

Myths & Realities

*Fact-checking and perspective on
common investment beliefs*

CIO Office | As of September 30, 2023



Staying on the sidelines waiting for a market correction?

Myth

The expectation of a stock market correction justifies staying on the sidelines.

Reality

If you're anticipating a stock market correction, you're probably right, as declines of at least 5% occur virtually every year; 10% six years out of ten; and around 15% four years out of ten.

Nevertheless, **history shows that investors willing to stay invested through these fluctuations are well advised**, as even the average return in years marked by a correction of 10% or more is positive.

Thus, **investors whose investment horizon allows for patience are probably better off accepting rather than fearing the inevitable periods of correction**, as these are, in some ways, the price to pay for achieving their return objectives in the long run.

Drawdowns and return by calendar year, S&P 500 (1971-2023)

Years with a drawdown of...	# of Years	% of Years	Average Return	# of positive Years
... 5% or Worse	51/52	94%	11%	38/51
... 10% or Worse	32/52	59%	6%	19/32
... 15% or Worse	20/52	37%	0%	8/20
... 20% or Worse	10/52	19%	-9%	3/10
... 30% or Worse	5/52	9%	-12%	2/5
... 40% or Worse	1/52	2%	-37%	0/1

Drawdowns and return by calendar year, S&P/TSX (1971-2023)

Years with a drawdown of...	# of Years	% of Years	Average Return	# of positive Years
... 5% or Worse	51/52	94%	10%	35/51
... 10% or Worse	32/52	59%	4%	17/32
... 15% or Worse	24/52	44%	1%	11/24
... 20% or Worse	15/52	28%	-2%	6/15
... 30% or Worse	7/52	13%	-8%	3/7
... 40% or Worse	1/52	2%	-33%	0/1

Market timing in the long run

Myth

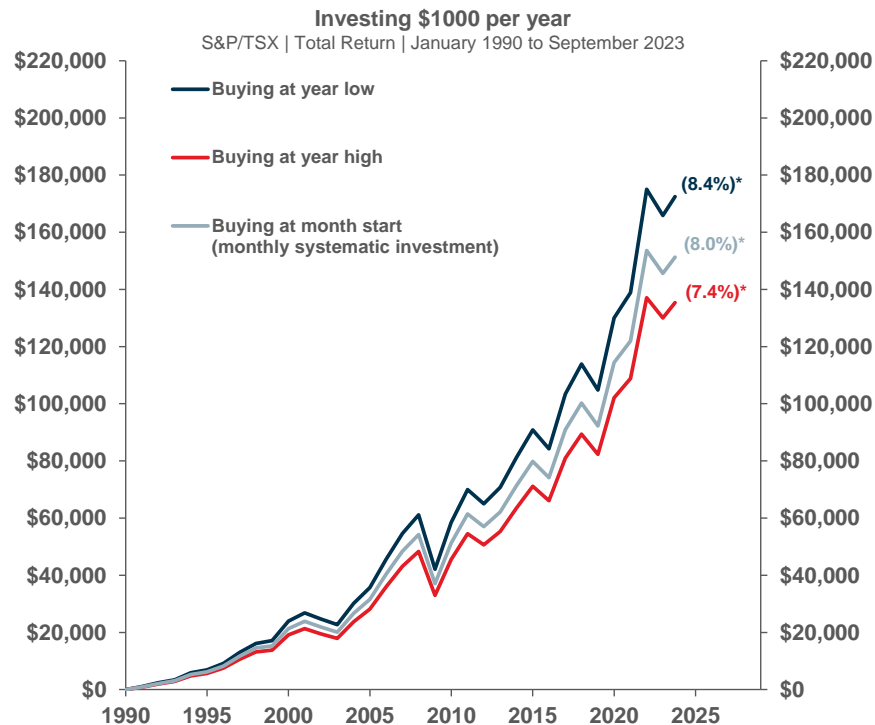
The timing of your annual savings investment is of utmost importance for the well-being of your portfolio in the long run.

Reality

The timing of your annual savings investment will make a difference in the long run, but it is far from being the critical factor many seem to believe.

Case in point: consider an investor blessed with the power of perfect market timing (blue line) compared to another investor cursed with systematically picking the worst possible day to invest each year, over 30 years (red line). In the end, the market timing champion would have outperformed the most unfortunate of all investors by a mild 1% / year. If we take the more realistic example of an investor saving systematically at the beginning of each month, this annual outperformance shrinks below 1%.

How is such a small gap possible? Simply because **in the long run, the first year's return is superfluous. What truly matters is the frequency of savings and passage of time, not market timing.**



Reasons to sell?

Myth

Selling in times of heightened uncertainty can protect investments from heavy losses.

Reality

Selling in times of heightened uncertainty is generally the best way to ensure heavy losses, as it often rhymes with selling low and missing the rebound.

