

# US Equity Strategy

## If History Were A Perfect Guide ...

### Stocks Would Be In A World Of Trouble Here

#### Equity Strategy

Americas

#### In Today's Report:

#### A contraction in forward EPS is still the biggest threat for U.S. equities ahead:

Every bear market of the past 50 years has witnessed an actual decline in S&P 500 forward earnings. Moreover, earnings expectations for the S&P 500 have fallen in the wake of 7 of the past 8 Fed tightening cycles.

**The earnings landscape has already deteriorated and will likely get worse:** The consensus year-over-year growth rate in S&P 500 forward earnings is down to a mere 1% from a peak of 23% in September of 2018. Forward earnings are already contracting in the Midcap and Smallcap indices.

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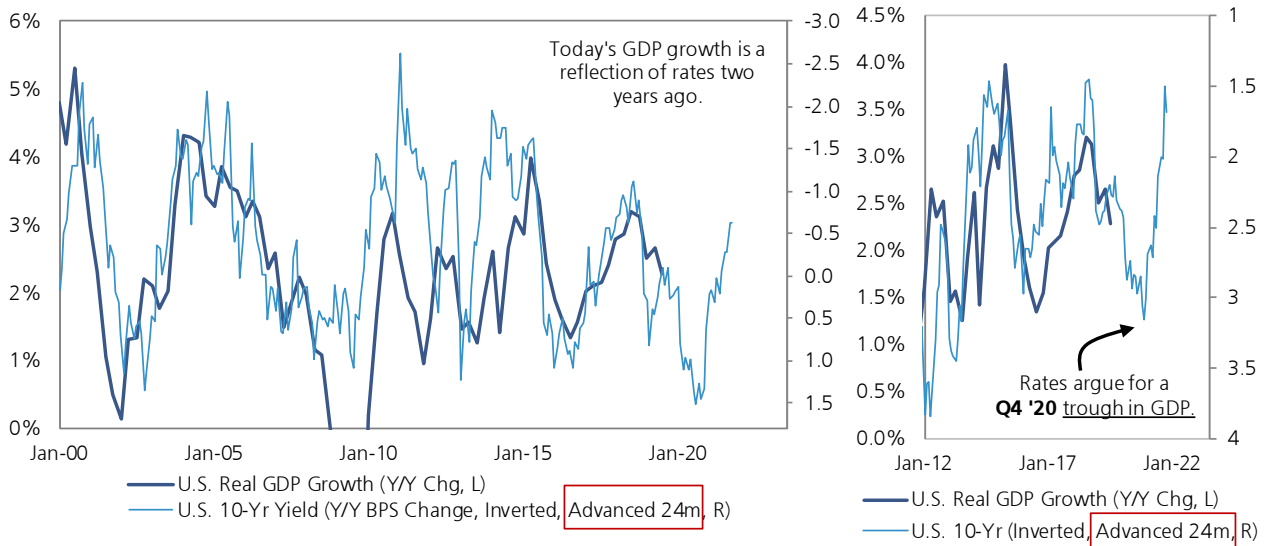
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#### The Q4 2018 Cycle Peak In Rates Argues That U.S. GDP Will Bottom In Q4 2020



Source: FactSet, UBS

#### Rates argue that real GDP growth will continue to slow through Q4 of 2020:

It takes about two years historically for a change in interest rates to be fully reflected in the U.S. economy. The November 2018 peak in the 10-year bond yield argues for a trough in U.S. real GDP sometime in late 2020.

#### The S&P 500 has historically been able to discount a low in GDP with a lead time of 3-7 months:

The S&P 500 has begun to discount an economic recovery sometime between 3 and 7 months before the low point in U.S. GDP in the economic slowdowns of the past 50 years.

#### If history were a perfect guide, the S&P 500 would trough in Q2 of 2020 and rebound thereafter:

Should the economy bottom in Q4 of 2020, as interest rates suggest, then history argues the S&P 500 would begin to price in a sustainable recovery sometime between April and August of 2020.

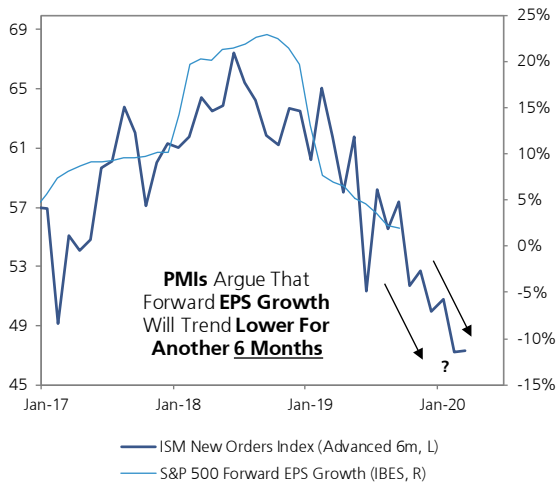
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# The Greatest Risk To U.S. Equities In 2019 ... Negative Earnings Expectations

