

## US Utilities &amp; IPPs

# PowerPoints: ED Guidance Update. Why Are Utilities Lagging? More than just rates

Industry Overview

## ED: Indicates stronger future growth with payout cut

Last night Consolidated Edison (ED) announced its annual dividend per share increase which was +\$0.08, an unchanged level YoY while lowering its target payout ratio. The +2.5% increase is a marginal slowing YoY with the \$3.32 annualized 2024 lower than \$3.36 BofA/\$3.34 Consensus. ED reduced the target payout ratio to 55-65% from 60-70% which management attributed to "anticipation of higher levels of future capital investment and the associated funding needs."

## ED: Implied FY24 EPS above BofA and Street: Positive

ED's dividend increases have historically provided useful insight into current year EPS as it relates to the payout ratio. For example in January 2023, ED increased the dividend to \$3.16 annualized which implies \$4.85 at the then 65% payout ratio target midpoint. ED subsequently guided FY23 to \$4.75-\$4.95, bracketing the level implied by the dividend analysis. Subsequently ED outperformed its initial targets in 2023 with two guidance increases: first to \$4.85-\$5.00 then to \$5.00-\$5.10. The same 60% payout ratio midpoint approach for 2024 implies \$5.40 and would support a \$5.30-\$5.50 guidance range. The \$5.40 compares favorably to \$5.34 BofA and \$5.30 Consensus FY24 EPS. Further, ED could use a stronger starting point for long-term EPS growth rate, effectively guiding up its long-term expectations, consistent with the dividend press release. *We maintain Buy on shares of ED with the underappreciated growth acceleration coupled with one of the strongest balance sheets and limited major regulatory activity. ED has consistently had little investor ownership in our conversations and from the review of the 13-F filings but we see it is one of the increasingly view defensive utilities as many peers have faced setbacks.*

## Utilities: Sector lagging more than expected to start 2024

Utilities have started 2024 on a sour note with -4% absolute performance, lagging the S&P 500 which is essentially flat. The +35bp increase in the 30Yr US Treasury to 4.4% has been a key factor but the sector has unfavorably decoupled and is lagging the implied move in interest rates. *See chart in full report.* There has not been one clear themes from a 'micro' perspective with a mix of premium utilities outperforming (Southern Company and Consolidated Edison) and lagging (Alliant Energy and Public Service Enterprise Group). From our conversations, investors are generally looking for utilities with less rate case exposure which aligns with the strength in DUK, SO, and ED. As an outlier, the best performing utility YTD is FirstEnergy +4% despite the elevated regulatory activity. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Eversource Energy is the worst performer to start the year following its latest offshore impairment and concerns of a guidance reset. In our Year Ahead we described the sector valuation as more balanced but highlighted the quantum of long-term earnings headwinds for a variety of companies, such as Eversource. *Maintain Underperform on ES and FE as relatively expensive.* See more on ES here: [Eversource Energy: Offshore Wind Goes from Bad to Worse: Latest impairment leaves little value 09 January 2024](#)

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Equity  
United States  
Utilities

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DUK: Duke Energy  
ED: Consolidated Edison  
FE: FirstEnergy  
LNT: Alliant Energy  
PEG: Public Service Enterprise Group  
SO: Southern Company

