BofA SECURITIES

Hong Kong Watch

Year Ahead 2024: Battling with persistent headwinds

30 November 2023

GEM Economics
Asia | Hong Kong

Ting Him Ho, CFA
Asia Economist
Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong)
+852 3508 8744
tinghim.ho@bofa.com

Miao Ouyang
China & Asia Economist
Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong)
+852 3508 6745
miao.ouyang@bofa.com

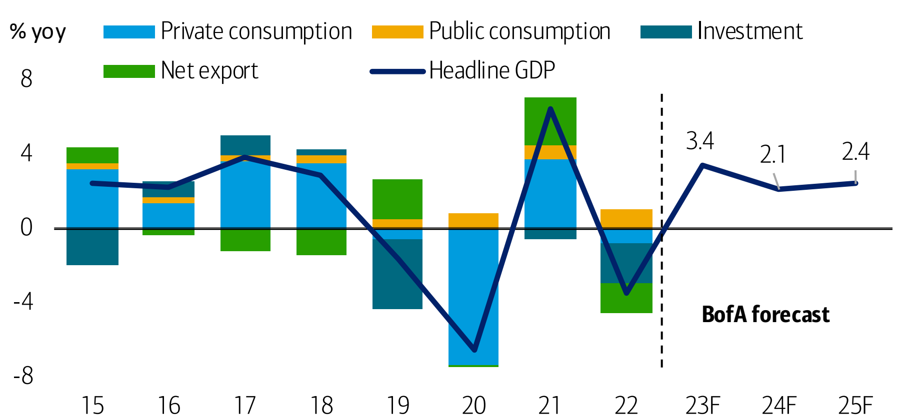
Multiple headwinds on growth in 2024

Hong Kong's post-reopening growth rebound has been weaker than expected, as the pace of consumption and tourism recovery was slow after an initial rebound in early 2023. Elevated interest rates, a property market downturn and weak mainland China demand are eroding the city's economic strength and fiscal health. We expect HK GDP to expand by 2.1% in 2024 and 2.4% in 2025, after a 3.4% growth this year (Exhibit 1). These forecasts have taken into account headwinds on consumption and investment in 1H24 before the Fed starts to cut interest rates and baked in a mild recovery after that. Given the subdued growth outlook, we expect CPI inflation to moderate to 1.6% in 2024 from 2.0% in 2023.

Fiscal deficits to cut into the city's reserves

Against the weak macro backdrop, we expect fiscal deficit to reach 3.5% of GDP in the 2023–24 fiscal year (Apr 23 to Mar 24), or almost double the amount the government had original budgeted in Feb 2023, due to weak land sales and stamp duty revenue. We believe the city is going to run a narrower deficit in the FY 2024-25, vs. its projection for a surplus. That would further reduce its fiscal reserves and prompt more debt issuance.

Exhibit 1: GDP forecast by expenditure
We expect Hong Kong GDP to expand by 2.1% in 2024 after a 3.4% growth in 2023



Source: BofA Global Research estimates

BofA GLOBAL RESEARCH

BofA Securities does and seeks to do business with issuers covered in its research reports. As a result, investors should be aware that the firm may have a conflict of interest that could affect the objectivity of this report. Investors should consider this report as only a single factor in making their investment decision.
Refer to important disclosures on page 5 to 6. **12632848**

Timestamp: 30 November 2023 02:07AM EST

Growth: Battling with persisting headwinds

Consumption recovery appeared to have stalled

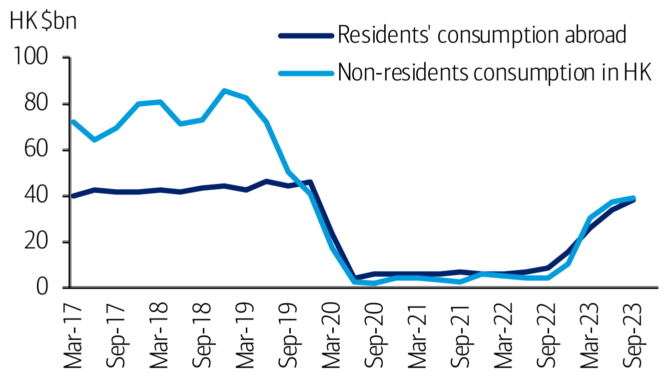
The post-reopening consumption and tourism rebound had been expected to drive a robust growth recovery this year. Yet, that boost appears to have slowed and stalled, with sequential growth of consumption and services exports dipping into negative territory in 3Q.