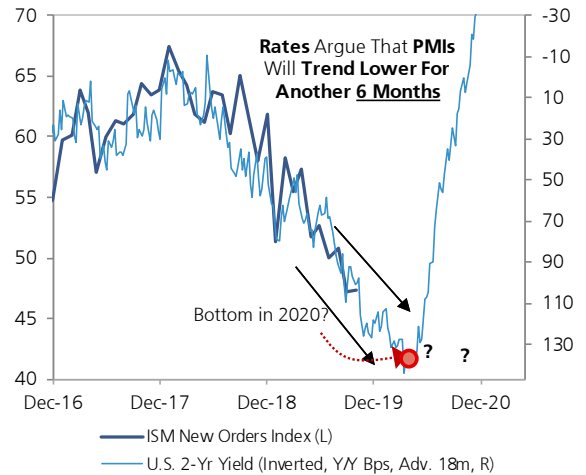
The S&P 500 has remained rather resilient in the last few weeks after a rocky start to the month of October. Some market participants are pointing to the Fed's past and potentially-future rate cuts as the reason for the market's buoyant response in the face of slowing economic prospects. This seems implausible to us since rates and equities are currently **positively** correlated. This means that lower rates would mean lower equities, which has indeed been the reaction after the last two rate cuts. We continue to see earnings as THE catalyst most likely to alter the equity landscape from here. Forward EPS growth for the S&P 500 is down to a mere 1% and leading economic indicators (LEIs) argue that the deceleration is set to continue. Moreover, the lagged effects of last year's Fed rate hikes point to further weakness in LEIs in the coming months. All and all, this adds up to S&P 500 EPS slowing well into H2'20.

## LEIs Like The ISM Argue For Slower Earnings ...



Source: FactSet, UBS

## ... And Past Rates Argue For Even Weaker LEIs



Source: FactSet, UBS

Across history, earnings expectations (forward earnings) crossing into negative territory have been a key catalyst for investors. In fact, most bear markets in the S&P 500 have been periods in which earnings were declining. There have been a few instances where the S&P 500 managed to rise when earnings were falling, barring the beginning of an economic recovery when LEIs were beginning to turn up, fueling P/E's higher. Ultimately, the most vulnerable macro backdrop for equities occurs when forward earnings growth turns negative as LEIs are trending downward (pushing P/E's lower). This is typically a combination seen in the latter stages of a slowdown, as the chart below highlights.

## A Contraction In Earnings Is THE Catalyst To A Bear Market Across History

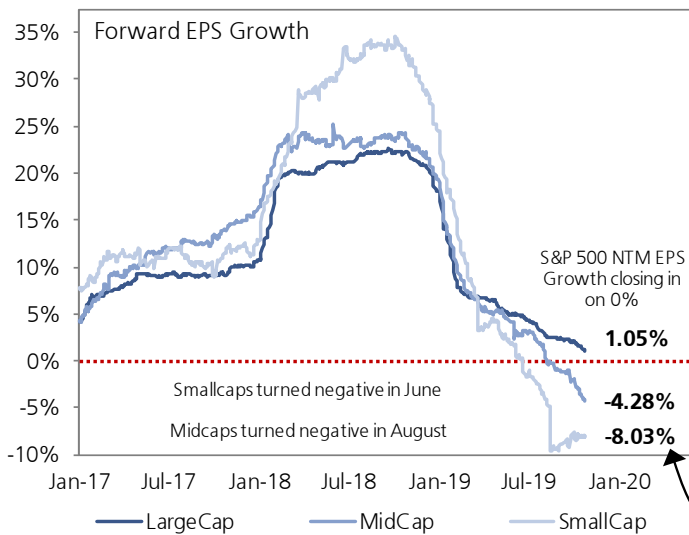


Source: FactSet, UBS

# The Landscape For U.S. Earnings Has Already Deteriorated Tremendously

Long gone are the days when S&P 500 forward earnings growth was in double-digit territory. Indeed, it's hard to believe that just 13 months ago earnings expectations were up 23% (September 2018). The deceleration has been abrupt given the roll-off effect from last year's corporate tax cuts. Forward earnings growth now sits at a paltry 1.05% while expectations are already negative in the midcap and smallcap S&P indices. At this pace, we would expect to see a negative print on S&P 500 forward earnings growth sometime in the coming months.

## Earnings Expectations For The S&P 500 Closing In On Negative Territory



## # of Companies With Negative EPS Growth

	Start of 2019	Today
S&P 500	68	160
S&P 400	81	176
S&P 600	172	304

There are more companies now with negative earnings growth.

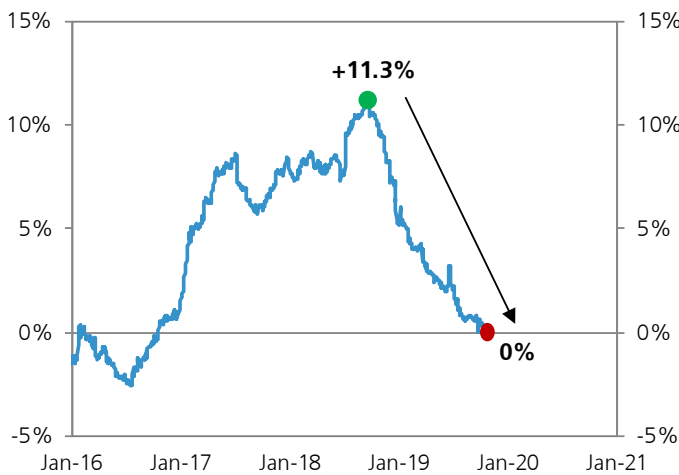
## Date Forward EPS Growth Went Negative

S&P 500	? (Current pace argues for Nov. '19)
S&P 400	August '19 (2 consecutive months)
S&P 600	June '19 (4 consecutive months)

