

Investment Weekly

23 May 2025 For Professional Clients only.

Chart of the week – Does the end of US exceptionalism persist?



A dominant theme in the minds of investors this year has been the prospect of an end to US exceptionalism. Last week's US credit rating downgrade by Moody's – while not exactly unexpected – provided a reminder that the US fiscal situation has become untenable. But when we talk about an end to exceptionalism, what has really changed?

Over the past decade, investors have enjoyed three types of US exceptionalism. The first is the country's **exceptional GDP growth**, especially within the context of the G10 (although a lot of that has been more about fiscal spending and immigration, than it has about productivity). Second is its **exceptional stocks**. Returns have been boosted by supernormal profits, the Magnificent Seven tech mega-caps, and a big re-rating of the market multiple. Thirdly, there has been the **exceptional US dollar**. The USD has boosted investor returns, and sucked up global capital and investor attention. It also provided portfolio hedging services to global investors – offering strength in times of both US economic outperformance and weak global growth (the "dollar smile").

The critical question now is the extent to which these elements survive? For a start, macro growth is cooling amid policy uncertainty, and that could persist as a dampening effect on US activity for a while. Meanwhile, the premium growth rates are in Asia and Frontier economies. In stocks, the US market cap as a percentage of global stock markets looks to have made a top. And profits growth is expected to be as fast in China as in the US over the next 12 months. As for the USD, it remains over-valued versus most currencies, and many global investors are now exploring hedging FX for US stock exposures – which is a material shift in psychology. **The forces making the US look less exceptional could stick around for a while**.

Market Spotlight

Retail therapy

Rollercoaster US stock market volatility in the early months of 2025 has given way to a pronounced rally in May. But with fund manager surveys pointing to some unusually bearish institutional positioning in US stocks, it seems that something else has been driving recent moves.

According to reported flows data, US stock prices since late April have been supported in part by a pick-up in buying among retail investors. In a repeat of a theme that's been a fixture in markets for the past decade – particularly in the rebound after the Covid crash of 2020 – retail has been acting like a stabilising force and "buying the dip".

The latest leg-up in prices followed the better-than-expected deal in early May between the US and China to cut tariffs for 90 days. But while developments like that help explain the shift in investors' perception of risk, there's potential for it to drive a disconnect between market performance and still ultra-high policy uncertainty. While retail investors got the rally started, the momentum could fade quickly if smart money institutions fail to join in – potentially causing further volatility, with markets continuing to spin around.

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US Fiscal Policy → What US fiscal plans could mean for markets

European Fixed Income \rightarrow

A change in sentiment for European credit markets?

Chinese Stocks \rightarrow

What recent market activity means for the profits outlook

Read our latest views: <u>Global Investment</u> <u>Outlook Q2 2025</u>

Beautiful bill, ugly truths

US tariffs policy has been front of mind for markets in recent weeks. But with a meaningful softening of the US administration's position of late, investors' focus now looks to be shifting to fiscal policy. Moody's decision to strip the US of its last remaining "triple A" rating is a timely reminder of the challenges facing President Trump's fiscal package as it moves through Congress. The one-notch downgrade reflected the wellknown rising debt burden and widening deficit, which Moody's expects to be exacerbated by the extension of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), the centrepiece of the administration's fiscal policy.

While the details of the "One, big, beautiful bill" are yet to be finalised, it is likely to include fiscal easing over and above the extension of the TCJA. However, Washington will have one eye on the bond market and the USD - the 30-year yield breached 5% this week while the USD is softening again. Meanwhile, although tax cuts may be seen as positive for the stock market, this may be offset by a renewed rise in yields. So, a key question for investors is do these ugly truths force the White House to pare back its ambitions?

Go with the euro income flow

When Mario Draghi published his blueprint to revive the EU economy last year, he said the bloc needed sharp increases in public and private investment. So, when Germany - with its long record of fiscal prudence announced plans for massive spending on infrastructure and defence six months later, no wonder Draghi called it a "game changer".

German fiscal expansion, together with expectations of further ECB rate cuts, have improved the prospects for the eurozone economy. Recent work by AM's Credit Research team suggests one spillover effect could be a positive change in sentiment in European credit markets.

European corporate credit fundamentals are healthy, with steady gross leverage and resilient profitability. Coverage ratios (measuring the ability of firms to service debts) have dipped, but many have strong cash buffers. The asset class should also be resilient to tariffs, with only a limited proportion of both IG and HY markets made up of US registered companies, while direct sales exposure to tariffs is also limited. One note of caution is that a lot of this good news is in the price - spread valuations remain tight. But high all-in yields are compelling for investors looking for steady income flows.