In our view, the weakness in domestic consumption was driven by **1)** sluggish income growth of the high earners dampened sentiment and purchasing power; **2)** higher mortgage payment squeezed disposable income, and falling property prices weighed on consumption via negative wealth effect; and **3)** residents are "leaking" consumption to overseas or mainland China. As Exhibit 2 suggests, overseas spending by residents has fully recovered.

Meanwhile, spending by visitors in HK remained lackluster and only returned to less than 60% of 2018 level (Exhibit 2). The strong HK$, weak growth momentum and sentiment in China, as well as incomplete recovery in flight and tourism group operation have likely capped tourist inflow and their spending. In addition, luxury brands' strategy to prioritize selling directly in mainland China could have further hampered sales of luxury items (Exhibit 3).

Going into 2024, these factors will probably continue to weigh on consumption and tourism spending, until we see a weaker US$ or demand in mainland China picks up more significantly. Therefore, we only expect a mild and gradual consumption recovery going into the next two years.

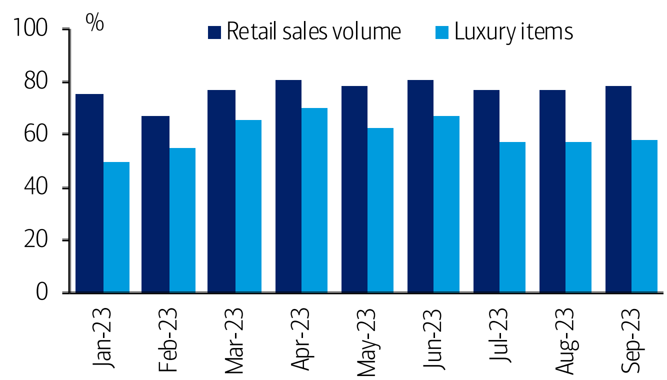
Exhibit 2: Spending abroad by residents vs. Visitor consumption in HK
Visitor consumption is low vs. pre-pandemic level, while resident consumption abroad has fully recovered



Source: CEIC, BofA Global Research

BofA GLOBAL RESEARCH

Exhibit 3: Retail sales volume, % of same month 2018
Retail sales recovery was sluggish, with tourists' spending on luxury items likely trailed the headline sales



Source: CEIC, BofA Global Research

BofA GLOBAL RESEARCH

Property downturn to weigh on growth outlook

Another major headwind on HK growth is the property market downturn. While the government has eased restrictive measures on the property market in October (see report), these actions will hardly reverse the home price decline trend, according to our property analysts (see report). That will continue to weigh on economic expansion into next years with rates remaining elevated for longer.

Beyond the negative effect on consumption via high mortgage payment and negative wealth effect, the property downturn will also hurt investment, which was still resilient until 3Q23 due to private construction. With property developers less eager to purchase new lands amid rising (unsold) residential property vacancy (Exhibit 4), we believe private-construction-related capex will slow more notably in coming quarters.

Goods trade likely bottomed out despite mild external demand

That said, goods trade will likely be more supportive to growth in 2024. In October, goods export rebounded 1.4% yoy (Exhibit 5), the first positive reading in 18 months, likely helped by favorable base effect and bottoming out in global trade cycle.

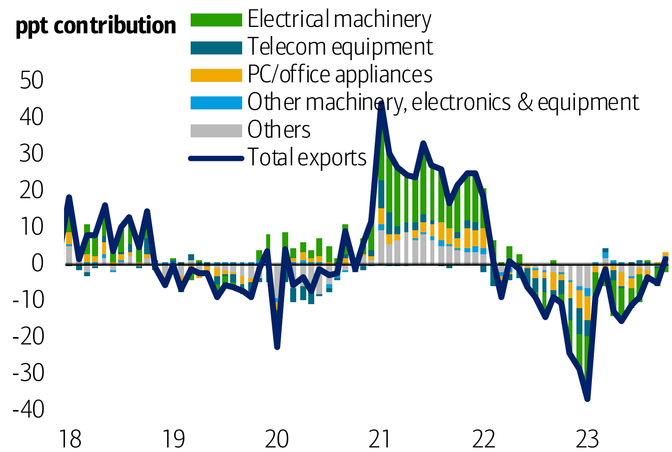
Going forward, we think the further recovery in vehicles throughput will boost overall goods trade and net exports in 2024, as it only recovered to 60% of 2018 level in 3Q23. That said, we expect only low-to-mid single digit growth in real exports in 2024, consistent with export growth in mainland China, given subdued growth in external demand.

