

Markets reflect on conflict in Iran.

Economic Highlights

- Geopolitics dominated markets in March amid the escalating Middle East conflict and near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a critical energy chokepoint which handles roughly 20% of global seaborne oil trade. Brent crude ended March at \$118 per barrel, up more than 60% for the month. Volatility also spiked across energy, fixed-income, and global equity markets.
- The initial market reaction focused on the potential inflationary impact of higher energy prices. While still too early to assess the full economic impact, sustained energy cost pressures could weigh on consumer sentiment and discretionary spending if the conflict persists.
- The Federal Open Market Committee (Fed or FOMC) met in March and held the target rate unchanged at 3.50%–3.75%, as expected. Policymakers acknowledged heightened uncertainty stemming from the conflict and communicated a patient, data-dependent approach. The “dot plot” showed several individual projections shifting toward fewer or no rate cuts, though the median expectation remained for one additional 25 basis point (bps) cut in 2026.
- Market expectations for Fed policy fluctuated wildly in March. The month began with markets pricing two or three cuts in 2026 but ended the month pushing the next expected rate cut into 2027. Fed Chair Jerome Powell’s measured “wait and see” commentary tempered these hawkish expectations, leaving the market priced for a prolonged hold.
- While too early to reflect the cascading impact of higher oil prices, consumer price inflation data for February was broadly in line with recent readings. Notably, producer prices jumped significantly more than expected, rising 0.7% month-over-month and highlighting renewed upstream price pressures.
- The labor market showed renewed resilience in March with payrolls rebounding after contracting in February. Other labor indicators such as initial jobless claims held near historically low levels and continuing claims declined. The unemployment rate edged down to 4.3%, reinforcing the persistence of a “low-hire, low-fire” environment. However, elevated energy prices pose potential risks to hiring momentum ahead.

Interest Rates

- U.S. Treasury yields increased and the yield curve steepened as investors repriced their Fed policy outlook driven by geopolitical turmoil and renewed inflation concerns. The yield on 3-month, 2-year, and 10-year U.S. Treasuries ended the month at 3.67%, 3.79%, and 4.32%, representing increases of +2 bps, +42 bps, and +38 bps, respectively.
- Longer duration bond indices bore the brunt of rising yields as higher rates pressured market values. The ICE BofA 3-month, 2-year, and 10-year U.S. Treasury indices returned +0.29%, -0.49%, and -2.52%, respectively.

Equity Markets

- Equity market volatility jumped to its highest level since April 2025 amid de-risking sentiment. For the month, the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell by -5.2%, the S&P 500 Index was down -5.0%, and the Nasdaq dipped -4.7%.
- After strong relative performance over the prior 12 months, international equities underperformed domestic counterparts in March as the MSCI ACWI ex U.S. Net Index declined -10.8%.

PFMAM Strategy Recap & Outlook

- While future Fed policy remains uncertain amid the ongoing conflict, we view the meaningful rise in interest rates and the steeper curve as an opportunity, particularly for strategies inside five years. As a result, we will look to target portfolio durations at 101-105% of benchmarks. For longer-duration strategies beyond five years, we believe the risk profile is less favorable relative to shorter strategies. As such, we expect to maintain durations near 100% of benchmarks.
- Spreads on federal agencies and supranationals remain narrow, although callable spreads have widened modestly due to increased market volatility. New supply is expected to be focused in the money market space and likely to remain limited beyond one year.
- In response to geopolitical tensions, heightened issuance, and concerns over private debt capital, investment-grade (IG) corporate bond spreads widened noticeably in March and pushed excess returns firmly negative. Despite these factors, fundamentals remain solid and the technical backdrop is supportive. Combined with cheaper valuations, we find the sector more attractive and anticipate adding via both new issues and secondary markets.
- Spreads on asset-backed securities (ABS) widened marginally over the month despite the negative market sentiment. Solid consumer fundamentals and credit enhancements are expected to insulate the sector from meaningful downturns.
- Mortgage-backed securities (MBS) generated negative excess returns over the month as higher yields and a spike in bond volatility weighed on the sector. Conversely, the less interest-rate sensitive agency CMBS sector largely broke even over the month.
- Credit spreads on the short end of the curve widened significantly over the month. Maturities in the 9-12 month range offer attractive all-in yields, particularly for investors anticipating the next Fed policy move will be a rate cut.

U.S. Treasury Yields

Maturity	Mar 31, 2025	Feb 28, 2026	Mar 31, 2026	Monthly Change
3-Month	4.30%	3.66%	3.68%	0.02%
6-Month	4.23%	3.62%	3.70%	0.08%
2-Year	3.89%	3.38%	3.80%	0.42%
5-Year	3.95%	3.50%	3.94%	0.44%
10-Year	4.21%	3.94%	4.32%	0.38%
30-Year	4.57%	4.61%	4.91%	0.30%

Yields by Sector and Maturity

Maturity	U.S. Treasury	Federal Agency	Corporates-AA-A Industrials	AAA Municipals
3-Month	3.68%	3.69%	4.14%	-
6-Month	3.70%	3.70%	4.15%	-
2-Year	3.80%	3.81%	4.18%	2.10%
5-Year	3.94%	3.95%	4.55%	2.19%
10-Year	4.32%	4.38%	5.04%	2.66%
30-Year	4.91%	-	5.79%	3.87%

