

CHIEF INVESTMENT OFFICE

# Viewpoint by Charts

May 2025

## The Chief Investment Office Nine Stages of Market Uncertainty To Recovery

#### **Reset Phase**

- Unforeseen event unfolds quickly
- Repricing of risk
- Liquidity needs arise

### **Relief Phase**

- Policy action takes place
- Significant relief rallies occur

#### **Re-examine Phase**

- Period of choppy trade
- Stable growth confirmation begins

### Re-growth Phase

- The climb back environment unfolds
- A new normal builds

Source: Chief Investment Office as of May 6, 2025. CIO views are subject to change. FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY.

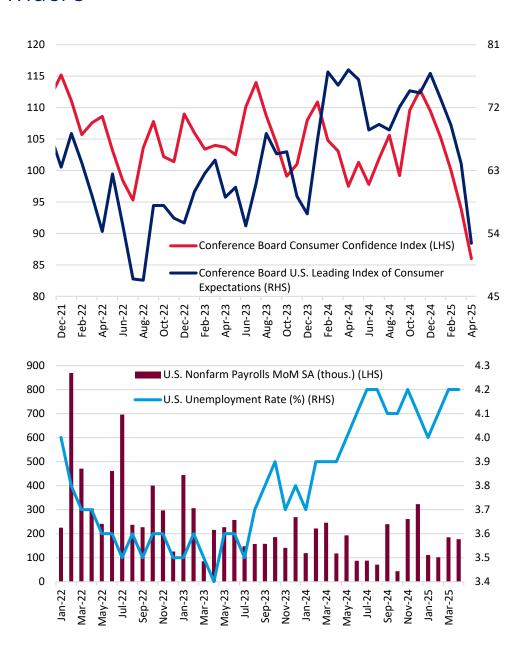
Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith Incorporated (also referred to as "MLPF&S" or "Merrill") makes available certain investment products sponsored, managed, distributed or provided by companies that are affiliates of Bank of America Corporation ("BofA Corp."). MLPF&S is a registered broker-dealer, registered investment adviser, Member SIPC and a wholly owned subsidiary of BofA Corp. Investment products:

|   | Are Not FDIC Insured | Are Not Bank Guaranteed | May Lose Value |  |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------|--|
| Diagram and last many fau improvement diaglacture information |                      |                         |                |  |

Please see last page for important disclosure information.



## Macro



- Soft data, like consumer confidence and future consumer expectations, has deteriorated as uncertainty persists. Meanwhile, hard data, like nonfarm payrolls and the unemployment rate, indicates that real levels of economic activity are still relatively strong.
- We continue to expect that economic growth will resume its firmer footing after this reset period in the U.S.

### **CIO Key Considerations**

Against an uncertain macro backdrop, we continue to emphasize diversification across and within asset classes.

Source: Bloomberg as of May 2, 2025.

Past performance is no guarantee of future results. FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. Indexes are unmanaged and do not take into account fees or expenses. It is not possible to invest directly in an index. Please refer to index definitions and important disclosures at the end of this presentation.



# CIO Portfolio Strategy

#### **CIO Asset Classes and Sector Views** Sector Valuations Slightly Neutral Overweight Underweight Underweight Current Fwd P/E ● 15-Year Average Asset Class Weighting **Global Equities** S&P 500 U.S. Large Cap Growth O Information U.S. Large Cap Value Technology U.S. Small Cap Growth Consumer U.S. Small Cap Value Discretionary International Developed **Emerging Markets** Healthcare Global Fixed Income **U.S. Governments** Financials U.S. Mortgages Communication **U.S.** Corporates Services International Fixed Income U.S. High Yield Industrials U.S. Investment-grade Tax Exempt Consumer U.S. High Yield Tax Exempt Staples Weight Sector **Financials** Energy Utilities **Consumer Discretionary** Real Estate **Communication Services** Materials Information Technology Healthcare Utilities Industrials Real Estate 10 20 25 30 35 15 **Consumer Staples** Forward Price-to-Earnings (P/E) for S&P 500 Sectors Energy Materials

- We maintain an overweight to Equities, driven by U.S. Equities, with a preference for Large-caps over Small-caps, and we are neutral outside of the U.S. We still favor a significant allocation to bonds in a well-diversified portfolio. Through periods of volatility, we emphasize portfolio diversification and are buyers on weakness.
- This month, the Global Wealth & Investment Management Investment Strategy Committee (GWIM ISC) did not make any tactical asset allocation adjustments.

