

Weekly commentary

December 9, 2024

BlackRock

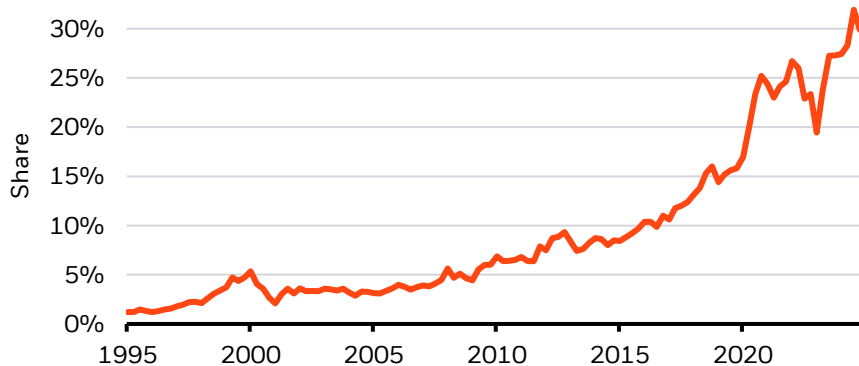
Staying pro-risk into 2025

- Structural shifts, like artificial intelligence, are reshaping economies. We stay pro-risk and up our U.S. stocks overweight as we see beneficiaries broadening.
- U.S. stocks hit new highs last week. November's U.S. jobs report showed wage growth above the level that would allow inflation to settle at the Fed's target.
- We see the European Central Bank cutting rates by 25 basis points this week. U.S. CPI should show services inflation staying sticky on solid wage gains.

This year has reinforced that we are not in a typical business cycle. Instead, mega forces – big structural shifts like the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) – are transforming economies and altering their long-term trajectories. That calls for a new way of investing: being more dynamic and putting more focus on themes and less on broad asset classes. We stay risk-on in our [2025 Outlook](#) and up our U.S. equity overweight as the AI theme broadens out – but stand ready to dial down risk.

Ever-bigger share

"Magnificent 7" market cap as a share of the S&P 500, 1995-2024



Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future results. It is not possible to invest in an index. Indexes are unmanaged and performance does not account for fees. Source: BlackRock Investment Institute, with data from LSEG Datastream, December 2024. Notes: The chart shows the combined market capitalization (cap) of the "magnificent 7" stocks (Amazon, Apple, Google, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia and Tesla) as a share of the S&P 500's total market cap. The chart sums up the market cap of each stock as they went public, capturing Amazon from 1997 onwards, Nvidia from 1999, Google from 2004, Tesla from 2010 and Meta from 2012.

We think investors should no longer think in terms of business cycles, with short-term fluctuations in activity leading to expansion or recession. Instead, mega forces are driving an economic transformation that could keep shifting the long-term trend, making a wide range of very different outcomes possible – on the upside and downside. Building the transformation – such as with AI data centers – requires a major infrastructure buildout. Financing the transformation given constrained public finances means that capital markets, including private markets, will be key. Markets are starting to reflect these shifts: The "magnificent 7" of mostly mega-cap tech shares now make up almost a third of the S&P 500's market capitalization. See the chart. We think this calls for rethinking investing, and challenges investment strategies based on valuations converging back to historical trends.



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We follow that playbook as we stay pro-risk headed into 2025. We increase our overweight to U.S. stocks as we expect AI beneficiaries to broaden out beyond tech. We're also confident U.S. equities can keep outpacing global peers given the ability to better capitalize on mega forces, a favorable growth outlook, potential tax cuts and regulatory easing. Signposts for changing our view include any surge in long-term bond yields or an escalation in trade protectionism. Pricey U.S. equity valuations, based on price-to-earnings ratios and equity risk premiums, don't yet change our view. Why? We find valuations affect near-term returns less than long-term returns. The equity risk premium – a common valuation gauge – for the equal-weighted S&P 500 is near its long-term average, according to LSEG data, and thus looks less affected by the transformation.

