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Markets in Review

Building on the momentum from the prior quarter, equity markets delivered another strong performance in Q3 2025, with all major U.S. indices posting robust gains and setting new record highs. The S&P 500 Index¹ and Nasdaq Composite Index² advanced by 7.8% and 11.2%, respectively, during the quarter, extending their year-to-date (through 9/30/25) gains to 13.7% and 17.3%. This continued rally was fueled by the Federal Reserve's first 2025 rate cut in September, solid corporate earnings growth, and further progress in AI-driven innovation across technology sectors. Investors shrugged off lingering tariff concerns as trade negotiations showed incremental progress, while softening labor market data appeared to bolster expectations for additional monetary easing without tipping the economy into recessionary territory.

Market leadership remained firmly with growth and large-cap technology stocks, as the tech-heavy Nasdaq-100 Index³ returned 8.8% during the quarter. In contrast, the Dow Jones Industrial Average⁴, with its value-oriented composition, posted a more modest 5.2% gain, underscoring the ongoing preference for growth amid optimistic rate-cut prospects. The Russell 2000 Index⁵, tracking small-cap stocks, outperformed with a 12.0% advance—its strongest quarterly showing since Q4 2023—benefiting from rate-cut tailwinds that eased borrowing costs for

highly levered smaller firms and partially alleviating prior tariff-related fears.

Providing further evidence of narrow market breadth, the S&P 500 Equal Weight Index⁶ underperformed the market-cap weighted S&P 500 by 3.4% in the quarter, reflecting the heavy concentration of gains in a handful of mega-cap technology and AI-linked companies. The “Magnificent Seven”⁷ delivered another strong quarter, posting an average return of 17.7% on the heels of a 21.5% gain in Q2. While this leadership supported index gains, it also raised concerns about concentration risk going forward.

International markets extended their positive gains in Q3 2025, though performance moderated slightly amid a modestly stronger U.S. dollar and mixed global growth signals. The MSCI World ex USA Index⁸ appreciated by 4.8% in the quarter, supported by strong Japanese returns and steady European performance. The MSCI Japan Index gained 7.2% in Q3, building on prior momentum driven by yen weakness, corporate governance reforms, and export tailwinds from easing U.S.-China trade frictions. The MSCI Europe Index extended its strong run with a 3.3% quarterly return, bringing its Q1 to Q3 performance to 24.6%—well ahead of the S&P 500's 13.7%

over the same period. European equity market performance was propelled by European Central Bank (ECB) rate cuts and robust earnings in industrials and consumer sectors.

Emerging markets posted solid results, with the MSCI Emerging Markets Index⁹ up 10.1%, led by continued strength in Korea and robust China performance. The MSCI Korea Index advanced 12.5% in Q3, fueled by foreign inflows into semiconductors and AI-related plays, alongside government-backed structural reforms that enhanced market accessibility. Chinese equity market returns were particularly robust, with the MSCI China Index appreciating by 20.1% during the quarter. The China rally was driven by enthusiasm around domestic AI-related advancements, easing trade tensions with the U.S., and accommodative fiscal and monetary policy measures.

On the domestic monetary policy front, the Federal Reserve held the federal funds rate steady at 4.25%–4.50% following its July FOMC meeting, with Chair Jerome Powell highlighting a balanced risk assessment from moderating inflation on one hand and a softening labor market on the other. However, at the September 17–18 meeting, the FOMC implemented a 25 basis-point rate cut lowering the target range to 4.00%–4.25%, citing sufficient progress toward the 2% inflation goal and the need to support employment. The updated Summary of Economic Projections indicated a median expectation for two additional cuts by year-end 2025, with futures markets aligning closely on this path amid resilient GDP growth.

In fixed income, the 10-year U.S. Treasury yield ended Q3 at 4.15%, down from 4.23% at the start of the quarter, reflecting the Fed's easing signal and benign inflation data. This decline masked intra-quarter fluctuations: yields spiked up to 4.50% in mid-July before bottoming out at 4.03% on 9/11/25 due to softer-than-expected labor market data and anticipation of a September Federal Reserve rate cut. The overall downward trend supported bond returns, with the Bloomberg U.S. Aggregate Bond Index¹⁰ advancing 2.1% in Q3. Long-duration bonds benefited most, as the iShares 20+ Year Treasury Bond ETF (TLT) rose 2.4%, while short-term exposure via the iShares 1-3 Year Treasury Bond ETF (SHY) gained 1.1%.