More importantly, one should keep in mind that **the only certainty is that there will always be uncertainty, as it is the price to pay for capital appreciation in the long run.**

And – need we add – it isn't in the media's best interest to report the latest news with nuance and historical perspective; better to let fear and pessimism easily set in. However, the chart on the right should act as a reminder that letting emotions take over is a good recipe for short-term gain, but long-term pain.



Average return?

Myth

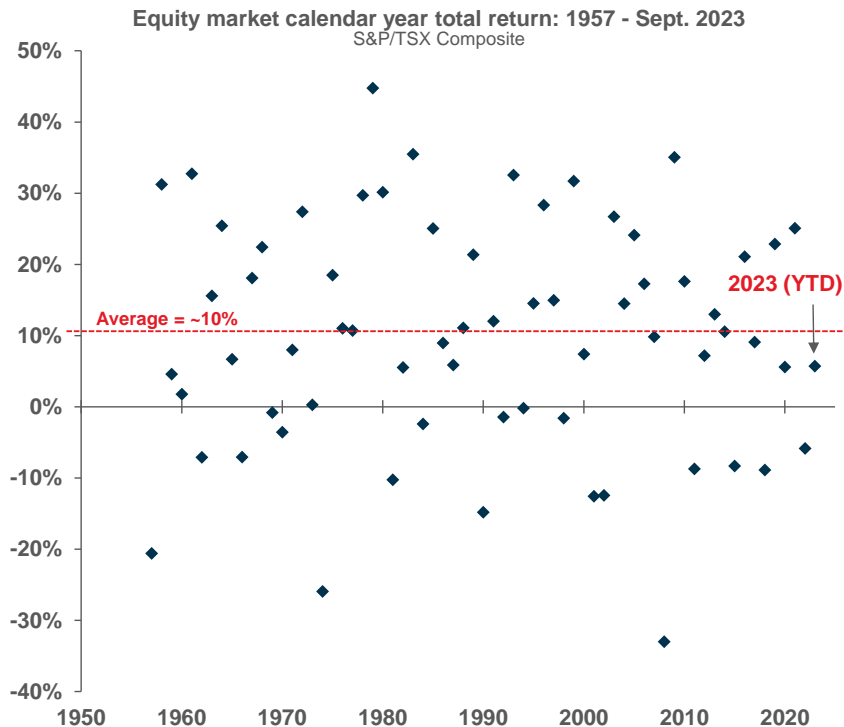
Since the long-term historical average annual return on the stock market is ~10%, investors should expect to see calendar-year returns near 10%.

Reality

Quite the contrary, it is likely that **investors will only rarely see a calendar year where equity returns are close to their long-term historical averages**. Case in point: since 1957, only 8 years out of 66 have seen the Canadian stock market generate performance near average (+/- 2%).

One likely reason for this myth is the common misconception that “average” is synonymous with “typical.” However, there is no such thing as a “typical” year in the stock market.

As a result, investors should expect a wide range of possible outcomes in any given year, whereas only the passage of time can lead to an annualized return near the market’s long-term average.



Equity performance in the long run

Myth

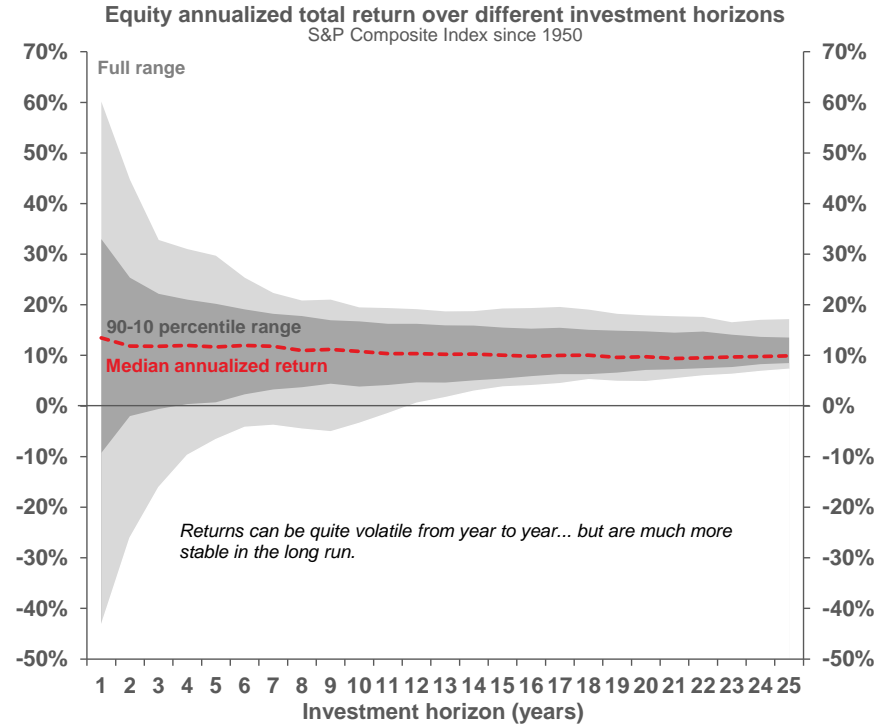
Investing in the stock market is akin to gambling at a casino.

