upgraded our mortgage-backed securities (MBS) view from neutral to positive. Fed
  buying is expected to be supportive, risk from increased refinancing has receded, and spreads
  have not compressed as much as they did during previous periods of quantitative easing (QE).

**Key changes** from April's report: Upgraded consumer staples from negative to neutral; downgraded financials and industrials from positive to neutral.



## Broad Asset Class Views: LPL Research's Views on Stocks, Bonds, and Cash

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Stocks			
Bonds			
Cash		<b></b>	

#### Our Asset Class & Sector Choices

<b>Equity Asset Classes</b>	<b>Equity Sectors</b>	Fixed Income	Alternative Asset Classes	
Emerging Markets Equities	Communication Services		Precious Metals	
Large Cap Equities	Healthcare	Mortgage-Backed Securities	Event Driven	
	Technology		Event Driven	

Data as of May 7, 2020

#### 2020 Market Forecasts

## COVID-19 Creates Significant Earnings and Interest Rate Uncertainty

	<b>April GPS Forecast</b>	<b>Base Case</b>	Bear Case
10-Year Treasury Yield	1.25–1.75%	1.25-1.75%	0–0.5%
S&P 500 Earnings per Share	\$158-162	\$120-125	\$110-115
S&P 500 Fair Value	3,150–3,200	3,150–3,200	2,400 or lower

Source: LPL Research, Bloomberg 05/7/2020

All indexes are unmanaged and cannot be invested into directly. Past performance is no guarantee of future results.

Economic forecasts set forth may not develop as predicated and are subject to change.

\*As noted in our *Weekly Market Commentary* dated 05/04/2020, our year-end fair value target for the S&P 500 of 3,150–3,200 is based on a price-to-earnings ratio (P/E) of about 19 and potential normalized S&P 500 earnings per share of \$165 in 2021–2022.

#### 2020 Economic Forecasts

## COVID-19 May Have Sparked a Global Recession

	April GPS Forecast	Base Case	Bear Case
United States	1.25–1.75%	-2% to -4%	-4% to -6%
Developed ex-US	0.75–1%	-3% to -5%	-5% to -7%
Emerging Markets	3.75–4%	flat to 2%	-2% to flat
Global	2.5–2.75%	-2% to flat	-4% to -2%

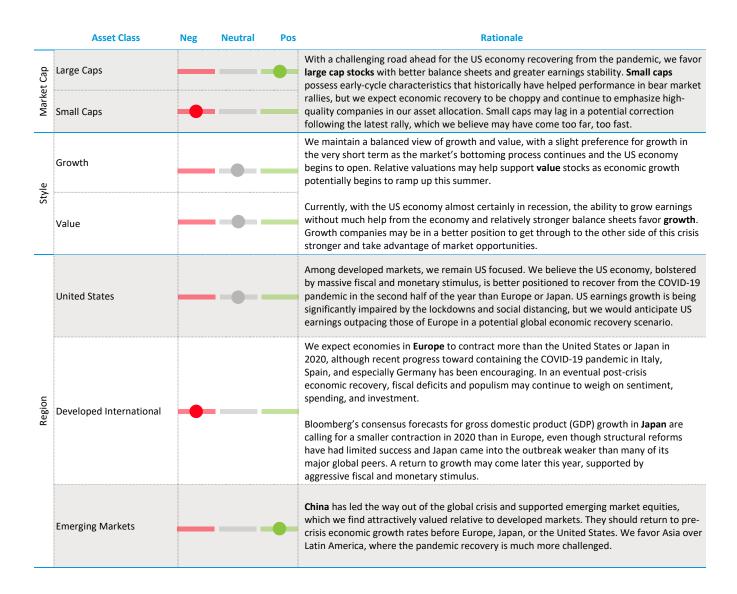
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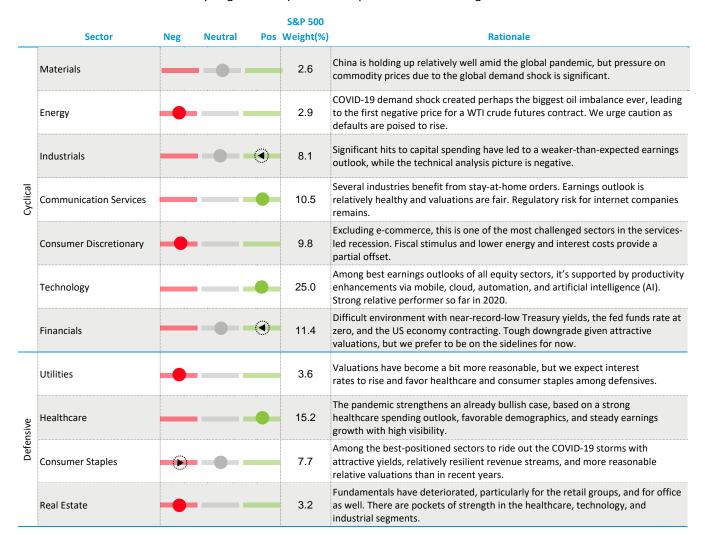
## Equities Asset Classes: Favor US Large Caps and Emerging Markets