Commodity markets exhibited renewed volatility in Q3 2025. The commodity enjoyed a brief rebound due to supply disruption fears from Middle East tensions before ending the quarter on a weak note at \$64.31 on supply surplus concerns and weaker demand signals.

Precious metals benefited from generous returns in the quarter with gold appreciating by 16.6%, extending its year-to date (though 9/30/25) return to 47.04%. Gold's rally was driven by a relatively weak U.S. dollar, its reputation as a safe haven asset, and robust demand from central banks. Silver's return was even more material, increasing by 29.0% to bring its nine-month return to 59.8%. While silver also benefited from safe haven inflows, price appreciation was also supported by supply deficits and industrial demand tailwinds.

Looking ahead, we remain constructively positioned for the balance of 2025, anticipating sustained equity upside from AI catalysts, healthy corporate profits, and further Fed accommodation. However, market leadership remains narrow and any earnings or guidance disappointment among mega-cap market leaders could spark volatility. In addition, the health of the labor market and continued progress on the inflation front

are critical components to the continued upside scenario. Consequently, we believe investors should maintain diversified positioning while selectively participating in growth-led opportunities.

Cost of Living Adjustments for 2026 Are Here!

On November 13, 2025, the IRS announced the Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) affecting the dollar limitations for retirement plans for 2026.

In October, the Social Security Administration announced a modest benefit increase of 2.8%. Retirement plan limits also increased over the 2025 limits. COLA increases are intended to allow participant contributions and benefits to keep up with the "cost of living" from year to year. Here are the highlights from the new 2026 limits:

- The calendar year elective deferral limit increased from \$23,500 to \$24,500.
- The elective deferral catch-up contribution increases from \$7,500 to \$8,000. This contribution is available to all participants aged 50 or older in 2026. An additional \$3,250 is available in 2026 for participants aged 60-63.
- The maximum available dollar amount that can be contributed to a participant's retirement account in a defined contribution plan increased from \$70,000 to \$72,000. The limit includes both employee and employer contributions as well as any allocated forfeitures. For those over age 50, the annual addition limit increases to include catch-up contributions.
- The maximum amount of compensation that can be considered in retirement plan compliance has been raised from \$350,000 to \$360,000.
- Annual income subject to Social Security taxation has increased from \$176,100 to \$184,500.

| Annual Plan Limits | 2026 | 2025 | 2024 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Contribution and Benefit Limits | | | |
| Elective Deferral Limit | \$24,500 | \$23,500 | \$23,000 |
| Catch-Up Contributions (age 50-59 and over 63) | \$8,000 | \$7,500 | \$7,500 |
| Catch-Up Contributions (age 60-63) | \$11,250 | \$11,250 | - |
| Annual Contribution Limit | \$72,000 | \$70,000 | \$69,000 |
| Annual Contribution Limit including Catch-Up Contributions (age 50-59 and over 63) | \$80,000 | \$77,500 | \$76,500 |
| Annual Contribution Limit including Catch-Up Contributions (age 60-63) | \$83,250 | \$81,250 | \$76,500 |
| Annual Benefit Limit | \$290,000 | \$280,000 | \$275,000 |

| Compensation Limits | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Maximum Plan Compensation | \$360,000 | \$350,000 | \$345,000 |
| Income Subject to Social Security | \$184,500 | \$176,100 | \$168,600 |
| Key Employee Compensation Threshold | \$235,000 | \$230,000 | \$220,000 |
| Highly Compensated Employee Threshold | \$160,000 | \$160,000 | \$155,000 |
| IRA Limits | | | |
| SIMPLE Plan Elective Deferrals | \$17,000 | \$16,500 | \$16,000 |
| SIMPLE Catch-Up Contributions | \$4,000 | \$3,500 | \$3,500 |
| Individual Retirement Account (IRA) | \$7,500 | \$7,000 | \$7,000 |
| IRA Catch-Up Contribution | \$1,100 | \$1,000 | \$1,000 |

- **Error Correction Relief:** If a plan mistakenly accepts a pre-tax catch-up contribution from a high-income participant, the IRS allows for correction without plan disqualification.
- **Puerto Rico Plan Guidance:** Special provisions apply to dual-qualified plans covering both Puerto Rico and United States participants, offering additional administrative flexibility.
 - Puerto Rico code does not currently allow Roth contributions, but participants who meet the wage requirement are permitted to make catch-up contributions as after-tax contributions.