Reality

It is true that daily market fluctuations resemble a coin toss (see [page 36](#) for further details on this subject). Nevertheless, two fundamental reasons make investing completely different from gambling.

First, unlike the world of gambling, investing in the stock market is not a zero-sum game, as evidenced by the positive median annualized return (red dotted line). In the long run, equity returns come from companies' ability to grow their earnings, not from other investors' misfortune.

Second, while gambling remains just as uncertain no matter how long you “play”, the opposite occurs within equity markets, as evidenced by the narrowing range of outcomes over time (grey area). The longer one “plays” (i.e. remains invested), the greater the chances are of converging towards the premium investors earn for bearing equity risk.



Dollar cost averaging or lump sum?

Myth

Investors contemplating investing a large amount (e.g. an inheritance) are better off spreading their entry over time (dollar cost averaging) rather than committing the full amount immediately (lump sum).

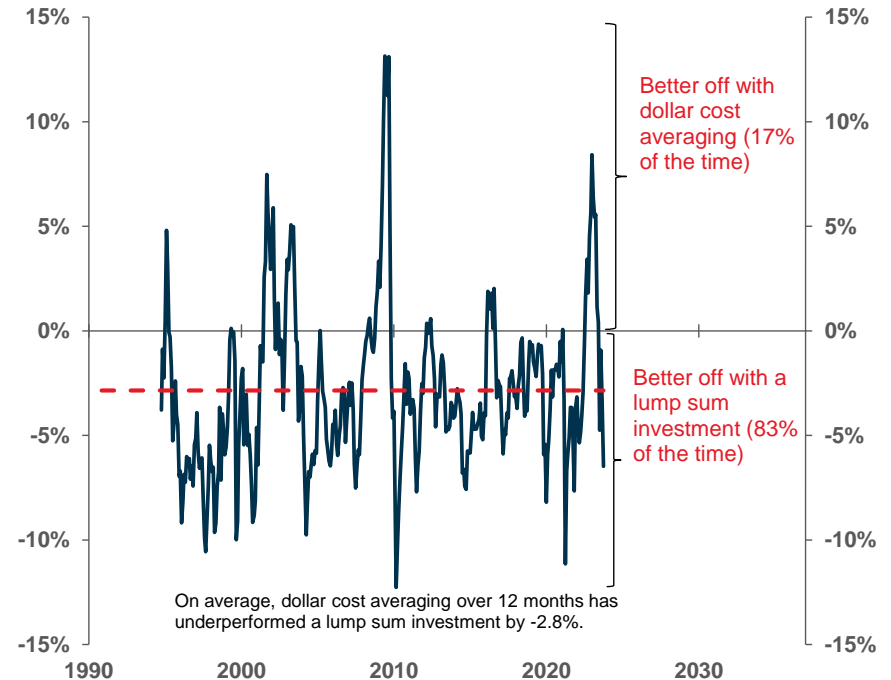
Reality

It depends. But since 1980, **you would have been better off investing the full amount right away 83% of the time**, while the decision to split the investment evenly over twelve months would have cost an average of 2.8% in lost returns. This simple study assumes a portfolio* evenly balanced between Canadian bonds and global equities.

Of course, no one wants to put money to work right before a market correction, this myth being a prime example of one of the most well documented behavioural biases in finance: loss aversion.

Yet, think of it this way. Would you invest in a strategy that loses 8 times out of 10 and by an average of 2.8%? After all, these are the historical properties of dollar cost averaging.

How often has dollar cost averaging beaten a lump sum investment?



Should investors fear recessions?

Myth

Investors should be fearful of recessions as they entail heavy financial losses.

Reality

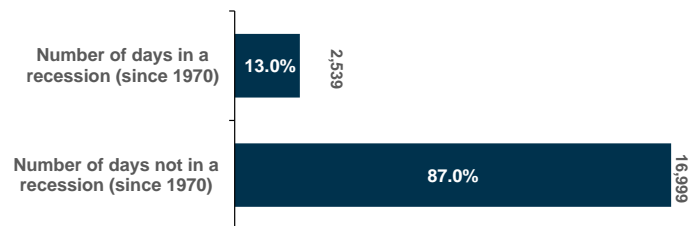
It is true that the most turbulent periods for markets are generally concomitant with recessions. As such, those with eyes riveted on daily stock exchange prices are very likely to experience fear in times of economic downturn.