U.S. outperformance is unlikely to extend to government bonds. We go tactically underweight long-term Treasuries as we expect investors to demand more compensation for the risk of holding them given persistent budget deficits, sticky inflation and greater bond market volatility. We favor government bonds in other developed markets. Globally, Japanese equities stand out due to corporate reforms and the return of mild inflation that are driving corporate pricing power and earnings growth.

More broadly, we think investors can find opportunities by tapping into the transformation we expect in the real economy. AI and the low-carbon transition require investment potentially on par with the Industrial Revolution. Major tech companies are starting to rival the U.S. government on research and development spending. Plus, meeting growing energy demand will generate US\$3.5 trillion of investment per year this decade, according to the BlackRock Investment Institute Transition Scenario. We see private markets playing a vital role in financing the future. Big spending on AI and the low-carbon transition plus rising geopolitical fragmentation is likely to cause persistent U.S. inflation pressures. And an aging workforce could start to bite as immigration slows, likely keeping wage growth too high for inflation to return to the Fed's 2% target. We think that means the Fed will keep rates well above pre-pandemic levels even after cutting some in 2025.

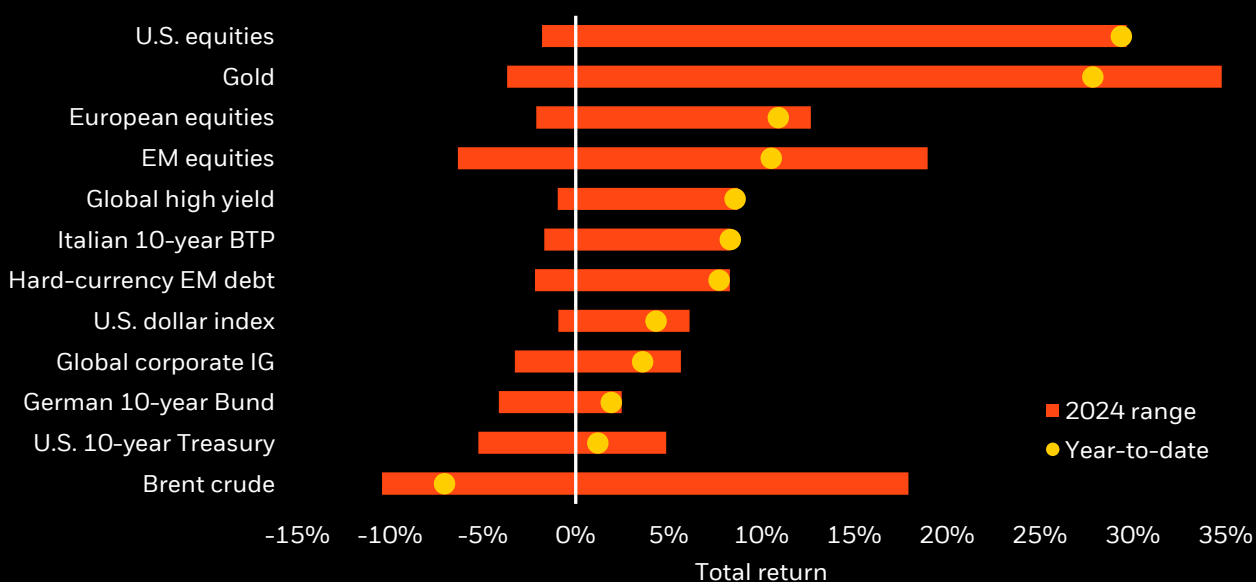
Bottom line: Mega forces are reshaping economies and markets. That requires a new playbook challenging old investment rules. We stay pro-risk to kick off 2025 but stand ready to dial down risk as catalysts emerge. Read our [2025 Global Outlook](#).