With a challenging road ahead for the US economy recovering from the pandemic, we favor large cap stocks with better balance sheets and greater earnings stability. Small caps possess early-cycle characteristics that historically have helped performance in bear market rallies, but we expect the economic recovery to be choppy. In the near term, growth stocks appear better positioned than value, but value may get support once the economic rebound gains steam. We believe the United States remains well positioned for a recovery, but China is leading the way out of the global economic crisis, which we expect to support emerging market equities.



## **Equities Sectors: Repositioning for Challenges Ahead**

We have made several changes to our sector views this month to better position for a very challenging near-term economic environment. We have downgraded our financials and industrials views to neutral to reflect a significantly weaker earnings outlook than previously anticipated. Heightened risk of underperformance in a potential market correction and technical weakness are also concerns. We have also upgraded our consumer staples view to neutral due to the sector's earnings stability and improved relative valuations. We believe communication services, healthcare, and technology are the best positioned sectors for the current environment as the US economy begins to reopen amid unprecedented challenges.



Investing in real estate/REITs involves special risks such as potential illiquidity and may not be suitable for all investors. There is no assurance that the investment objectives of this program will be attained.

Because of its narrow focus, specialty sector investing, such as healthcare, financials, or energy, will be subject to greater volatility than investing more broadly across many sectors and companies.

# Fixed Income: Limit Rate Sensitivity With Intermediate Focus

We suggest a blend of high-quality intermediate bonds in tactical portfolios. We expect modestly higher long-term rates in 2020 as economic activity recovers in the second half of the year. Compensation for longer-maturity bonds remains unattractive, in our view, supporting our positive view of MBS over Treasuries. We still see incremental value in corporate bonds over Treasuries, but risks temper our view. We favor municipal bonds as a high-quality option for taxable accounts. Supply dynamics still look supportive, and valuations relative to Treasuries are historically attractive. Economic risks are elevated, and we are biased toward higher quality issuers.