However, if we step back from market fluctuations and look, rather, at the historical performance of a basic balanced portfolio* during the last seven recessions, we see that **the average return was actually -1%**. Not something to celebrate, but far from the financial catastrophe many seem to believe – especially when we consider returns in the previous and following years. What's more, let's not forget that recessions are relatively rare events, covering only 13% of the last 53 years.

Therefore, **it is not the recession that investors should fear, but fear itself...** or rather the risk of materializing heavy losses, when in the grip of emotion, at an untimely moment.

Balanced portfolio (60/40)* total return

Recessions (NBER)	12-months Before	During Recession	12-months After	Full period**
Nov 1973 - Feb 1975	7%	-7%	12%	11%
Jan 1980 - Jun 1980	11%	9%	7%	31%
Jul 1981 - Oct 1982	9%	15%	26%	57%
Jul 1990 - Feb 1991	4%	6%	9%	21%
Mar 2001 - Oct 2001	-1%	-5%	-8%	-14%
Dec 2007 - May 2009	1%	-16%	9%	-8%
Feb 2020 - March 2020	16%	-9%	22%	28%
Average	7%	-1%	11%	18%



Are GICs a risk-free alternative?

Myth

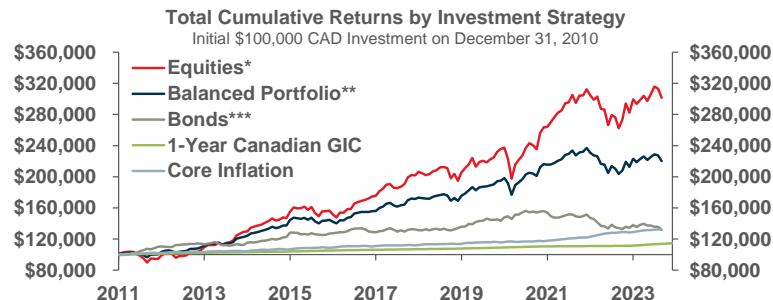
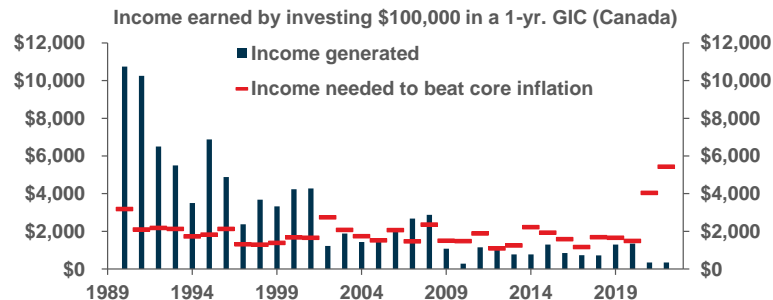
Guaranteed Investment Certificates (GICs) offer a risk-free alternative for investors seeking to at least preserve the purchasing power of their assets.

Reality

GICs are indeed among the safest investment vehicles available. However, their returns, while guaranteed, do not always cover inflation, leaving their holders at risk of seeing their purchasing power decline over time.

Ultimately, the selection of an investment vehicle depends on risk tolerance - GICs may therefore be the right choice for some. However, let's not forget the basic principle that investors willing to tolerate periodic market fluctuations are ultimately rewarded in the form of better returns over time.

As such, **a key risk for investors whose investment horizon is measured in years may not be the short-term volatility of other assets, but rather the potential erosion of their purchasing power over the long run.**



How strong is the “January effect”?

Myth

Stocks generally perform better in January than in other months.

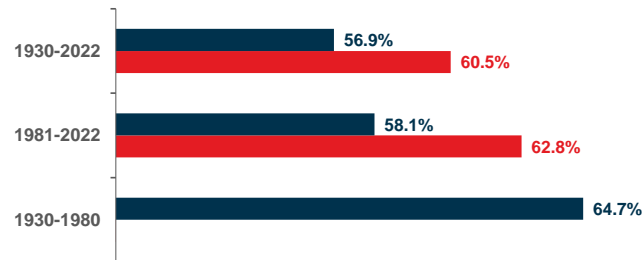
Reality

It is true that January has more often resulted in positive and high returns than what has been observed on average in the other months. However, this trend has largely faded or even inverted in recent decades.

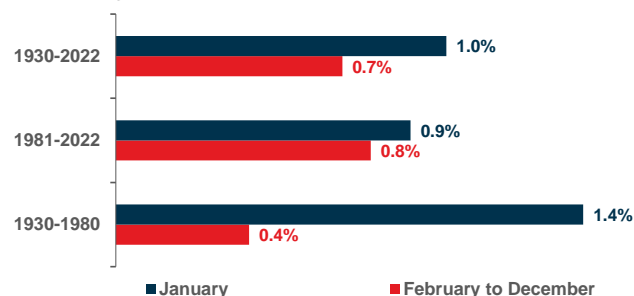
Seasonal trends in the stock market seem to be more a matter of chance. Thus, it is not surprising that a seasonal trend observed in one period is not repeated in another period. Moreover, the observed differences in performance are usually of marginal importance.