Exhibit 4: Private residential property vacancy
Residential property vacancy is the highest since 2007

Source: Haver, HK RVD, BofA Global Research

BofA GLOBAL RESEARCH

Exhibit 5: Goods exports by major products
Goods trade will likely be more supportive to growth going forward



Source: Haver, BofA Global Research

BofA GLOBAL RESEARCH

Further moderation in CPI inflation

Against the backdrop of soft growth and sluggish property market, we expect CPI inflation at 2.0% in 2023 and moderate to 1.6% in 2024. The rising housing rent coupled with the tapering of government subsidies could exert upward pressure on headline CPI inflation next year. However, the weak consumption sentiment and tight financial conditions will likely cap the upside of broader inflationary pressure.

Policy: Fiscal deficits to cut into the city's reserves

The subdued economic outlook likely implies a deterioration in fiscal position (Exhibit 6). We expect HK's fiscal deficit this year to come in at 3.5% of GDP, with the shortfall almost double the amount expected at the original budget released in Feb 2023. While the government is tapering the pandemic relief measures and cutting expenditure relative to last year, the large deficit is mostly due to the weak fiscal revenue. The sluggish property and equity market have weighed on land sales and stamp duty, which in combination contributed to 35% and 22%, respectively, to the consolidated revenue in the last two fiscal years. Meanwhile, the weaker-than-expected recovery also means that the nominal GDP would be smaller than the government's original forecast.

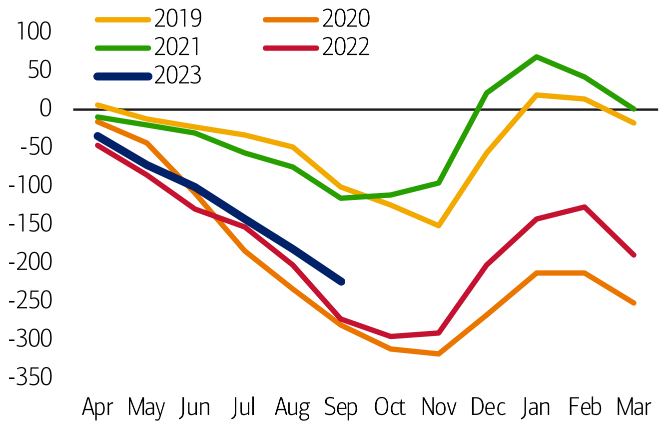
The larger-than-expected fiscal deficit would indicate that:

- HK is likely to have a thinner buffer against any economic shock in coming years, as fiscal reserves are likely to decline to roughly 11 months of fiscal expenditure by the end of this fiscal year (Exhibit 7), vs. the peak of 29 months in 2018. In particular, some of the fiscal reserves are by law not available to be diverted to cover general expenses.
- The city is unlikely to run fiscal surplus as expected in the FY 2024-25, given the prolonged property market downturn and stamp duty reduction.

- The city is likely to be prompted to issue more bonds than budgeted (HK$65bn) this fiscal year given the revenue shortfall. That said, the additional issuance is unlikely to affect the city's overall fiscal stability materially in the near term. Compared to other North Asia economies, the amount of outstanding HK government debt is still low (10% of GDP in Hong Kong vs 30% in Taiwan, 50% in Korea, 220% in Japan)

Exhibit 6: Cumulative running fiscal deficit

HK is seeing another year of deep fiscal deficit

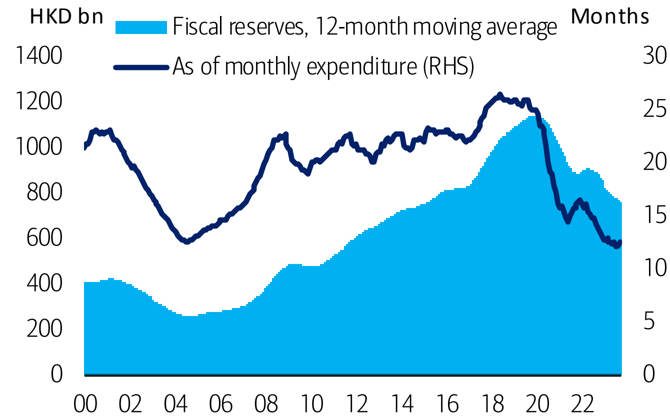


Source: CEIC, BofA Global Research

BofA GLOBAL RESEARCH

Exhibit 7: Fiscal reserves

Fiscal reserves are likely to decline to roughly 11 months of expenditure by the end of this fiscal year