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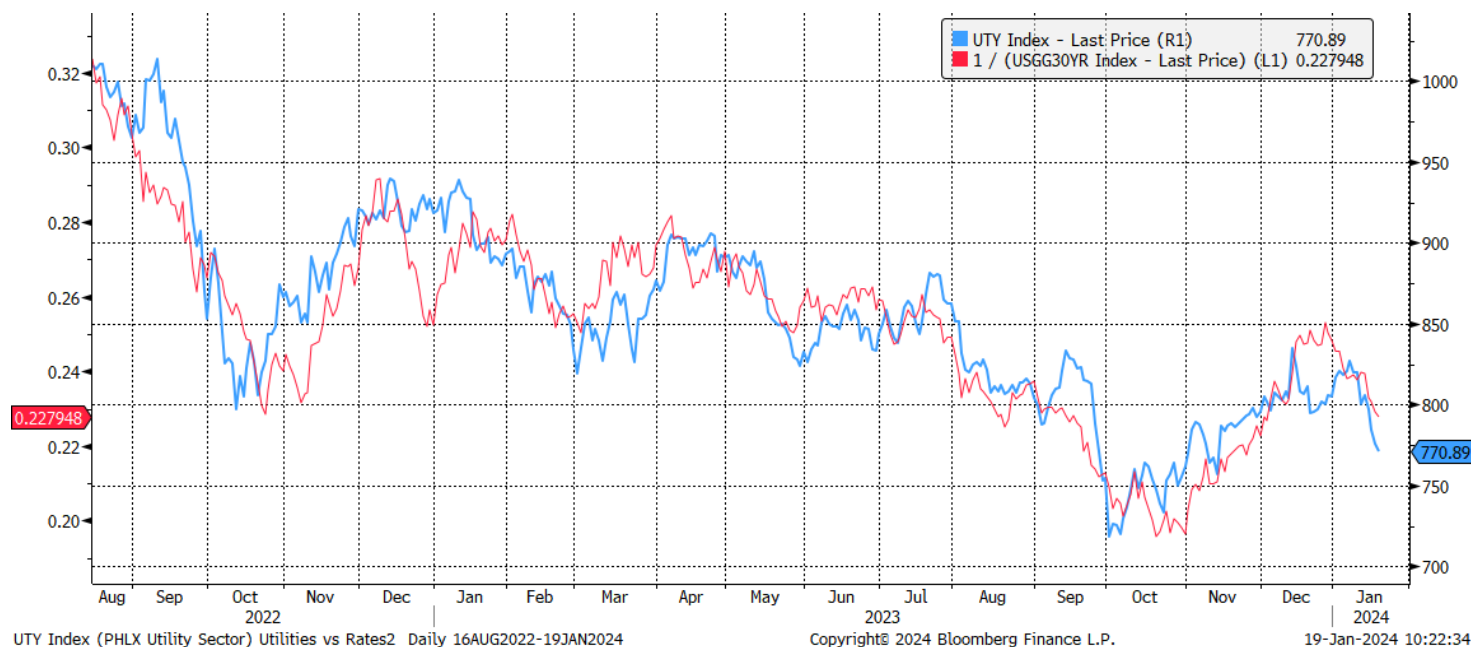
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## Utilities vs Rates: The perpetual ‘battle’

[US Utilities & Clean Tech: Year Ahead 2024: Our 24 Themes. Utilities set for a rebound but regulatory risks lurk 08 January 2024](#)

### Exhibit 1: Utilities Equities (Blue) vs 30Yr US Treasury Rates (Red)

A favorable gap has emerged for utilities relative to interest rates today



Source: Company Filings, Bloomberg, & BofA Global Research

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### Exhibit 2: Primary stocks mentioned in this report

Prices and ratings for primary stocks mentioned in this report

BofA Ticker	Bloomberg ticker	Company name	Price	Rating
ED	ED US	Consolidated Edison	US\$ 89.4	A-1-7
ES	ES US	Eversource Energy	US\$ 54	B-3-7
FE	FE US	FirstEnergy	US\$ 37.11	B-3-7

Source: BofA Global Research

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## Price objective basis & risk

### Consolidated Edison (ED)

Our \$96 PO is based on a sum-of-the-parts analysis applying premiums and discounts to the regulated group multiples 14.8x/14.3x for electric/gas respectively with an in-line multiple for Electric, Steam, & Gas to reflect a combination of historically challenging

regulation but above-peer growth and de-risked profile. We apply a 2x premium to electric and 1x premium to gas to reflect regulatory de-risk and growth prospects. Both electric and gas peer 2025 P/E multiples are grossed up by 5% to reflect capital appreciation across the sector.

