The Case for Strategic Convertible Allocations

Our experience with convertible securities dates to the volatile financial markets of the 1970s. During this period, convertible strategies often provided better returns than either the stock or bond markets. As a fixed-income security with equity attributes, a convertible may be viewed as offering the best of both worlds. With active management, convertibles can address a variety of asset allocation challenges. In the current environment, we believe the case is especially strong for including convertible securities as a core defensive equity allocation.

» Convertibles can provide compelling advantages in advancing but volatile equity markets. Economic growth, consumer activity, corporate profits, contained inflation and fiscal policy provide more room for stocks to advance, especially in the U.S. However, markets are likely to be volatile due to political and geopolitical uncertainty, global growth concerns, trade tensions, and monetary policy unknowns. As the economy moves through this phase of the cycle, we expect rotational market leadership, rolling recessions in industries, and uneven profit growth. In this environment, convertible securities may provide an attractive way to participate in equity market upside with potentially less exposure to equity downside.

» Issuance is likely to remain healthy, creating opportunities for active managers. Against a backdrop of business-friendly policies in the U.S. and continued albeit slower global economic expansion, many corporations are in growth mode. Convertible securities provide an attractive way to access the capital markets at lower borrowing costs. Further, interest deductibility caps put in place as part of tax reform provide increased incentives for corporations to issue convertibles.

» Convertible securities are less sensitive to interest rate changes versus traditional bonds. Although central banks are likely to keep short-term rates at low levels, long-term interest rates are influenced by many forces and can rise with little warning. An actively managed convertible allocation can provide a strategic hedge against an eventual rise in interest rates.

As we will discuss in this paper, the use of convertibles in a risk-managed strategy may provide benefits that stock and bond allocations alone cannot. However, due to their structural complexities, convertible securities require active management to achieve a desired outcome.
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John is often quoted as an authority on risk-managed investment strategies, markets and the economy, and has authored two books on convertible securities. He is a frequent speaker at investment seminars and conferences around the world and appears regularly on leading news networks. He holds a B.A. in Economics and M.B.A. in Finance, both from the Illinois Institute of Technology. After college graduation, he joined the United States Air Force where he served as a combat pilot during the Vietnam War and ultimately earned the rank of Major.

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I. INTRODUCTION: CONVERTIBLES AND ASSET ALLOCATION

Convertible securities are equity-linked instruments that offer equity market participation with potential downside resilience when equity markets decline. In simplest terms, a convertible is a fixed-income security that includes an embedded option. Structurally, the risk/reward characteristics of convertibles allow them to support a range of asset allocation goals. However, convertible securities are complex. The attributes of convertibles may differ considerably and a specific convertible may be more equity-like at certain periods and more fixed-income-like in others.

Because of their structural complexities, we believe convertible securities demand active management within asset allocations. Often, convertibles are thought of as a single asset class; this ignores the variations within the convertible universe. Our approach is to use different convertibles within specific investment strategies. It is not simply the convertibles that make a strategy work but how convertibles are managed to achieve a particular investment objective.

One of the most compelling features of a convertible bond is its potential to participate in equity upside with downside protection during periods of equity volatility. With active management, convertible strategies can be attractive choices for risk-conscious investors who wish to stay invested through full market cycles. When a convertible strategy is positioned with sufficient downside protection, investors are better equipped to resist the temptation of market timing. In volatile markets, the bond value provides a floor, and through coupon income, investors are “paid to wait” for the markets to turn.

FIGURE 1. CONVERTIBLE BONDS: AN OVERVIEW

A convertible bond has three main parts: its value as a straight bond (investment value), its value as a stock (conversion value) and the theoretical fair value. The three factors are interdependent, and each must be considered for a proper valuation of a convertible security.

Because of their structural complexities, convertible securities demand active management within asset allocations.
Convertibles can serve a role within enhanced fixed-income allocations. Convertibles have historically performed well during periods of rising interest rates and inflation, and therefore convertible strategies may be used to diversify a traditional fixed-income portfolio (i.e., government bonds) as a high yield corporate bond allocation might. Additionally, convertibles with a range of characteristics can be used within alternative allocations, such as hedge strategies that employ convertible arbitrage.

II. MARKET ENVIRONMENT

The global convertible market is valued at more than $318 billion, with the U.S. representing the lion’s share of the market ($193 billion). The convertible market provides a diverse set of opportunities, but is tilted toward growth-oriented companies, such as the technology sector.

