This report is for the exclusive use of the subscriber recipient. Please do not forward or share.

FridsonVision HIGH YIELD STRATEGY

Table of Contents

| IMPACT | OF INCREASED YIELD ON |
|----------|-----------------------|
| FIITLIRE | HIGH VIELD RETURN |

Quantifying the Yield/Subsequent

| Return Relationship |
|---------------------------------------|
| Total Return Outlook 2005-2009 |
| Conclusion |
| Appendix |
| MODEL UPDATES |
| BB Distressed Bonds |
| CCC & Lower versus BB/B |
| Distressed Debt's Attractiveness 8-9 |
| Emerging Markets versus U.S |
| Europe versus U.S |
| Investment Grade versus High Yield 10 |
| Industry Relative Value10-1 |
| Maturity Bucket Opportunities12, 13 |

Market-Implied Default Rate13

Undervalued Bonds......14

Impact of Increased Yield on Future High Yield Return

Some high yield bond advocates, acknowledging that the prevailing spread-versus-Treasuries is narrow by historical standards, argue that the asset class is nevertheless attractive because its yield is high by historical standards. The premise is dependent on which historical period is used for comparison. This report examines the validity of the advocates' line of reasoning by analyzing the relationship between beginning yield and subsequent return. We do not find that the present yield on speculative grade bonds points to a future return that is high by historical standard. A case can be made, however, that high yield has better total return prospects than equities, a riskier asset class.



Martin Fridson, CFA
Publisher

There is little controversy on high yield advocates' first point, the narrowness of the present high yield risk premium. At +287 basis points (bps) on February 28, 2025, the ICE BofA US High Yield Index's option-adjusted spread (OAS) was 242 bps below its December 1996-December 2024 mean of +529 bps. As we have pointed out in the past, however, a below-average risk premium might be justified by below-average risk. We quantify the risks associated with non-investment grade bonds through the four-factor model described in "Fair Value of High Yield Spread" in the Model Descriptions tab on www.fridson.com. Our most recent update indicated that given the prevailing values of the model's explanatory variables, the required OAS was +425 bps, or 138 bps more than the actual February 28 spread of +287 bps.

Published bi-weekly for subscribing financial professionals.

FridsonVision High Yield Strategy is a bi-weekly research service produced by FridsonVision LLC and geared to finance professionals. Its publisher is Martin Fridson, CFA, who was the #1 Institutional Investor All America Research High Yield Strategist while at a leading investment bank and is an inductee to the Fixed Income Analysts Society Hall of Fame.

Impact of Increased Yield on Future High Yield Return

According to the argument currently being advanced for noninvestment grade bonds, this disadvantage is offset by a comparatively high yield. The question is, "High compared to what?" At 6.92% on February 28, the ICE BofA US High Yield Index's effective yield is certainly far above its all-time low of 3.92% on July 7, 2021. It would be myopic, however, to compare present yields only with those of the 2020-2022 period of the Fed's Zero Interest Rate Policy. The February 28 OAS was a more modest 29 bps above the December 2014-December 2024 monthly mean of 6.63%. Moreover, from December 1996, the earliest date of effective yield availability on the index, through December 2024, the mean was *higher* than the February 28 level, at 8.53%.

Quantifying the Yield/Subsequent Return Relationship

To arrive at an evidence-based answer to the question of what the present, up-from-the-all-time-low yield actually implies for the noninvestment grade outlook, we first investigated whether yield actually has a bearing on return in the subsequent period. Even without conducting any statistical analysis, one can conclude that the relationship is less than airtight. Total returns were negative in some periods, even though the ICE BofA US High Yield Index's effective yield was positive at the start of all periods. Pinning things down more precisely calls for a correlation analysis.

A key question in correlating beginning yield and subsequent return is, "Over what period ought we measure total return?" Advocates of the asset class may point to the present "high" yield and—without presenting any supporting evidence—hope readers will conclude that a comparatively high total return, by historical standards, is assured for the next 12 months. That may well be the relevant performance measurement period for many institutions engaged in tactical asset allocation. Might it not be too short a period, however, for beginning yield to determine to any great extent the total return? (Surely no one expects a 7% beginning yield to guarantee a 7% annualized return over the succeeding month, week, or day.) In the absence of empirical evidence, it is entirely arbitrary to assert a connection between the starting yield and return over any particular timeframe.