### **CIO Key Considerations**

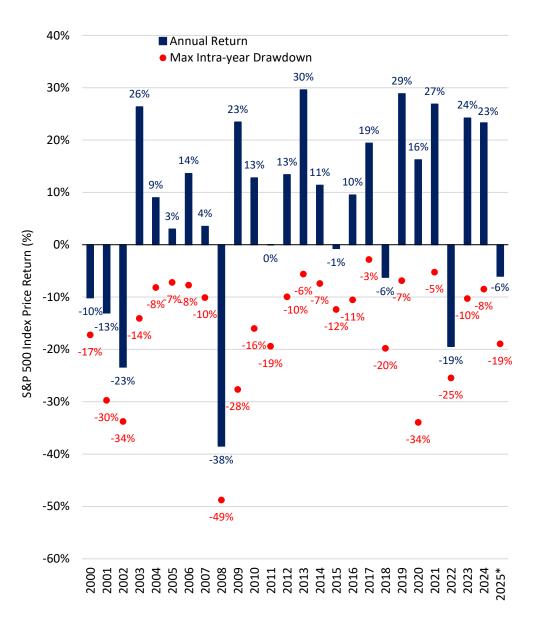
Portfolio diversification across and within asset classes in a core framework with targeted thematic overlays is our preferred strategy.

Please refer to the May 2025 Viewpoint for more detail weightings information. Sector Valuations source: Bloomberg as of May 2, 2025. The Chief Investment Office (CIO) views and opinions expressed are for informational purposes only, are made as of the date of this material, and are subject to change without notice. All sector and asset allocation recommendations must be considered in the context of an individual investor's goals, time horizon, liquidity needs and risk tolerance.

Past performance is no guarantee of future results. FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. Indexes are unmanaged and do not take into account fees or expenses. It is not possible to invest directly in an index. Please refer to index definitions and important disclosures at the end of this presentation.



# Equities



- Equity market volatility spiked in April and may continue as uncertainty persists. Against this backdrop, it's important to remember that volatility is normal.
- Since 2000, annual returns for the S&P 500 have been greater than the maximum intra-year drawdown.

### **CIO Key Considerations**

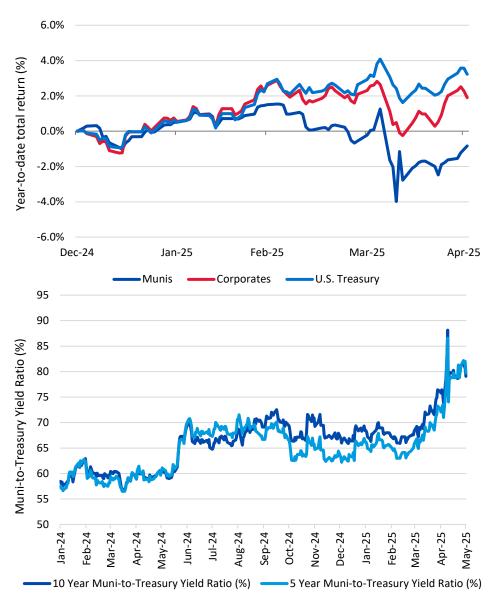
While near term volatility is likely to persist, we expect Equities to regain a sense of stability as the fog lifts and the path forward becomes clearer. We maintain an Equity overweight relative to our strategic targets.

Past performance is no guarantee of future results. FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. Indexes are unmanaged and do not take into account fees or expenses. It is not possible to invest directly in an index. Please refer to index definitions and important disclosures at the end of this presentation.