No Extension of Transition Relief: The administrative transition period still ends on December 31, 2025. Plan sponsors must be fully compliant by January 1, 2026.

Immediate Action Items

To prepare for the upcoming effective date, plan sponsors should:

1. **Coordinate with Payroll Providers:** Ensure systems can track prior-year FICA wages and apply the Roth requirement accordingly.
 - FICA (or Federal Insurance Contributions Act) wages include nearly all taxable earned income, such as salary, wages, bonuses, etc. An employee's FICA wages may be higher than their federal taxable wages (Box 1 on Form W-2) because deductions such as pre-tax 401(k) contributions that reduce taxable wages are still considered to be FICA wages to calculate FICA taxes.
2. **Update Plan Documents:** Amend plan language to reflect the Roth catch-up requirement and any deemed election provisions.
 - Plan document provisions that do not currently allow participants to defer Roth contributions are not required to add the provision. Without the option, however, participants who are age 50 and older and meet the wage threshold will not be permitted to elect to defer catch-up contributions.
3. **Review Participant Communication Strategies:** Clearly explain the change to affected participants, including the implications of Roth vs. pre-tax contributions.
4. **Train Internal Teams:** HR, payroll and benefits teams should understand the new rules and how to respond to participant questions.
5. **Consult Legal and Recordkeeping Partners:** Ensure all stakeholders are aligned on implementation and compliance.

Participant Impact

While the rule limits flexibility for high earners, it also presents an opportunity to educate participants on the benefits of Roth

contributions, such as tax-free growth and no required minimum distributions (RMDs) during the account holder's lifetime.

Broader SECURE 2.0 Context

The Roth catch-up rule is part of a broader effort under SECURE 2.0 to modernize retirement savings. Other provisions already released include:

- Higher catch-up limits for ages 60–63
- Student loan matching contributions
- Mandatory automatic enrollment for new plans

The final regulations also provide guidance on these provisions, helping plan sponsors implement them in a coordinated fashion.

Final Thoughts

The IRS's final regulations provide much-needed clarity, but the compliance burden now shifts to plan sponsors. With the transition period ending in just a few months, proactive planning is essential.

"These final regulations reflect the Treasury Department and IRS's commitment to helping Americans save for retirement while ensuring compliance with the law," the IRS stated.¹

Need help preparing your plan for 2026? We can assist with drafting participant notices, updating plan language or creating a compliance checklist. Just let us know what you need.

¹IRS Newsroom – Treasury, IRS issue final regulations on new Roth catch-up rule, other SECURE 2.0 Act provisions

<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-24-63.pdf>

Year-End Data Collection

It's that time of year again. A chill is in the air, football is on TV almost every night, and many are planning family holidays. It's also time—if your plan has a December year end—to start thinking about your annual data request.

You may wonder why we ask for this data at the end of every year. The bottom line is that we need the information to keep your plan in compliance and provide the best possible service.

First, we verify that the company data we have for you is correct. Your address, phone number and company EIN appear on annual filings and plan documents, so it's important that we have current information. However, this is only the start.

Ownership of businesses may change over time, whether it's due to a sale or new partners. The change will influence who is considered a highly-compensated employee (HCE), as well as who is a key employee. We use this information to perform the compliance testing for your plan.

Due to family attribution laws, some family members of company owners are treated as owning part of the business, even if they don't have direct ownership. Family members of owners, including children, spouses, parents or grandparents, who work at the company may be attributed ownership, which will have an effect on the compliance testing.

Ownership (or partial ownership) of other companies can also affect compliance testing on your plan. In certain situations, the other businesses will need to be included in the compliance testing, regardless of whether any employees of the other company participate in your plan. We will also need to know if the other business has its own retirement plan; if so, the two plans may need to be tested together.

Laws governing family attribution and business ownership can be complicated but are in place to protect the plan participants. Although we ask for this information at year end, we highly recommend informing us of any changes and their effective dates as soon as possible so we can review the impact on the plan design and avoid surprises during testing later.

Other events that can occur during the plan year include staffing and advisor changes. Retirement plan communications often involve confidential information and time-sensitive requests, which should only be received by individuals who are authorized to discuss the plan. To guarantee that our communications go to the correct person, please notify us of any changes immediately. With that said, we will still ask for updates at the end of the year to verify that our records are up to date.