![Figure 2. Regional and Sector Characteristics of Global Convertible Market](image)

Data as of June 30, 2019. The global convertible market is represented by the Thomson Reuters Global Convertible Bond Index. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

The dynamics of all asset classes ebb and flow due to economic and market factors, issuance trends and investor sentiment. Convertible securities are no exception. Convertible issuance is about capital market access, and capital market access is tied to economic growth. Issuance has proceeded at a healthy clip over recent years as companies have sought growth capital to forge ahead with mergers, acquisitions, R&D and capital spending.

There are a number of reasons why companies choose to issue convertible rather than non-convertible debt. Convertible issuers can typically offer a lower coupon in exchange for providing investors with the opportunity to participate in the upside of the convertible’s underlying equity. In addition, U.S. tax codes have limited interest deductibility for corporations, strengthening the relative appeal of issuing a convertible security instead of a non-convertible one. Convertibles also provide companies with a way to monetize the volatility of their stocks. This may be particularly appealing for more volatile growth-oriented companies. The more volatile the stock, the more
beneficial a convertible structure may be to investors, due to the potential downside protection it affords. This appealing trait enables issuers to offer convertible debt with a modestly lower coupon versus straight debt.

Convertible securities can be brought to market with vastly different characteristics. Some convertibles are issued with mandatory conversion features, which increase a convertible's equity sensitivity—and potential vulnerability to equity market downside. In the years prior to 2018, we saw a ramp up in mandatory issuance, but more recently, convertible issuance has favored traditional structures without mandatory conversion features. We've seen more balanced structures with a better blend of upside participation and potential downside protection.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVE MANAGEMENT

As we discussed, convertibles have varying degrees of equity and fixed-income sensitivity, and these characteristics may change for a given convertible over time. Figure 4 provides a good example of how convertible characteristics change alongside market conditions. The convertible market demonstrated a much higher degree of equity sensitivity in March of 2000, against the backdrop of a peaking equity market and technology bubble. In February of 2009, the pendulum had swung to the other extreme. As the markets troughed in the liquidity crisis, more than two-thirds of convertible markets were trading as “credit-sensitive.”

A convertible bond has “fixed-income characteristics” when it is valued at about the same level as a similar non-convertible bond and is not as sensitive to the underlying equity. A convertible bond has “hybrid characteristics” when it has fixed-income characteristics as previously explained but is becoming increasingly sensitive to changes in the underlying equity price. “Equity characteristics” represents a convertible bond that is highly sensitive to movements in the underlying equity. Percentages shown represent the proportion of convertible bonds in the BofA Merrill Lynch, All U.S. Convertibles Index (VXAO) which fall into each classification.

FIGURE 3. NEW CONVERTIBLE SECURITIES ISSUANCE

1998-JUNE 2019 ($ BIL)

Source: BofA Merrill Lynch Global Research.

Convertible issuance is about capital market access; capital market access is closely tied with economic growth.
These changing characteristics speak to the importance of actively managing convertible allocations. The most equity-sensitive convertibles may not provide adequate downside protection, while the most bond-like convertibles may not offer sufficient equity upside participation. Passive strategies cannot adjust to either the changes in an individual convertible’s characteristics or to the characteristics of the convertible universe as a whole. Therefore, they cannot provide investors with the benefits that an actively managed convertible portfolio may offer. In contrast, in our flagship U.S. and global convertible strategies, our goal is to earn equity-like returns over a full market cycle with less volatility than the equity market. An active approach affords us this opportunity, and we continually monitor the equity- and credit-sensitivities of the issues in a portfolio, among our many risk-management considerations.

IV. A PROACTIVE WAY TO ADDRESS INTEREST RATE INCREASES

Convertibles can provide a way for investors to hedge against a rising interest-rate environment. Bonds tend to lose value in an environment of rising interest rates. However, convertible returns have tended to more closely reflect equity returns than bond returns when the 10-year Treasury yield rose more than 100 basis points (Figure 5). While convertibles are influenced to a degree by interest-rate fluctuations, they also are affected by the price movements of their underlying stocks, a factor that historically has helped soften the negative effect of rising interest rates. In general, the more a convertible’s price is determined by the value of its underlying equities, the greater its tendency not to be influenced by changing interest rates.

