How to harness the risk aversion premium embedded in equity volatility or corporate bonds?

Axel Botte
Head of Market Strategy

DISCOUNT, RISKS AND RISK PREMIUM

The objective of active management is to generate additional performance compared to the ultimate risk-free benchmark: the money market investment. The price of a risky asset, whose cash flows (dividends, coupons) are uncertain, must include a discount to its certain equivalent. This discount, which determines the risk premium, is not incidental. It remunerates the risks incurred by investors. **Capturing a risk premium therefore requires judgement on the adequacy of this discount to the identifiable risks.**

The existence of an ex-ante premium is inseparable from investors' aversion to loss and risk. The credit market is characterised by the potential default of the issuer. **Holding a risky bond is equivalent to selling a put on the value of the borrowing company's assets**. Default risk creates this asymmetry that justifies the premium linked to the aversion to the creditors' loss. **This asymmetry can be found in equity markets**. Protection against a stock market crash is notoriously more expensive than an index upside option.

While asymmetry reflects loss aversion, investors' risk aversion leads to a second type of premium. **The risks of illiquidity of an asset, downgrading of an issuer's rating or systemic financial risk** are present in all markets to varying degrees. Capturing a risk premium means identifying excess valuations.

Simon Aninat
Volatility Portfolio manager

CAPTURING THE EQUITY MARKET VOLATILITY RISK PREMIUM

The volatility risk premium is closely related to a known behavioural bias, **the loss aversion bias**: individuals on average feel twice as much pain from a €100 loss as they feel joy from an equivalent gain. In the options market, this bias creates an imbalance, resulting in a demand for protection against market drawdowns that significantly exceeds supply. Consequently, protection sellers find themselves in a position of strength and demand a premium to assume the risk of drawdown. As a result, there is **a volatility risk premium in equity markets that can be captured to generate alpha**.

This generally involves selling volatility, usually by selling options on equity indices. Two main implementations are possible:

- cover all risks except for volatility to achieve **a pure carry strategy**
- cover all risks except for volatility and directional risk to achieve **a strategy that benefits from both volatility normalisation and market rebound**

To optimise the risk-return profile of a volatility selling strategy, we are convinced that it is necessary **to dynamically allocate between these strategies based on market conditions**. In calm market conditions, it is preferable to take advantage of the carry by reducing directional risk. Conversely, after a market shock, there is an opportunity to benefit from a potential rebound by increasing directional exposure.

Emmanuel Schatz
Credit Portfolio manager

CAPTURING CREDIT SPREADS

In the corporate bond space, humans' aversion to risk is materialised by the so-called “credit spread”: the excess remuneration for taking on credit risk vs “risk-free” debt. To capture this premium with a fair degree of stability, we focus on the following.

First, **credit research** to gain a deep, forward-looking understanding of the **fundamentals** and the dynamics of the company's business and its capacity to deliver recurring cashflows.

Second, because, unlike stocks, bonds are an asymmetric asset class, issuer **diversification** is required to mitigate unwanted idiosyncratic shocks. Probably, a 3% maximum portfolio weight per issuer is a good yardstick is most situations.

Third, one needs to **optimize relative value** amongst the many candidates for inclusion in the portfolio. Under the classic quantitative approach of the **Merton model, a corporate bond is equated to a short put option position on the assets of the firm and hence the level of its credit spread is positively correlated with its equity volatility**. Obviously real life is more complex, but this model can be used to identify opportunities or inefficiencies. For example, a dividend cut may increase stock volatility and credit spread, but on the other hand such an event can be seen as a boon for bondholders. Alternatively, relative value can be assessed more qualitatively by comparing the credit spread vs the perception of credit fundamentals.