A market catalyst?

This week, a major Chinese battery maker pulled off the biggest share sale in the world this year, with a multi-billion dollar secondary listing in Hong Kong. The move could bode well for other China-quoted firms hoping to attract funding from both domestic and foreign investors. It comes amid signs of continuing positive sentiment towards Chinese stocks this year, especially in technology-related sectors, with investors seeking to broaden their international exposure beyond the US.

Growing global appetite for Chinese stocks coincides with a recent pickup in earnings upgrades. That's been driven by cooling trade tensions between the US and China, and Q1-2025 profits numbers from Chinese firms that are largely in line with market consensus, delivering decent year-on-year growth. In the offshore market, technology industries are the profit engine, with AI still expanding at a clip. In the onshore market the strongest growth has been in consumption-sensitive sectors like consumer discretionary and staples, in part because of ongoing policy support and the expectation that policymakers will respond (with a "put") if headwinds worsen. Put together, these latest developments could be a catalyst for further positive performance in Chinese stocks.





Consensus change in forward 12-months earnings-per-share



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Asset class views

Our baseline macro scenario is for below-trend growth and above-target inflation in the US while other major economies experience more trend-like growth and limited inflation pressures. But policy uncertainty remains high, and the data flow is likely to remain bumpy. Risk asset valuations are stretched in many areas. That means that any deterioration in corporate fundamentals could create market volatility. A defensive positioning in portfolios remains appropriate, which includes selective exposures to fixed income, risk assets, and private markets.

House view represents a 12-month investment view across major asset classes in our portfolios.



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Key Events and Data Releases

This week

Date	Country	Indicator	Data as of	Actual	Prior	Comment
Mon. 19 May	UK	UK-EU Trade Agreement				The deal included an extension of EU fishing rights, a defence and security agreement, and a potential youth mobility scheme
	CN	Industrial Production (yoy)	Apr	6.1%	7.7%	Industrial production slowed by less than expected, underpinned by solid exports, and sustained policy support
	CN	Retail Sales (yoy)	Apr	5.1%	5.9%	Retail sales growth slowed, driven by softer auto and fuel sales. However, the policy priority areas remained resilient
Tue. 20 May	AU	RBA Cash Target Rate	May	3.85%	4.10%	Downward revisions to the RBA's forecasts and the Governor's dovish remarks raised expectations for further policy easing
	CA	G7 Meeting in Banff, Canada				G7 finance ministers and central bank governors reiterated their commitment to FX stability
Wed. 21 May	ID	Bank Indonesia Rate	May	5.50%	5.75%	The BI resumed rate cuts given the IDR rebound and cited the need to stimulate growth. BI's GDP forecasts were downgraded
	UK	СРІ (уоу)	Apr	3.5%	2.6%	The sharp rise in CPI came from services, reinforcing the BoE's hawkish bias and limiting the chances of a summer rate cut
Thu. 22 May	US	Composite PMI, Flash	May	52.1	50.6	Business activity picked up from April's low, but remained soft amid tariff concerns. Employment intentions weakened
	EZ	Composite PMI, Flash	May	49.5	50.4	Services drove a decline in the composite PMI, bucking the trend of other surveys that rebounded following US tariff suspension
	JP	СРІ (уоу)	Apr	3.6%	3.6%	A phaseout of energy subsidies has kept headline print high. Excluding fresh food and energy, inflation edged up to 3.0%
	GE	IFO Business Confidence Index	May	87.5	86.9	The IFO edged higher on rising expectations. The current conditions index fell, consistent with a weaker German PMI
	UK	Composite PMI, Flash	May	49.4	48.5	The composite PMI rose on the back of stronger service sector activity, but remains in contraction territory
	IN	Composite PMI, Flash	May	61.2	59.7	The service sector PMI hit a 14-month high, consistent with continued solid growth. The manufacturing index edged up

UK - United Kingdom, CN - China, AU - Australia, CA - Canada, ID - Indonesia, US - United States, EZ - Eurozone, JP - Japan, GE - Germany, IN - India

