



#### Albert Desclée

+44 20 7773 3382 albert.desclee@barclays.com Barclays, UK

#### **Evgeny Katenko**

+44 20 7773 0113 evgeny.x.katenko@barclays.com Barclays, UK

#### Simon Polbennikov

+44 20 3134 0752 simon.polbennikov@barclays.com Barclays, UK

# Carry in Global Rates Markets

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#### Introduction

- In global rates markets, carry strategies exploit the empirical finding that rates tend to persist rather than move according to the forwards\*
- Within a given market, curve steepness can be an indicator of duration positioning
- Relative steepness across markets can be an indicator of yield spread positioning
- We focus on cross-market positioning based on relative steepness and discuss
  - Performance,
  - Risk properties
- Applications:
  - Stand-alone long-short rate strategy that can describe a carry factor in rates markets
  - Benchmark design: "smart beta" in global rates markets



<sup>\*</sup> See a.o. Global Fixed Income Investments: The Persistence Effect, Leibowitz M., L. Bader and S Kogelman, Financial Analysts Journal, 1995 and Expected Returns, Ilmanen, Wiley Finance, 2011

#### Data

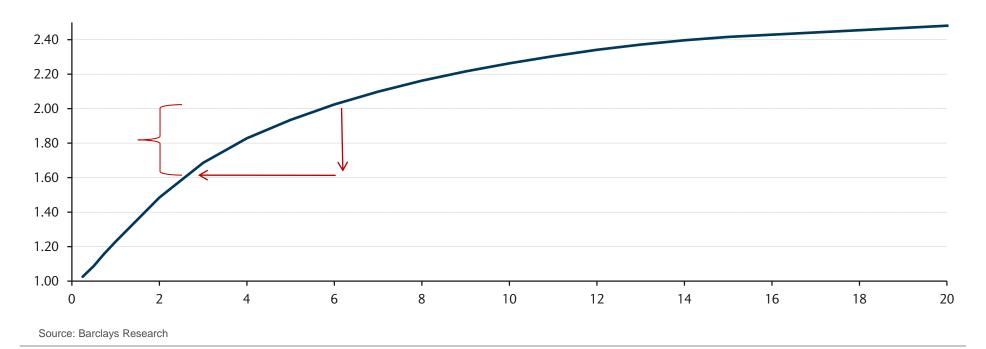
- We study global rates markets using
  - Interest Rate Swaps (Bloomberg swap curves)
  - Treasury bonds (Bloomberg Barclays Bond Indices)
- Swaps
  - 2 periods:
    - Jan 1995 to Sep 2016 (7 markets: USD, CAD, AUD, JPY, GBP, CHF, SEK)
      - 3 tenors: 3y, 5y, 10y
    - Nov 2002 to Sep 2016 (8 markets: USD, CAD, AUD, JPY, GBP, CHF, SEK, EUR)
      - 4 tenors: 3y, 5y, 10y, and 15y
- Treasury bonds
  - Nov 2001 to Dec 2016 (7 major markets: US, CA, AU, JP, DE, GB, SE)
    - 3-7y maturity sector only



## Assessing rates carry

- Rates carry can be measured as yield accretion plus roll-down return in excess of the cost of financing
  - Assuming the yield curve remains unchanged at horizon
    - Yield accretion over time
    - Return impact of yield change due to maturity shortening

