



# Alternative Credit – The Road Less Traveled

Spring / Summer 2019



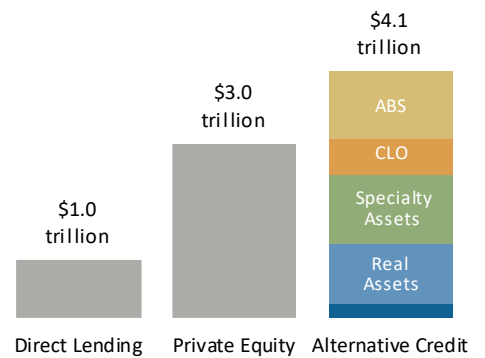
Alternative Credit has long described the spectrum of investments and sectors that exist outside of traditional markets. The development and expansion of markets can lead to the formation of new, Alternative Credit sectors. Likewise, market stresses and economic cycles can create mismatches in the supply and demand for capital thus creating opportunities for Alternative Credit investors.

Whatever the root cause, Alternative Credit investments are often aimed at filling gaps created by market inefficiencies. By providing capital solutions that traditional markets do not or cannot, Alternative Credit managers can create value and deliver attractive returns to investors – often in excess of 10%<sup>1</sup> – despite a credit profile that is protective of principal.

The sectors that comprise this market evolve over time. Some become large and established. Occasionally, a sector may become so well established and conventional that it ‘graduates’ into the realm of traditional markets where investors benefit from greater market liquidity, transparency, standardization and scalability (albeit at a lower yield premium). In fact, several credit-oriented asset classes with which investors today are very familiar initially began as newly-formed, niche Alternative Credit sectors (think: high yield corporate bonds and leveraged loans).

However, for the large majority of Alternative Credit sectors, there are inherent limits to liquidity, transparency, standardization or scale. Most sectors never institutionalize and never become efficient. Consequently, we find that the already-large Alternative Credit universe is ever expanding in size and scope.

Ares estimates that the various sectors comprising this market represent an overall investible universe of over \$4 trillion in size today. To put that in context, Alternative Credit presents an investible market roughly equal in size to direct lending and private equity markets *combined* (illustrated below).<sup>2</sup>



Despite the large market size and potential for attractive risk-adjusted returns, we find that Alternative Credit is often underrepresented in many investors’ portfolios. It thus represents a road less traveled.

In this paper we will explore the key reasons for this underrepresentation and the opportunity cost it signifies, including: greater diversification, higher returns, current income, and a profile that can increase the risk-return efficiency of credit-focused portfolios.<sup>3</sup>

#### HEADQUARTERS

Ares Management Corporation  
2000 Avenue of the Stars  
12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90067  
www.aresmgmt.com

#### Company Locations

**U.S.** Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Boston, Atlanta, Washington D.C., Dallas, San Francisco  
**Europe/Middle East** London, Paris, Frankfurt, Stockholm, Luxembourg, Dubai  
**Asia/Australia** Shanghai, Hong Kong, Chengdu, Sydney

Please see the Endnotes and Legal Notice and Disclaimers beginning on page 8.

## A CASE STUDY IN ALTERNATIVE CREDIT MARKET DEVELOPMENT

The history of Corporate Direct Lending is illustrative of the several factors that, especially in combination, can create large gaps in traditional markets. These factors have played, and continue to play, a central role in creating new sectors and sustaining today's \$4+ trillion Alternative Credit market.

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth...*

The U.S. Corporate Direct Lending market started as a niche, Alternative Credit opportunity. It has since become so established and institutionalized that many investors today no longer refer to it as 'alternative.' It began as most Alternative Credit sectors do – a capital solution to address a gap in the credit market. In this case, the gap was first created by the wave of bank consolidations between 1990 and 2005 that consumed nearly 500 banks per year.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, small to mid-sized companies relied largely on regional banks for financing as they were too small to access the public debt markets. As large banks consolidated smaller banks, they turned their resources and attention toward large, public debt transactions, leaving smaller borrowers with shrinking access to financing and waning attention. The middle market became famously overlooked and underbanked... until an Alternative Credit solution was developed by non-bank institutional investors: *Corporate Direct Lending*.

The few non-bank lenders in this early market were niche operators often with industry or product specialization. They offered middle market companies an alternative source of debt capital that either complemented their bank loan or offered terms or scale they could not obtain from a small bank syndicate.

As Alternative Credit managers organized themselves around this emerging market opportunity, most investors viewed investing in middle market loans as a 'trade' rather than an asset class. That view did not last long, however. Through the mid-2000s, middle market lending activity in the U.S. steadily shifted into the hands of non-bank, Alternative Credit managers.<sup>4,5</sup> That shift changed the Corporate Direct Lending landscape as it

became an opportunity that could attract scale capital from large institutional investors.

Following the Great Financial Crisis ('GFC')<sup>6</sup>, banks were further displaced as they faced new, punitive capital charges and regulatory barriers that inhibited middle market lending. With the writing on the wall, talented originators and underwriters left their seats at commercial banks to join non-bank lenders. The transition was complete at the point Alternative Credit managers had accumulated sufficient scale and product flexibility to attract capital from large institutional investors.