Since the past is no guarantee of the future and seasonal trends are not always persistent, **an investor is well advised to ignore these historical observations and maintain a systematic investment plan.** There is no need to wait until January to make this good resolution!

Proportion of months with a positive return



Mean monthly return



Are rate hikes bad for stocks?

Myth

Stocks generally perform poorly when central banks hike their policy rate.

Reality

Each rate hike cycle has its own set of circumstances that often bring additional volatility to markets. However, **what normally prompts central banks to raise their policy rate is usually an economy that is showing strength and is expected to continue to do so; a typically favorable environment for stocks.**

Case in point: since 1996, the yearly total return of the S&P/TSX averages 6.1% (8.9% for the S&P 500) when the Bank of Canada (Federal Reserve) hikes the overnight rate at least once, lower than the 9.2% (10.9% for the S&P 500) average of all years over that same time period but still well into positive territory.

To be clear, these historical trends are no guarantee for any specific year, as evidenced by the year 2022, whose unique circumstances led to substantial setbacks for stocks. Nevertheless, over the long run, odds remain in favor of patient investors, regardless of the ups and downs of policy rates.

Markets and rate hikes (data since 1996)

Canada

Year	# of rate hikes*	Total return (S&P/TSX)
1997	5	15.0%
1998	3	-1.6%
2000	4	7.4%
2002	2	-12.4%
2005	3	24.1%
2006	4	17.3%
2010	3	17.6%
2017	2	9.1%
2018	3	-8.9%
2022	16	-5.8%
2023 (YTD)	3	5.7%
Average (rate hikes)		6.1%
Average (all years)		9.2%

United States

Year	# of rate hikes*	Total return (S&P 500)
1997	1	33.4%
1999	3	21.0%
2000	4	-9.1%
2004	5	10.9%
2005	8	4.9%
2006	4	15.8%
2015	1	1.4%
2016	1	12.0%
2017	3	21.8%
2018	4	-4.4%
2022	17	-18.1%
2023 (YTD)	4	16.9%
Average (rate hikes)		8.9%
Average (all years)		10.9%

Stock performance and the political party in power

Myth

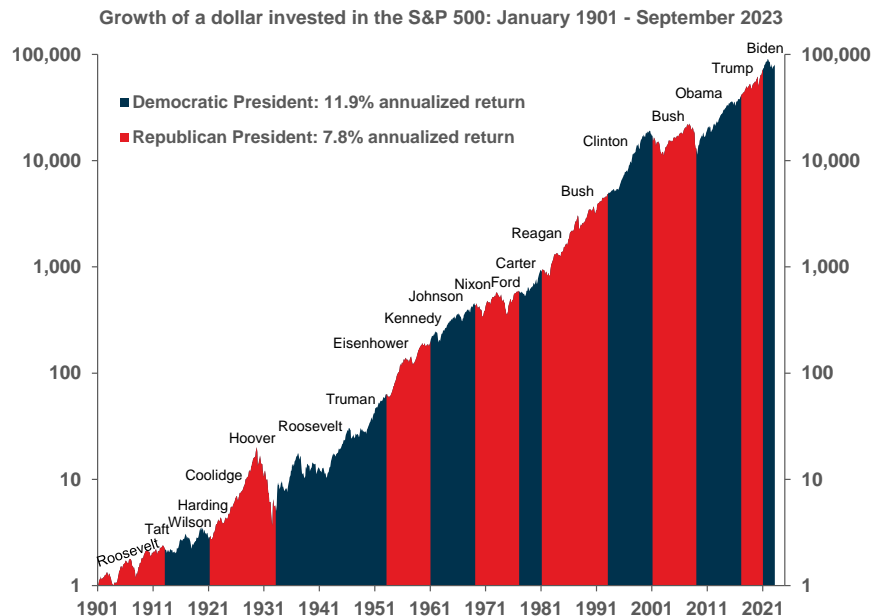
The political party of the government in power has a significant impact on equity market returns.

Reality

Over the very long term, history shows that stock markets have been successful in continuing their upward trend regardless of which political party is in power.

For example, since 1901, the annualized total return of the S&P 500 has been largely positive during both periods with a Democratic president in office (11.9%) and periods with a Republican president in office (7.8%). Moreover, the difference between these two returns seems to stem primarily from the economic environment over which politicians have limited control, with Democrats taking power at the bottom of the Great Depression in 1933 and at the bottom of the financial crisis in 2009.

In the end, **history shows that investors benefit from not letting politics and investments mix**, as difficult as that may be at times!



Home country bias

Myth

It is more prudent to invest most of your portfolio in companies domiciled at home and thus of greater familiarity than to “risk it” with foreign corporations.