#### **Carry and Roll Down – Example USD Swap Curve (16 Jan 2017)**

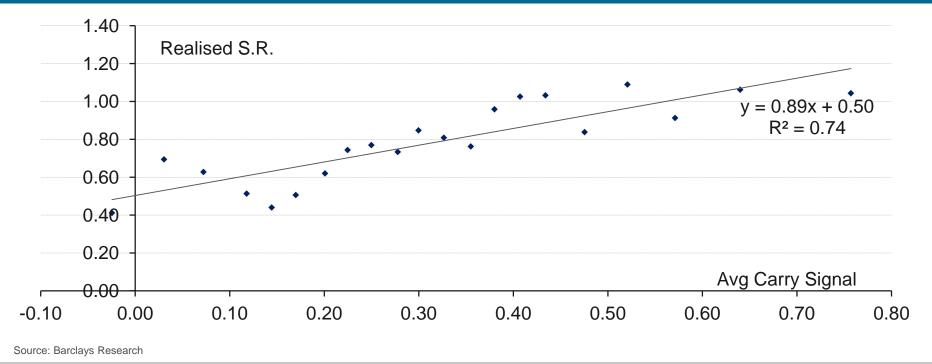




# Does rates carry predict returns?

- Rank all 21 cells (3 maturities and 7 markets) by carry signal every month
  - Carry is normalized for risk
    - Risk can be defined either in terms of duration, or of volatility of historical returns
- Observe average realized return, risk and Sharpe ratio of each bucket in subsequent month
- For each cell, report average signal and realised return

#### Carry signal and subsequent performance (pooled data) (1995 to 2016)





## **Swap-based strategies**

- Long-short strategy
- Every month
  - Go long duration in markets with highest carry (steepest slope) per unit of risk
  - Short markets with lowest carry (flattest or most inverted slope)
- Long and short portfolios are diversified
  - For a single maturity (e.g. 5y):
    - 3 long and 3 short out of 7 markets for dataset starting in 1995
    - 4 long and 4 short out of 8 markets for dataset starting in 2002
  - For all maturity x country cells (pooled strategy)
    - 7 long and 7 short out of 21 cells for dataset starting in 1995
    - 11 long and 11 short out of 32 cells for dataset starting in 2002
- Weighting scheme for individual swaps within long and short legs of the strategy
  - Equal duration contribution (total duration of each leg is 6y)



# Long-Short swap strategy

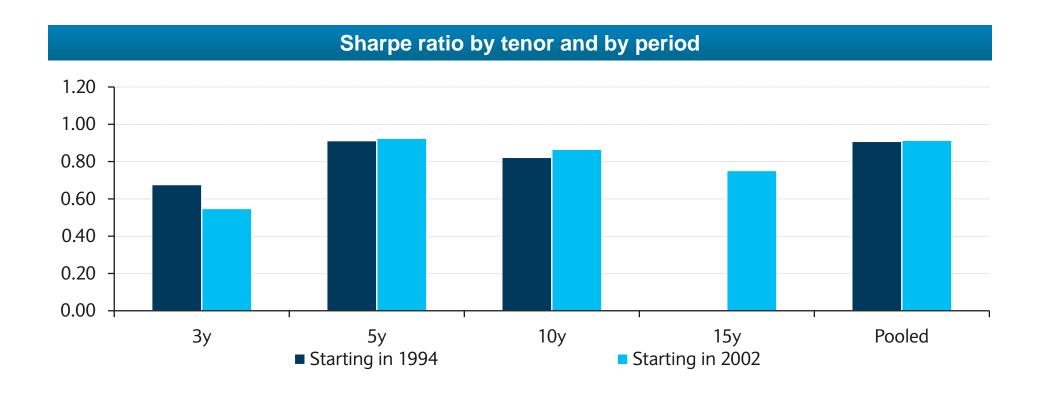
- Long-short swap strategy is:
  - Long duration in markets with steep slope and high carry per unit of risk
  - Short durations in markets with relatively flat slope and low carry
- The example below relates to a long-short strategy in 5y swaps
  - Long the three steepest curves and short the three flattest curves





## Swap strategies: summary performance

- Focus on "equal duration contribution" strategy (6 yr of duration in each of long and short legs of the long-short strategy)
- Highest Sharpe ratio observed for intermediate maturities
- Pooled strategy improves Sharpe ratio only marginally