Finally, **keeping a decent cash level** makes sense to capture opportunities in volatile market conditions. Keeping cash on an ongoing basis creates a drag but this is more than recouped when markets seize up and cheap investment opportunities arise. This strategy is akin to holding an out-of-the-money option on credit spread volatility.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Ostrum Asset Management

Asset management company regulated by AMF under n° GP-18000014 – Limited company with a share capital of 50 938 997€. Trade register n°525 192 753 Paris – VAT : FR 93 525 192 753 – Registered Office: 43, avenue Pierre Mendès-France, 75013 Paris www.ostrum.com

This document is intended for professional, in accordance with MIFID. It may not be used for any purpose other than that for which it was conceived and may not be copied, distributed or communicated to third parties, in part or in whole, without the prior written authorization of Ostrum Asset Management.

None of the information contained in this document should be interpreted as having any contractual value. This document is produced purely for the purposes of providing indicative information. This document consists of a presentation created and prepared by Ostrum Asset Management based on sources it considers to be reliable.

Ostrum Asset Management reserves the right to modify the information presented in this document at any time without notice, which under no circumstances constitutes a commitment from Ostrum Asset Management.

The analyses and opinions referenced herein represent the subjective views of the author(s) as referenced, are as of the date shown and are subject to change without prior notice. There can be no assurance that developments will transpire as may be forecasted in this material. This simulation was carried out for indicative purposes, on the basis of hypothetical investments, and does not constitute a contractual agreement from the part of Ostrum Asset Management.

Ostrum Asset Management will not be held responsible for any decision taken or not taken on the basis of the information contained in this document, nor in the use that a third party might make of the information. Figures mentioned refer to previous years. Past performance does not guarantee future results. Any reference to a ranking, a rating, a label or an award provides no guarantee for future performance and is not constant over time. Reference to a ranking and/or an award does not indicate the future performance of the UCITS/AIF or the fund manager.

Under Ostrum Asset Management's social responsibility policy, and in accordance with the treaties signed by the French government, the funds directly managed by Ostrum Asset Management do not invest in any company that manufactures, sells or stocks anti-personnel mines and cluster bombs.

Natixis Investment Managers

This material has been provided for information purposes only to investment service providers or other Professional Clients, Qualified or Institutional Investors and, when required by local regulation, only at their written request. This material must not be used with Retail Investors. It is the responsibility of each investment service provider to ensure that the offering or sale of fund shares or third party investment services to its clients complies with the relevant national law.

Please read the Prospectus and Key Information Document carefully before investing. If the fund is registered in your jurisdiction, these documents are also available free of charge and in the official language of the country of registration at the Natixis Investment Managers website (im.natixis.com/intl/intl-fund-documents).

To obtain a summary of investor rights in the official language of your jurisdiction, please consult the legal documentation section of the website (im.natixis.com/intl/intl-fund-documents).

In the E.U.: Provided by Natixis Investment Managers International or one of its BRANCH offices listed below. Natixis Investment Managers International is a portfolio management company authorized by the Autorité des Marchés Financiers (French Financial Markets Authority - AMF) under no. GP 90-009, and a simplified joint-stock company (société par actions simplifiée - SAS) registered in the Paris Trade and Companies Register under no. 329 450 738, Registered office: 43 avenue Pierre Mendès France, 75013 Paris. Germany: Natixis Investment Managers International, Zweigniederlassung Deutschland (Registration number: HRB 129507). Registered office: Senckenberganlage 21, 60325 Frankfurt am Main. Italy: Natixis Investment Managers International Succursale Italiana (Registration number: MI-2637562). Registered office: Via Adalberto Catena, 4, 20121 Milan, Italy. Netherlands: Natixis Investment Managers International, Dutch BRANCH (Registration number: 000050438298), Registered office: Stadsplateau 7, 3521AZ Utrecht, the Netherlands. Spain: Natixis Investment Managers International S.A., Sucursal en España (Registration number: NIF W0232616C), Registered office: Serrano n°90, 6th Floor, 28006 Madrid, Spain. Luxembourg: Natixis Investment Managers International, Luxembourg BRANCH (Registration number: B283713), Registered office: 2, rue Jean Monnet, L-2180 Luxembourg, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Belgium: Natixis Investment Managers International, Belgian BRANCH (Registration number: 1006.931.462), Gare Maritime, Rue Picard 7, Bte 100, 1000 Bruxelles, Belgium.