Source: CEIC, BofA Global Research

BofA GLOBAL RESEARCH

Disclosures

Important Disclosures

BofA Global Research personnel (including the analyst(s) responsible for this report) receive compensation based upon, among other factors, the overall profitability of Bank of America Corporation, including profits derived from investment banking. The analyst(s) responsible for this report may also receive compensation based upon, among other factors, the overall profitability of the Bank's sales and trading businesses relating to the class of securities or financial instruments for which such analyst is responsible.

Other Important Disclosures

Prices are indicative and for information purposes only. Except as otherwise stated in the report, for any recommendation in relation to an equity security, the price referenced is the publicly traded price of the security as of close of business on the day prior to the date of the report or, if the report is published during intraday trading, the price referenced is indicative of the traded price as of the date and time of the report and in relation to a debt security (including equity preferred and CDS), prices are indicative as of the date and time of the report and are from various sources including BofA Securities trading desks.
The date and time of completion of the production of any recommendation in this report shall be the date and time of dissemination of this report as recorded in the report timestamp.

Recipients who are not institutional investors or market professionals should seek the advice of their independent financial advisor before considering information in this report in connection with any investment decision, or for a necessary explanation of its contents.
Officers of BofAS or one or more of its affiliates (other than research analysts) may have a financial interest in securities of the issuer(s) or in related investments.
Individuals identified as economists do not function as research analysts under U.S. law and reports prepared by them are not research reports under applicable U.S. rules and regulations.
Macroeconomic analysis is considered investment research for purposes of distribution in the U.K. under the rules of the Financial Conduct Authority.
Refer to BofA Global Research policies relating to conflicts of interest.
"BofA Securities" includes BofA Securities, Inc. ("BofAS") and its affiliates. Investors should contact their BofA Securities representative or Merrill Global Wealth Management financial advisor if they have questions concerning this report or concerning the appropriateness of any investment idea described herein for such investor. "BofA Securities" is a global brand for BofA Global Research.
Information relating to Non-US affiliates of BofA Securities and Distribution of Affiliate Research Reports:
BofAS and/or Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith Incorporated ("MLPF&S") may in the future distribute, information of the following non-US affiliates in the US (short name: legal name, regulator): Merrill Lynch (South Africa): Merrill Lynch South Africa (Pty) Ltd., regulated by The Financial Service Board; MLI (UK): Merrill Lynch International, regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA); BofASE (France): BofA Securities Europe SA is authorized by the Autorité de Contrôle Prudentiel et de Résolution (ACPR) and regulated by the ACPR and the Autorité des Marchés Financiers (AMF). BofA Securities Europe SA ("BofASE") with registered address at 51, rue La Boétie, 75008 Paris is registered under no 842 602 690 RCS Paris. In accordance with the provisions of French Code Monétaire et Financier (Monetary and Financial Code), BofASE is an établissement de crédit et d'investissement (credit and investment institution) that is authorised and supervised by the European Central Bank and the Autorité de Contrôle Prudentiel et de Résolution (ACPR) and regulated by the ACPR and the Autorité des Marchés Financiers. BofASE's share capital can be found at www.bofaml.com/BofASEdisclaimer; BofA Europe (Milan): Bank of America Europe Designated Activity Company, Milan Branch, regulated by the Bank of Italy, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI); BofA Europe (Frankfurt): Bank of America Europe Designated Activity Company, Frankfurt Branch regulated by BaFin, the ECB and the CBI; BofA Europe (Madrid): Bank of America Europe Designated Activity Company, Sucursal en España, regulated by the Bank of Spain, the ECB and the CBI; Merrill Lynch (Australia): Merrill Lynch Equities (Australia) Limited, regulated by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission; Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong): Merrill Lynch (Asia Pacific) Limited, regulated by the Hong Kong Securities and Futures Commission (HKSFC); Merrill Lynch (Singapore): Merrill Lynch (Singapore) Pte Ltd, regulated by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS); Merrill Lynch (Canada): Merrill Lynch Canada Inc, regulated by the Canadian Investment Regulatory Organization; Merrill Lynch (Mexico): Merrill Lynch Mexico, SA de CV, Casa de Bolsa, regulated by the Comisión Nacional Bancaria y de Valores; Merrill Lynch (Argentina): Merrill Lynch Argentina SA, regulated by Comisión Nacional de Valores; BofAS Japan: BofA Securities Japan Co., Ltd., regulated by the Financial Services Agency; Merrill Lynch (Seoul): Merrill Lynch International, LLC Seoul Branch, regulated by the Financial Supervisory Service; Merrill Lynch (Taiwan): Merrill Lynch Securities (Taiwan) Ltd., regulated by the Securities and Futures Bureau; BofAS India: BofA Securities India Limited, regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI); Merrill Lynch (Israel): Merrill Lynch Israel Limited, regulated by Israel Securities Authority; Merrill Lynch (DIFC): Merrill Lynch International (DIFC Branch), regulated by the Dubai Financial Services Authority (DFSA); Merrill Lynch (Brazil): Merrill Lynch S.A. Corretora de Títulos e Valores Mobiliários, regulated by Comissão de Valores Mobiliários; Merrill Lynch KSA Company: Merrill Lynch Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Company, regulated by the Capital Market Authority.