Determining the actual connection between beginning yield and subsequent return requires a formal correlation analysis. The timeframe over which the correlation is meaningful is an important consideration.

Impact of Increased Yield on Future High Yield Return

To determine the investment horizon over which beginning yield exerts the strongest influence over subsequent total return, we collected the data summarized in **Exhibit 1**. For all full years of availability of total returns on the ICE BofA US High Yield Index, the correlation (R) between beginning effective yield and annualized total return over the succeeding one-year period is 0.52. (See Appendix regarding effective yield numbers for 1986-1995.) That 0.52 figure qualifies as a moderate correlation. The percentage of variance in one-year total return explained by beginning yield (R^2) is just 0.52 x 0.52, or 27%. Correlation peaks at the five-year horizon at 0.82. That is conventionally deemed a very strong correlation, with beginning yield explaining 67% of the variance in five-year total return. To be sure, other factors, notably fluctuations in underlying Treasury yields, improvement and deterioration in the outlook for the economy, and increases and decreases in high yield secondary market liquidity, will also influence the five-year annualized return. Unlike the one-year outlook for noninvestment grade returns, however, the five-year outlook is one for which a serious argument can be made based on the prevailing yield on the high yield index.

Exhibit 1 Correlation (R) Beginning Effective Yield and Annualized Return ICE BofA US High Yield Index: Year-Ends 1986-2024



Impact of Increased Yield on Future High Yield Return

Our next step was to create a simple regression formula to answer the question, "Given an index yield of x, what is the expected annualized high yield return for the next five years?" The formula derived from the data underlying Exhibit 1 is:

 $y = 1.04 \times -2.41$

Where:

x = Effective yield of ICE BofA US High Yield Index

y = Annualized total return of ICE BofA US High Yield Index over subsequent five years

Incidentally, the greater relevance of beginning yield to five-year than to one-year returns is captured by **Exhibit 2**. We ran the formula just above for each five-year period, then ran a similarly derived formula (y = 2.05x -11.29) for each one-year period. Using the two formulas, we calculated the respective forecast errors, defined as the period's actual return minus the return predicted by the regression formula. The median forecast errors were nearly the same for the one-year and five-year forecast periods, but the mean was about one percentage point lower for the five-year period. Most important was a maximum error about twice as great for the one-year period as for the five-year period. In 2008, the one-year formula predicted a return of 8.23% but the actual return was a disastrous -26.39%. As it happened, in 2005 the one-year formula predicted a return of 2.81% and the actual return came in almost exactly on the nose, at 2.74%. The five-year formula did not produce a comparably precise (purely by chance) result, but it served investors far better by avoiding a whopping forecast error as great as the one-year formula's massive 2008 miss.

| Exhibit 2 Actual minus Predicted Return (Percentage Points) | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|------|-------|------|--|--|--|--|
| | Mean Median Maximum Minimum | | | | | | | |
| Horizon | | | | | | | | |
| 1 Year | 9.04 | 7.44 | 34.62 | 0.07 | | | | |
| 5 Years | 8.05 | 7.46 | 17.84 | 3.13 | | | | |

Sources: ICE Indices, LLC; FridsonVision calculations

Impact of Increased Yield on Future High Yield Return

Total Return Outlook 2025-2029

Applying the formula shown above to December 31, 2024's effective yield of 7.30% produces an expected five-year annualized high yield total return of 5.18%. High yield advocates may not be excited about publicizing that figure. It is considerably below the 1987-2024 mean of 8.48%, although it compares less unfavorably with the median of 6.80%.¹

On the other hand, 5.18% is materially higher than the 2025-2029 annualized return predicted by analogous methodology for equities, as represented by the Standard & Poor's 500 Index. For that calculation we made \mathbf{x} the stock index's beginning price/earnings ratio, as reported by Bloomberg. The resulting formula for year-ends 1986 to 2023 was:

-1.18x + 32.30

Applying the formula to the year-end 2024 price/earnings ratio of 24.83 produces an expected five-year annualized return of 3.00% for the S&P 500.

High yield's expected five-year annalized return of 5.18% exceeds equity's 3.00%.