The week ahead

Date	Country	Indicator	Data as of	Survey	Prior	Comment
Mon. 26 May	US	Earnings	Q1			94% of S&P500 reported, with strength in healthcare and telecoms, but energy and consumer facing sectors were weaker
Tue. 27 May	US	Consumer Confidence Index, Conference Board	May	87.0	86.0	Better news on US tariffs may lead consumer confidence to edge up after five consecutive monthly declines
Wed. 28 May	IN	Industrial Production (yoy)	Apr	0.8%	3.0%	While yoy industrial production growth likely slowed, infrastructure and durables output have remained solid recently
	NZ	RBNZ Official Cash Rate	May	3.25%	3.50%	The RBNZ may continue its measured rate cuts amid persistent spare capacity in the economy
	US	FOMC Minutes	May			May FOMC minutes should confirm most, if not all, members support a wait and see stance amid an uncertain outlook
Thu. 29 May	КО	Bank of Korea Base Rate	May	2.50%	2.75%	The BoK is likely to resume its policy easing reflecting lingering macro downside risks. A gradual approach is still expected
	US	GDP, 2nd Estimate (qoq annualised)	Q1	-0.4%	-0.3%	Little change is envisaged in the second GDP estimate with data heavily distorted by a surge in imports ahead of increased tariffs
Fri. 30 May	US	PCE Price Index (yoy)	Apr	2.2%	2.3%	The latest CPI and PPI data point to a benign print for April core PCE inflation before tariff-induced price rises start to kick in
Sat. 31 May	CN	NBS Composite PMI	May	-	50.2	Resilient services should keep the PMI >50, while manufacturing sentiment may rise following the US-China tariff de-escalation

US - United States, IN - India, NZ - New Zealand, KO - South Korea, CN - China

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This week

Risk sentiment pulled back this week amid growing worries about US debt sustainability, following the US House of Representatives' passage of a bill extending the 2017 tax cuts this week and Moody's downgrade of the US credit rating late last week. The US dollar weakened while longer-dated US Treasury yields rose, with the 30-year yields breaching 5.00%. UK Gilt yields also rallied, and most European yields rose too, albeit to a lesser extent. US HY credit spreads widened after weeks of narrowing, while IG spreads remained stable. In equities, US markets saw broad-based losses, while the Euro STOXX50 were largely unchanged. The DAX rose, whereas the CAC40 edged lower. Japan's Nikkei 225 declined amid a stronger yen, and other Asian equities were mixed: Hong Kong's Hang Seng and China's Shanghai Composite gained, while Korea's Kospi and India's Sensex fell. In commodities, oil prices dropped amid investor concerns over a potential increase in OPEC+ production. Gold advanced, and Crypto extended their weekly rallies.

Selected asset performance



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Aggregate Treasuries Total Return Index. JP Morgan EMBI Global Total Return local currency. Commodities and real estate: Gold Spot \$/OZ/ Other commodities: S&P GSCI Total Return CME. Real Estate: FTSE EPRA/NAREIT Global Index TR USD. All the data above is in in USD, total return, month-to-date terms.