This information: has been approved for publication and is distributed in the United Kingdom (UK) to professional clients and eligible counterparties (as each is defined in the rules of the FCA and the PRA) by MLI (UK), which is authorized by the PRA and regulated by the FCA and the PRA - details about the extent of our regulation by the FCA and PRA are available from us on request; has been approved for publication and is distributed in the European Economic Area (EEA) by BofASE (France), which is authorized by the ACPR and regulated by the ACPR and the AMF; has been considered and distributed in Japan by BofAS Japan, a registered securities dealer under the Financial Instruments and Exchange Act in Japan, or its permitted affiliates; is issued and distributed in Hong Kong by Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong) which is regulated by HKSFC; is issued and distributed in Taiwan by Merrill Lynch (Taiwan); is issued and distributed in India by BofAS India; and is issued and distributed in Singapore to institutional investors and/or accredited investors (each as defined under the Financial Advisers Regulations) by Merrill Lynch (Singapore) (Company Registration No 198602883D). Merrill Lynch (Singapore) is regulated by MAS. Merrill Lynch Equities (Australia) Limited (ABN 65 006 276 795), AFS License 235132 (MLEA) distributes this information in Australia only to 'Wholesale' clients as defined by s.761G of the Corporations Act 2001. With the exception of Bank of America N.A., Australia Branch, neither MLEA nor any of its affiliates involved in preparing this information is an Authorised Deposit-Taking Institution under the Banking Act 1959 nor regulated by the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority. No approval is required for publication or distribution of this information in Brazil and its local distribution is by Merrill Lynch (Brazil) in accordance with applicable regulations. Merrill Lynch (DIFC) is authorized and regulated by the DFSA. Information prepared and issued by Merrill Lynch (DIFC) is done so in accordance with the requirements of the DFSA conduct of business rules. BofA Europe (Frankfurt) distributes this information in Germany and is regulated by BaFin, the ECB and the CBI. BofA Securities entities, including BofA Europe and BofASE (France), may outsource/delegate the marketing and/or provision of certain research services or aspects of research services to other branches or members of the BofA Securities group. You may be contacted by a different BofA Securities entity acting for and on behalf of your service provider where permitted by applicable law. This does not change your service provider. Please refer to the Electronic Communications Disclaimers for further information.
This information has been prepared and issued by BofAS and/or one or more of its non-US affiliates. The author(s) of this information may not be licensed to carry on regulated activities in your jurisdiction and, if not licensed, do not hold themselves out as being able to do so. BofAS and/or MLPF&S is the distributor of this information in the US and accepts full responsibility for information distributed to BofAS and/or MLPF&S clients in the US by its non-US affiliates. Any US person receiving this information and wishing to effect any transaction in any security discussed herein should do so through BofAS and/or MLPF&S and not such foreign affiliates. Hong Kong recipients of this information should contact Merrill Lynch (Asia Pacific) Limited in respect of any matters relating to dealing in securities or provision of specific advice on securities or any other matters arising from, or in connection with, this information. Singapore recipients of this information should contact Merrill Lynch (Singapore) Pte Ltd in respect of any matters arising from, or in connection with, this information. For clients that are not accredited investors, expert investors or institutional investors Merrill Lynch (Singapore) Pte Ltd accepts full responsibility for the contents of this information distributed to such clients in Singapore.
General Investment Related Disclosures:
Taiwan Readers: Neither the information nor any opinion expressed herein constitutes an offer or a solicitation of an offer to transact in any securities or other financial instrument. No part of this report may be used or reproduced or quoted in any manner whatsoever in Taiwan by the press or any other person without the express written consent of BofA Securities.
This document provides general information only, and has been prepared for, and is intended for general distribution to, BofA Securities clients. Neither the information nor any opinion expressed constitutes an offer or an invitation to make an offer, to buy or sell any securities or other financial instrument or any derivative related to such securities or instruments (e.g., options, futures, warrants, and contracts for differences). This document is not intended to provide personal investment advice and it does not take into account the specific investment objectives,