Over the period 1987-2024, the S&P 500 had a higher mean return than the ICE BofA US High Yield Index, i.e., 10.29% versus 8.48%. The stock index was also riskier, with a standard deviation of 16.81% versus 13.62% for the high yield index. There is a valid argument for advocating a full or more than full allocation to high yield on the basis of an expected multi-year annualized return higher than that of a riskier asset class that delivers a higher return over the longer run.

Conclusion

To declare that high yield, which currently sports a risk premium grossly inadequate for its prevailing risk, is currently attractive merely because its yield is up from an all-time low and slightly higher than its long-run average has the feel of grasping at straws. Beginning yield does have a bearing on future returns, but that is not especially so in a timeframe as short as one year. It is worthy of consideration by asset allocators, however, that high yield's expected five-year annualized return is substantially higher than that of equities, a riskier asset class.

(

¹Advocates may object to the 5.18% expected return number, arguing that underlying Treasury yields will fall over the next five years, the economy will be strong, and that supply-demand conditions will ensure good secondary market liquidity. If they take that line, however, they are undercutting their own assertion that investors should make substantial allocations to noninvestment grade debt purely on the grounds that its yield is currently "high."

Impact of Increased Yield on Future High Yield Return

Appendix

Effective Yield is considered the best way of measuring bond yields, taking into account early redemption provisions. Unfortunately, ICE Indices, LLC provides effective yield data on the ICE BofA US High Yield Index only from December 31, 1996 onward, while the index's inception date is August 31, 1986. To calculate the correlation statistics displayed in Exhibit 1, we realize that we could have at least 30 years of data for all timeframes from one to nine years if we could somehow estimate effective yields for the year-ends from 1986 to 1995. (Thirty is the rule-of-thumb minimum number of observations constituting a valid scientific sample.)

For the period of effective yield availability, we found a strong 72.06% correlation between the ICE BofA US High Yield Index's price and the difference between its yield to maturity and its effective yield. We considered it valid to estimate effective yield for year-ends 1986-1995 using the following regression formula:

y = 0.017x - 1.36
Where:
y = Yield-to-maturity minus effective yield
x = Index price

For each year-end 1986-1995 we added y, as calculated by this formula, to yield-to-maturity to produce an estimated effective yield. While our methodology was not going to achieve 100% accuracy, we judged that the associated disadvantage was offset by the ability to obtain a statistically valid sample size for calculating the correlation between beginning yield and subsequent annualized total return.

Aggression analysis enabled us to estimate effective yield for early years in which it was unreported by the index provider.

MODEL UPDATES FEBRUARY 28, 2025

For fuller descriptions of the models updated below click here.

Recommendations Summary

Equalized Ratings
Mix analysis calls
for underweighting
Emerging Markets.

| BB Distressed Bonds | No Special Opportunity at Present |
|---|---|
| CCC & Lower | Neutral |
| Distressed Bonds | Overweight |
| Emerging Markets(Portfolios that also own | U.S. High Yield)Underweight |
| Europe(Portfolios that also own | U.S. High Yield)Neutral |
| High Yield(Portfolios that also own | Investment Grade)Underweight |
| Industry Relative Value | See highlighted industries below |
| Maturity Bucket Opportunities | No current reallocation recommendations |
| Market-Implied Default Rate Forecast | 3.0% |
| Undervalued Bonds | See highlighted bonds below |

Shading indicates a change from the previous update.

BB Distressed Bonds

Our historical research has found that when 5% or more of the issuers represented in the ICE BofA US Distressed High Yield Index are rated in the broad BB category, the market is overstating the default risk of those issuers' bonds. On February 28, 2025, 0.0% of the bonds, unchanged from January 31, 2025, of the distressed index's 54 issuers (up from 53 from a month earlier) had a Composite Rating in the broad BB category, according to the ICE Indices, LLC's classifications.

Accordingly, our methodology points to no current opportunity to pick up issues that have a strong likelihood of being undervalued on the basis of having option-adjusted spreads of +1,000 bps or more despite being rated in the broad BB category.

Click here for a fuller description of this model.