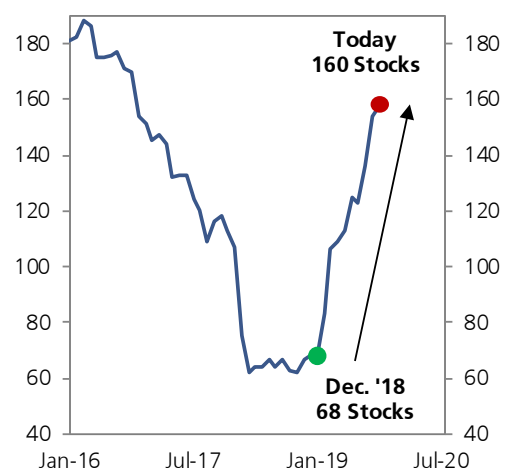
Source: FactSet, UBS

There are many ways to assess the health of S&P 500 earnings, but at this stage no matter how you slice it, the trend is slowing. One measure of underlying earnings (Forward EBIT) that we like to monitor is already down to zero growth. This is likely due to the fact that EBIT was less impacted than overall EPS by the tax cuts of 2018. Meanwhile, breadth in S&P earnings expectations also looks paltry. Indeed, there are now 160 companies in the S&P 500 with negative earnings expectations from just 68 at the beginning of the year. Note that over half of the S&P 600 Small Index constituents have negative expectations and the S&P 400 is also faced with limiting breadth. While the S&P 500 has fared better than other indices historically, that is not enough to keep the index up once earnings turn negative.

## S&P 500 Forward EBIT Growth Already At 0%



## Number of Companies With EPS Growth < 0

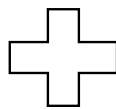


Source: FactSet, UBS

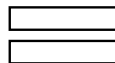
# Interest Rates Argue For Another 12 Months Of Slower Earnings From Here

Historically there has been about a six-month lead time between leading indicators (i.e., ISM New Orders Index) and S&P 500 forward earnings growth, as illustrated below. Furthermore, the lagged effects of the Fed's tightening cycle are still in the pipeline and argue for a low in the ISM New Orders Index some time next Spring. All and all, this suggests that **S&P 500 forward earnings growth could slow into the Fall of 2020.**

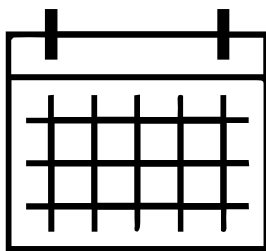
The past decline in the ISM New Orders Index suggests there are at least **6 more months of downside for earnings expectations ahead**



The ISM New Orders Index still has about **6 more months** of past monetary tightening to digest and is set to decline further

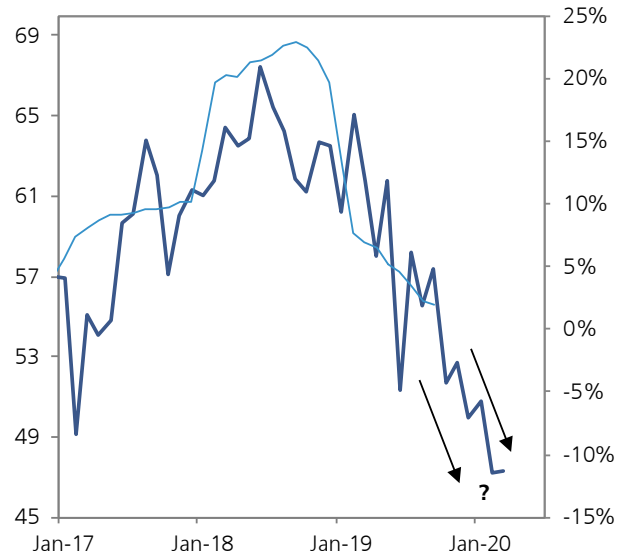


**~12 months** until trough in Forward EPS growth



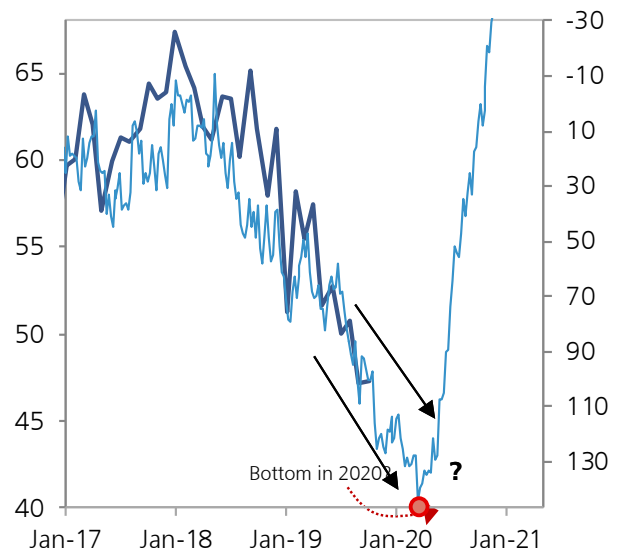
**Earnings Bottom in Sept. 2020?**

**PMIs Argue That Forward EPS Growth Will Trend Lower For Another 6 Months**



— ISM New Orders Index (Advanced 6m, L)  
— S&P 500 Forward EPS Growth (IBES, R)

**Rates Argue That PMIs Will Trend Lower For Another 6 Months**



— ISM New Orders Index (L)  
— U.S. 2-Yr Yield (Inverted, Y/Y Bps, Adv. 18m, R)

Source: FactSet, UBS

# S&P 500 Returns Historically Abysmal When EPS And P/E Are Both Contracting

Leading indicators have been steadily falling since the end of 2017 and earnings have lost steam. This slowing dynamic has pushed the equity market into what we like to call the "Risk-Off" phase of the business cycle. Risk-Off is characterized by P/Es trending lower as a result of slowing LEIs, while earnings growth remains positive, albeit slowing ... all of this typically adds up to subpar returns for the equity market. This backdrop sometimes turns worse if LEIs continue to slow (pushing P/Es lower still) while earnings growth turns negative. This combination usually turns investors very pessimistic and is what we call the "Risk-Aversion" phase of the cycle. **The S&P 500 has been down double digits 7 out of the past 8 times we have seen Risk-Aversion in the wake of Fed rate hikes.**