<sup>\*</sup>Year-to-date through April 28, 2025. Source: Bloomberg. Data as of April 28, 2025.



## Fixed Income



- Within Fixed Income, tax-exempt bonds (munis) have significantly underperformed taxable securities year-to-date due to a combination of technical and fundamental factors.
- However, we believe that technical and fundamental conditions should strengthen from here, potentially poising valuations to rally over the rest of the year.
- In all-Fixed Income high-tax-sensitivity portfolios, this month we move to exhibit a preference for Investment-grade Tax-Exempt and High Yield Tax- Exempt relative to Investment-grade Corporates.

### **CIO Key Considerations**

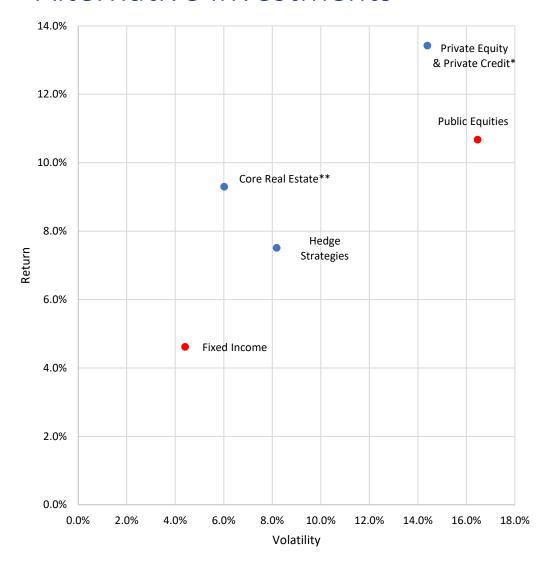
While U.S. Investment-grade Tax Exempt appears more attractive, we maintain a slight underweight to favor our Equity overweight in multi asset class portfolios.

Source: Bloomberg. Data as of May 1, 2025. Indexes referenced: Munis = Bloomberg Municipal Bond Index, Corporates = Bloomberg U.S. Corporate Index, U.S. Treasury = Bloomberg U.S. Treasury Index.

Past performance is no guarantee of future results. FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. Indexes are unmanaged and do not take into account fees or expenses. It is not possible to invest directly in an index. Please refer to index definitions and important disclosures at the end of this presentation.



## Alternative Investments



- Alternative Investments (Alts)<sup>1</sup> have delivered attractive historical return and risk profiles that helped improve portfolio efficiency when implemented in properly diversified and methodical manners.
- Within the Alts asset classes, we see potential tactical opportunities and challenges.

### **CIO Key Considerations**

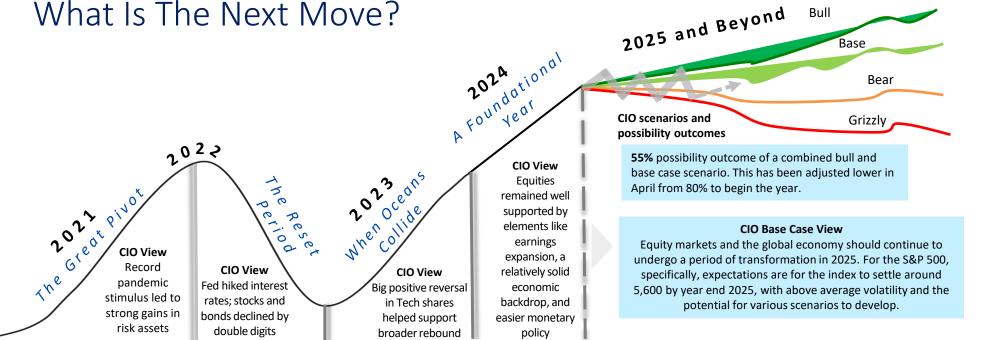
For qualified investors, Alts may help complement traditional Equities and Fixed Income investments.

