DFC Newsletter

Investing In Your Retirement

Alan Levine, CFP®, RFC®, CRC®, AIF®, CPFA®
President, Founding Partner
Diversified Financial Consultants, LLC
110 South Jefferson Road • Suite 301 • Whippany • NJ • 07981
862-579-3500
alan.levine@lpl.com • http://www.diversifiedfinancialconsultantsllc.com/

Risks and Fears

How Long Do Workers Stay with Their Employers?

The median number of years that wage and salary workers had been with their current employer was 4.1 years in January 2020. However, employee tenure tends to vary based on many factors, including the type of occupation, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tenure remains to be seen.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020

Stock Market Risks in the Spotlight

During March 2021, the widening availability of COVID-19 vaccinations, signs of improving economic conditions, and a third, $1.9 trillion stimulus package brought about more optimistic growth projections. Even though a healthy economy could be good news for many businesses and the financial markets, rising inflation expectations caused a multi-week sell-off in U.S. government bonds that pushed up longer-term yields and sent the Nasdaq Composite Index into correction territory on March 8, 2021.[1]

Promising a patient approach, the Federal Reserve stated that it would not raise interest rates until the labor market fully recovers and inflation moderately exceeds the 2% target for some time.[2] But some investors worry that sharply higher inflation could force policymakers to boost rates sooner than originally expected.

Here's a closer look at some specific types of investment risk that could influence individual stock prices and/or cause broader market swings during the second half of 2021.

Inflation and Interest-Rate Fears

Inflation and interest rates are two different but closely related investment risks. The Federal Reserve is tasked with fostering full employment and controlling inflation. One way it balances these two goals is by lowering interest rates to stimulate business activity or raising rates to help slow inflation when the economy is heating up too fast.

High inflation erodes the value of investment returns, but when interest rates rise, bond values fall (and vice versa). These risks are obvious considerations for bond owners, but they also impact stocks. When goods, services, and credit cost more, consumers have less purchasing power, which can hurt company earnings and stock prices as well.

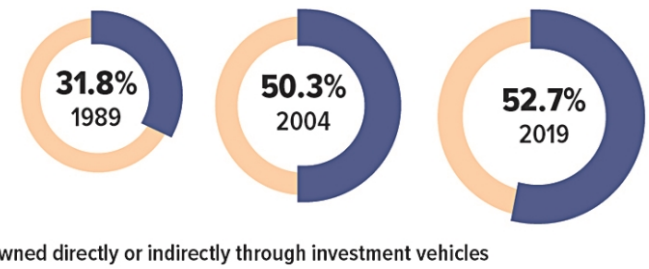
Rising bond yields might continue to have a negative effect on stock values, because as they move up, borrowing costs for most businesses also rise, cutting into profits. Higher yields could also entice risk-averse investors to sell their stocks and buy more stable bonds instead.

Legislative or Regulatory Impacts

Some government actions (such as antitrust lawsuits, higher taxes, and more stringent regulations or standards) make it more difficult and expensive for companies to do business, which can adversely affect their earnings and stock prices. On the other hand, government subsidies and tariffs on foreign products can provide competitive advantages.

The Justice Department, Federal Trade Commission, and numerous states are in the midst of antitrust lawsuits or major investigations into the business practices of several market-dominating tech companies.[3] In another example, the Securities and Exchange Commission is considering new standards for corporate disclosures related to environmental, social, and governance risks.[4]

Percentage of U.S. Households Who Own Stocks*



Source: Investment Company Institute, 2021 (data from Federal Reserve Board Survey of Consumer Finances)

Event or Headline-Driven Volatility

Headline risk refers to the possibility that events reported in the media could hurt a company's reputation and/or earnings prospects. Troubling news can cause market backlash against a specific company or an entire industry. Companies try to manage this risk through public relations campaigns and other efforts to generate positive news that leaves a good impression on consumers. Events that threaten to disrupt business activity nationwide, regionally, or around the world can cause sudden stock market declines.

The market responds to news, good or bad, almost every day. For this reason, your portfolio should be designed to weather a range of market conditions and have a risk profile that reflects your ability to endure periods of market volatility, both financially and emotionally.

The principal value of bonds may fluctuate with changes in interest rates and market conditions. Bonds redeemed prior to maturity may be worth more or less than their original cost. The return and principal value of stocks fluctuate with changes in market conditions. Shares, when sold, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Investments seeking to achieve higher yields also involve a higher degree of risk.

1) *The Wall Street Journal,* March 8, 2021

2) Federal Reserve, March 17, 2021

3) Reuters, December 16, 2020

4) *The Wall Street Journal,* February 24, 2021

Child Tax Credit for 2021: Will You Get More?

If you have qualifying children under the age of 18, you may be able to claim a child tax credit. (You may also be able to claim a partial credit for certain other dependents who are not qualifying children.) The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 makes substantial, temporary improvements to the child tax credit for 2021, which may increase the amount you might receive.

Ages of Qualifying Children

The legislation makes 17-year-olds eligible as qualifying children in 2021. Thus, children ages 17 and younger are eligible as qualifying children in 2021.