## Analysis Of S&P 500 Returns Across Eight Fed-Driven Business Cycles ~50 Years

PMI Phase	1974	1980	1981	1984	1991	1995	2001	2008	Average
Risk-On	10.8%	23.1%	27.2%	66.9%	20.4%	-3.2%	47.9%	16.3%	<b>28.4%</b>
Risk-Off	-16.4%	4.0%	-3.6%	-1.0%	0.4%	13.7%	2.5%	-4.3%	<b>1.7%</b>
Risk-Aversion	-33.0%	-11.7%	-16.8%	-12.7%	-19.9%	26.0%	-24.2%	-53.9%	<b>-16.2%</b>

The historical exception covered in Annex on page 9.

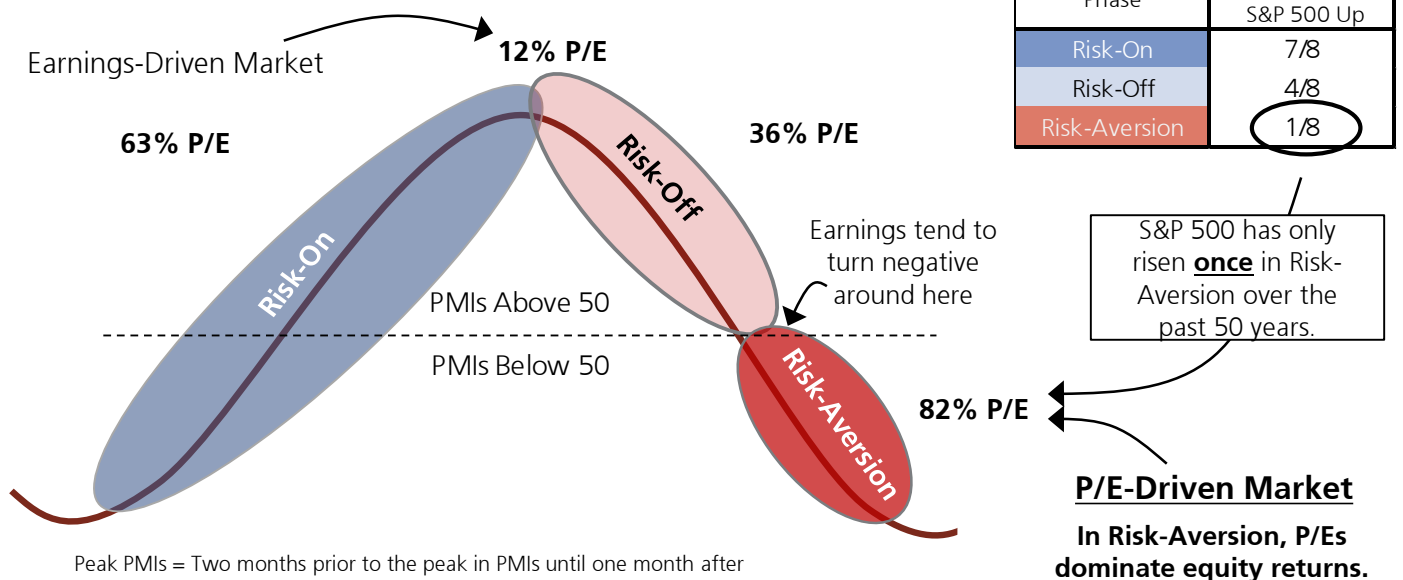
PMI Phase	Description	Historical Odds
Risk-On	PMIs Rising	7/8
Risk-Off	PMIs Falling > 50	4/8
Risk-Aversion	PMIs falling < 50	1/8

The S&P 500 is almost always up in the Risk-On phase of the business cycle.

The S&P 500 has been up only **once** in the last eight Risk-Aversion cycles of the past 45 years.

Source: FactSet, UBS

## ISM < 50 Usually Spells Problems As Earnings Turn Negative Leading P/E To Compress Further



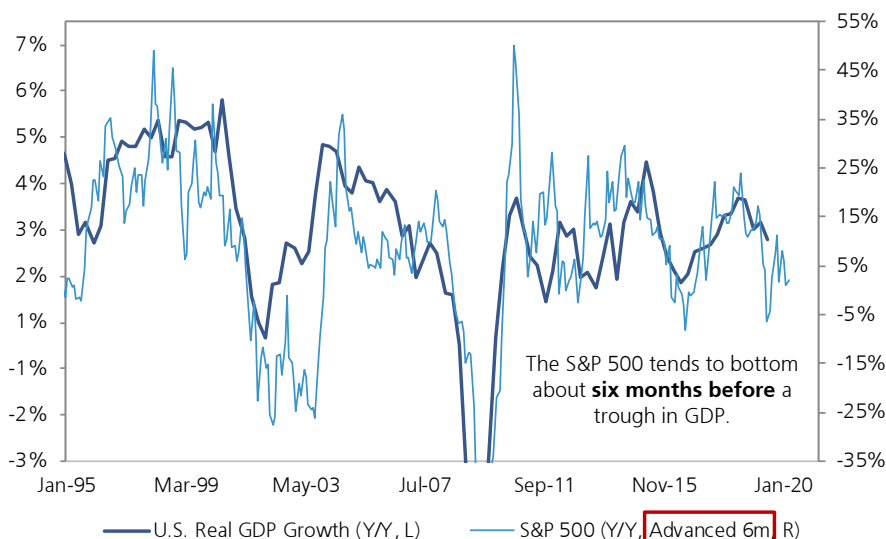
Source: FactSet, UBS

The significance of P/Es as a contributor to equity returns fluctuates around the business cycle, as the relative importance of sentiment and earnings change. On average, P/Es hit their peak influence during the Risk-Aversion phase where they are responsible for 82% of the S&P 500's return. This is not good news at a time when downward pressure on the multiple is intensifying via increasing risks, declining earnings growth, and deteriorating sentiment. This is the period in which we typically see the worst performance from equities, and it is why today our biggest concern for the S&P 500 is forward earnings turning negative.