		Low	Medium	High	Rationale
Fixed Income Positioning	Credit Quality				Valuations are attractive, but uncertainty merits some caution.
		Short	Intermediate	Long	
	Duration		•		We prefer below-benchmark interest-rate sensitivity due to historically low longer-maturity Treasury yields and prospects of a second-half economic rebound.
		Neg.	Neutral	Pos	
	US Treasuries	-			Yield spreads to international sovereigns remain elevated but have narrowed. Valuations have become very expensive on COVID-19-related demand.
	MBS				Fed buying is supportive, spreads are wider than other QE periods, and risks from refinancing have receded. Remains a diversifying source of yield among high-quality options.
	Investment-Grade Corporates				Risks are elevated due to economic uncertainty, but valuations remain attractive. Favor high-quality non-cyclical issuers. Some support from the Fed.
ors	Preferred Stocks				Higher credit quality among the riskier fixed income options. Bank fundamentals firm prior to pandemic, but distributions optional and at increased risk.
Sectors	High-Yield Corporates	-			Fed support announced in April resulted in spread tightening. Valuations remain attractive, but we believe equities have more upside and high-quality options may be better diversifiers. More attractive for income-oriented investors.
	Bank Loans	-			Weaker investor protections and the end of rate hikes have reduced attractiveness, especially during a period of economic stress.
	Foreign Bonds	-			Rich valuations, interest-rate risk, and potential currency volatility are among the negatives.
	Emerging Markets Debt				Dovish central banks improve the valuation picture but may be vulnerable to COVID-19-related risk. Positive bias for second half of 2020.

Yield spread is the difference between yields on differing debt instruments, calculated by deducting the yield of one instrument from another. The higher the yield spread, the greater the difference between the yields offered by each instrument. The spread can be measured between debt instruments of differing maturities, credit ratings, and risk. Bank loans are loans issued by below investment-grade companies for short-term funding purposes with higher yield than short-term debt and involve risk. For the purposes of this publication, intermediate-term bonds have maturities between 3 and 10 years, and short-term bonds are those with maturities of less than 3 years.

All bonds are subject to market and interest rate risk if sold prior to maturity. Bond values will decline as interest rates rise and are subject to availability and change in price. Corporate bonds are considered higher risk than government bonds but normally offer a higher yield and are subject to market, interest rate, and credit risk, as well as additional risks based on the quality of issuer coupon rate, price, yield, maturity, and redemption features. Investing in foreign and emerging market debt (EMD) securities involves special additional risks. These risks include, but are not limited to, currency risk, geopolitical and regulatory risk, and risk associated with varying settlement standards. High-yield/junk bonds are not investment-grade securities, involve substantial risks, and generally should be part of the diversified portfolio of sophisticated investors. Municipal bonds are subject to availability, price, and market and interest rate risk if sold prior to maturity. Bond values will decline as interest rates rise. Interest income may be subject to the alternative minimum tax. Federally tax-free but other state and local taxes may apply. Mortgage-backed securities (MBS) are subject to credit, default, prepayment risk that acts much like call risk when you get your principal back sooner than the stated maturity, extension risk, the opposite of prepayment risk, market and interest rate risk.

## Commodities: Favor Precious Metals

We continue to favor **precious metals**, which are benefiting from safe-haven buying, lower interest rates, and massive stimulus from the Fed. Although the **US dollar** has generally been strong this year, it has weakened as stocks rallied off their March lows and may weaken further, potentially adding more support for precious metals, particularly **gold**.

Our neutral **industrial metals** view reflects near-term global recession risk; however, China appears to be leading the global economy out of the current crisis and may help provide near-term support for the industrial metal complex.

Our **crude oil** outlook remains negative despite progress in recent weeks toward balancing global supply and demand through production cut agreements from OPEC, Russia, and others. The lockdowns and travel restrictions remain a significant drag on global oil demand, while the economic recovery is likely to be choppy, particularly for travel. Although the latest rebound in WTI crude is encouraging and a global economic recovery in the second half of the year could shore up demand, the US supply overhang should eventually cap price gains if the rally goes much further.

### Alternative Investments: Event-Driven Rebounded From Weak March

The event-driven industry, which remains our preferred alternative strategy, rebounded from a weak March with its best monthly performance in more than seven years, as the HFRX Event Driven: Merger Arbitrage Index gained 5.2% in April. Managers in the space benefited not only from the broader equity market's gains but also from the recognition that many announced merger targets were trading at levels consistent with deals being terminated. As market participants gradually began to view the March selling in merger names to have been exaggerated, deal spreads tightened, and target stock prices moved up to reflect a more fundamental view of deal risk.

