

THE UNDERVALUED VALUE FACTOR

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Is [value](#) investing dead?

After a decade of underperformance, investors aren't wrong for asking.

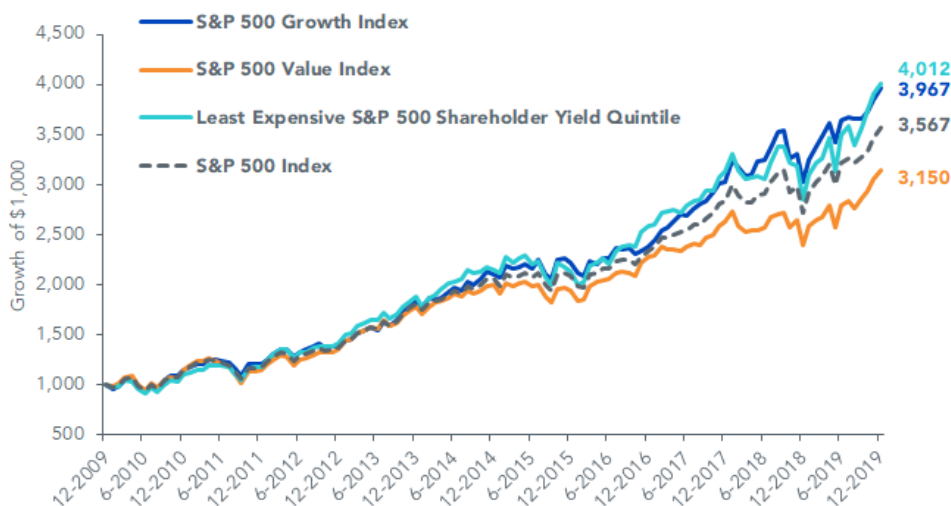
In the last 10 years the [S&P 500 Growth Index](#) has returned 14.8% annually, while the [S&P 500 Value Index](#) returned 12.2%.¹

Closing a 260 [basis points \(bps\)](#) annual return deficit is no small feat—but don't throw in the towel on value just yet.

[Shareholder yield](#), the ratio of capital returned through [dividends](#) and [buybacks](#) relative to share price, is a measure of value that kept up with the S&P 500 Growth Index over the last decade.

Companies with the highest shareholder yield returned 14.9% annually between 2010 and 2019.²

Figure 1: Growth of \$1,000 (12/31/09–12/31/19)



Sources: S&P Dow Jones Indices, FactSet, WisdomTree, for the period 12/31/09–12/31/19. Past performance is not indicative of future results. You cannot invest directly in an index. Index performance does not represent actual fund or portfolio performance. A fund or portfolio may differ significantly from the securities included in the index. Index performance assumes reinvestment of dividends but does not reflect any management fees, transaction costs or other expenses that would be incurred by a portfolio or fund, or brokerage commissions on transactions in fund shares. Such fees, expenses and commissions could reduce returns.

Last year we wrote about [shareholder yield being a more effective measure of value](#) than [price-to-earnings \(P/E\)](#) or [price-to-book \(P/B\) ratios](#).

If you believe in value investing, you expect the least expensive stocks to outperform **both** the 1) most expensive stocks and 2) benchmark:

- Returns for the highest shareholder yield (lowest [valuation](#)) stocks beat the most expensive by 570 bps annually over the last 10 years.³ For price-to-book and price-to-earnings value ratios, the least expensive failed to outperform the most expensive.⁴
- Relative to other measures of value, the highest shareholder yield stocks delivered the greatest outperformance

(+134 bps annually) versus the S&P 500 Index. The least expensive price-to-earnings stocks slightly beat the benchmark (+26 bps annually), and the least expensive price-to-book stocks lagged (-193 bps annually).⁵

Part of the reason that shareholder yield has proven to be an effective value measure is because of sector exposures.

The least expensive subsets on price-to-book and price-to-earnings have loaded approximately 50%–75% of their weight in the Energy and Financials sectors. Meanwhile, shareholder yield has benefited from more diverse sector exposure and an overweight allocation to Information Technology, the strongest performing sector of the 2010s.⁶

Notably, the least expensive shareholder yield quintile has the lowest active weight versus the S&P 500. This means that sector weights in this subset most closely resemble that of the broad market benchmark.