Market backdrop

U.S. stocks hit an all-time high last week. U.S. payrolls for November showed the economy is adding jobs at a healthy clip. Wage growth remains above the level that would allow inflation to settle at the Fed's 2% target – a reason we do not see the Fed cutting rates sharply. U.S. 10-year Treasury yields slid to around 4.15%, down about 35 basis points in the past few weeks. Spreads between French and German 10-year yields edged off 12-year highs reached on France's political stalemate.

Assets in review

Selected asset performance, year-to-date return and range



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Sources: BlackRock Investment Institute, with data from LSEG Datastream as of Dec. 5, 2024. Notes: The two ends of the bars show the lowest and highest returns at any point year to date, and the dots represent current year-to-date returns. Emerging market (EM), high yield and global corporate investment grade (IG) returns are denominated in U.S. dollars, and the rest in local currencies. Indexes or prices used are: spot Brent crude, ICE U.S. Dollar Index (DXY), spot gold, MSCI Emerging Markets Index, MSCI Europe Index, LSEG Datastream 10-year benchmark government bond index (U.S., Germany and Italy), Bank of America Merrill Lynch Global High Yield Index, J.P. Morgan EMBI Index, Bank of America Merrill Lynch Global Broad Corporate Index and MSCI USA Index.

Week ahead

Dec. 9	China CPI and PPI	Dec. 11	U.S. CPI
Dec. 10	China trade data	Dec. 12	European Central Bank (ECB) policy decision

This week we expect the ECB to cut interest rates by 25 basis points as euro area core inflation has kept normalizing. We're monitoring the ECB's updated growth and inflation projections as consumer spending shows signs of recovery. Yet fiscal consolidation and the potential impact of U.S. tariffs cloud the outlook. In the U.S., we watch for whether the November CPI will keep showing services inflation catching up with wage growth, keeping core inflation sticky.

Big calls

Our highest conviction views on tactical (6-12 month) and strategic (long-term) horizons, December 2024

Tactical	Reasons
U.S. equities	We see the AI buildout and adoption creating opportunities across sectors. We tap into beneficiaries outside the tech sector. Robust economic growth, broad earnings growth and a quality tilt underpin our conviction and overweight in U.S. stocks versus other regions. We see valuations for big tech backed by strong earnings, and less lofty valuations for other sectors.
Japanese equities	A brighter outlook for Japan's economy and corporate reforms are driving improved earnings and shareholder returns. Yet the potential drag on earnings from a stronger yen is a risk.
Selective in fixed income	Persistent deficits and sticky inflation in the U.S. make us more positive on fixed income elsewhere, notably Europe. We are underweight long-term U.S. Treasuries and like UK gilts instead. We also prefer European credit – both investment grade and high yield – over the U.S. on cheaper valuations.
Strategic	Reasons
Infrastructure equity and private credit	We see opportunities in infrastructure equity due to attractive relative valuations and mega forces. We think private credit will earn lending share as banks retreat – and at attractive returns.
Fixed income granularity	We prefer short- and medium-term investment grade credit, which offers similar yields with less interest rate risk than long-dated credit. We also like short-term government bonds in the U.S. and euro area and UK gilts overall.
Equity granularity	We favor emerging over developed markets yet get selective in both. EMs at the cross current of mega forces – like India and Saudi Arabia – offer opportunities. In DM, we like Japan as the return of inflation and corporate reforms brighten the outlook.

Note: Views are from a U.S. dollar perspective, December 2024. 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.

Tracking five mega forces

Mega forces are big, structural changes that affect investing now – and far in the future. As key drivers of the new regime of greater macroeconomic and market volatility, they change the long-term growth and inflation outlook and are poised to create big shifts in profitability across economies and sectors. This creates major opportunities – and risks – for investors. See our [web hub](#) for our research and related content on each mega force.