For noncore segments we apply an in line valuation to Con Edison Electric Transmission (CET) given potential for earnings growth and attractive regulatory characteristics. For the Mountain Valley Pipeline stake we apply a 10x EBITDA multiple to our 2024 EPS estimate reflecting recent positive legal and legislative developments.

Upside/downside risks are 1) earned regulatory returns, 2) capital expenditures, 3) regulatory/political/legislative changes, 4) interest rates, 5) natural disasters, 6) execution on unregulated projects. Additional downside risk: lack of approval or modification of the JP by the New York state commission.

### **Eversource Energy (ES)**

Our sum of the parts based price objective of \$50 uses P/E multiples on 2025E earnings. The valuation is based on a 2025 sum of the parts analysis. We apply the 2025 average peer P/Es of 13.5x electric, 13.5x natural gas, and 20.0x water. For Connecticut electric & gas utilities, we value at -20% discount (-2.8x) to reflect historical challenges and prospective earnings risks. Connecticut water is valued in-line with natural gas. The other utilities are valued at a -15% discount (-2.1x) for below-average consolidated growth and weaker balance sheet metrics. Parent net loss per share is valued at an -1x discount to the electric utility average.

Upside and downside risks to our Price Objective are 1) regulatory/political/legislative changes, 2) capital expenditures forecasts, 3) ability to earn the regulatory allowed ROE, 4) offshore wind review, 5) natural disasters & storms, 6) operational performance and gas incidents, 7) integration of historical and prospective M&A, 8) pension plan performance, and 9) equity issuances.

### **FirstEnergy (FE)**

The \$32 Price Objective is based on a sum-of-the-parts valuation. Our multiples are driven by relative P/E premiums/discounts to the 14.3x 2025E regulated peer multiple. Peer P/E multiple is grossed up for a year by 5% to reflect capital appreciation across the sector, a consistent approach across our coverage universe. We apply -2x discount to reflect rate review risk, below average risk, and pension exposure. We subtract out the holding company debt given the above-average leverage. The unregulated coal mining business Signal peak is valued at 5x P/E

Upside and downside risks to the Price Objective are: 1) regulatory/political/legislative outcomes, 2) ability to earn the allowed ROEs and/or other changes in regulatory earnings, 3) weather and natural disasters, 4) investigation revelations and liabilities, 5) equity needs versus forecasts, 6) capital expenditures, 7) pension plan returns, discount rate changes, and interest/service costs associated with the plan, 8) economic conditions & interest rates, and 9) taxes.

## **Analyst Certification**

We, Julien Dumoulin-Smith and Paul Zimbardo, hereby certify that the views each of us has expressed in this research report accurately reflect each of our respective personal views about the subject securities and issuers. We also certify that no part of our respective compensation was, is, or will be, directly or indirectly, related to the specific recommendations or view expressed in this research report.