## U.S. Equities Are A Discounting Mechanism For Future Economic Activity (i.e., GDP)

The S&P 500 is a leading indicator of the economy. In fact, it is such a reliable discounting mechanism for future economic activity that the Conference Board includes it in its official Leading Economic Indicator index. As the chart below illustrates, the year-over-year change in the S&P 500 (sometimes called the S&P 500's return) leads GDP across history by about six months. In the current cycle, the S&P 500's return topped out in late 2017, about six months before the Q2 '18 peak in U.S. GDP growth. Going forward, we would expect stocks to bottom about six months before the trough in U.S. GDP.

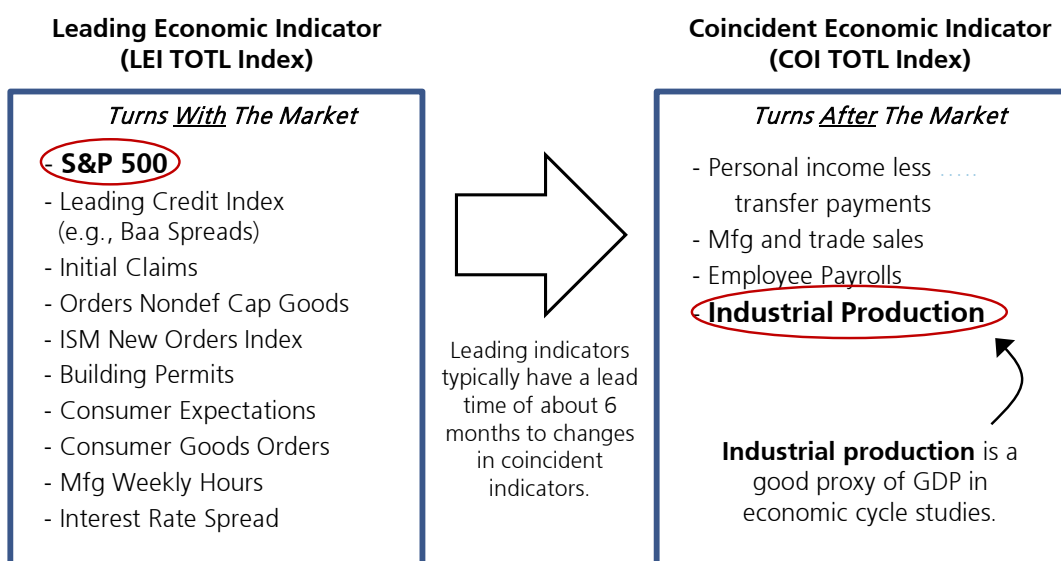
### Stocks Usually Begin To Price Changes In U.S. Economy About Six Months Ahead Of Time



Source: FactSet, UBS

Truth be told, the S&P 500 is not the only reliable gauge of future activity across time. Indeed, most LEIs end up changing course about six months before the economy does. Similarly, stocks are not only a gauge of future GDP. Indeed, it is easy to show that the S&P 500's return leads other coincident indicators of the economy, like monthly Payrolls or Industrial Production. In fact, when doing historical analyses on the S&P 500's discounting mechanism, we often use Industrial Production instead of GDP, given its monthly periodicity.

### The S&P 500 Is Officially An LEI And Often Leads GDP And Other Coincident Data By About Six Months



Source: The Conference Board, UBS

## S&P 500 Discounting Mechanism: Stocks Historically Have A ~6 Month Visibility

A review of past Fed-induced slowdowns shows 7 major episodes over the last 50 years. There is also 1995 but as we cover in the Annex on page 9, the economy barely slowed in that particular episode and S&P 500 earnings did not turn negative. So that is not a great period to use when studying the discounting mechanism of the S&P 500. Looking at the other episodes, however, shows that the S&P 500 typically bottoms 5 to 7 months before GDP does. There are two exceptions: the recession of 1980 and the financial crisis of 2008, in which equities troughed 4 and 3 months before GDP, respectively. As we see it, it looks like the more severe the slowdown, the shorter the window of visibility.