financial situation and the particular needs of, and is not directed to, any specific person(s). This document and its content do not constitute, and should not be considered to constitute, investment advice for purposes of ERISA, the US tax code, the Investment Advisers Act or otherwise. Investors should seek financial advice regarding the appropriateness of investing in financial instruments and implementing investment strategies discussed or recommended in this document and should understand that statements regarding future prospects may not be realized. Any decision to purchase or subscribe for securities in any offering must be based solely on existing public information on such security or the information in the prospectus or other offering document issued in connection with such offering, and not on this document.

Securities and other financial instruments referred to herein, or recommended, offered or sold by BofA Securities, are not insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and are not deposits or other obligations of any insured depository institution (including, Bank of America, N.A.). Investments in general and, derivatives, in particular, involve numerous risks, including, among others, market risk, counterparty default risk and liquidity risk. No security, financial instrument or derivative is suitable for all investors. Digital assets are extremely speculative, volatile and are largely unregulated. In some cases, securities and other financial instruments may be difficult to value or sell and reliable information about the value or risks related to the security or financial instrument may be difficult to obtain. Investors should note that income from such securities and other financial instruments, if any, may fluctuate and that price or value of such securities and instruments may rise or fall and, in some cases, investors may lose their entire principal investment. Past performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance. Levels and basis for taxation may change.

BofA Securities is aware that the implementation of the ideas expressed in this report may depend upon an investor's ability to "short" securities or other financial instruments and that such action may be limited by regulations prohibiting or restricting "shortselling" in many jurisdictions. Investors are urged to seek advice regarding the applicability of such regulations prior to executing any short idea contained in this report.

Certain investment strategies and financial instruments discussed herein may only be appropriate for consideration in accounts qualified for high risk investment.

Foreign currency rates of exchange may adversely affect the value, price or income of any security or financial instrument mentioned in this report. Investors in such securities and instruments effectively assume currency risk.

BofAS or one of its affiliates is a regular issuer of traded financial instruments linked to securities that may have been recommended in this report. BofAS or one of its affiliates may, at any time, hold a trading position (long or short) in the securities and financial instruments discussed in this report.

BofA Securities, through business units other than BofA Global Research, may have issued and may in the future issue trading ideas or recommendations that are inconsistent with, and reach different conclusions from, the information presented herein. Such ideas or recommendations may reflect different time frames, assumptions, views and analytical methods of the persons who prepared them, and BofA Securities is under no obligation to ensure that such other trading ideas or recommendations are brought to the attention of any recipient of this information.

In the event that the recipient received this information pursuant to a contract between the recipient and BofAS for the provision of research services for a separate fee, and in connection therewith BofAS may be deemed to be acting as an investment adviser, such status relates, if at all, solely to the person with whom BofAS has contracted directly and does not extend beyond the delivery of this report (unless otherwise agreed specifically in writing by BofAS). If such recipient uses the services of BofAS in connection with the sale or purchase of a security referred to herein, BofAS may act as principal for its own account or as agent for another person. BofAS is and continues to act solely as a broker-dealer in connection with the execution of any transactions, including transactions in any securities referred to herein.