Figure 2: Sector Exposures

Last 10 Years: S&P 500 Index Average Sector Composition of <i>Least Expensive</i> Quintiles							
Price-to-Book		Price-to-Earnings		Dividend Yield		Shareholder Yield	
Financials	64.6%	Financials	31.6%	Energy	15.3%	Information Technology	23.1%
Energy	12.6%	Energy	16.9%	Health Care	15.1%	Financials	16.6%
Utilities	6.3%	Information Technology	16.5%	Consumer Staples	14.9%	Consumer Discretionary	14.4%
Consumer Discretionary	3.7%	Health Care	9.0%	Communication Services	14.8%	Health Care	11.3%
Information Technology	2.8%	Consumer Discretionary	6.0%	Utilities	13.8%	Industrials	10.0%
Health Care	2.7%	Industrials	5.4%	Real Estate	5.5%	Consumer Staples	9.6%
Communication Services	2.2%	Consumer Staples	4.8%	Industrials	5.2%	Energy	7.1%
Consumer Staples	2.0%	Communication Services	4.5%	Information Technology	5.0%	Communication Services	4.3%
Materials	1.7%	Materials	2.9%	Consumer Discretionary	4.2%	Materials	2.3%
Industrials	0.8%	Utilities	2.4%	Financials	3.4%	Utilities	0.8%
Real Estate	0.7%	Real Estate	0.1%	Materials	2.9%	Real Estate	0.4%

Sources: WisdomTree, FactSet, for the period 12/31/09–12/31/19. Weights subject to change. Past performance is not indicative of future results. You cannot invest directly in an index.

Sectors that have screened expensive on P/B or P/E have been more attractively valued based on shareholder yield (figure 3). These sectors, which include Information Technology and Consumer Discretionary, have delivered above-benchmark returns over the last decade.

Figure 3: Median Sector Valuations

Last 10 Years: S&P 500 Index Median Sector Valuations						
Sector	Return	Price-to-Book	Price-to-Earnings	Dividend Yield	Shareholder Yield	
Information Technology	17.4%	▶ 3.8x	▶ 20.4x	▶ 1.6%	▶ 3.9%	
Consumer Discretionary	17.3%	▶ 3.6x	▶ 18.0x	▶ 1.7%	▶ 4.4%	
Communication Services	15.7%	▶ 3.1x	▶ 17.9x	▶ 1.5%	▶ 4.4%	
Health Care	14.6%	▶ 3.5x	▶ 20.3x	▶ 0.9%	▶ 3.2%	
Real Estate	13.8%	▶ 2.8x	▶ 41.5x	▶ 3.1%	▶ 2.6%	
Industrials	13.3%	▶ 3.4x	▶ 18.7x	▶ 1.8%	▶ 4.0%	
Consumer Staples	12.0%	▶ 4.6x	▶ 19.0x	▶ 2.5%	▶ 4.1%	
Financials	12.0%	▶ 1.3x	▶ 13.6x	▶ 1.8%	▶ 4.4%	
Utilities	11.6%	▶ 1.7x	▶ 16.7x	▶ 3.7%	▶ 3.2%	
Materials	9.8%	▶ 3.3x	▶ 18.4x	▶ 1.8%	▶ 2.9%	
Energy	3.4%	▶ 1.9x	▶ 15.2x	▶ 1.6%	▶ 1.6%	
S&P 500	13.6%	2.8x	18.2x	1.9%	3.6%	

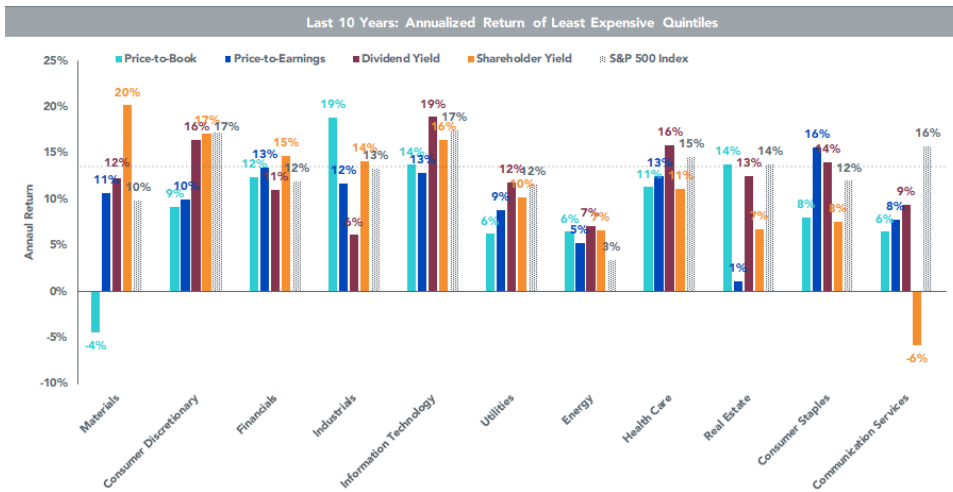
Sources: WisdomTree, FactSet, for the period 12/31/09–12/31/19. Red flags mark most expensive sectors. Green flags mark least expensive sectors. Past performance is not indicative of future results. Weights subject to change.