Market data

Equity Indices	Close	1-week Change (%)	1-month Change (%)	3-month Change (%)	1-year Change (%)	YTD Change (%)	52-week High	52-week Low	Fwd P/E (X)
World									
MSCI AC World Index (USD)	871	-1.1	7.8	-0.4	10.4	3.5	888	723	19.0
North America									
US Dow Jones Industrial Average	41,859	-1.9	5.7	-3.6	7.2	-1.6	45,074	36,612	20.8
US S&P 500 Index	5,842	-2.0	8.7	-2.8	10.9	-0.7	6,147	4,835	22.2
US NASDAQ Composite Index	18,926	-1.5	13.3	-3.1	13.1	-2.0	20,205	14,784	28.7
Canada S&P/TSX Composite Index	25,854	-0.5	5.6	2.8	16.5	4.6	26,117	21,467	16.1
Europe		-							
MSCI AC Europe (USD)	624	1.2	5.7	6.9	9.6	18.1	633	516	15.5
Euro STOXX 50 Index	5,424	-0.1	6.4	-0.9	7.7	10.8	5,568	4,474	15.6
UK FTSE 100 Index	8,739	0.6	4.0	0.9	4.8	6.9	8,909	7,545	13.3
Germany DAX Index*	23,999	1.0	9.3	7.7	28.4	20.5	24,152	17,025	16.8
France CAC-40 Index	7,864	-0.3	5.1	-3.6	-2.9	6.6	8,258	6,764	15.5
Spain IBEX 35 Index	14,273	1.5	8.1	10.2	26.2	23.1	14,371	10,299	12.9
Italy FTSE MIB Index	40,257	-1.0	10.4	4.8	16.8	17.8	40,709	30,653	12.1
Asia Pacific									
MSCI AC Asia Pacific ex Japan (USD)	611	-0.5	6.9	1.5	7.7	7.3	632	507	14.4
Japan Nikkei-225 Stock Average	37,206	-1.4	6.7	-4.1	-4.9	-6.7	42,427	30,793	19.0
Australian Stock Exchange 200	8,367	0.3	5.6	0.9	7.1	2.5	8,615	7,169	18.7
Hong Kong Hang Seng Index	23,726	1.6	7.5	1.1	25.7	18.3	24,874	16,441	10.6
Shanghai Stock Exchange Composite Index	3,381	0.4	2.6	0.1	8.5	0.9	3,674	2,690	13.1
Hang Seng China Enterprises Index	8,638	2.0	6.4	-0.3	28.9	18.5	9,211	5,772	9.9
Taiwan TAIEX Index	21,609	-1.1	10.0	-8.9	0.0	-6.2	24,417	17,307	16.1
Korea KOSPI Index	2,594	-1.2	2.7	-2.3	-4.7	8.1	2,896	2,285	9.2
India SENSEX 30 Index	81,878	-0.5	2.2	8.7	8.6	4.8	85,978	70,234	21.8
Indonesia Jakarta Stock Price Index	7,193	1.2	8.4	5.7	-0.4	1.6	7,911	5,883	11.9
Malaysia Kuala Lumpur Composite Index	1,534	-2.4	2.2	-3.6	-5.8	-6.6	1,685	1,387	13.8
Philippines Stock Exchange PSE Index	6,375	-1.4	3.3	4.5	-4.3	-2.4	7,605	5,805	10.0
Singapore FTSE Straits Times Index	3,874	-0.6	1.1	-1.4	16.6	2.3	4,005	3,198	12.2
Thailand SET Index	1,180	-1.3	2.3	-5.3	-13.7	-15.7	1,507	1,056	13.0
Latam									
Argentina Merval Index	2,314,897	-0.1	3.4	-2.1	52.9	-8.6	2,867,775	1,333,622	10.1
Brazil Bovespa Index*	137,273	-1.4	3.8	8.0	10.1	14.1	140,244	118,223	8.2
Chile IPSA Index	8,368	-0.2	5.6	14.4	23.4	24.7	8,493	6,082	12.2
Colombia COLCAP Index	1,641	-0.3	-0.1	0.7	16.7	19.0	1,702	1,272	7.8
Mexico S&P/BMV IPC Index	57,895	-0.2	3.8	7.7	3.5	16.9	58,858	48,770	12.7
EEMEA									
Saudi Arabia Tadawul Index	11,189	-2.6	-4.2	-9.7	-6.7	-7.0	12,536	10,657	N/A
South Africa JSE Index	93,135	0.6	3.7	4.7	18.0	10.7	93,827	75,753	13.6
Turkey ISE 100 Index*	9,475	-2.0	1.8	-1.3	-12.2	-3.6	11,252	8,567	3.7

*Indices expressed as total returns. All others are price returns.

	1-week Change	1-month Change	3-month Change	YTD Change	1-year Change	3-year Change	5-year Change
Equity Indices - Total Return	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Global equities	-1.1	8.0	0.2	4.3	12.1	45.0	92.0
US equities	-1.9	9.0	-2.6	-0.2	12.3	52.6	107.7
Europe equities	1.4	6.5	8.6	20.1	12.5	45.0	86.6
Asia Pacific ex Japan equities	-0.4	7.3	2.2	8.2	10.3	22.7	49.1
Japan equities	0.6	4.9	3.4	6.8	8.4	34.6	53.9
Latam equities	-0.3	5.1	10.1	23.9	-1.8	12.8	80.6
Emerging Markets equities	-0.6	6.6	2.4	9.4	9.4	22.1	45.7

All total returns quoted in USD terms and subject to one-day lag. Data sourced from MSCI AC World Total Return Index, MSCI USA Total Return Index, MSCI AC Europe Total Return Index, MSCI AC Asia Pacific ex Japan Total Return Index, MSCI Japan Total Return Index, MSCI Emerging Latin America Total Return Index, and MSCI Emerging Markets Total Return Index Total return includes income from dividends and interest as well as appreciation or depreciation in the price of an asset over the given period.

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Bond indices - Total Return	Close	1-week Change (%)	1-month Change (%)	3-month Change (%)	1-year Change (%)	YTD Change (%)
BarCap GlobalAgg (Hedged in USD)	586	-0.4	-0.3	0.2	5.2	1.0
JPM EMBI Global	919.4	-0.5	0.9	0.4	7.0	2.5
BarCap US Corporate Index (USD)	3325.3	-0.6	0.2	-0.4	4.6	1.1
BarCap Euro Corporate Index (Eur)	260.3	-0.1	0.0	0.1	5.8	0.9
BarCap Global High Yield (Hedged in USD)	641.6	-0.2	1.6	0.5	9.8	2.3
Markit iBoxx Asia ex-Japan Bond Index (USD)	229.6	-0.3	0.3	0.5	5.7	2.0
Markit iBoxx Asia ex-Japan High-Yield Bond Index (USD)	268	-0.3	0.8	1.0	7.7	2.9

Total return includes income from dividends and interest as well as appreciation or depreciation in the price of an asset over the given period.