## Performances of long-short swap strategies

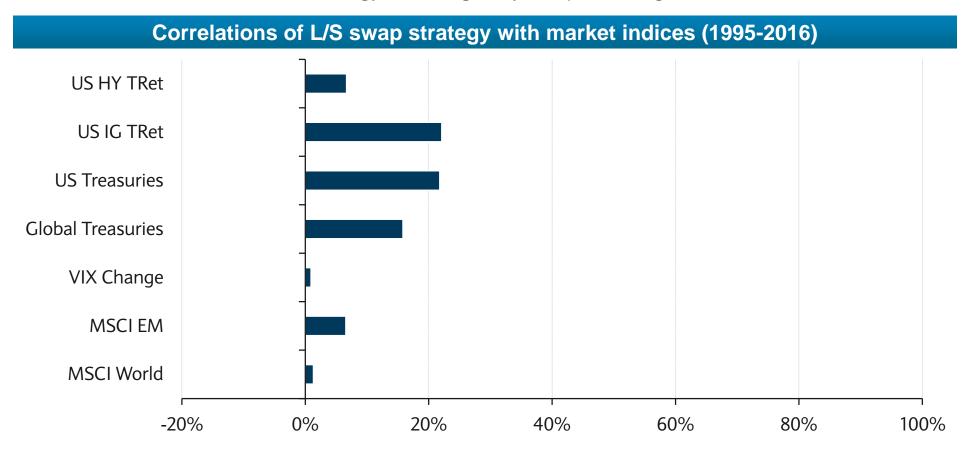
- Performance is generally positive, for all tenors and weighting schemes
- Pooled strategy (consider all countries and maturities) has only small gain in S.R.
- Main attraction of carry signal is cross-market rather than curve positioning

Summary performance							
	Starting in 1995 (7 markets)						
	Зу	5y	10y		Pooled		
Avg Return (%/y)	2.12%	2.50%	2.12%		2.62%		
Volatility (%/y)	3.13%	2.75%	2.58%		2.88%		
Sharpe Ratio	0.68	0.91	0.82		0.91		
Max Drawdown	-5.33%	-4.28%	-4.28%				
	Starting i	n 2002 (8 mark	cets)				
	Зу	5y	10y	15y	Pooled		
Avg Return (%/y)	1.18%	1.88%	1.55%	1.34%	1.92%		
Volatility (%/y)	2.15%	2.03%	1.79%	1.78%	2.11%		
Sharpe Ratio	0.55	0.92	0.87	0.75	0.91		
Max Drawdown	-4.48%	-3.77%	-3.52%	-3.49%			
Source: Barclays Research							



## Swap strategy: correlation with market variables

- Correlations with market factors are small but positive on fixed income factors
- Correlations can change substantially over time according to strategy positioning and differences in market volatility
- Data below relate to the L/S strategy investing in 5y swaps starting in 1995







# Swap strategy: performance in macro regimes

- Strong directionality on global tsy market returns and on Fed regimes
- L/S strategy investing in 5y swaps starting in 1995

Performance of 5	yr L/S swap strategy	(1995 to 2016)
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	Freq.	Return (bp/m)	Sharpe Ratio
Fed Easing	31%	15	0.61
Fed Post Easing	19%	47	1.62
Fed Tightening	31%	17	0.87
Fed Post Tightening	20%	11	0.74

	Freq.	Return (bp/m)	Sharpe Ratio
NBER Recession	11%	19	0.68
NBER Expansion	89%	21	0.95

	Freq.	Return (bp/m)	Sharpe Ratio
Global Tsy Up	64%	28	1.27
Global Tsy Down	36%	9	0.36
US Tsy Up	56%	33	1.52
US Tsy Down	44%	6	0.25