### The S&P 500 Has Had A Consistent Track Record Of Having About A 6-Month Discounting Window

Historical Cycles	Trough In Economy (GDP)	Lead Time of Stocks to Economy (months)
1974	Q1 '75	5
1980	Q3 '80	4
1981	Q3 '82	5
1984	Q2 '85	7
1991	Q1 '91	5
2001	Q4 '01	7
2008	Q2 '09	3

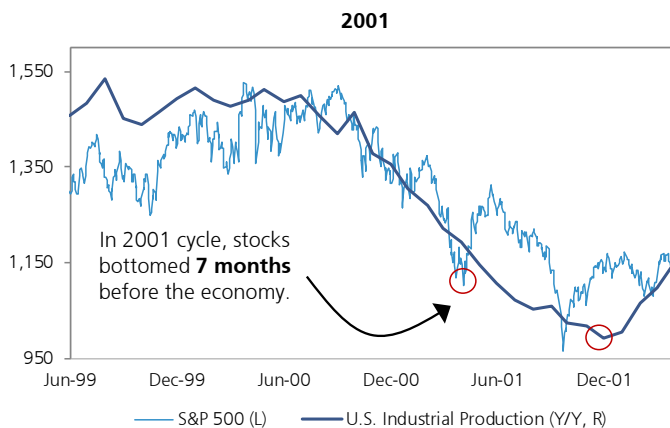
Seven Fed-induced business cycles where **monetary tightening led to a trough in GDP about 24 months after that last rate hike.**

The S&P 500's ability to discount a trough in the U.S. economy has been somewhere in the range of **3 – 7 months** in past Fed-induced business cycles.

\* 1995 cycle not included in analysis (see pg 9)

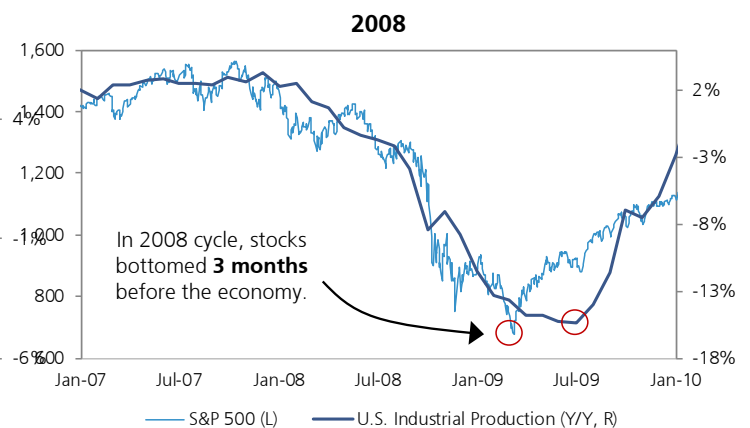
#### 2001 Example:

The S&P 500 Began To Discount The Coming Recovery About **7 Months Before The Trough**



#### 2008 Example:

The S&P 500 Began To Discount The Coming Recovery About **3 Months Before The Trough**



Source: FactSet, UBS

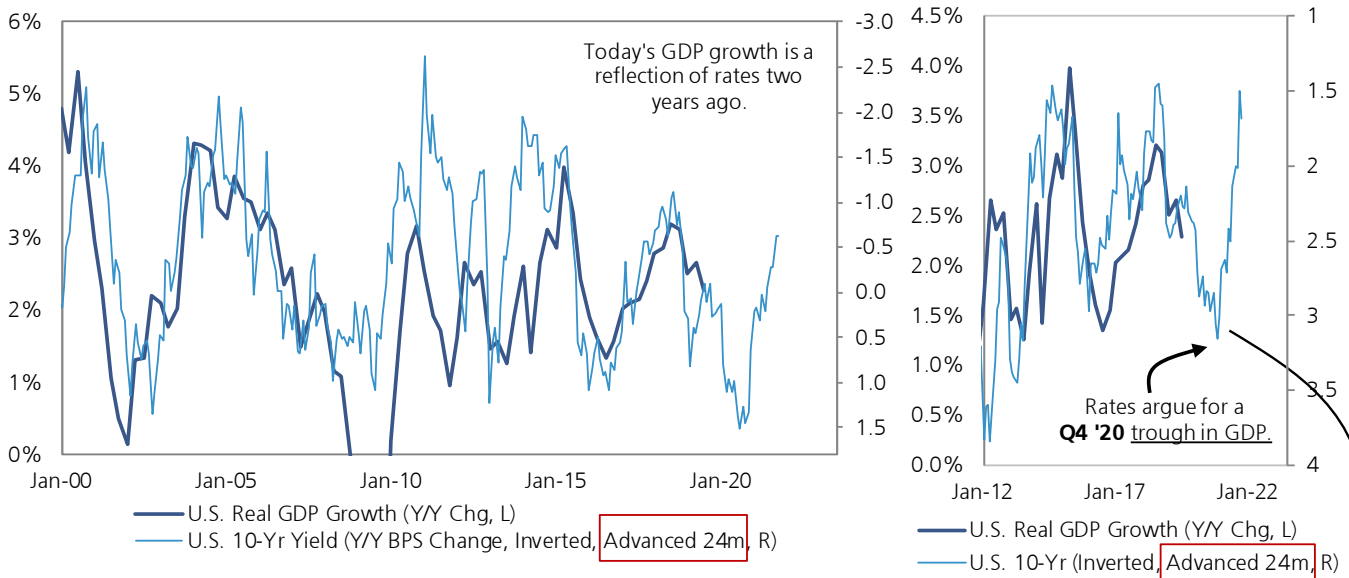
The longest discounting window we have seen between the stock market and the economy over the past 50 years is a seven-month lead time. This occurred twice, once in 1984 and then again in 2001. At the other end of the spectrum is the financial crisis of 2008 where equities only managed to trough in March of 2009, or about three months before the economy put in a low for the cycle. Looking at these patterns one does wonder whether the severity of a downturn impacts the stock market's ability to discount economic activity. Regardless, what is clear is that equities tend to bottom about six months before the economy does, and there has not been an episode with a longer lead time than 7 months, at least not in the past 50 years.