							E2alk	E2alı	1-week
Currencies (vs USD)	Latest	1-week Ago	1-month Ago	3-months Ago	1-year Ago	Year End 2023	52-week High	52-week Low	Change (%)
Developed markets									
EUR/USD	1.13	1.12	1.13	1.05	1.08	1.04	1.16	1.01	1.3
GBP/USD	1.34	1.33	1.33	1.26	1.27	1.25	1.35	1.21	1.2
CHF/USD	1.21	1.19	1.20	1.11	1.09	1.10	1.24	1.09	1.3
CAD	1.38	1.40	1.39	1.42	1.37	1.44	1.48	1.34	1.0
JPY	144	146	143	149	157	157	162	140	1.5
AUD/USD	0.64	0.64	0.64	0.64	0.66	0.62	0.69	0.59	0.4
NZD/USD	0.59	0.59	0.59	0.57	0.61	0.56	0.64	0.55	0.6
Asia									
HKD	7.83	7.81	7.76	7.77	7.81	7.77	7.83	7.75	-0.2
CNY	7.20	7.21	7.29	7.25	7.24	7.30	7.35	7.01	0.2
INR	85.7	85.5	85.4	86.7	83.3	85.6	88.0	83.0	-0.3
MYR	4.25	4.29	4.39	4.42	4.70	4.47	4.73	4.09	1.0
KRW	1378	1402	1427	1434	1362	1472	1487	1303	1.7
TWD	30.0	30.2	32.5	32.8	32.2	32.8	33.3	29.6	0.5
Latam									
BRL	5.71	5.67	5.71	5.73	5.14	6.18	6.32	5.13	-0.8
COP	4175	4176	4306	4082	3867	4406	4566	3841	0.0
MXN	19.3	19.5	19.6	20.4	16.7	20.8	21.3	16.6	0.9
ARS	1136	1142	1163	1058	890	1031	1206	890	0.5
EEMEA									
RUB	79.7	81.1	83.0	88.5	91.6	113.5	115.1	78.2	1.7
ZAR	17.9	18.0	18.7	18.4	18.5	18.8	19.9	17.0	0.7
TRY	39.0	38.8	38.3	36.4	32.2	35.4	41.3	32.1	-0.4

Bonds	Close	1-week Ago	1-month Ago	3-months Ago	1-year Ago	Year End 2023	1-week basis point change*
US Treasury yields (%)							
3-Month	4.31	4.34	4.31	4.30	5.40	4.31	-2
2-Year	3.99	4.00	3.87	4.20	4.94	4.24	-1
5-Year	4.10	4.09	4.02	4.27	4.53	4.38	1
10-Year	4.54	4.48	4.38	4.43	4.48	4.57	6
30-Year	5.05	4.94	4.82	4.68	4.58	4.78	11
10-year bond yields (%)							
Japan	1.55	1.45	1.33	1.42	1.00	1.09	10
UK	4.75	4.65	4.55	4.57	4.26	4.56	10
Germany	2.64	2.59	2.50	2.47	2.60	2.36	5
France	3.32	3.26	3.24	3.22	3.06	3.19	6
Italy	3.65	3.60	3.63	3.55	3.89	3.52	6
Spain	3.26	3.21	3.17	3.09	3.35	3.06	5
China	1.70	1.68	1.66	1.76	2.31	1.68	2
Australia	4.45	4.45	4.27	4.51	4.26	4.36	0
Canada	3.37	3.17	3.24	3.11	3.62	3.23	20

*Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

<i>,</i> .	6	1-week	1-month	3-month	1-year	YTD		
		Change	Change	Change	Change	Change	52-week	52-week
Commodities		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	High	Low
Gold	3,317	3.5	0.9	13.0	42.4	26.4	3,500	2,287
Brent Oil	64.1	-1.9	-1.6	-12.5	-16.5	-12.4	82	58
WTI Crude Oil	60.9	-1.7	-1.2	-12.5	-15.4	-12.8	77	54
R/J CRB Futures Index	296.3	0.1	0.2	-4.8	0.8	-0.2	317	265
LME Copper	9,501	0.6	1.3	-0.6	-8.8	8.4	10,604	8,105

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Content ID: D045414_v1.0; Expiry Date: 23.11.2025