Sources: Hedge Fund Research HFRI; Cambridge Associates; NCREIF; Bloomberg. Indices referenced: Public Equities (S&P 500 index), Fixed Income (Bloomberg U.S. Aggregate bond index), Hedge Strategies (Hedge Fund Research HFRI Fund Weighted Composite), Core Real Estate (50/50 NCREIF Property /NCREIF Transaction Based; After 06/2020 80% NCREIF Property + 20% FTSE NAREIT Equity REITs Total Return Index), and Private Equity & Private Credit (Cambridge Associates US Private Equity Index (Legacy Version) / US Private Credit Index). Quarterly data from 3/31/1995 – 12/31/2024 referenced. \*Return through 9/30/2024. \*\*Return through 12/31/2024. For illustrative purposes only.

<sup>1</sup>Many products that pursue Alternative Investment strategies, specifically Private Equity and Hedge Funds, are available only to qualified investors. Past performance is no guarantee of future results. FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. Indexes are unmanaged and do not take into account fees or expenses. It is not possible to invest directly in an index. Please refer to index definitions and important disclosures at the end of this presentation.



## What Is The Next Move?



#### **SCENARIO 1 BULL CASE (approximately 10%** possibility outcome)

- Tariffs are negotiated downwards.
- A new economic re-expansion builds, and growth is well above trend in 2025.
- Financial conditions remain easy and inflation trends lower at the same time.
- Yield curve steepens as yields on the backend rise as economic growth increases above trend.
- Long-term bull market continues as earnings rise higher-than-expected through 2025.
- Cyclical areas lead Equity markets with growth stock momentum resurging.
- S&P 500 climbs back well above new highs.

#### **SCENARIO 2 BASE CASE (approximately 45%** possibility outcome)

- Deals are made and some of the announced tariffs are negotiated down.
- U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) overall remains slightly positive, and a recession scenario is avoided, but a negative GDP quarter is likely.
- One-time price increases do not materialize into an "economy-wide" resurgence in inflation.
- Deregulation and tax relief potentially boost growth outlook.
- Fed funds rate is stable for the remainder of the year with the potential for cuts if needed.
- Earnings growth for S&P 500 is lower than previously anticipated but remains positive in 2025.
- U.S. dollar slightly weaker.
- Broader participation within the Equity markets including non-U.S. stocks.
- Sector dispersion remains wide.

#### SCENARIO 3 BEAR CASE (approximately 35% possibility outcome)

- Tariffs add 1 to 1.5% to inflation and subtract a similar amount from GDP growth.
- Stagflation worries build as growth slumps below trend and inflation remains above
- Expectations for monetary policy are recalibrated.
- Earnings could decline slightly more than 10% in 2025.
- Unemployment rate rises above 5% as recession risk increases.
- Defensive areas of the market outperform.
- Cyclical areas underperform and high-quality Growth outperforms low-quality Value.

#### **SCENARIO 4 GRIZZLY CASE (approximately** 10% possibility outcome)

- Tit-for-tat tariffs turn into a full blown "trade
- Sharp economic hard landing, not just deterioration, occurs through 2025.
- Federal Reserve policy requires new emergency measures and aggressive cuts.
- Contains the sharpest fall in earnings by some 20% or more.
- Major widespread stress hits the office property and regional banking sectors.
- Fixed Income significantly outperforms Equities as risk aversion rises sharply.
- U.S. dollar rallies.
- Defensive assets outperform sharply.
- S&P 500 falls further into bear market territory.

Denotes current significant uncertainty sharp volatility. —— Black line represents the lifecycle of the CIO economic process and is not meant to represent any specific investment, index or performance of any kind. Source: CIO. Data as of May 2, 2025. CIO views are subject to change. FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. Economic or financial forecasts are inherently limited and should not be relied on as indicators of future investment performance. Please refer to index definitions and important disclosures at the end of this presentation.



## Index Definitions

Securities indexes assume reinvestment of all distributions and interest payments. Indexes are unmanaged and do not take into account fees or expenses. It is not possible to invest directly in an index. Indexes are all based in U.S. dollars.

Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index is a monthly indicator that measures consumer optimism about the economy and their personal financial situation.

Conference Board U.S. Leading Index of Consumer Expectations is a composite index that aims to predict the future direction of the U.S. economy.

Public Equities/S&P 500 Index is a market-capitalization-weighted index that is widely regarded as the best single gauge of large-cap U.S. equities. The index includes 500 leading companies and covers approximately 80% of available market capitalization.

Munis/Bloomberg Municipal Bond Index is a widely used benchmark that tracks the performance of the US tax-exempt municipal bond market. It's a market-valueweighted index, meaning the inclusion of bonds in the index is based on their relative market capitalization. The index includes a variety of bond types, such as general obligation bonds, revenue bonds, insured bonds, and pre-refunded bonds.

Corporates/Bloomberg U.S. Corporate Index is a benchmark for investment-grade, fixedrate, taxable U.S. corporate bonds. It tracks the performance of USD-denominated securities publicly issued by industrial, utility, and financial institutions. The index serves as a key reference point for portfolios that include investment-grade corporate bonds.

U.S. Treasury/Bloomberg U.S. Treasury Index is a market index that tracks the performance of fixed-rate, nominal debt issued by the U.S. Treasury. It includes a wide range of Treasury securities, but excludes Treasury bills and STRIPS.

Fixed Income/Bloomberg US Aggregate Bond Index is a broad-based flagship benchmark that measures the investment grade, US dollar-denominated, fixed-rate taxable bond market. The index includes Treasuries, government-related and corporate securities, fixed-rate agency MBS, ABS and CMBS (agency and non-agency).

Hedge Strategies/HFRI Fund Weighted Composite Index is a benchmark that tracks the performance of a group of single-manager hedge funds. It's a global index that's equally weighted, meaning each fund has the same weight in the index.

Core Real Estate/NCREIF Property/NCREIF Transaction Based measures the composite total rate of return of a large pool of individual commercial real estate properties acquired in the private market for investment purposes; A real estate market index that's equally weighted between transaction and appraisal indices.

FTSE Nareit All Equity REITs Index Total Return is a free-float adjusted, market capitalization-weighted index of U.S. equity REITs. Constituents of the index include all tax-qualified REITs with more than 50 percent of total assets in qualifying real estate assets other than mortgages secured by real property.

Private Equity & Private Credit/Cambridge Associates US Private Equity Index is a calculation of the average return of a group of private equity funds. It's based on data from a range of private equity funds, including buyout, growth equity, and energy funds.

Cambridge Associates US Private Credit Index contains the historical performance records of 180+ private investment fund managers and 782 institutional quality funds raised between 1986 and 2024.

S&P 500 sub-sectors and industry groups Global Industry Classification Standard (GICS®)/S&P 500 Total Return Index, including Information Technology Total Return (TR) USD; Consumer Discretionary TR USD; Industrials TR USD; Real Estate TR USD; Communication Services TR USD; Materials TR USD; Financials TR USD; Consumer Staples TR USD; Utilities TR USD; Energy TR USD; Healthcare TR USD.



## Important Disclosures

#### Investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal. Past performance is no guarantee of future results.

This material does not take into account a client's particular investment objectives, financial situations, or needs and is not intended as a recommendation, offer, or solicitation for the purchase or sale of any security or investment strategy. Merrill offers a broad range of brokerage, investment advisory (including financial planning) and other services. There are important differences between brokerage and investment advisory services, including the type of advice and assistance provided, the fees charged, and the rights and obligations of the parties. It is important to understand the differences, particularly when determining which service or services to select. For more information about these services and their differences, speak with your Merrill financial advisor.

This information should not be construed as investment advice and is subject to change. It is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended to be either a specific offer by Bank of America, Merrill or any affiliate to sell or provide, or a specific invitation for a consumer to apply for, any particular retail financial product or service that may be available.