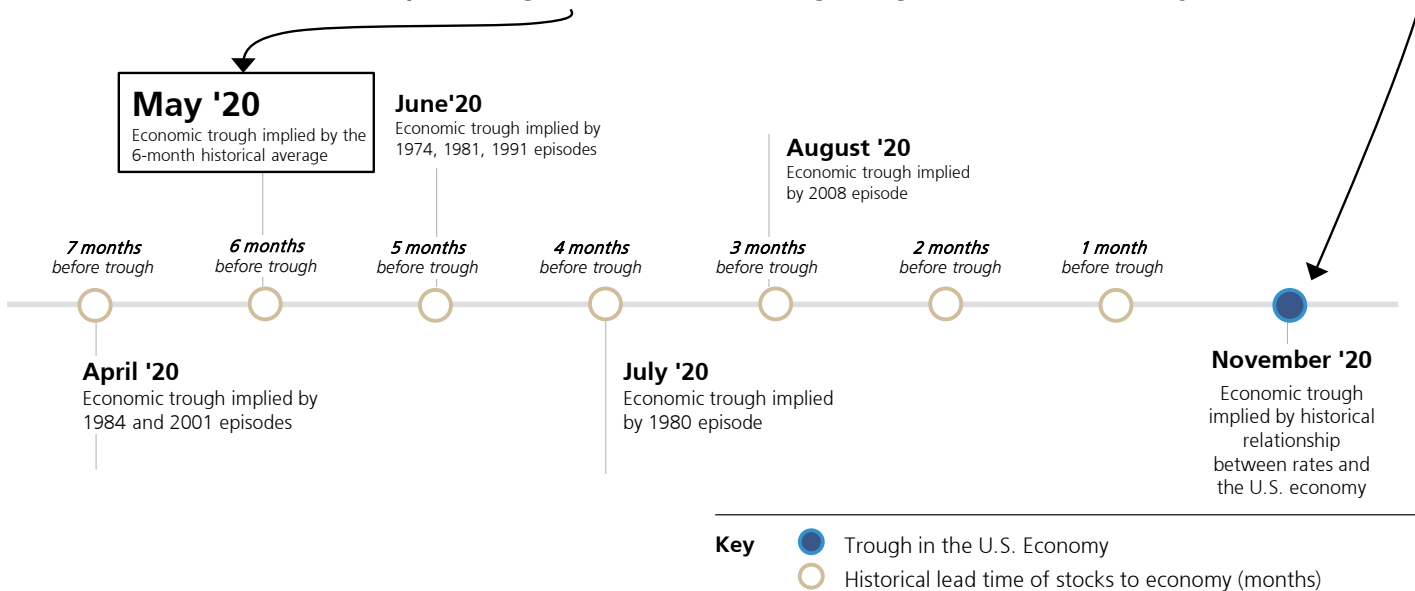
# If History Were A Perfect Guide Then Stocks Would Bottom In Q2 Of 2020

Another relationship that has been very stable across time is that of interest rates and their impact on future growth. Indeed, across the decades, it takes about 24 months for a change in interest rates to be fully reflected in economic activity. This is why most GDP forecasting models are able to predict the future path of the economy by about two years. As the chart below illustrates, taking the 10-year bond yield and inverting it has in itself been a great forecasting tool of future growth in real U.S. GDP. In the current cycle where the 10-year bond yield peaked in November of 2018, this relationship would argue for a bottom in the economy in November of 2020, or essentially in Q4 of next year.

## The Q4 2018 Cycle Peak In Rates Argues That The U.S. Slowdown Will Continue Through Q4 2020



## When Will Equities Begin To Discount The Beginning Of The Next Recovery?



Source: FactSet, UBS

There is a lot of "IF" in the following, but if history were to be a perfect guide then the economy would bottom exactly as interest rates suggest in November of 2020. Now adding another "IF" to this and using the historical lead times seen across history would leave stocks at their lows sometime between 3 and 7 months before the November low point in the economy. This would mean that the stock market could finally begin to discount a recovery sometime between April and August of next year. Anything earlier than April would be making history.