As a value factor, shareholder yield has generated the greatest outperformance relative to P/B and P/E in the Materials and Consumer Discretionary sectors (figure 4). It has also been very effective within Information Technology and Financials.

It's important to acknowledge that P/B and P/E have still been useful measures of value in certain sectors. Screening for low price-to-book companies in Industrials and Real Estate worked well during the last 10 years. Low price-to-earnings companies in the Consumer Staples sector delivered strong returns as well.

Interestingly, high shareholder yield companies within Communication Services were a substantial headwind on the return for the factor. All measures of value lagged the benchmark within this sector, which brings into question whether a value strategy works at all in Communication Services.

Figure 4: Sector Returns



Last 10 Years: S&P 500 Index Annualized Return of Least Expensive Quintiles							
Price-to-Book	11.6%	Price-to-Earnings	13.8%	Dividend Yield	14.0%	Shareholder Yield	14.9%
Industrials	18.8%	Consumer Staples	15.7%	Information Technology	18.9%	Materials	20.2%
Real Estate	13.8%	Financials	13.5%	Consumer Discretionary	16.4%	Consumer Discretionary	17.1%
Information Technology	13.7%	Information Technology	12.9%	Health Care	15.9%	Information Technology	16.4%
Financials	12.4%	Health Care	12.5%	Consumer Staples	14.0%	Financials	14.7%
Health Care	11.3%	Industrials	11.7%	Real Estate	12.5%	Industrials	14.2%
Consumer Discretionary	9.2%	Materials	10.7%	Materials	12.3%	Health Care	11.1%
Consumer Staples	8.0%	Consumer Discretionary	10.0%	Utilities	11.9%	Utilities	10.2%
Communication Services	6.5%	Utilities	8.9%	Financials	11.0%	Consumer Staples	7.6%
Energy	6.5%	Communication Services	7.8%	Communication Services	9.4%	Real Estate	6.7%
Utilities	6.2%	Energy	5.2%	Energy	7.1%	Energy	6.6%
Materials	-4.4%	Real Estate	1.1%	Industrials	6.1%	Communication Service	-5.8%

Sources: WisdomTree, FactSet, for the period 12/31/09-12/31/19. Weights subject to change. Past performance is not indicative of future results. You cannot invest directly in an index.

Adding a Shareholder Yield Value Strategy to Your Portfolio

The highest shareholder yield subset of the S&P 500 not only generated returns above the low P/E and P/B subsets, but it also outperformed the broad benchmark and its [growth](#) counterpart while maintaining sector diversity.

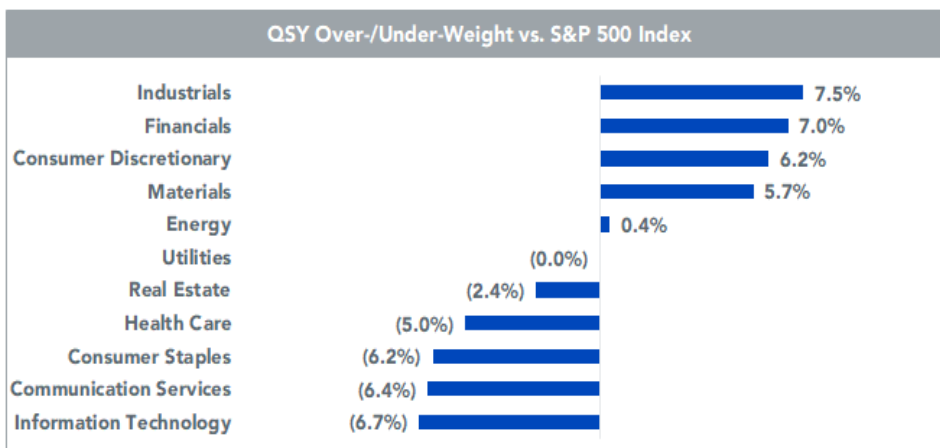
Value *isn't* dead.

The [WisdomTree U.S. Quality Shareholder Yield Fund \(QSY\)](#) is a quantitative [active](#) strategy that combines a methodical approach to ranking stocks on their shareholder yield and quality scores, with the added ability to apply discretion where risks or opportunities to the quantitative model are present.

QSY is currently valued at a steep discount to the S&P 500 on both P/B and P/E, and it offers more than triple the shareholder yield of the benchmark index.

Figure 5: QSY Characteristics

	Price-to-Book	Price-to-Earnings	Dividend Yield	Shareholder Yield
QSY	2.7x	14.2x	1.8%	6.4%
S&P 500 Index	3.7x	21.9x	1.8%	2.0%



Sources: WisdomTree, FactSet, as of 1/31/20. Weights subject to change. QSY's SEC 30-day yield was 1.35% as of 2/14/20.