	Freq.	Return (bp/m)	Sharpe Ratio
MSCI Up	58%	20	0.89
MSCI Down	42%	22	0.94



# Adjusting the swap strategy for macro variables

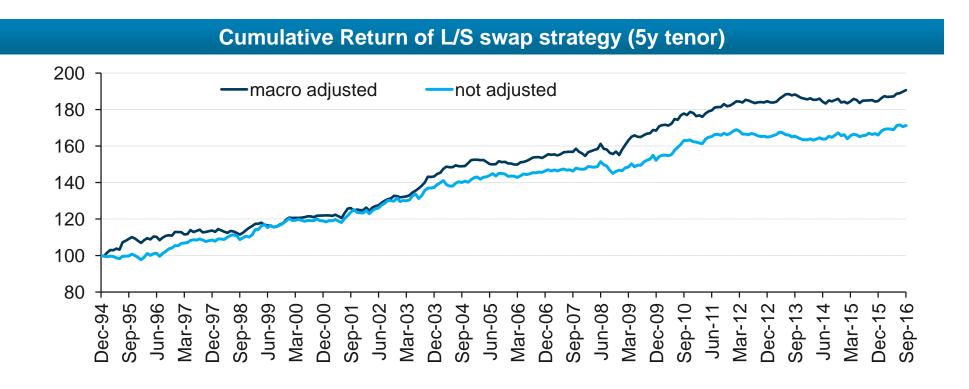
- A pure carry indicator which assumes the curve does not change
  - But a steep curve can predict increases in rates :
    - Is this consistent with the macro environment?
- We adjust the carry signal according to macro variables to try predict changes in policy rates
  - Level of rates
  - Inflation
  - Wealth
  - Economic activity
- · Adjusted carry signal

$$CarrySignal = \frac{YieldCarry + Rolldown}{Risk} - MacroAdjustment$$



# Swap strategy with macro data

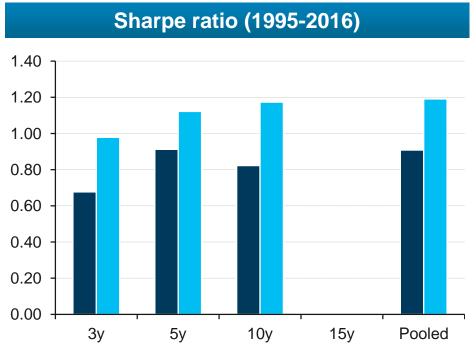
- The long-short strategy below invests in 5y swaps across 7 markets
  - Long duration in the top three in terms of macro-adjusted carry signal
  - Short duration in bottom three
  - Equal duration contributions
  - Target duration of short and long legs: 6 y

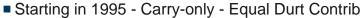


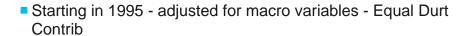


# Swap strategies with macro adjustment: performance

- Adding fundamental variables helps improve Sharpe ratios of long-short swap strategies
- Strategies investing in intermediate maturities deliver the best performance







# Sharpe ratio (2002-2016) 1.80 1.60 1.40 1.20 1.00 0.80 0.60 0.40 0.20 0.00

■ Starting in 2002 - Carry-only - Equal Durt Contrib

**5**y

3y

 Starting in 2002 - adjusted for macro variables - Equal Durt Contrib

10y

15<sub>V</sub>

Source: Barclays Research



Pooled

# Performances of macro-adjusted L/S swap strategies

Performance has generally improved vs. carry-only strategies

Performances of macro-adjusted L/S swap strategies					
	Starting	in 1995 (7 mark	cets)		
	Зу	5y	10y	Pooled	
Avg Return (%/y)	2.87%	2.99%	3.00%	3.26%	
Volatility (%/y)	2.93%	2.67%	2.55%	2.74%	
Sharpe Ratio	0.98	1.12	1.17	1.19	
Max Drawdown	-4.74%	-3.83%	-3.64%		
	Starting	in 2002 (8 mark	(ets)		