Reality

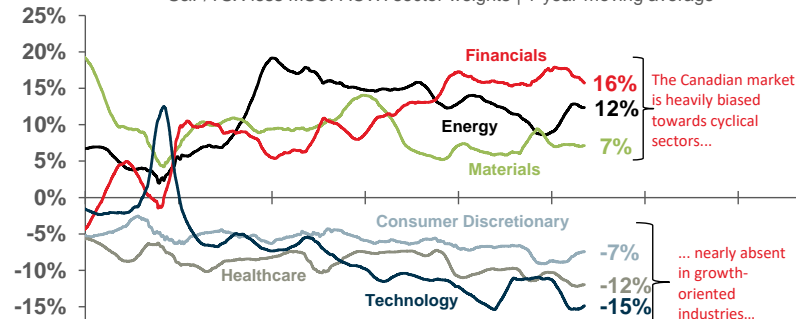
While predominantly investing in domestic equities might seem sufficient and feel comforting, **such a portfolio could, in fact, be just the opposite. Do not confuse familiarity with safety.**

For instance, Canada's stock market's high concentration in some of the most cyclical sectors and its relative lack of growth-oriented companies poses a risk that can result in unpleasant surprises if left undiversified.

The good news is that there are plenty of opportunities abroad to complement for such risks. After all, **Canadian stocks only represent 3% of the global equity investment universe... a far cry from the ~45% they account for in Canadians' portfolios***. Home bias indeed!

Sector allocation spread - Canadian vs. World Equities

S&P/TSX less MSCI ACWI sector weights | 1-year moving average



Share of world equities

MSCI ACWI region weights | 1-year moving average



Additional

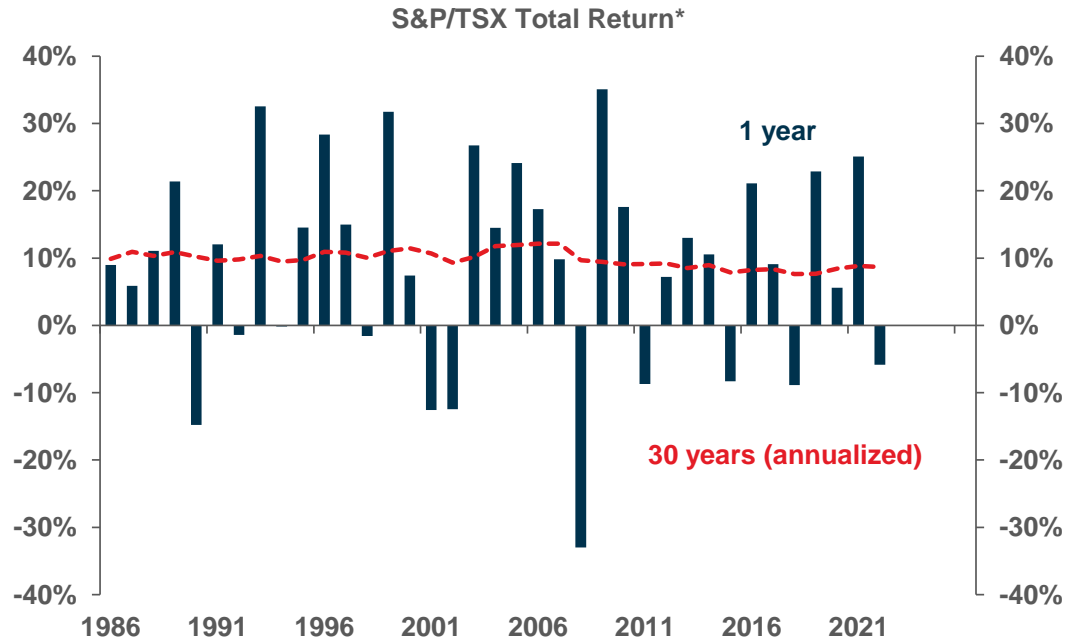
Charts & Tables

Short-term fluctuations, long-term stability

Description

Illustrates how stock market returns can fluctuate from year to year (blue columns) but are very stable over the long term (red line).

Helpful for investors highly concerned about the short-term market outlook, although their investment horizon is long-term.