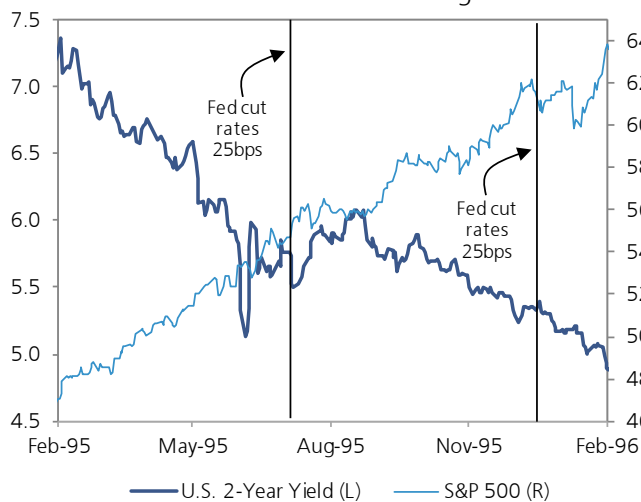


## Annex: No, It's Not The 90s: Why Rate Cuts Likely Won't Save Equities This Time

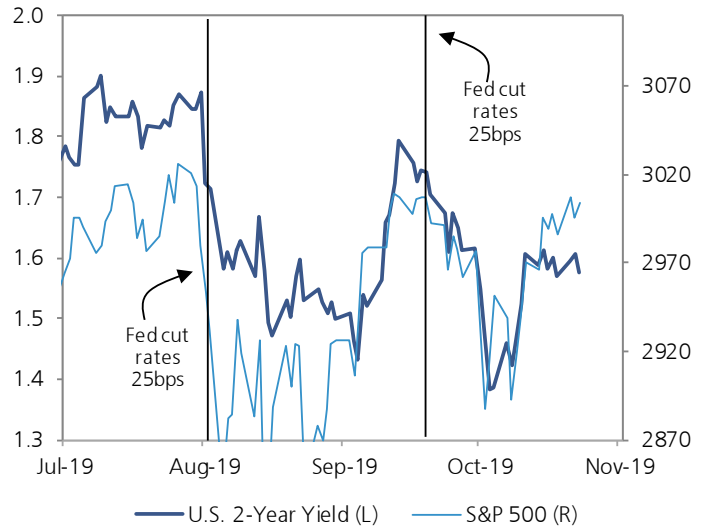
Investors anchored on a 1990s style "rate cut rally" are likely to be disappointed by the impact of any additional Fed rate cuts this year. The S&P 500 and interest rates moved in opposite directions earlier this year. This led many to conclude that the equity markets were behaving like they did in the mid-90s when the S&P 500 was able to rise in the face of deteriorating data (see chart on the left). This did not last, however, as equities and rates are now back in sync (see chart on the right), arguing that rate cuts likely won't help stocks this time around.

### P/E's and Rates Were Inversely Correlated In The 1990s ... But NOT In The 2000s

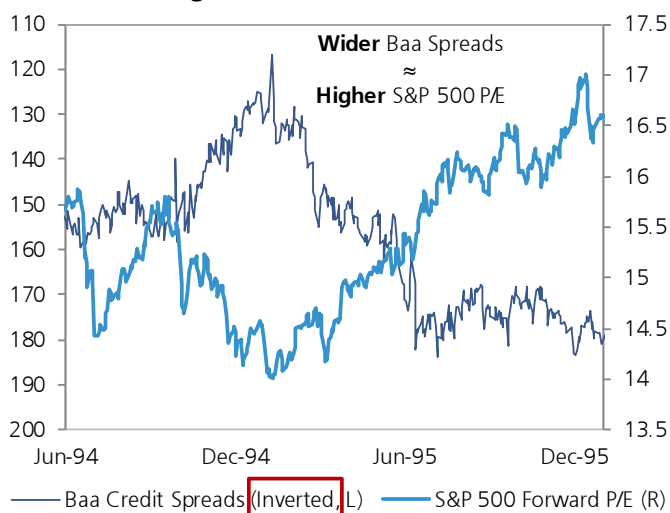
**1995**  
**Rates And Equities Negatively Correlated**  
 Lower Rates = S&P 500 Rising



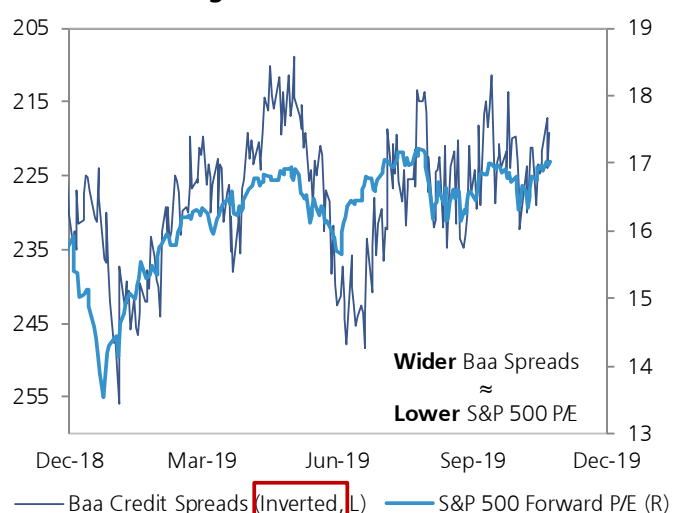
**Present**  
**Rates And Equities Positively Correlated**  
 Lower Rates = S&P 500 Falling



**1995**  
**Baa Spreads and P/E's Positively Correlated**  
**Higher Risks = Lower P/E's**



**Present**  
**Baa Spreads and P/E's Inversely Correlated**  
**Higher Risks = Lower P/E's**



Source: FactSet, Bloomberg, UBS

The two charts directly above focus in on the comparison between today's cycle and the one from 1995. Twenty-five years ago, P/E's and credit spreads moved in the same direction, where wider spreads (i.e., higher risks) were synonymous with P/E expansion. Admittedly, in that world the S&P 500 still gained ground even as the PMI fell into contraction territory below 50. Contrast this with the chart on the right, which shows the relationship between P/E's and credit spreads today inversely correlated. In this backdrop, higher risks are synonymous with P/E contraction. We do not foresee a scenario where Fed rate cuts can sustainably boost equities as the PMIs continue to trend lower through the Spring of 2020, and in turn, market multiples likely contract until leading indicators bottom.

### **Valuation Method and Risk Statement**

Equity market returns are influenced by corporate earnings, interest rates, risk premia, as well as other variables influenced by the business cycle. The outlook for any and all of these variables is subject to change.

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Buy	FSR is > 6% above the MRA.	45%	29%
Neutral	FSR is between -6% and 6% of the MRA.	40%	29%
Sell	FSR is > 6% below the MRA.	15%	21%
Short-Term Rating	Definition	Coverage <sup>3</sup>	IB Services <sup>4</sup>
Buy	Stock price expected to rise within three months from the time the rating was assigned because of a specific catalyst or event.	<1%	<1%
Sell	Stock price expected to fall within three months from the time the rating was assigned because of a specific catalyst or event.	<1%	<1%

Source: UBS. Rating allocations are as of 30 September 2019.

1: Percentage of companies under coverage globally within the 12-month rating category.

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