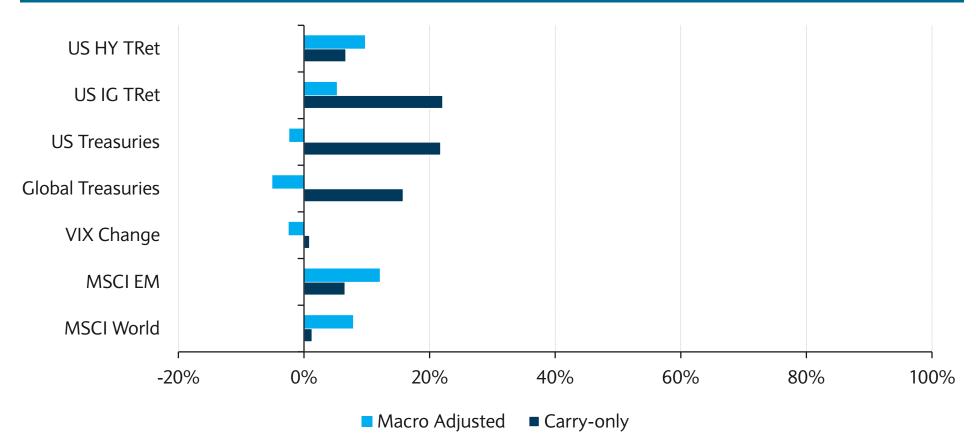
Starting in 2002 (8 markets)						
	Зу	5у	10y	15y	Pooled	
Avg Return (%/y)	1.90%	2.03%	2.16%	1.72%	3.02%	
Volatility (%/y)	2.03%	1.79%	1.79%	1.85%	1.90%	
Sharpe Ratio	0.94	1.13	1.21	0.93	1.59	
Max Drawdown	-3.84%	-3.01%	-2.76%	-2.66%		
Source: Barclays Research						



## Swap strategy: correlations with market variables

- Macro-adjusted strategy is slightly less directional on rates market performance
- Long-short swap strategy investing in 5y swaps since 1995

#### Correlations of L/S swap strategy with market indices (1995 to 2016)



Source: Barclays Research; Bloomberg



# Swap strategy: performance in macro regimes

• Lower directionality on rates market performance than prior to macro adjustments

Performance of 5yr L/S swap strategy – macro adjusted (1995 to 2016)
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	Freq.	Return (bp/m)	Sharpe Ratio	
Fed Easing	31%	21	0.79	NBER Recession
Fed Post Easing	19%	49	2.19	NBER Expansion
Fed Tightening	31%	17	0.99	
Fed Post Tightening	20%	20	1.05	

	Freq.	Return (bp/m)	Sharpe Ratio
Global Tsy Up	64%	24	1.05
Global Tsy Down	36%	27	1.27
US Tsy Up	56%	26	1.21
US Tsy Down	44%	24	1.03
Source: Barclays Research: B	lloomhera		

	Freq.	Return (bp/m)	Sharpe Ratio
MSCI Up	58%	28	1.29
MSCI Down	42%	21	0.91

Return

(bp/m)

28

25

Freq.

11%

89%

Source: Barclays Research; Bloomberg



**Sharpe Ratio** 

0.88

1.19

Designing a "smart beta" in global rates markets



# Customizing global treasury indices

- Popular customization schemes of global treasury indices have focused on controlling risk
  - Issuer Capped Sovereign Indices (QPS 2006)
  - GDP weighted indices (Bloomberg Barclays Indices 2009)
  - Fiscal Strength weighted indices (Bloomberg Barclays Indices, QPS 2011)

Could a customization based on carry help design a suitable "smart beta" index for global rates?

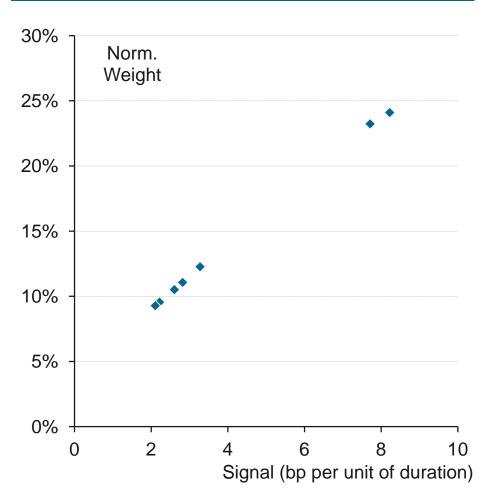
- Consider as a baseline
  - A global treasury index investing in 7 markets (US, JP, GB, DE, CA, AU, SE), 3-7y maturity
    - Market-capitalization weighted or equal-weighted
    - Returns reported in USD, currency-hedged, in excess of 1M USD Libor
    - Period: Nov 2001 to Sep 2016