Increase in Credit Amount

For 2021, the child tax credit amount increases from $2,000 to $3,000 per qualifying child ($3,600 per qualifying child under age 6). The partial credit for other dependents who are not qualifying children remains at $500 per dependent.

Refundable Credit

The aggregate amount of nonrefundable credits allowed is limited to tax liability. With refundable credits, a taxpayer may receive a refund at tax time if they exceed tax liability. For most taxpayers, the child tax credit is fully refundable for 2021. To qualify for a full refund, the taxpayer (or either spouse for joint returns) must generally reside in the United States for more than one-half of the taxable year. Otherwise, under the pre-existing rules, a partial refund of up to $1,400 per qualifying child may be available. The credit for other dependents is not refundable.

Advance Payments

Taxpayers may receive periodic advance payments for up to one-half of the refundable child tax credit during 2021, generally based on 2020 tax returns. The U.S. Treasury will make the payments for periods between July 1 and December 31, 2021. For example, monthly payments could be up to $250 per qualifying child ($300 per qualifying child under age 6).

Phaseout of Credit

The combined child tax credit (the sum of your child tax credits and credits for other dependents) is subject to phaseout based on modified adjusted gross income (MAGI). Special rules start phasing out the increased portion of the child tax credit in 2021 at much lower thresholds than under pre-existing rules. The credit, as reduced under the special rules for 2021, is then subject to phaseout under the pre-existing phaseout rules.

Phaseout of Credit in 2021 Based on MAGI

Credit can be reduced to $2,000 per qualifying child, or $500 per other dependent, based on MAGI	
Single/Married filing separately	Over $75,000 to $200,000
Married filing jointly	Over $150,000 to $400,000
Head of household	Over $112,500 to $200,000

Credit can be reduced to $0, based on MAGI	
Single/Married filing separately	More than $200,000
Married filing jointly	More than $400,000
Head of household	More than $200,000

For 2021, there is no reduction in the credit if the taxpayer's MAGI does not exceed $75,000 ($150,000 for joint returns and surviving spouses, $112,500 for heads of households). The credit is partially phased out for MAGI exceeding these income limits. At this stage, the credit is reduced by the lowest of the following three amounts:

- $50 for each $1,000 (or fraction thereof) of MAGI exceeding these thresholds
- The total increase in the credit amounts for 2021 [e.g., if 3 qualifying children (2 under the age of 6), then $10,200 increased credit minus $6,000 pre-existing credit = $4,200 increase in credit]
- $6,250 ($12,500 for joint returns, $4,375 for heads of households, $2,500 for surviving spouses); these amounts are equal to 5% of the difference between the higher pre-existing phaseout thresholds and the special thresholds for 2021

The credit cannot be reduced below $2,000 per qualifying child or $500 per other dependent at this stage under this special rule for 2021.

However, the credit can be fully phased out for MAGI in excess of $200,000 ($400,000 for a joint return) under the pre-existing phaseout rules. The credit as reduced in the preceding stage is further reduced by $50 for each $1,000 (or fraction thereof) by which the taxpayer's MAGI exceeds these thresholds.

Tips for Keeping Your Teen Driver Safe Behind the Wheel

For many teenagers, getting a driver's license is a rite of passage that brings them one step closer to adulthood. Unfortunately, distracted driving, drinking and driving, and not wearing a seat belt are just some of the known risks associated with teenage drivers.[1]

Most parents are painfully aware that automobile crashes are a leading cause of injury and death among teenagers.[2] Fortunately, there are proven strategies to help prevent these tragedies, and your role as a parent is essential. Here are some steps you can take to help keep your teen safe behind the wheel.

Check your state's graduated driver licensing program (GDL). GDL programs have been adopted in every state and are designed to allow young, novice drivers to practice their driving skills in low-risk situations. Restrictions such as late-night driving curfews and passenger limitations are gradually lifted, and greater responsibility is granted until teens ultimately earn full driving privileges.

GDL programs typically have three stages, beginning with a learner's permit, followed by a provisional license, and ultimately leading to a full, unrestricted license. Be sure to review the GDL laws in your state and require your teen driver to follow them, even though they may seem restrictive or inconvenient.

Set a good example for your teen. Talk regularly with your teen about the importance of maintaining good driving habits and be sure to replicate that behavior when driving. You should also emphasize specific risks, such as cell phone use, speeding, and the use of drugs and/or alcohol while driving.

Talk regularly with your teen about the importance of maintaining good driving habits and be sure to replicate that behavior when driving.

You may even want to make driving rules and consequences more clear by creating a parent-teen driving agreement. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a sample agreement that you can download at cdc.gov.

Take advantage of safe driving incentives. Although insuring a newly licensed driver may come with sticker shock, rates typically go down as a young driver gains more experience and maintains a clean driving record. In addition, many insurance companies offer discounts through safe driving incentive programs.

Ask your insurance company if it offers a good student discount (typically for students with a B or higher grade-point average) or a discount if you utilize a mobile app to monitor your teen's driving habits.

1-2) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020