**FIGURE 5. RETURNS IN RISING INTEREST RATE ENVIRONMENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yield Increase (bps)*</th>
<th>OCT ’93-NOV ’94</th>
<th>JAN ’96-JUN ’96</th>
<th>OCT ’98-JAN ’00</th>
<th>NOV ’01-APR ’02</th>
<th>JUN ’03-JUN ’04</th>
<th>JUN ’05-JUN ’06</th>
<th>DEC ’08-JUN ’09</th>
<th>OCT ’10-FEB ’11</th>
<th>JUL ’12-DEC ’13</th>
<th>JUL ’16-DEC ’16</th>
<th>SEP ’17-NOV ’18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloomberg Barclays U.S. Govt/Credit</td>
<td>-5.15%</td>
<td>-4.08%</td>
<td>-3.38%</td>
<td>-3.09%</td>
<td>-3.64%</td>
<td>-1.49%</td>
<td>-2.08%</td>
<td>-3.94%</td>
<td>-2.14%</td>
<td>-4.88%</td>
<td>-3.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICE BofAML All U.S. Convertibles</td>
<td>-2.28</td>
<td>11.97</td>
<td>68.85</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>11.49</td>
<td>9.46</td>
<td>24.68</td>
<td>11.63</td>
<td>35.49</td>
<td>7.58</td>
<td>9.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Past performance is no guarantee of future results.
V. CREDIT QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS
Convertible issuers frequently choose to avoid the lengthy—and expensive—process of having their securities rated at the outset. Overall, unrated credits make up more than half of both markets. Unrated securities provide opportunities for experienced and discerning asset managers. In evaluating the unrated segment of the market, we draw upon decades of proprietary research, including company fundamentals, balance sheet data, debt servicing prospects and our analysis of other securities within the company’s capital structure.

Proprietary research is no less important for rated issues. For example, a third-party credit rating in isolation may give a misleading picture of a convertible’s risk/reward potential. A convertible with an investment grade rating may have low default risk, but it is not necessarily “lower risk” in terms of its vulnerability to a downturn in its issuer’s stock or the broader stock market. As a convertible’s equity sensitivity rises, the credit rating becomes a less telling measure of risk and the underlying equity valuation becomes more important. Understanding a convertible’s risk/reward therefore requires a multi-layered approach that includes equity analysis, credit analysis and convertible analysis.

VI. HISTORICALLY, CONVERTIBLES HAVE SEEN LOW LEVELS OF DEFAULTS
We are often asked about default rates in the convertible market. As Figure 7 shows, defaults in the U.S. convertible market have been lower than in the high yield market. According to Barclay’s equity research, the default rates for convertible bonds have averaged 1% versus 3% for traditional high yield from 2003 through March 2019. There has not been a wide disparity among the default rates of investment grade, non-investment grade and non-rated convertible issues (Figure 8). In fact, non-rated convertibles have experienced lower defaults than rated issues.
Financials account for the largest amount of defaults over recent years, including a number of investment grade issues hit hard during the financial crisis. Notably, technology companies—the largest sector in the U.S. market—have seen far fewer defaults. Generally, technology issuers have maintained more modest levels of leverage, which has helped keep defaults in check.

VII. FROM A VALUATION PERSPECTIVE, THE HUNTING GROUNDS ARE FINE

In 2008, systemic risk led to unparalleled valuation opportunities within convertibles. No other period came close to the undervaluation level recorded in the second half of 2008, when we saw an 11% discount to theoretical fair value in the U.S. market. Currently, the average valuation remains in the normal band (Figure 10), supporting our constructive view of the asset class. Valuations vary among sectors and issuers, however. While we continue to find pockets of value in non-U.S. markets, valuations are more expensive on the whole. In particular, we are wary of richness in certain areas of the investment grade market, especially in Europe, where supply/demand dynamics are particularly challenging.
In our view, the variability of the valuation climate speaks to the importance of actively managed strategies versus passive strategies, such as exchange traded funds. Since we began managing convertible portfolios in the 1970s, we have invested through many valuation environments. We are not looking to buy the asset class as a whole, but rather, to construct portfolios of securities most likely to deliver the specific risk/return profiles we seek. Also, the emphasis we place on valuations may differ as the result of strategy-specific considerations. For example, in a convertible arbitrage strategy, valuations are the most important criteria because we seek to take advantage of pricing discrepancies in the convertible security itself. (In a convertible arbitrage strategy, we purchase convertibles that we believe are mispriced while simultaneously short-selling a specific number of shares of the underlying stock.) In contrast, while valuations are important in a long-only strategy, the direction of the underlying stock’s movement tends to be our top criteria.