Copyright and General Information:

Copyright 2023 Bank of America Corporation. All rights reserved. iQdatabase® is a registered service mark of Bank of America Corporation. This information is prepared for the use of BofA Securities clients and may not be redistributed, retransmitted or disclosed, in whole or in part, or in any form or manner, without the express written consent of BofA Securities. BofA Global Research information is distributed simultaneously to internal and client websites and other portals by BofA Securities and is not publicly-available material. Any unauthorized use or disclosure is prohibited. Receipt and review of this information constitutes your agreement not to redistribute, retransmit, or disclose to others the contents, opinions, conclusion, or information contained herein (including any investment recommendations, estimates or price targets) without first obtaining express permission from an authorized officer of BofA Securities.

Materials prepared by BofA Global Research personnel are based on public information. Facts and views presented in this material have not been reviewed by, and may not reflect information known to, professionals in other business areas of BofA Securities, including investment banking personnel. BofA Securities has established information barriers between BofA Global Research and certain business groups. As a result, BofA Securities does not disclose certain client relationships with, or compensation received from, such issuers. To the extent this material discusses any legal proceeding or issues, it has not been prepared as nor is it intended to express any legal conclusion, opinion or advice. Investors should consult their own legal advisers as to issues of law relating to the subject matter of this material. BofA Global Research personnel's knowledge of legal proceedings in which any BofA Securities entity and/or its directors, officers and employees may be plaintiffs, defendants, co-defendants or co-plaintiffs with or involving issuers mentioned in this material is based on public information. Facts and views presented in this material that relate to any such proceedings have not been reviewed by, discussed with, and may not reflect information known to, professionals in other business areas of BofA Securities in connection with the legal proceedings or matters relevant to such proceedings.

This information has been prepared independently of any issuer of securities mentioned herein and not in connection with any proposed offering of securities or as agent of any issuer of any securities. None of BofAS any of its affiliates or their research analysts has any authority whatsoever to make any representation or warranty on behalf of the issuer(s). BofA Global Research policy prohibits research personnel from disclosing a recommendation, investment rating, or investment thesis for review by an issuer prior to the publication of a research report containing such rating, recommendation or investment thesis.

Any information relating to the tax status of financial instruments discussed herein is not intended to provide tax advice or to be used by anyone to provide tax advice. Investors are urged to seek tax advice based on their particular circumstances from an independent tax professional.

The information herein (other than disclosure information relating to BofA Securities and its affiliates) was obtained from various sources and we do not guarantee its accuracy. This information may contain links to third-party websites. BofA Securities is not responsible for the content of any third-party website or any linked content contained in a third-party website. Content contained on such third-party websites is not part of this information and is not incorporated by reference. The inclusion of a link does not imply any endorsement by or any affiliation with BofA Securities. Access to any third-party website is at your own risk, and you should always review the terms and privacy policies at third-party websites before submitting any personal information to them. BofA Securities is not responsible for such terms and privacy policies and expressly disclaims any liability for them.

All opinions, projections and estimates constitute the judgment of the author as of the date of publication and are subject to change without notice. Prices also are subject to change without notice. BofA Securities is under no obligation to update this information and BofA Securities ability to publish information on the subject issuer(s) in the future is subject to applicable quiet periods. You should therefore assume that BofA Securities will not update any fact, circumstance or opinion contained herein.

Certain outstanding reports or investment opinions relating to securities, financial instruments and/or issuers may no longer be current. Always refer to the most recent research report relating to an issuer prior to making an investment decision.

In some cases, an issuer may be classified as Restricted or may be Under Review or Extended Review. In each case, investors should consider any investment opinion relating to such issuer (or its security and/or financial instruments) to be suspended or withdrawn and should not rely on the analyses and investment opinion(s) pertaining to such issuer (or its securities and/or financial instruments) nor should the analyses or opinion(s) be considered a solicitation of any kind. Sales persons and financial advisors affiliated with BofAS or any of its affiliates may not solicit purchases of securities or financial instruments that are Restricted or Under Review and may only solicit securities under Extended Review in accordance with firm policies.

Neither BofA Securities nor any officer or employee of BofA Securities accepts any liability whatsoever for any direct, indirect or consequential damages or losses arising from any use of this information.

w