Performance is historical and does not guarantee future results. Current performance may be lower or higher than quoted. Investment returns and principal value of an investment will fluctuate so that an investor's shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Performance data for the most recent month-end is available at wisdomtree.com.

WisdomTree shares are bought and sold at market price (not NAV) and are not individually redeemed from the Fund. Total Returns are calculated using the daily 4:00 p.m. EST net asset value (NAV). Market price returns reflect the midpoint of the bid/ask spread as of the close of trading on the exchange where Fund shares are listed. Market price returns do not represent the returns you would receive if you traded shares at other times.

For standardized performance of QSY, please click [here](#).

After a decade of traditional value underperformance, we've seen that companies returning the most capital through dividends and buybacks can create value for shareholders in the form of excess returns. Looking ahead to the 2020s, QSY may be a solution for valuation-sensitive investors seeking exposure to high shareholder yield companies.

¹Source: S&P Dow Jones Indices. As measured by the S&P 500 Growth Index and S&P 500 Value Index for the period 12/31/09–12/31/19.

²Sources WisdomTree, FactSet. As measured by companies in the S&P 500 with a shareholder yield ratio ranking the top 20th percentile of their corresponding regional and size grouping for the period 12/31/09–12/31/19.

³Sources: WisdomTree, FactSet. As measured by the difference in returns between the companies in the S&P 500 with a shareholder yield ratio ranking in the top and bottom 20th percentile of their corresponding regional and size grouping. For the period 12/31/09–12/31/19, the top and bottom quintiles returned 14.9% and 9.2% annualized, respectively.

⁴Sources: WisdomTree, FactSet. As measured by the difference in returns between the companies in the S&P 500 with a price-to-book ratio and price-to-earnings ratio ranking in the bottom and top 20th percentile of their corresponding regional and size grouping. For the period 12/31/09–12/31/19, the bottom and top price-to-book quintiles returned 11.6% and 17.2% annualized, respectively; the bottom and top price-to-earnings quintiles returned 13.8% and 14.8% annualized, respectively.

⁵Sources: WisdomTree, FactSet. As measured by the returns of companies in the S&P 500 with a shareholder yield ranking in the top 20th percentile and a price-to-book and price-to-earnings ratio in the bottom 20th percentile of their corresponding regional and size grouping versus the returns of the S&P 500 Index. For the period 12/31/09–12/31/19, the top shareholder yield, bottom price-to-book and bottom price-to-earnings quintiles returned 14.9%, 11.6%, and 13.8% annualized, respectively, versus 13.6% annualized for the S&P 500 Index.

⁶Sources: WisdomTree, FactSet. For the period 12/31/09–12/31/19, the Information Technology sector returned 17.4% annualized.

Important Risks Related to this Article

There are risks associated with investing, including possible loss of principal. Funds focusing their investments on certain sectors increase their vulnerability to any single economic or regulatory development. This may result in greater share price volatility. While the Fund is actively managed, the Fund's investment process is expected to be heavily dependent on quantitative models, and the models may not perform as intended. Please read the Fund's prospectus for specific details regarding the Fund's risk profile.

For standardized performance and the most recent month-end performance click [here](#) NOTE, this material is intended for electronic use only. Individuals who intend to print and physically deliver to an investor must print the monthly performance report to accompany this blog.

For more investing insights, check out our [Economic & Market Outlook](#)

View the online version of this article [here](#).

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You cannot invest directly in an index.

DEFINITIONS

Value : Characterized by lower price levels relative to fundamentals, such as earnings or dividends. Prices are lower because investors are less certain of the performance of these fundamentals in the future. This term is also related to the Value Factor, which associates these stock characteristics with excess returns vs the market over time.

S&P 500 Growth Index : A market capitalization-weighted benchmark designed to measure the growth segment of the S&P 500 Index.

S&P 500 Value Index : A market capitalization-weighted benchmark designed to measure the value segment of the S&P 500 Index.

Basis point : 1/100th of 1 percent.

Shareholder Yield : A data point that references the combination of dividend yield and buyback yield.

Dividend : A portion of corporate profits paid out to shareholders.

Buyback : When a company uses its own cash to purchase its own outstanding shares; may positively impact the share price.

Price-to-earnings (P/E) ratio : Share price divided by earnings per share. Lower numbers indicate an ability to access greater amounts of earnings per dollar invested.

Price-to-book ratio : Share price divided by book value per share. Lower numbers indicate an ability to access greater amounts of earnings per dollar invested.

Valuation : Refers to metrics that relate financial statistics for equities to their price levels to determine if certain attributes, such as earnings or dividends, are cheap or expensive.

Growth : Characterized by higher price levels relative to fundamentals, such as dividends or earnings. Price levels are higher because investors are willing to pay more due to their expectations of future improvements in these fundamentals.

Active : Funds that attempt to outperform the market by selecting securities a portfolio manager believes to be the best.