Fair Value Model Update

CCC & Lower versus BB/B

To calculate fair value for the CCC-C spread at a point in time we apply the following regression formula:

y = 2.34x + 73.44

Where:

Neutral weighting maintained for CCC & Lower.

x = OAS of the ICE BofA BB/B US High Yield Index y = OAS of the ICE BofA CCC & Lower US High Yield Index

With the BB/B spread at +224 bps on February 28, 2025 (versus + 208 bps one month earlier), the formula yields a fair value OAS of +598 bps for CCC & Lower. That is below the actual OAS of +760 bps for CCC & Lower by 162 bps. The gap between fair value and actual spread is below our threshold of 254 bps (one standard deviation) for deeming the CCC & Lower sector extremely undervalued. Accordingly, we are maintaining our previous Neutral recommendation for the CCC & Lower sector for value-oriented high yield investors.

Click <u>here</u> for a fuller description of this model.

Distressed Debt's Attractiveness

We recommend that investors who customarily include some distressed bonds in their high yield portfolios overweight (underweight) the distressed sector when the market-implied forecast exceeds (falls short of) Moody's forecast by one percentage point or more.

To derive the Moody's forecast for the one-year default rate on U.S. speculative grade bonds, we take the agency's current percentage-of-issuers forecast for speculative grade debt (which includes loan-only issuers) and it by the fraction consisting of the agency's all-regions bonds forecast divided by its all-regions bonds & loans forecast.

We calculate the market-implied default rate using the following formula:

 $y = 0.133 \text{ times } x^{-0.534}$

Where:

y = Distressed default rate

x = Percentage of issues in the ICE BofA US High Yield Index with option-adjusted spreads of +1,000 bps or greater (see note 1)

The market-implied default rate forecast for the next 12 months is:

Distress ratio times distressed default rate

Click here for a fuller description of this model.

(Continued on page 9)

Fair Value Model Update

Our last Overweight recommendation on distressed debt worked out very favorably.

These calculations currently produce a distressed default rate of 72.1%. Multiplying by the February 28, 2025 distress ratio of 4.22% (up from 3.74%% on January 31), we find that the high yield market expects a 3.0% default rate over the next 12 months. That is more than a full percentage point above the rate for Moody's implied 1.5% U.S. speculative grade bond-only forecast.

Based on our model, we are maintaining our previous Overweight recommendation on distressed debt. Our last Overweight recommendation on distressed debt ran from FridsonVision High Yield Strategy's inaugural issue for May 31, 2024 through December 31, 2024. Over that period the ICE BofA US Distressed High Yield Index trounced the ICE BofA US High Yield Index, 27.01% to 6.46%.

Emerging Markets versus U.S.

To determine relative value for these two regions on a rating-for-rating basis, we compare option-adjusted spreads on the ICE BofA High Yield US Emerging Markets Corporate Plus Index and the BofA US High Yield Index. We recommend overweighting (underweighting) EM when its OAS is unusually wide (narrow) versus its U.S. counterpart according to our Equally Ratings Mix (ERM) methodology.

Click here for a fuller description of this model.

On February 28, 2025, the emerging markets ERM-based OAS was +314 bps. That exceeded the high yield index's ERM-based OAS of +236.5 bps by just 77.5bps, placing it in Quartile 4 (narrowest differential) of historical experience. Accordingly, we continue to recommend underweighting emerging markets debt in portfolios that also invest in U.S. high yield.

Europe versus U.S.

To determine relative value for these two regions on a rating-for-rating basis, we compare option-adjusted spreads on the ICE BofA Euro Non-Financial High Yield Constrained Index and the ICE BofA US Non-Financial High Yield Constrained Index. We recommend overweighting (underweighting) European high yield when its OAS is unusually wide (narrow) versus its U.S. counterpart, according to our Equally Ratings Mix (ERM) methodology.

Click <u>here</u> for a fuller description of this model.

On February 25, 2025 the European ERM-based OAS was +253 bps. That exceeded the high yield index's ERM-based OAS of +239 bps by 14 bps, keeping in in Quintile 2 (second widest differential) of historical experience. The analysis thus indicates that European high yield debt remains only moderately cheap versus its U.S. counterpart. Accordingly, we continue to recommend a Neutral weighting on European high yield debt in portfolios that also invest in U.S. high yield.