In Switzerland: Provided for information purposes only by Natixis Investment Managers, Switzerland Sàrl (Registration number: CHE-114.271.882), Rue du Vieux Collège 10, 1204 Geneva, Switzerland or its representative office in Zurich, Schweizergasse 6, 8001 Zürich.

In the British Isles: Provided by Natixis Investment Managers UK Limited which is authorised and regulated by the UK Financial Conduct Authority (FCA firm reference no. 190258) - registered office: Natixis Investment Managers UK Limited, Level 4, Cannon Bridge House, 25 Dowgate Hill, London, EC4R 2YA. When permitted, the distribution of this material is intended to be made to persons as described as follows: in the United Kingdom: this material is intended to be communicated to and/or directed at investment professionals and professional investors only; in Ireland: this material is intended to be communicated to and/or directed at professional investors only; in Guernsey: this material is intended to be communicated to and/or directed at only financial services providers which hold a license from the Guernsey Financial Services Commission; in Jersey: this material is intended to be communicated to and/or directed at professional investors only; in the Isle of Man: this material is intended to be communicated to and/or directed at only financial services providers which hold a license from the Isle of Man Financial Services Authority or insurers authorised under section 8 of the Insurance Act 2008.

In the DIFC: Provided in and from the DIFC financial district by Natixis Investment Managers Middle East (DIFC BRANCH) which is regulated by the DFSA. Related financial products or services are only available to persons who have sufficient financial experience and understanding to participate in financial markets within the DIFC, and qualify as Professional Clients or Market Counterparties as defined by the DFSA. No other Person should act upon this material. Registered office: Unit L10-02, Level 10 ,ICD Brookfield Place, DIFC, PO Box 506752, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

In Taiwan: Provided by Natixis Investment Managers Securities Investment Consulting (Taipei) Co., Ltd., a Securities Investment Consulting Enterprise regulated by the Financial Supervisory Commission of the R.O.C. Registered address: 34F., No. 68, Sec. 5, Zhongxiao East Road, Xinyi Dist., Taipei City 11065, Taiwan (R.O.C.), license number 2020 FSC SICE No. 025, Tel. +886 2 8789 2788.

In Singapore: Provided by Natixis Investment Managers Singapore Limited (NIM Singapore) having office at 5 Shenton Way, #22-05/06, UIC Building, Singapore 068808 (Company Registration No. 199801044D) to distributors and qualified investors for information purpose only. NIM Singapore is regulated by the Monetary Authority of Singapore under a Capital Markets Services Licence to conduct fund management activities and is an exempt financial adviser. Mirova Division (Business Name Registration No.: 53431077W) and Ostrum Division (Business Name Registration No.: 53463468X) are part of NIM Singapore and are not separate legal entities. This advertisement or publication has not been reviewed by the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

In Hong Kong: Provided by Natixis Investment Managers Hong Kong Limited to professional investors for information purpose only.

In Australia: Provided by Natixis Investment Managers Australia Pty Limited (ABN 60 088 786 289) (AFSL No. 246830) and is intended for the general information of financial advisers and wholesale clients only.

In Korea: Provided by Natixis Investment Managers Korea Limited (Registered with Financial Services Commission for General Private Collective Investment Business) to distributors and qualified investors for information purpose only.

In New Zealand: This document is intended for the general information of New Zealand wholesale investors only and does not constitute financial advice. This is not a regulated offer for the purposes of the Financial Markets Conduct Act 2013 (FMCA) and is only available to New Zealand investors who have certified that they meet the requirements in the FMCA for wholesale investors. Natixis Investment Managers Australia Pty Limited is not a registered financial service provider in New Zealand.

In Colombia: Provided by Natixis Investment Managers International Oficina de Representación (Colombia) to professional clients for informational purposes only as permitted under Decree 2555 of 2010. Any products, services or investments referred to herein are rendered exclusively outside of Colombia. This material does not constitute a public offering in Colombia and is addressed to less than 100 specifically identified investors.