## North America - Utilities and Alt Energy Coverage Cluster

Investment rating	Company	BofA Ticker	Bloomberg symbol	Analyst
<b>BUY</b>				
	Alliant Energy Corporation	LNT	LNT US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Array Technologies	ARRY	ARRY US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Atlantica Sustainable Infrastructure	AY	AY US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Atmos Energy Corporation	ATO	ATO US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	CenterPoint Energy	CNP	CNP US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Cheniere Energy Inc	LNG	LNG US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Clearway Energy	CWENA	CWEN/A US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Clearway Energy	CWEN	CWEN US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	CMS Energy	CMS	CMS US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Consolidated Edison	ED	ED US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	DTE Energy	DTE	DTE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Duke Energy	DUK	DUK US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Enlight Renewable Energy Ltd	ENLT	ENLT US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Enlight Renewable Energy Ltd	XENLF	ENLT IT	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Entergy	ETR	ETR US	Paul Zimbardo
	First Solar, Inc.	FSLR	FSLR US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Fluence Energy	FLNC	FLNC US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Hannon Armstrong	HASI	HASI US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Hydro One	YH	H CN	Dariusz Lozny, CFA
	MDU Resources Group, Inc.	MDU	MDU US	Dariusz Lozny, CFA
	Nextacker Inc	NXT	NXT US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	NiSource Inc	NI	NI US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	NorthWestern Corporation	NWE	NWE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	NRG Energy	NRG	NRG US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	PG&E Corporation	PCG	PCG US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	PNM Resources Inc.	PNM	PNM US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Portland General Electric Company	POR	POR US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	PPL Corporation	PPL	PPL US	Paul Zimbardo
	Public Service Enterprise Group	PEG	PEG US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Sempra Energy	SRE	SRE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Sunnova Energy	NOVA	NOVA US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	SunRun	RUN	RUN US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	TPI Composites	TPIC	TPIC US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Vistra Energy	VST	VST US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Xcel Energy Inc	XEL	XEL US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
<b>NEUTRAL</b>				
	AES	AES	AES US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Algonquin Power & Utilities Corp	AQN	AQN US	Dariusz Lozny, CFA
	Algonquin Power & Utilities Corp	YAQN	AQN CN	Dariusz Lozny, CFA
	AltaGas	YALA	ALA CN	Cameron Lochridge
	Ameren Corporation	AEE	AEE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Ameresco	AMRC	AMRC US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	American Electric Power	AEP	AEP US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Bloom Energy	BE	BE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	ChargePoint Holdings	CHPT	CHPT US	Cameron Lochridge
	Constellation Energy Corp	CEG	CEG US	Paul Zimbardo
	Emera Inc	YEMA	EMA CN	Dariusz Lozny, CFA
	Essential Utilities	WTRG	WTRG US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Evergy, Inc	EVERG	EVERG US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Exelon	EXC	EXC US	Paul Zimbardo
	Generac Holdings Inc.	GNRC	GNRC US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Idacorp	IDA	IDA US	Paul Zimbardo
	Maxon Solar Technologies	MAXN	MAXN US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	New Fortress Energy	NFE	NFE US	Cameron Lochridge
	NextEra Energy	NEE	NEE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	NextEra Energy Partners	NEP	NEP US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	OGE Energy Corp	OGE	OGE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Ormat Technologies	ORA	ORA US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Pinnacle West	PNW	PNW US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Southern Company	SO	SO US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Southwest Gas Holdings	SWX	SWX US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	TransAlta Corp	TAC	TAC US	Dariusz Lozny, CFA
	TransAlta Corporation	YTA	TA CN	Dariusz Lozny, CFA

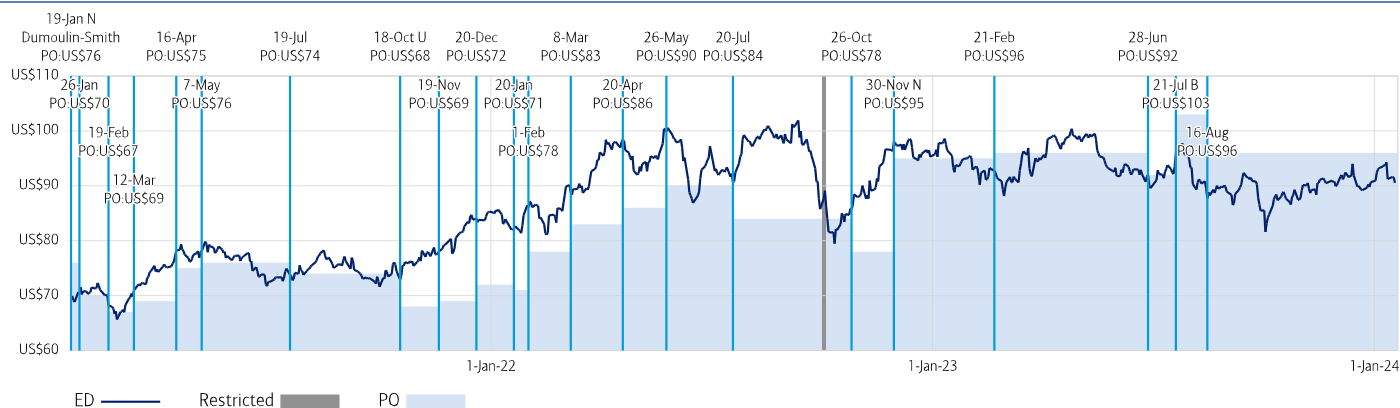
## North America - Utilities and Alt Energy Coverage Cluster