VIII. SYNTHETIC CONVERTIBLES INCREASE THE INVESTABLE UNIVERSE

Our investable universe is not solely dictated by convertible issuance. We can also build synthetic convertibles. A convertible bond can be thought of as the sum of its parts—that is, a straight bond and a long-term call option (the right to convert the bond into stock). A synthetic convertible can be constructed by purchasing these parts in such quantities to provide the balanced risk/reward attributes that we seek. This allows us to create a convertible security for a company that may not have any convertible or even non-convertible debt outstanding. The bond component could be a credit instrument of any kind, including a Treasury bond, sovereign debt or a straight corporate bond. The synthetic convertible is created when this credit instrument is combined with a long-term call option such as long-term equity anticipation securities (LEAPS) or warrants.

We are not looking to buy the asset class as a whole, but rather, to construct portfolios of securities most likely to deliver the specific risk/return profiles we seek.
IX. CALAMOS U.S. CONVERTIBLE AND GLOBAL CONVERTIBLE STRATEGIES

The Calamos Convertible Strategy is one of the oldest convertible strategies in the marketplace, with roots that date to 1979. In 2001, we introduced our global convertible strategy, designed to capitalize on the global growth in the convertible market. We believe the performance of these strategies speaks to potential benefits of including convertible securities as an actively managed strategic allocation (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11. CAPTURING UPSIDE, REDUCING DOWNSIDE OVER MARKET CYCLES

11A. CALAMOS U.S. CONVERTIBLE STRATEGY VERSUS U.S. EQUITY MARKET, 20 YEARS THROUGH 6/30/19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Great '90s Bull Market</th>
<th>Internet Bubble Crash</th>
<th>Recovery</th>
<th>Financial Crisis</th>
<th>Recovery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7/1/99-3/31/00</td>
<td>295% of market upside</td>
<td>23% of market downside</td>
<td>81% of market upside</td>
<td>55% of market downside</td>
<td>63% of market upside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Capture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>30.07%</td>
<td>-3.66%</td>
<td>13.05%</td>
<td>-22.73%</td>
<td>10.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;P 500</td>
<td>10.18</td>
<td>-16.09</td>
<td>16.11</td>
<td>-41.50</td>
<td>16.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GROWTH OF $10 MILLION


11B. CALAMOS GLOBAL CONVERTIBLE STRATEGY VERSUS GLOBAL EQUITY MARKET, SINCE INCEPTION THROUGH 6/30/19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Internet Bubble Crash</th>
<th>Recovery</th>
<th>Financial Crisis</th>
<th>Recovery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/1/01-3/31/03</td>
<td>2.46%</td>
<td>16.62%</td>
<td>-22.42%</td>
<td>9.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Capture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>-11.62</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>-43.94</td>
<td>13.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSCI World</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GROWTH OF $10 MILLION

Net of fees returns: Internet bubble crash, 1.41%; 2003-2007 recovery, 15.43%; financial crisis, -22.94%; 2009-2019 recovery, 8.27%.

Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Current performance may be lower or higher than the performance quoted. The principal value and return of an investment will fluctuate so that your shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. For the most recent strategy performance information visit www.calamos.com. For Calamos Global Convertible Strategy, index data shown is from 10/1/01, since comparative index data is available only for full monthly periods. Source: Mellon Analytical Solutions LLC.

Our global and U.S. convertible strategies have participated in equity market upside with less exposure to downside. Over the long term, this has resulted in risk-managed outperformance of all-equity benchmarks.
In both strategies, our goal is to provide a favorable asymmetrical risk/return profile over full market cycles, with more equity upside than downside. Our emphasis on capital preservation sets us apart both from passive strategies as well as from investment managers that invest more heavily in the most speculative issues. While there are periods when our focus on mitigating downside risk may cause our approach to trail during rapidly rising markets, we believe the risk-management opportunities offered by select convertible securities are too compelling to overlook within an overall asset allocation.

X. CONCLUSION
The case for strategic convertible allocations has been demonstrated over decades and remains strong today. Strategic convertible allocations can provide investors with opportunities to manage returns and risk in ways that stocks or bonds cannot. However, convertible portfolios require active management to maximize their potential benefits. In our view, the structural characteristics of convertibles (the opportunity for upside equity participation with a degree of downside resilience) can serve investors well, given our expectations for advancing but volatile equity markets and slow global growth.