Fair Value Model Update

Investment Grade versus High Yield

Our empirical study has found that when the ICE BofA US High Yield Index's OAS exceeds the investment grade ICE BofA US Corporate Index's OAS by more than 700 basis points, there is a strong probability that high yield will beat investment grade in total return in the next quarter. We recommend overweighting high yield under those conditions. Further, we have found that when the high yield OAS exceeds the investment grade OAS by less than 265 basis points, there is a substantial probability that high yield will underperform investment grade for the next 2.5 years or more. We recommend underweighting high yield under those conditions.

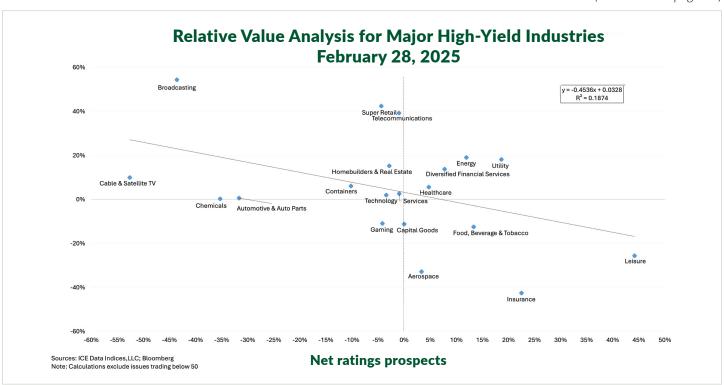
Click here for a fuller description of this model.

On February 28, 2025 the high yield OAS was +287 bps (up from +268 bps on January 31). That exceeded the investment grade index's OAS of +88 bps by just 199 bps. Therefore, we continue to recommend underweighting U.S. high yield debt in portfolios that also invest in U.S. investment grade corporates.

Industry Relative Value

In the graph below we plot each industry on the vertical scale according to the percentage by which its Equalized Ratings Mix-based OAS exceeds or falls short of the peer group average.

(Continued on page 11)



Fair Value Model Update

On the horizontal scale we plot industries by their Net Ratings Prospects. (Each issue within the industry subindex has ratings outlooks or watchlistings of Positive, Stable, or Negative from some or all of the following agencies—Moody's, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch Ratings.) Coordinates for all industries appear in the table shown further down.

Click here for a fuller description of this model.

Industries located above (below) the diagonal line are cheap (rich) on a rating-for-rating basis, taking into account their net ratings prospects. The most attractive positioning is in the northeast quadrant, indicating that and industry is cheap on a rating-for-rating basis even though the rating agencies are telling investors that its ratings are likely to improve on balance. There are currently a large number (four) industries in the northeast quadrant. All four are holdovers from last month—Diversified Financial Services, Energy, Healthcare, and Utility.

Homebuilders & Real Estate, which was in the northeast quadrant last month, migrated to the negative ratings prospects zone and the northwest quadrant.

(Continued on page 10)

Major High Yield Industries Ranked by Relative Value February 2025

| Industry | Symbol | Actual minus estimated spread as % of estimated | Net ratings prospects |
|--------------------------------|--------|---|-----------------------|
| Broadcasting | BR | 54.39% | -43.59% |
| Super Retail | SR | 42.45% | -4.40% |
| Telecommunications | TC | 39.28% | -1.00% |
| Energy | EN | 19.11% | 11.93% |
| Utility | EL | 18.18% | 18.64% |
| Homebuilders & Real Estate | НВ | 15.29% | -2.86% |
| Diversified Financial Services | FI | 13.82% | 7.75% |
| Cable & Satellite TV | CV | 9.97% | -52.63% |
| Containers | СТ | 6.11% | -10.20% |
| Healthcare | HL | 5.67% | 4.72% |
| Services | SE | 2.69% | -0.94% |
| Technology | TY | 2.00% | -3.45% |
| Automotive & Auto Parts | AU | 0.62% | -31.67% |
| Chemicals | CH | 0.30% | -35.29% |
| Gaming | AG | -10.88% | -4.17% |
| Capital Goods | CA | -11.18% | 0.00% |
| Food, Beverage & Tobacco | FO | -12.44% | 13.33% |
| Leisure | LE | -25.57% | 44.19% |
| Aerospace | AE | -32.78% | 3.33% |
| Insurance | IN | -42.49% | 22.50% |

Note: Calculations exclude issues priced below 50. Sources: ICE Data Indices,LLC; Bloomberg

Fair Value Model Update

In the southwest quadrant, an industry is expensive on a rating-for-rating basis even though the rating agencies indicate that its ratings are likely to decline on balance. Gaming is currently the only industry deemed unattractive by this criterion. Chemicals and Technology moved from the southwest to the northwest quadrant this month. Also cheap within the 20-industry peer group, although not in the coveted northeast quadrant, are industries appearing above the diagonal line. At the extreme, Broadcasting has exceptionally negative net ratings prospects, but our analysis indicates that current market spreads more than compensate investors for that disadvantage.