- 1. Demographic divergence:** The world is split between aging advanced economies and younger emerging markets – with different implications.
- 2. Digital disruption and artificial intelligence (AI):** Technologies are transforming how we live and work.
- 3. Geopolitical fragmentation and economic competition:** Globalization is being rewired as the world splits into competing blocs.
- 4. Future of finance:** A fast-evolving financial architecture is changing how households and companies use cash, borrow, transact and seek returns.
- 5. Transition to a low-carbon economy:** The transition is set to spur a massive capital reallocation as energy systems are rewired.

Granular views

Six- to 12-month tactical views on selected assets vs. broad global asset classes by level of conviction, December 2024

Our approach is to first determine asset allocations based on our macro outlook – and what’s in the price. **The table below reflects this and, importantly, leaves aside the opportunity for alpha, or the potential to generate above-benchmark returns.** The new regime is not conducive to static exposures to broad asset classes, in our view, but is creating more space for alpha.

	Asset	View	Commentary
Equities	Developed markets		
	United States		We are overweight as the AI theme and earnings growth broaden. Valuations for AI beneficiaries are supported by tech companies delivering on earnings. Resilient growth and Fed rate cuts support sentiment. Risks include any long-term yield surges or escalating trade protectionism.
	Europe		We are underweight relative to the U.S., Japan and the UK – our preferred markets. Valuations are fair. A growth pickup and European Central Bank rate cuts support a modest earnings recovery. Yet political uncertainty could keep investors cautious.
	UK		We are neutral. Political stability could improve investor sentiment. Yet an increase in the corporate tax burden could hurt profit margins near term
	Japan		We are overweight. A brighter outlook for Japan’s economy and corporate reforms are driving improved earnings and shareholder returns. Yet a stronger yen dragging on earnings is a risk.
Fixed Income	Emerging markets		We are neutral. The growth and earnings outlook is mixed. We see valuations for India and Taiwan looking high.
	China		We are modestly overweight. China’s fiscal stimulus is not yet enough to address the drags on economic growth, but we think stocks are at attractive valuations to DM shares. We stand ready to pivot. We are cautious long term given China’s structural challenges.
	Short U.S. Treasuries		We are neutral. Markets are pricing in fewer Federal Reserve rate cuts and their policy rate expectations are now roughly in line with our views.
	Long U.S. Treasuries		We are underweight. Persistent budget deficits and geopolitical fragmentation could drive term premium up over the near term. We prefer intermediate maturities less vulnerable to investors demanding more term premium.
	Global inflation-linked bonds		We are neutral. We see higher medium-term inflation, but cooling inflation and growth may matter more near term.
	Euro area govt bonds		We are neutral. Market pricing reflects policy rates in line with our expectations and 10-year yields are off their highs. Political uncertainty remains a risk to fiscal sustainability.
	UK gilts		We are overweight. Gilt yields offer attractive income, and we think the Bank of England will cut rates more than the market is pricing given a soft economy.
	Japanese govt bonds		We are underweight. Stock returns look more attractive to us. We see some of the least attractive returns in JGBs.
	China govt bonds		We are neutral. Bonds are supported by looser policy. Yet we find yields more attractive in short-term DM paper.
	U.S. agency MBS		We are neutral. We see agency MBS as a high-quality exposure in a diversified bond allocation and prefer it to IG.
	Short-term IG credit		We are overweight. Short-term bonds better compensate for interest rate risk.
	Long-term IG credit		We are underweight. Spreads are tight, so we prefer taking risk in equities from a whole portfolio perspective. We prefer Europe over the U.S.
	Global high yield		We are neutral. Spreads are tight, but the total income makes it more attractive than IG. We prefer Europe.
	Asia credit		We are neutral. We don’t find valuations compelling enough to turn more positive.
	Emerging hard currency		We are neutral. The asset class has performed well due to its quality, attractive yields and EM central bank rate cuts. We think those rate cuts may soon be paused.
Emerging local currency		We are neutral. Yields have fallen closer to U.S. Treasury yields, and EM central banks look to be turning more cautious after cutting policy rates sharply.	

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