We are encouraged by recent global issuance trends and believe that macro conditions can support new opportunities for convertible investors. We are confident that our long track record speaks to our ability to identify convertible opportunities to support a variety of long-term asset allocation needs.

For additional information about convertible securities and asset allocations, please visit us at www.calamos.com. You can also contact us at 800.582.6959.
Past performance does not guarantee or indicate future results. Current performance may be lower or higher than the performance quoted. Portfolios are managed according to their respective strategies which may differ significantly in terms of security holdings, industry weightings, and asset allocation from those of the benchmark(s). Portfolio performance, characteristics and volatility may differ from the benchmark(s) shown.

In addition to market risk, there are certain other risks associated with an investment in a convertible bond, such as default risk, the risk that the company issuing debt securities will be unable to repay principal and interest, and interest rate risk, the risk that the security may decrease in value if interest rates increase.

The opinions referenced are as of the date of publication and are subject to change due to changes in the market or economic conditions and may not necessarily come to pass. Information contained herein is for informational purposes only and should not be considered investment advice. Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Active management does not guarantee that the strategy will produce its intended results.

The results portrayed on the preceding pages are for the Calamos Global Convertible Composite. Representative holdings and portfolio characteristics are specific only to the portfolio shown at that point in time. Other portfolios will vary in composition, characteristics, and will experience different investment results. The representative portfolio shown has been selected by the advisor based on account characteristics that the advisor feels accurately represents the investment strategy as a whole. Supplemental information has been provided for the Global Convertible Composite.

The Calamos Global Convertible Composite is an actively managed composite investing primarily in a globally diversified portfolio of convertible securities. The composite includes all fully discretionary, fee-paying accounts, including those no longer with the firm. All returns are net of commission and other similar fees charged on securities transactions and include reinvestment of net realized gains and interest.

The results portrayed on the preceding pages are for the Calamos Institutional Convertible Composite (inception date: 1/1991). The inception dates and performance results shown are for the composite. Representative holdings and portfolio characteristics are specific only to the portfolio shown at that point in time. Other portfolios will vary in composition, characteristics, and will experience different investment results. The representative portfolio shown has been selected by the advisor based on account characteristics that the advisor feels accurately represents the investment strategy as a whole. Supplemental information has been provided for the Institutional Convertible Composite.

Returns presented are based on the Calamos Institutional Convertible Composite, which is an actively managed composite investing primarily in high-quality U.S. convertible bonds. The composite includes all fully discretionary, fee paying accounts. All returns are net of commission and other similar fees charged on securities transactions and include reinvestment of net realized gains and interest.

Fees include the investment advisory fee charge by Calamos Advisors LLC. Returns greater than 12 months are annualized. Chart Data Sources: Mellon Analytical Solutions LLC and Calamos Advisors LLC.

The Thomson Reuters Global Convertible Bond Index is designed to represent the global convertible bond market. The ICE Bank of America Merrill Lynch All U.S. Convertibles ex Mandatory Index (VQAO) is a measure of the U.S. convertible securities market, consisting of publicly traded issues, denominated in U.S. dollars, of all credit qualities, and excluding mandatory (equity-linked) convertibles. The ICE Bank of America Merrill Lynch Emerging Markets Convertible Index is a measure of emerging market convertible performance. Unmanaged index returns assume reinvestment of any and all distributions and do not reflect any fees, expenses or sales charges. Investors cannot invest directly in an index. The ICE Bank of America Merrill Lynch Global 300 Convertible Index (VG00) is a global convertible index composed of companies representative of the market structure of countries in North America, Europe and the Asia/Pacific region. Source ICE Data Indices, LLC, used with permission. ICE permits use of the ICE BofA/ML indices and related data on an ‘as is’ basis, makes no warranties regarding same, does not guarantee the suitability, quality, accuracy, timeliness, and/or completeness of the ICE BofA/ML Indices or data included in, related to, or derived therefrom, assumes no liability in connection with the use of the foregoing and does not sponsor, endorse or recommend Calamos Advisors LLC or any of its products or services. The MSCI World Index is a market capitalization weighted index composed of companies representative of the market structure of developed market countries in North America, Europe, and the Asia/Pacific region. The indices are calculated in both U.S. dollars and local currencies. The S&P 500 Index is a measure of the performance of the U.S. equity market.

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