In Latin America: Provided by Natixis Investment Managers International.

In Chile: Esta oferta privada se inicia el día de la fecha de la presente comunicación. La presente oferta se acoge a la Norma de Carácter General N°336 de la Superintendencia de Valores y Seguros de Chile. La presente oferta versa sobre valores no inscritos en el Registro de Valores o en el Registro de Valores Extranjeros que lleva la Superintendencia de Valores y Seguros, por lo que los valores sobre los cuales ésta versa, no están sujetos a su fiscalización. Que por tratarse de valores no inscritos, no existe la obligación por parte del emisor de entregar en Chile información pública respecto de estos valores. Estos valores no podrán ser objeto de oferta pública mientras no sean inscritos en el Registro de Valores correspondiente.

In Mexico: Provided by Natixis IM Mexico, S. de R.L. de C.V., which is not a regulated financial entity, securities intermediary, or an investment manager in terms of the Mexican Securities Market Law (Ley del Mercado de Valores) and is not registered with the Comisión Nacional Bancaria y de Valores (CNBV) or any other Mexican authority. Any products, services or investments referred to herein that require authorization or license are rendered exclusively outside of Mexico. While shares of certain ETFs may be listed in the Sistema Internacional de Cotizaciones (SIC), such listing does not represent a public offering of securities in Mexico, and therefore the accuracy of this information has not been confirmed by the CNBV. Natixis Investment Managers is an entity organized under the laws of France and is not authorized by or registered with the CNBV or any other Mexican authority. Any reference contained herein to "Investment Managers" is made to Natixis Investment Managers and/or any of its investment management subsidiaries, which are also not authorized by or registered with the CNBV or any other Mexican authority.

In Uruguay: Provided by Natixis Investment Managers Uruguay S.A. Office: San Lucar 1491, Montevideo, Uruguay, CP 11500. The sale or offer of any units of a fund qualifies as a private placement pursuant to section 2 of Uruguayan law 18,627.

In Brazil: Provided to a specific identified investment professional for information purposes only by Natixis Investment Managers International. This communication cannot be distributed other than to the identified addressee. Further, this communication should not be construed as a public offer of any securities or any related financial instruments. Natixis Investment Managers International is a portfolio management company authorized by the Autorité des Marchés Financiers (French Financial Markets Authority - AMF) under no. GP 90-009, and simplified joint-stock company (société par actions simplifiée – SAS) registered in the Paris Trade and Companies Register under no. 329 450 738. Registered office: 43 avenue Pierre Mendès France, 75013 Paris.

The above referenced entities are business development units of Natixis Investment Managers, the holding company of a diverse line-up of specialised investment management and distribution entities worldwide. The investment management subsidiaries of Natixis Investment Managers conduct any regulated activities only in and from the jurisdictions in which they are licensed or authorised. Their services and the products they manage are not available to all investors in all jurisdictions.

Although Natixis Investment Managers believes the information provided in this material to be reliable, including that from third party sources, it does not guarantee the accuracy, adequacy, or completeness of such information.

The provision of this material and/or reference to specific securities, sectors, or markets within this material does not constitute investment advice, or a recommendation or an offer to buy or to sell any security, or an offer of any regulated financial activity. **Investors should consider the investment objectives, risks and expenses of any investment carefully before investing.** The analyses, opinions, and certain of the investment themes and processes referenced herein represent the views of the individual(s) as of the date indicated. These, as well as the portfolio holdings and characteristics shown, are subject to change and cannot be construed as having any contractual value. There can be no assurance that developments will transpire as may be forecasted in this material. The analyses and opinions expressed by external third parties are independent and does not necessarily reflect those of Natixis Investment Managers. Any past performance information presented is not indicative of future performance.

This material may not be redistributed, published, or reproduced, in whole or in part.

All amounts shown are expressed in USD unless otherwise indicated.

Natixis Investment Managers may decide to terminate its marketing arrangements for this fund in accordance with the relevant legislation