## Designing a carry-based global bond allocation

- Each month, carry-based signals are produced for each market, based on the shape of its treasury yield curve
- Signals are transformed into weights in a logit function
- Weights are then normalised to 100%
  - So, in this example, portfolio weights are determined independently of any baseline index weights
- Portfolio returns are compared with marketcapitalization and equal weighted G7 3-7y treasury indices

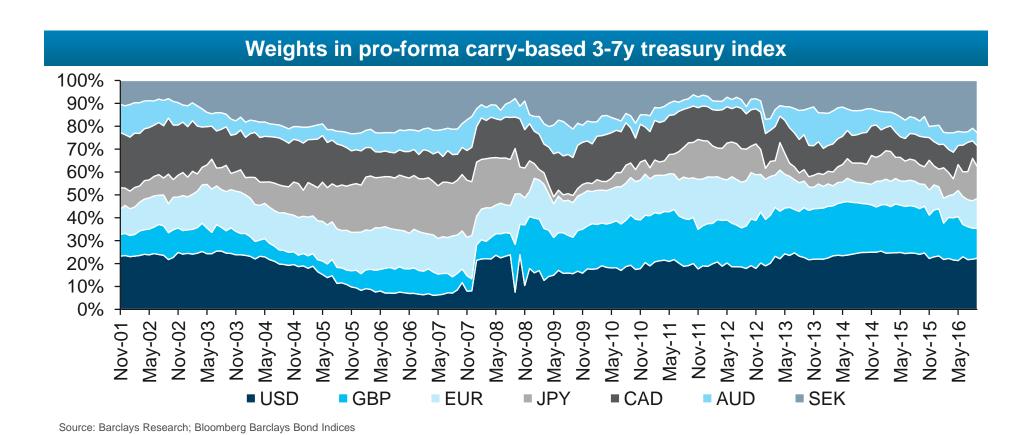
#### **Transforming signals into weights**





## Historical weights of carry-based 3-7y global bond portfolio

- Weights fluctuate over time but are not extremely volatile
- Different options exist to smooth weights and therefore control turnover
  - Or to anchor weights to relative market capitalizations in order to ensure investability





## Performance summary of 3-7y treasury indices

Performance (2001-2016)				
	Return (%/y)	Volatility (%/y)	Sharpe Ratio	
AU	1.16%	3.42%	0.34	
CA	2.47%	2.94%	0.84	
DE	2.68%	2.95%	0.91	
JP	1.28%	1.36%	0.94	
SE	2.70%	3.13%	0.86	
GB	2.32%	3.06%	0.76	
US	2.81%	3.90%	0.72	
Market Weights	2.04%	2.05%	1.00	
<b>Equal Weights</b>	2.20%	2.49%	0.88	
Carry Only	2.55%	2.49%	1.03	
Macro Adjusted	2.59%	2.47%	1.05	

- Allocate portfolio weights according to carry signal
- Risk comparable to EW index
- Positive information ratio relative to both EW and MW indices
- All USD hedged returns in excess of 1M Libor