Investment rating	Company	BofA Ticker	Bloomberg symbol	Analyst
<b>UNDERPERFORM</b>				
	Allete Inc	ALE	ALE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	American Water Works	AWK	AWK US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Avangrid	AGR	AGR US	Paul Zimbardo
	Avista	AVA	AVA US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Black Hills Corporation	BKH	BKH US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Dominion Energy	D	D US	Paul Zimbardo
	Edison International	EIX	EIX US	Paul Zimbardo
	Enphase Energy	ENPH	ENPH US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Eversource Energy	ES	ES US	Paul Zimbardo
	FirstEnergy	FE	FE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Fortis	YFTS	FTS CN	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Fortis Inc	FTS	FTS US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	FREYR Battery	FREY	FREY US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	FTC Solar	FTCI	FTCI US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Hawaiian Electric Industries	HE	HE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	MGE Energy	MGEE	MGEE US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	New Jersey Resources Corp	NJR	NJR US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	ONE Gas, Inc.	OGS	OGS US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	SolarEdge Technologies	SEDG	SEDG US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Spire	SR	SR US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	Stem, Inc.	STEM	STEM US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	SunPower Corp.	SPWR	SPWR US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	UGI Corp.	UGI	UGI US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith
	WEC Energy Group Inc	WEC	WEC US	Julien Dumoulin-Smith