The Chief Investment Office (CIO) provides thought leadership on wealth management, investment strategy and global markets; portfolio management solutions; due diligence; and solutions oversight and data analytics. CIO viewpoints are developed for Bank of America Private Bank, a division of Bank of America, N.A., ("Bank of America") and Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith Incorporated ("MLPF&S" or "Merrill"), a registered broker-dealer, registered investment adviser and a wholly owned subsidiary of Bank of America Corporation ("BofA Corp.").

Asset allocation, diversification and rebalancing do not ensure a profit or protect against loss in declining markets.

Merrill assumes no responsibility for any of the foregoing performance information, and does not guarantee the accuracy of the returns which have been provided by the index sponsor, nor verify the validity or accuracy of the self-reported returns of the managers used to calculate the index returns.

Reference to indices, or other measures of relative market performance over a specified period of time (each, an "index") are provided for illustrative purposes only, do not represent a benchmark or proxy for the return or volatility of any particular product, portfolio, or security holding, indices are unmanaged. The figures for the index reflect the reinvestment of dividends but do not reflect the deduction of any fees or expenses which would reduce returns. We strongly recommend that these factors be taken into consideration before an investment decision is made. Neither the Chief Investment Office nor the index sponsor can verify the validity or accuracy of the self reported returns of the managers used to calculate the index returns. The Chief Investment Office does not guarantee the accuracy of the index returns and does not recommend any investment or other decision based on the results presented. The indices referred in the presentation do not reflect the performance of any account or fund managed by Bank of America, Merrill, or their affiliates, or of any other specific fund or account, and do not reflect the deduction of any management or performance fees or expenses. Indices are unmanaged and results shown are not reduced by taxes or transaction costs such as fees. It is not possible to invest directly in an Index.

Investments discussed have varying degrees of risk. Some of the risks involved with equities include the possibility that the value of the stocks may fluctuate in response to events specific to the companies or markets, as well as economic, political or social events in the U.S. or abroad. Stocks of small- and mid-cap companies pose special risks, including possible illiquidity and greater price volatility than stocks of larger, more established companies. Investing in fixed-income securities may involve certain risks, including the credit quality of individual issuers, possible prepayments, market or economic developments and yields and share price fluctuations due to changes in interest rates. Bonds are subject to interest rate, inflation and credit risks. Treasury bills are less volatile than longer-term fixed income securities and are guaranteed as to timely payment of principal and interest by the U.S. government. Investments in foreign securities involve special risks, including foreign currency risk and the possibility of substantial volatility due to adverse political, economic or other developments. These risk are magnified for investments made in emerging markets. Investments in a certain industry or sector may pose additional risk due to lack of diversification and sector concentration. Investments in real estate securities can be subject to fluctuations in the value of the underlying properties, the effect of economic conditions on real estate values, changes in interest rates, and risk related to renting properties, such as rental defaults. There are special risks associated with an investment in commodities, such as gold, including market price fluctuations, regulatory change, interest rate change, credit risk, economic changes and the impact of adverse political or financial factors.

#### Alternative investments are speculative and involve a high degree of risk.

Alternative investments are intended for qualified investors only. Alternative Investments such as derivatives, hedge funds, private equity funds, and funds of funds can result in higher return potential but also higher loss potential. Changes in economic conditions or other circumstances may adversely affect your investments. Before you invest in alternative investments, you should consider your overall financial situation, how much money you have to invest, your need for liquidity, and your tolerance for risk.

Nonfinancial assets, such as closely-held businesses, real estate, fine art, oil, gas and mineral properties, and timber, farm and ranch land, are complex in nature and involve risks including total loss of value. Special risk considerations include natural events (for example, earthquakes or fires), complex tax considerations, and lack of liquidity. Nonfinancial assets are not in the best interest of all investors. Clients should always consult with your independent attorney, tax advisor, investment manager, and insurance agent for final recommendations and before changing or implementing any financial, tax, or estate planning strategy.

© 2025 Bank of America Corporation. All rights reserved.