Maturity Bucket Opportunities

We compare current option-adjusted spread differentials among the 1-3, 3-5, 5-7, and 7-10 year sectors of the ICE BofA US Cash Pay High Yield Index with their historical averages and recommend reallocation trades based on divergences of one standard deviation or more from their historical means. Portfolio managers can also look for security-level trades that exploit large divergences from historical norms. For example, the manager might swap out of a bond with a maturity in a relatively rich bucket into a pari passu bond of the same issuer with a maturity in a relatively cheap bucket.

The present and historical output for this analysis is contained in the following five tables.

| Exhibit 1 February 28, 2025 Spread Between Maturity Buckets (Basis Points) | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|------------|---------------|---------|--|--|--|--|
| Horizonta | l Scale Va | alue Minus | Vertical Scal | e Value | | | | |
| Years ↓→ | Years ↓→ 1 to 3 3 to 5 5 to 7 7 to 10 | | | | | | | |
| 1 to 3 | Х | х | х | x | | | | |
| 3 to 5 | o 5 -30 x x x | | | | | | | |
| 5 to 7 | 25 | x | × | | | | | |
| 7 to 10 | 72 | 102 | 47 | х | | | | |

| Exhibit 2 February 28, 2025 Spread versus Historical Mean (Basis Points) | | | | | | | |
|--|---|----|---|---|--|--|--|
| Horizonta | Horizontal Scale Value Minus Vertical Scale Value | | | | | | |
| Years ↓→ 1 to 3 3 to 5 5 to 7 7 to 10 | | | | | | | |
| 1 to 3 | x x x | | | | | | |
| 3 to 5 -20 x x x | | | | | | | |
| 5 to 7 | 5 24 x x | | | | | | |
| 7 to 10 | 11 | 31 | 6 | х | | | |

| Exhibit 3 February 28, 2025 Spread versus Historical Mean (Standard Deviations) | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------------|------------|---------------|---------|--|--|--|--|
| Horizonta | I Scale Va | alue Minus | Vertical Scal | e Value | | | | |
| Years ↓→ | 1 to 3 3 to 5 5 to 7 7 to 10 | | | | | | | |
| 1 to 3 | x x x x | | | | | | | |
| 3 to 5 -0.14 x x x | | | | | | | | |
| 5 to 7 | 0.03 0.40 x | | | | | | | |
| 7 to 10 | 0.05 | 0.37 | 0.80 | х | | | | |

Source: ICE Indices, LLC

Fair Value Model Update

| Exhibit 4 Mean Spread Between Maturity Buckets (Basis Points) | | | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|---|--|--|--|
| Monthly, December 1996-December 2023 | | | | | | | |
| Horizontal Scale Value Minus Vertical Scale Value | | | | | | | |
| Years ↓→ 1 to 3 3 to 5 5 to 7 7 to 10 | | | | | | | |
| 1 to 3 | | | | | | | |
| 3 to 5 -10 x x x | | | | | | | |
| 5 to 7 20 31 x x | | | | | | | |
| 7 to 10 | 61 | 71 | 41 | Х | | | |

| Exhibit 5 Standard Deviation of Spread Between Maturity Buckets (Basis Points) | | | | | | |
|--|------------|------------|---------------|---------|--|--|
| Monthly, December 1996-December 2023 | | | | | | |
| Horizonta | l Scale Va | alue Minus | Vertical Scal | e Value | | |
| Years ↓→ | 1 to 3 | 3 to 5 | 5 to 7 | 7 to 10 | | |
| 1 to 3 | | | | | | |
| 3 to 5 145 x x x | | | | | | |
| 5 to 7 175 60 x x | | | | | | |
| 7 to 10 | 204 | 84 | 51 | х | | |

Source: ICE Indices, LLC

At present, no maturity bucket is out of line with another by more than one standard deviation. We consequently recommend no departures from portfolio managers' standard allocations by maturity.