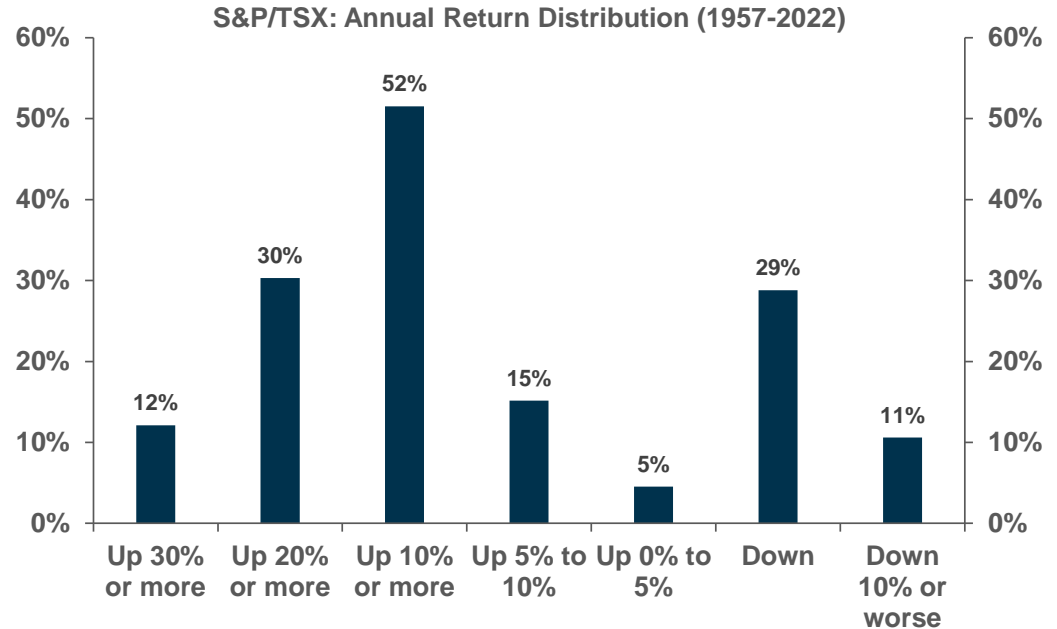
CIO Office (data via Refinitiv). Data from 1956 to 2022 (first complete 30-years period = 1986).

Annual stock market returns are rarely "average"

Description

Illustrates what one can "normally" expect in terms of equity returns in any given year. It shows that, although the average is between 5% and 10%, this result rarely occurs (15% of the time). In fact, it's even more common to see negative returns (29% of the time) or returns in excess of 20% (30% of the time).

Helpful for investors questioning why annual returns often seem exaggerated or bad, when in reality these fluctuations are "normal".



CIO Office (data via Refinitiv).

Even the best years for the stock market feature corrections

Description

Illustrates the inevitable – yet not catastrophic – nature of stock market corrections, as even the top ten years of the Canadian market have seen an average correction of 10% (since 1957).

Helpful for investors who see a potential (or ongoing) correction as a motive to exit markets altogether.

S&P/TSX Top 10 years of return (1957-2022)

Year	Total return	Max drawdown
1979	44.8%	-15.7%
1983	35.5%	-9.2%
2009	35.1%	-20.1%
1961	32.7%	-1.6%
1993	32.5%	-5.0%
1999	31.7%	-10.0%
1958	31.2%	-1.1%
1980	30.1%	-22.4%
1978	29.7%	-9.2%
1996	28.3%	-7.0%
Average	33.2%	-10.1%

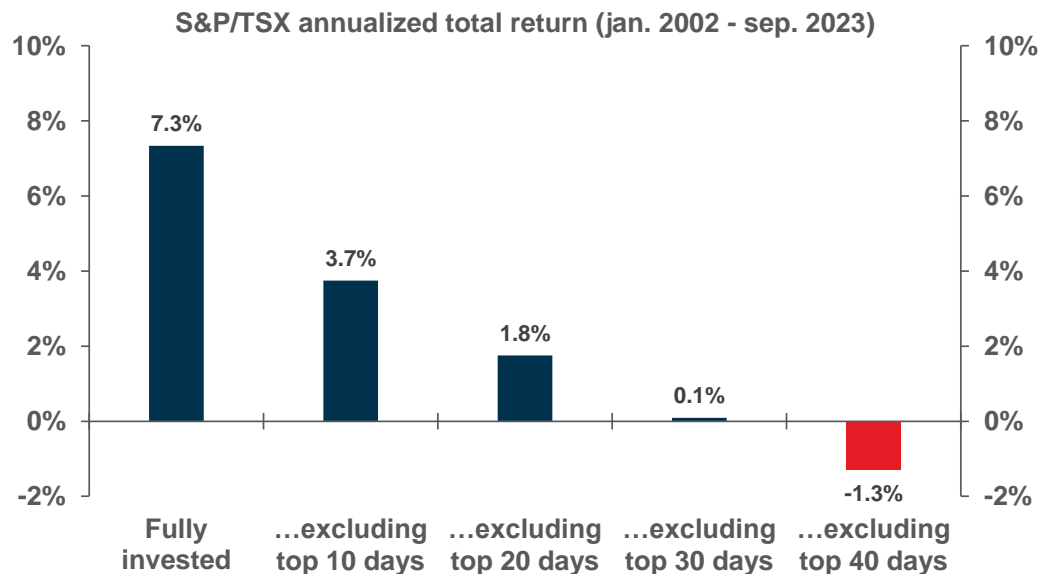
CIO Office (data via Refinitiv).