# A Look Back at the Prior Month

## Economy: "Great Lockdown" Recession Reflected in Latest Data

Economic data released in April reflected the significant hit to the economy from the lockdowns related to containing the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Conference Board's Leading Economic Index (LEI) fell 6.7% in March, registering the largest decline in the 60-year history of the indicator. The biggest detractors included jobless claims and falling stock prices. Leading indicators tumbled despite shutdowns affecting only the second half of the month.
- Payrolls and Labor. Nonfarm payrolls fell 20.5 million in April, following a historic and devastating stretch of job losses in which 33 million people filed for unemployment insurance in a seven-week period through May 1. The unemployment rate soared to nearly 15%, which may understate the true rate.
- Inflation. The demand shock caused by lockdowns pushed inflation lower in March. The core Consumer Price Index (CPI), excluding food and energy, declined 0.1% month over month in March—marking the first monthly decline since January 2010. Headline CPI fell 0.4% as oil prices tumbled. The headline Producer Price Index (PPI) fell 0.2% in March, while core PPI rose 0.2%. The annual increase in core personal consumption expenditures (PCE), the Fed's preferred inflation gauge, dropped from 1.7% in February to 1.3% in March, well below the Fed's 2% target.
- US Consumer. The Conference Board's Consumer Confidence Index dropped sharply in April to 86.9, falling more than 30 points from the prior month. The expectations component of the report actually improved, reflecting increasing optimism surrounding reopening plans and stimulus measures. The most recent retail sales data for March revealed a month-over-month decline of 8.7%, reflecting the devastating impact of stay-at-home orders, business shutdowns, and travel restrictions.
- US Manufacturing. The effects of COVID-19 have not been limited to consumers, as April's Institute for Supply Management (ISM) Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) plummeted 7.6 points to 41.5, a level consistent with prior recessions. Supply chain disruptions, which ordinarily are a sign of strong demand, propped up the reading, though the disruptions were caused by global lockdowns. The new orders component of the report narrowly missed the December 2008 record low.
- US Business. Capital investment fell sharply in March, though some measures were better than expected. US durable goods orders sank 14.4%, surpassing the consensus expectation of 11.9%. Excluding the hard-hit transportation sector, data improved slightly. Core capital goods orders (excluding transportation and defense) were the lone bright spot, rising a better-than-expected 0.1%. Several regional Fed surveys declined for the month, capturing the rapid decline in business sentiment.
- Policy. A \$484 billion stimulus package was passed into law April 24 in support of small businesses and a stressed healthcare system. As part of its broad effort to support the economy, the Fed continued to expand its lending facilities while shifting its focus to municipalities and small businesses ailing from the effects of the lockdowns. Despite their active role in mitigating the economic impact of the lockdowns, Fed Chair Jerome Powell—and other central bankers—noted that while monetary support for the economy has proved beneficial, additional fiscal stimulus might be needed.

## **Equities: Impressive Rebound**

After a historic drop in March, the **S&P 500**Index staged an impressive recovery in April.
The index's 12.8% return for the month was its best since January 1987. Market sentiment was boosted by bold stimulus measures from policymakers, developing plans to reopen economies amid stabilizing COVID-19 case growth, and growing optimism surrounding possible treatments and vaccine candidates. Stocks began the month deeply oversold from a technical analysis perspective while bargain hunters were likely attracted to low valuations.