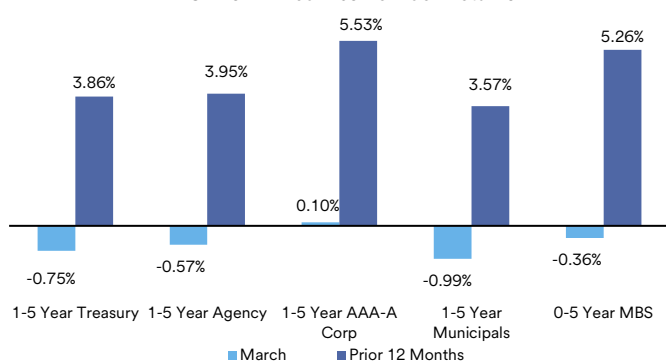
Spot Prices and Benchmark Rates

Index	Mar 31, 2025	Feb 28, 2026	Mar 31, 2026	Monthly Change
1-Month SOFR	4.32%	3.67%	3.66%	-0.01%
3-Month SOFR	4.29%	3.67%	3.68%	0.01%
Effective Fed Funds Rate	4.33%	3.64%	3.64%	0.00%
Fed Funds Target Rate	4.50%	3.75%	3.75%	0.00%
Gold (\$/oz)	\$3,123	\$5,248	\$4,648	-\$600
Crude Oil (\$/Barrel)	\$71.48	\$67.02	\$101.38	\$34.36
U.S. Dollars per Euro	\$1.08	\$1.18	\$1.16	-\$0.02

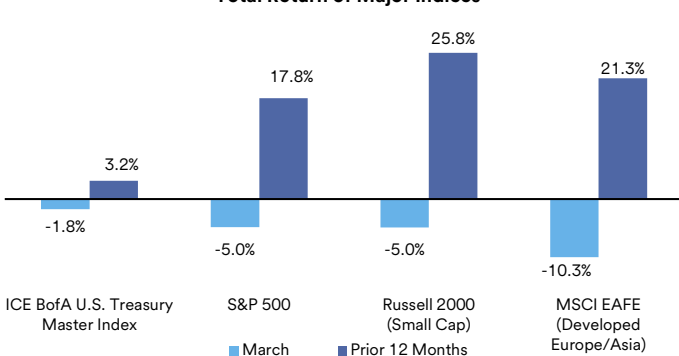
Economic Indicators

Indicator	Release Date	Period	Actual	Survey (Median)
Existing Home Sales MoM	10-Mar	Feb	1.70%	-0.80%
CPI YoY	11-Mar	Feb	2.40%	2.40%
GDP Annualized QoQ	13-Mar	4Q S	0.70%	1.40%
PCE YoY	13-Mar	Jan	2.80%	2.90%
FOMC Rate Decision	18-Mar	Mar	3.75%	3.75%
U. of Mich. Consumer Sentiment	27-Mar	Mar F	53.3	54
Change in Nonfarm Payrolls	3-Apr	Mar	178k	65k

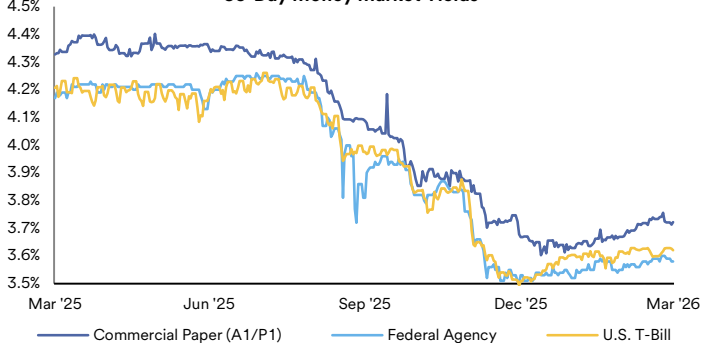
ICE BofA Fixed Income Index Returns



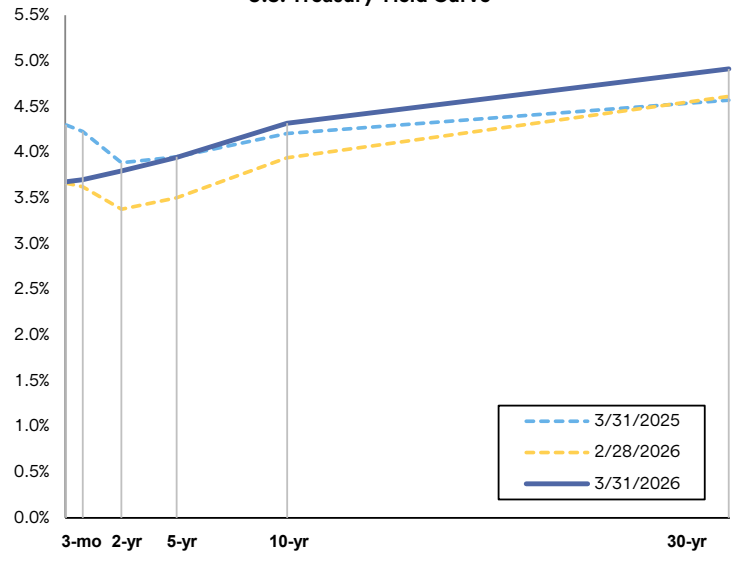
Total Return of Major Indices



30-Day Money Market Yields



U.S. Treasury Yield Curve



Source: Bloomberg. Data as of March 31, 2026, unless otherwise noted.

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