The risk with market timing

Description

Illustrates how long-term returns can be significantly and permanently influenced by missing just a few of the best days on the stock market (which, by the way, usually occur in turbulent times).

Helpful **for investors tempted by market timing**. All too often, this comes at the expense of the best ally of long-term investors: compound returns.



CIO Office (data via Refinitiv).

Returns over time: a matter of perspective

Description

Illustrates the random nature of shorter-term stock market fluctuations (almost as often negative as positive on a daily basis), which gradually give way to predominantly positive returns as the time horizon increases.

Helpful for demonstrating the importance (and power) of patience to investors concerned about short-term fluctuations.

S&P 500 returns*

Period	Positive	Negative
Daily	54%	46%
Monthly	65%	35%
Quarterly	71%	29%
1 year	80%	20%
3 years	83%	17%
5 years	83%	17%
10 years	93%	7%
20 years	100%	0%

CIO Office (data via Refinitiv). *Price index from 1966 to 1987. Total return from January 1st, 1988.

S&P/TSX returns*

Period	Positive	Negative
Daily	55%	45%
Monthly	63%	37%
Quarterly	68%	32%
1 year	73%	27%
3 years	88%	12%
5 years	96%	4%
10 years	100%	0%
20 years	100%	0%

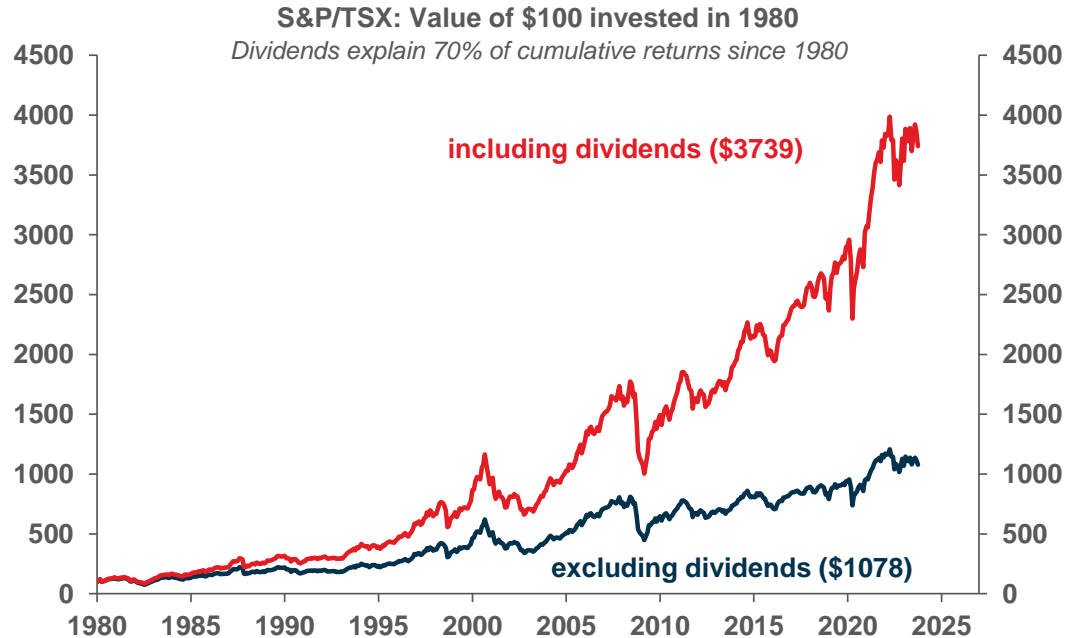
CIO Office (data via Refinitiv). *Price index from 1966 to 1985. Total return from January 1st, 1986.

The power of dividends in the long run

Description

Illustrates the importance that dividends can have on long-term cumulative returns, accounting for 70% of total gains on the Canadian stock market since 1980.

Helpful for investors under the impression that their returns rest entirely on share price fluctuations, when, in reality, compound dividends often explain more than the majority of cumulative gains in the long run.



CIO Office (data via Refinitiv).

CIO Office

CIO-Office@bnc.ca

Martin Lefebvre

Chief Investment Officer
martin.lefebvre@bnc.ca

Louis Lajoie

Director
Investment strategy
louis.lajoie@bnc.ca

Mikhael Deutsch-Heng

Associate
Investment strategy
mikhael.deutschheng@bnc.ca

Simon-Carl Dunberry

Director
Portfolio strategy
simon-carl.dunberry@bnc.ca

Zaïd Shoufan

Associate
Portfolio strategy
zaid.shoufan@bnc.ca

Nicolas Charlton

Associate
Quantitative strategy
nicolas.charlton@bnc.ca

Julien Gordon

Analyst
Quantitative strategy
julien.gordon@bnc.ca



CIO Office

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