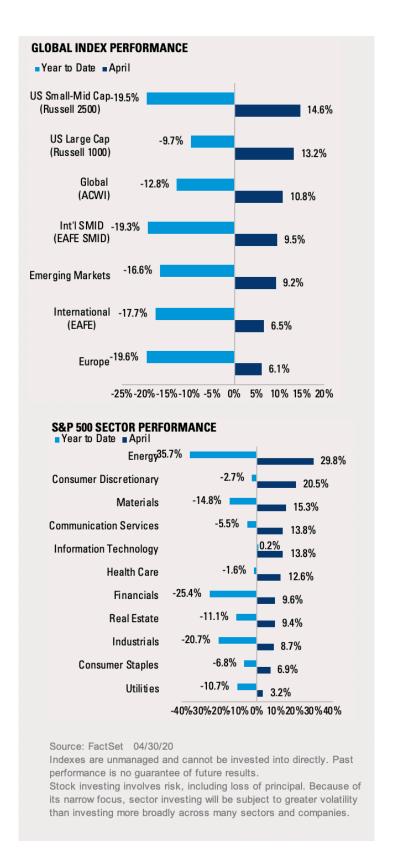
### Style/Capitalization

Large cap and small cap stocks posted similar gains in April despite small caps' generally greater economic and market sensitivity and tendency to bounce strongly from major market lows. Growth stocks paced the rally amid outperformance from key growth sectors—communication services, healthcare and technology—despite strong performance from value-oriented energy.

### **Global Equities**

International developed and emerging market equities lagged behind the gains in the United States despite a weaker US dollar. Emerging markets outpaced developed international markets, buoyed by strength in several key Asian countries.

International developed equities gained 6.5% for the month, based on the MSCI EAFE Index. Based on the MSCI EAFE country indexes, laggards included **France**, **Japan**, and **Switzerland**, while stocks in **Australia** and **Germany** outperformed. Emerging markets equities gained 9.2%, based on the MSCI Emerging Markets Index, led by markets in **India** and **Taiwan**, while **Brazil** lagged.



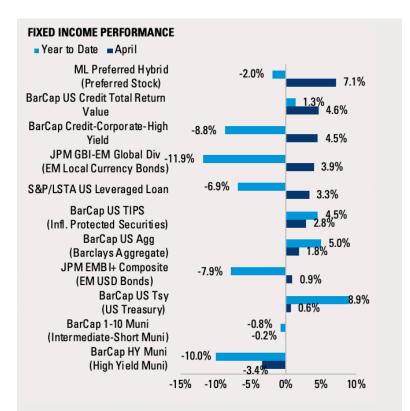
# Fixed Income: Corporate Strength

While equities rallied in April, Treasury yields barely budged. The **10-year Treasury yield** actually declined 6 basis points (0.06%) to end April near a record low of 0.64%. The Treasury yield curve remained relatively stable and remains upward sloping following the Fed's actions to lower short-term rates earlier in 2020.

The Fed's policy actions to support bond market liquidity seemed to spark a risk-on environment in fixed income markets. Investors favored spread opportunities in investment-grade corporate bonds, as shown in the Fixed Income Performance Table. The Bloomberg Barclays US Aggregate Bond Index (Agg) rallied 1.8% on corporate bond strength, while Treasuries were unable to keep pace. Lower-quality bond sectors rebounded in April, particularly high yield, emerging markets local currency debt, and bank loans. Municipal bonds lagged the returns of taxable bonds during April, as investors may have been looking for additional details on how the Fed would provide support to municipal bond markets.

# Commodities: Crude Collapse

Commodities fell slightly overall in April. Most major agricultural prices were down for the month, while prices of other major commodity subsectors, both economically sensitive and defensive, rose amid increasing economic optimism among investors, bolstered by bold stimulus globally. Crude oil was the glaring exception, as a dramatically imbalanced market showed an unwillingness to accept physical delivery due to limited storage capacity, causing the near-term futures contract (May) to turn negative right before expiration.



#### **US Treasury Yields**

Security	3/31/20	4/30/20	Change in Yield
3 Month	0.11	0.09	-0.02
2 Year	0.23	0.20	-0.03
5 Year	0.37	0.36	-0.01
10 Year	0.70	0.64	-0.06
30 Year	1.35	1.28	-0.07

#### **AAA Municipal Yields**

Security	3/31/20	4/30/20	Change in Yield
2 Year	1.27	1.06	-0.21
5 Year	1.31	1.31	0.00
10 Year	1.62	1.81	0.19
20 Year	2.08	2.33	0.25
30 Year	2.21	2.45	0.24

Source: FactSet 04/30/20

Indexes are unmanaged and cannot be invested into directly. Unmanaged index returns do not reflect fees, expenses, or sales charges. Index performance is not indicative of the performance of any investment. Past performance is no guarantee of future results.