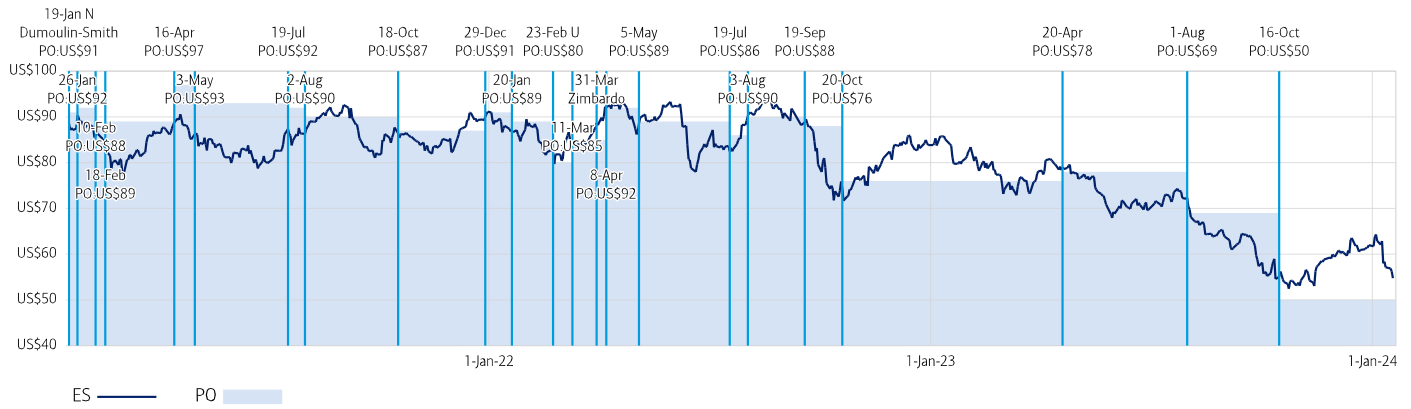
## Disclosures

## Important Disclosures

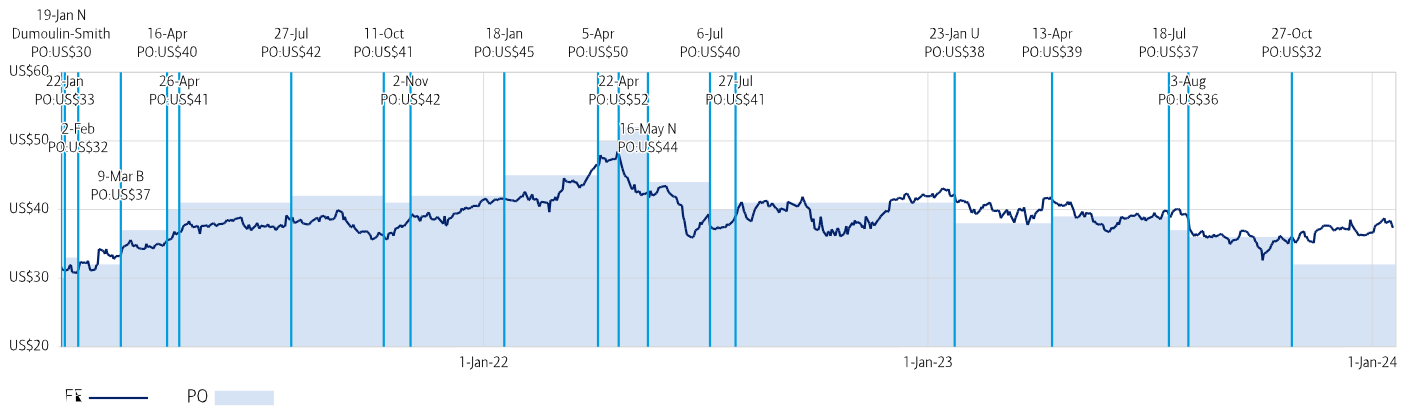
## Consolidated Edison (ED) Price Chart



The Investment Opinion System is contained at the end of the report under the heading "Fundamental Equity Opinion Key". Dark grey shading indicates the security is restricted with the opinion suspended. Medium grey shading indicates the security is under review with the opinion withdrawn. Light grey shading indicates the security is not covered. Chart is current as of a date no more than one trading day prior to the date of the report.

**Eversource Energy (ES) Price Chart**

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**FirstEnergy (FE) Price Chart**

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**Equity Investment Rating Distribution: Utilities Group (as of 31 Dec 2023)**

Coverage Universe	Count	Percent	Inv. Banking Relationships <sup>R1</sup>	Count	Percent
Buy	72	46.45%	Buy	52	72.22%
Hold	45	29.03%	Hold	32	71.11%
Sell	38	24.52%	Sell	21	55.26%

**Equity Investment Rating Distribution: Global Group (as of 31 Dec 2023)**

Coverage Universe	Count	Percent	Inv. Banking Relationships <sup>R1</sup>	Count	Percent
Buy	1895	53.62%	Buy	1083	57.15%
Hold	832	23.54%	Hold	454	54.57%
Sell	807	22.84%	Sell	383	47.46%

<sup>R1</sup> Issuers that were investment banking clients of BofA Securities or one of its affiliates within the past 12 months. For purposes of this Investment Rating Distribution, the coverage universe includes only stocks. A stock rated Neutral is included as a Hold, and a stock rated Underperform is included as a Sell.

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Investment rating	Total return expectation (within 12-month period of date of initial rating)	Ratings dispersion guidelines for coverage cluster <sup>R2</sup>
Buy	≥ 10%	≤ 70%
Neutral	≥ 0%	≤ 30%
Underperform	N/A	≥ 20%

<sup>R2</sup>Ratings dispersions may vary from time to time where BofA Global Research believes it better reflects the investment prospects of stocks in a Coverage Cluster.

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