It is likely, however, that attractive opportunities will arise in the not-too-distant future. On August 31, 2022, the 3-5 year bucket outyielded the 7-10 year bucket by 155 bps (9.02% versus 7.47%). The spread at that time was 1.48 standard deviations greater than the historical average of 84 bps. Subsequent returns vindicated our analysis, namely, that trades from 7-10 year maturities to 3-5 year maturities were attractive. Over the next 12 months, the 3-5 year index returned 6.91%, beating the 7-10 year index's 5.68% by 123 bps.

Market-Implied Default Rate

Using the methodology described above in "Distressed Debt's Attractiveness" we calculate a 3.0% one-year market-implied percentage-of-issuers default rate forecast for U.S. speculative grade bonds as of February 28, 2025.

Fair Value Model Update

Undervalued Bonds

Our Undervalued Bond Model identifies non-distressed bonds within the ICE BofA US High Yield Index that are cheaply valued and therefore have a high probability of outperforming the ICE BofA US High Yield Index. The details of our financial-data-driven Undervalued Bond Model are proprietary. Note, however, that past returns for periods detailed here, on bonds selected by our methodology, have received attestation by the institutionally recognized boutique performance measurement consulting and GIPS® standards specialist firm TSG® (also known as The Spaulding Group). Each month we highlight a few currently rich and cheap bonds. Subscribers can view the full current list of 119 bonds (down from 136 last month) at www.fridson.com. The list includes all issues with actual spreads that exceed their modelestimated fair values spreads by at least one standard deviation. Bonds included in this list can be viewed as prime candidates for additions to high yield managers' portfolios, possibly subject to their analysts' own credit assessment.

Click here for a fuller description of this model.

The present roster of undervalued bonds is spread over 17 industries. Most heavily represented in the current list is Energy, with 18 bonds, up from 13 last month. The next most distress-intensive industries are Financial services (16 bonds) and Basic Industry (12 bonds).

Our methodology does not simply characterize bonds as cheap because they are trading exceptionally wide in absolute terms versus their industry/rating peers or their historical averages. Our current list of 119 bonds (down from 136 in the prior month) includes 26 bonds with option-adjusted spreads narrower than the ICE BofA US High Yield Index's +287 bps (all data as of February 28, 2025).

This month our highlighted selection of issues from the full list that is available to subscribers at www.fridson.com focuses on Energy, where the number of undervalued bonds increased notably in February. The bonds identified as cheap run the gamut in terms of spread and rating.

| Cheap Bonds February 2025 | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------|-----------|--|--|
| Issuer | Coupon (%) | Maturity | <u>Industry</u> | Rating* | OAS (bps) | | |
| Diamond Foreign Asset | 8.5 | 10/1/2030 | Energy | BB1 | 292 | | |
| Valaris Ltd. | 8.375 | 4/30/2030 | Energy | BB3 | 353 | | |
| CVR Energy | 8.5 | 1/15/2029 | Energy | B2 | 476 | | |
| New Fortress Energy | 6.5 | 9/30/2026 | Energy | В3 | 651 | | |
| Nabors Industries | 8 | 5/15/2027 | Energy | CCC3 | 905 | | |

*ICE Indices Composite

This Research is for information purposes only. While we believe the information contained herein to be reliable, FridsonVision LLC ("Company") does not warrant its accuracy.

The information is not intended as an offer or solicitation of any security or financial instrument. Accordingly, Company gives no representation or warranty of reliability, completeness or accuracy of such information or endorse any Research displayed or distributed to you.

You acknowledge that any reliance upon any such Research is at your sole risk, and that this Research does not constitute an offer to sell or a solicitation of an offer to buy any product which may be referenced in this Research.

The information and materials contained in these pages and the terms, conditions and descriptions that appear are subject to change without notice.

FridsonVision High Yield Strategy

FridsonVision LLC

Head of Research: Martin Fridson, CFA

Quantitative Research Analyst:Jack Beyda

Research Analysts: Shaurya Thakur Weiming Zhao

For Information About FridsonVision High Yield Strategy:

Research Questions: info@fridson.com

Subscriptions: www.fridson.com

Copyright © 2024 by FridsonVision LLC