Bonds are subject to market and interest rate risk if sold prior to maturity. Bond values and yields will decline as interest rates rise, and bonds are subject to availability and change in price.



#### **IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES**

This material has been prepared for informational purposes only, and is not intended as specific advice or recommendations for any individual. There is no assurance that the views or strategies discussed are suitable for all investors and they do not take into account the particular needs, investment objectives, tax and financial condition of any specific person. To determine which investment(s) may be appropriate for you, please consult your financial professional prior to investing. Any economic forecasts set forth may not develop as predicted and are subject to change.

Stock investing involves risk including loss of principal. Because of their narrow focus, sector investing will be subject to greater volatility than investing more broadly across many sectors and companies. Value investments can perform differently from the market as a whole and can remain undervalued by the market for long periods of time. The prices of small and mid-cap stocks are generally more volatile than large cap stocks. Bonds are subject to market and interest rate risk if sold prior to maturity.

Bond values will decline as interest rates rise and bonds are subject to availability and change in price. Corporate bonds are considered higher risk than government bonds. Municipal bonds are subject to availability and change in price. Interest income may be subject to the alternative minimum tax. Municipal bonds are federally tax-free but other state and local taxes may apply. If sold prior to maturity, capital gains tax could apply. U.S. Treasuries may be considered "safe haven" investments but do carry some degree of risk including interest rate, credit, and market risk. Bond yields are subject to change. Certain call or special redemption features may exist which could impact yield.

Mortgage-backed securities are subject to credit, default, prepayment, extension, market and interest rate risk.

Credit Quality is one of the principal criteria for judging the investment quality of a bond or bond mutual fund. Credit ratings are published rankings based on detailed financial analyses by a credit bureau specifically as it relates the bond issue's ability to meet debt obligations. The highest rating is AAA, and the lowest is D. Securities with credit ratings of BBB and above are considered investment grade. Duration is a measure of the sensitivity of the price (the value of principal) of a fixed-income investment to a change in interest rates. It is expressed as a number of years.

Alternative investments may not be suitable for all investors and should be considered as an investment for the risk capital portion of the investor's portfolio. The strategies employed in the management of alternative investments may accelerate the velocity of potential losses.

Commodity-linked investments may be more volatile and less liquid than the underlying instruments or measures, and their value may be affected by the performance of the overall commodities baskets as well as weather, geopolitical events, and regulatory developments. The fast price swings in commodities and currencies will result in significant volatility in an investor's holdings.

Investing in foreign and emerging markets securities involves special additional risks. These risks include, but are not limited to, currency risk, geopolitical risk, and risk associated with varying accounting standards. Investing in emerging markets may accentuate these risks. All information is believed to be from reliable sources; however, LPL Financial makes no representation as to its completeness or accuracy.

US Treasuries may be considered "safe haven" investments but do carry some degree of risk including interest rate, credit, and market risk. Bonds are subject to market and interest rate risk if sold prior to maturity. Bond values will decline as interest rates rise and bonds are subject to availability and change in price.

Earnings per share (EPS) is the portion of a company's profit allocated to each outstanding share of common stock. EPS serves as an indicator of a company's profitability. Earnings per share is generally considered to be the single most important variable in determining a share's price. It is also a major component used to calculate the price-to-earnings valuation ratio.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period, though GDP is usually calculated on an annual basis. It includes all of private and public consumption, government outlays, investments and exports less imports that occur within a defined territory.

All index data from FactSet.

For a list of descriptions of the indexes referenced in this publication, please visit our website at <a href="mailto:lplresearch.com/definitions">lplresearch.com/definitions</a>.

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