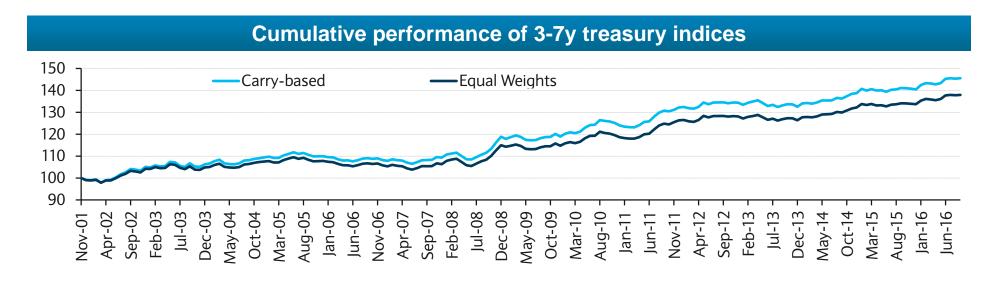
Tracking Error (2001-2016)					
	Avg (%/y)	Vol.(%/y)	I.R.		
Carry only					
over MW	0.51%	0.89%	0.58		
over EW	0.35%	0.35%	1.02		
Macro Adjusted					
over MW	0.55%	0.92%	0.60		
over EW	0.39%	0.34%	1.17		

Source: Barclays Research; Bloomberg Barclays Bond Indices

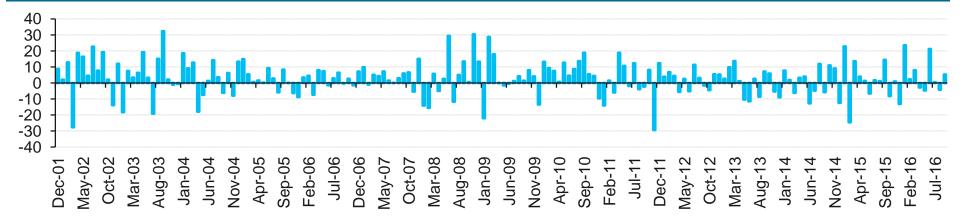


# Performance summary of pro-forma 3-7y treasury indices

Allocate portfolio weights according to carry signal



#### Monthly tracking errors of carry-based over equal-weighted index (bp)

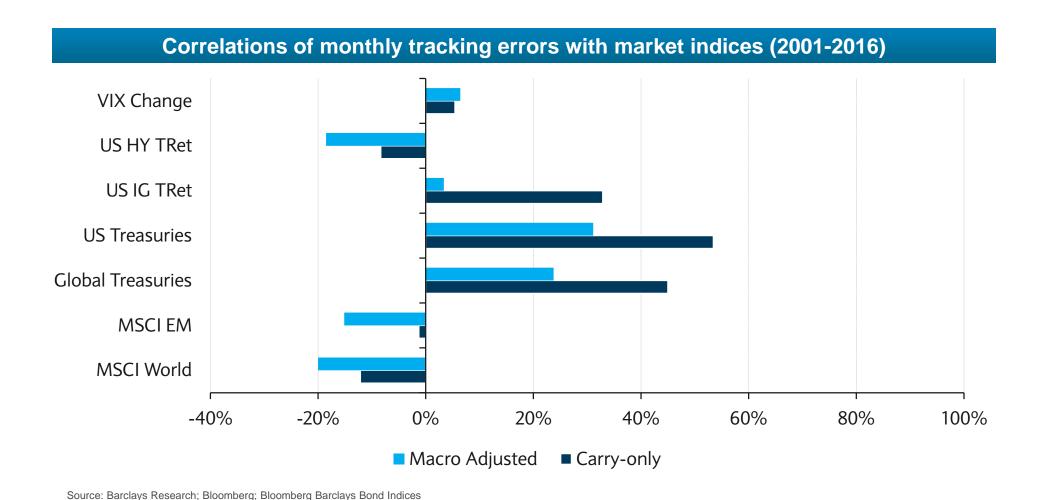


Source: Barclays Research; Bloomberg Barclays Bond Indices



## Performance characteristics of global bond portfolios

- Monthly tracking errors remain directional on treasury market returns
  - Even after adjustment for macro variables





#### Conclusion

- A carry strategy based on relative slope of the yield curve could help add value in global rates markets
- Possible applications:
  - Systematic strategies
    - For example, a long-short systematic strategy based on interest rate swaps
  - Benchmark customization for long only portfolios
    - Could represent a "smart beta" in global rates markets



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