In addition to the year-end items we've already mentioned, we also ask you a series of questions relating to your company and your plan. You'll notice that many of these questions are repeated every year. As your business situation changes over time, your answers may be different from one year to the next. Ultimately, your responses help us to identify possible compliance issues and allow us to ensure your plan is meeting your business goals.

Lastly, although certainly not least, an accurate employee census is vital to accurate testing and reporting. Incorrect data for even a single individual can affect the results of multiple compliance tests. It's important to provide complete information on all employees regardless of how many hours the employee worked or whether the employee participated in the plan. Even if an employee is newly hired and not yet eligible for the plan, they need to be included, as their information helps us determine their eligibility date. As a rule of thumb, the census data you provide should be consistent with the company's year-end payroll records.

While these represent the types of information we will request from you at the end of the plan year, if there is anything that you think we should know about the business that we didn't ask about, this is the perfect time to let us know. As you provide this year-end data, we would also request that you be thorough and complete to avoid follow-up questions and potential delays. We appreciate your partnership in providing the data we need. If you ever have any questions or concerns regarding our data request or anything else, please feel free to reach out to us.



Upcoming Compliance Deadlines

December 2025

1st: Participant Notices – Annual notices due for Safe Harbor elections (note that some plans are no longer required to distribute Safe Harbor notices), Qualified Default Investment Arrangement (QDIA), and Automatic Contribution Arrangements (EACA or QACA).

31st: ADP/ACP Corrections - Deadline for a plan to make ADP/ACP corrective distributions and/or deposit qualified nonelective contributions (QNEC) for the previous plan year.

31st: Discretionary Amendments - Deadline to adopt discretionary amendments to the plan, subject to certain exceptions (e.g., anti-cutbacks).

31st: Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) – The first RMD can be taken by December 31, 2025, or may be delayed until April 1, 2026. For participants already receiving RMDs, the distribution is due by December 31, 2025.

31st: Contribution Funding – Final funding deadline for 2024 plan year end. See your tax advisor for the year of deductibility.

January 2026

31st: IRS Form 945 – Deadline to file IRS Form 945 to report income tax withheld from qualified plan distributions made during the prior plan year. The deadline may be extended to February 10th if taxes were deposited on time during the prior plan year.

31st: IRS Form 1099-R – Deadline to distribute Form 1099-R to participants and beneficiaries who received a distribution or a deemed distribution during the prior plan year.

31st: IRS Form W-2 – Deadline to distribute Form W-2, which must reflect the aggregate value of employer-provided employee benefits.

Sources:

1. The S&P 500 Index is designed to be a leading indicator of U.S. equities and is commonly used as a proxy for the U.S. stock market.
2. The Nasdaq Composite is a stock market index that includes almost all stocks listed on the Nasdaq stock exchange. The composition of the NASDAQ Composite is heavily weighted towards companies in the information technology sector.
3. The Nasdaq-100 Index is U.S. stock market index comprised of the largest 100 non-financial companies listed on the Nasdaq stock exchange. The index is dominated by technology companies and is commonly used as proxy for U.S. large cap technology performance.
4. The Dow Jones Industrial Average is a widely followed, price weighted stock market index of 30 prominent companies listed on stock exchanges in the United States.
5. The Russell 2000 Index is a small-cap U.S. stock market index that makes up the smallest 2,000 stocks in the Russell Index. The index is commonly used as proxy for U.S. small cap stock market performance.
6. The S&P 500 Equal Weight Index (EWI) is the equal-weight version of the S&P 500. The index includes the same constituents as the capitalization weighted S&P 500, but each company in the S&P 500 EWI is allocated a fixed weight of 0.2% of the index total at each quarterly rebalance.
7. The term "Magnificent Seven stocks" refers to a group of seven dominant and influential technology-focused companies in the U.S. stock market. The components of the Magnificent Seven are: Apple Inc. (AAPL), Microsoft Corporation (MSFT), Amazon.com, Inc. (AMZN), Alphabet Inc. (GOOG), Meta Platforms, Inc. (META), NVIDIA Corporation (NVDA), and Tesla, Inc. (TSLA).
8. The MSCI World ex USA Index captures large and mid-cap representation across 22 of 23 Developed Markets countries (excluding the U.S.) and 24 Emerging Markets countries.
9. The MSCI Emerging Markets Index captures large and mid-cap representation across 24 Emerging Markets countries.
10. The Bloomberg U.S. Aggregate Bond Index is a broad-based index that is commonly used as a proxy for the U.S. bond market.

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