Corporate Direct Lending investors have reaped the benefits of this mismatch of supply and demand for finance – not only in the form of excess returns, but also in access to an opportunity set that simply did not exist until it was created and offered as an Alternative Credit sector.

### FACTORS THAT CREATE GAPS IN TRADITIONAL MARKETS



### GAPS AND BOXES: THE ROLE OF ALTERNATIVE CREDIT

*Gaps* and *boxes* are useful motifs for thinking about Alternative Credit. Where gaps exist in between markets, we tend to find sectors that are overlooked or misunderstood. This is often due to lack of market visibility, access or perceived complexity.

Many of today's Alternative Credit sectors are well established and familiar to most investors, including:

- ❖ asset-backed securities
- ❖ collateralized loan obligations
- ❖ inventory finance
- ❖ equipment finance
- ❖ credit tenant leases
- ❖ trade finance

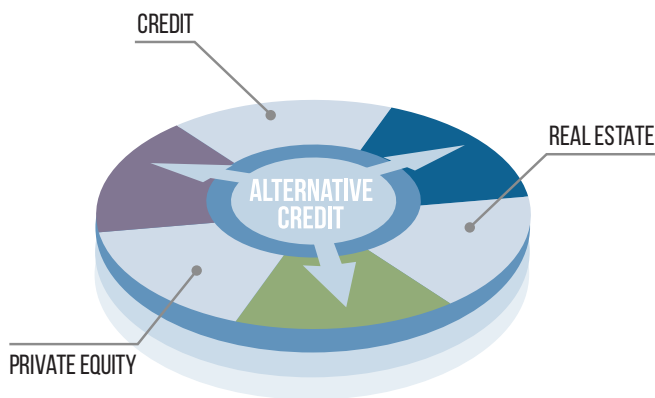
Other Alternative Credit sectors are also well established but have remained small and niche and may therefore be less familiar. They include:

- ❖ royalty finance
- ❖ tax lien securities
- ❖ media finance
- ❖ intellectual property finance
- ❖ agriculture finance
- ❖ insurance-linked securities
- ❖ transportation equipment
- ❖ franchise lending
- ❖ regulatory capital finance
- ❖ structured settlements

Irrespective of the sector, Alternative Credit investments share important features and characteristics. For example, each is secured by real or financial assets that generate cash flows upon which the investment relies for repayment. That feature, in combination with other features, contributes to an investment profile (described below) that has historically exhibited significant resiliency to stress while generating excess returns and attractive levels of current yield.<sup>3,7</sup>

Perhaps the most commonly-shared characteristic is that Alternative Credit sectors exist outside of – or in between – traditional, well-defined markets. Ironically, perhaps, the traditional markets’ quest for efficiencies very often creates the gaps that Alternative Credit seeks to fill.

### ALTERNATIVE CREDIT EXISTS IN THE GAPS BETWEEN TRADITIONAL MARKETS



For example, markets find efficiency in standardization. By creating ‘one-size-fits-all’ transactions, or by defining a sector narrowly and strictly, efficiencies are created for bankers, issuers and investors alike. Standardization is also driven by other factors including regulations, tax and accounting rules, rating agency criteria, and even benchmarking criteria.

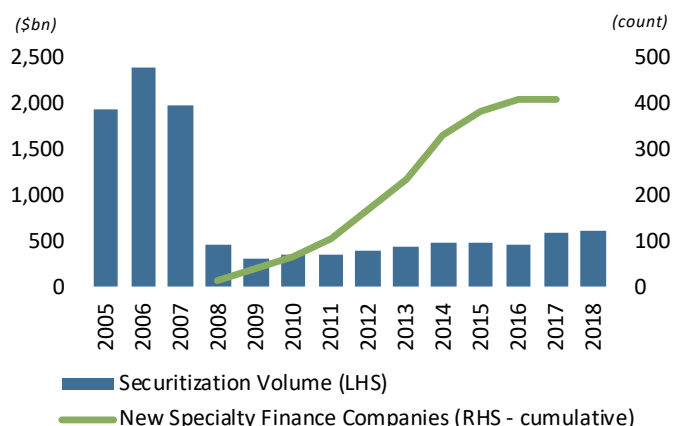
By design, Alternative Credit seeks to provide a *non-standard* solution in an effort to address those opportunities and

financing needs that ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches leave behind. At scale, we believe an Alternative Credit solution can go a long way toward filling large gaps in the market.

### ALTERNATIVE CREDIT AND THE SPECIALTY FINANCE GAP

In the years leading up to the GFC, the public securitization (non-mortgage) market produced roughly \$2 trillion of new investment opportunities each year.<sup>8</sup> In the GFC, and despite solid credit performance across ABS sectors<sup>7</sup>, most banks and other traditional investors in this market exited – many involuntarily. The result was a massive capital dislocation that caused primary issuance volumes in the public securitization markets to contract from over \$2 trillion per year to less than \$500 billion per year...and never recover (see chart below).<sup>9</sup>

### YEARLY PUBLIC SECURITIZATION VOLUMES VS. CREATION OF NEW U.S. SPECIALTY FINANCE COMPANIES



Did the consumers and small businesses represented by the pre-GFC securitization markets disappear or stop borrowing? Of course not. They simply turned to a different set of lenders.

Coincident with the contraction in public securitization volumes was a dramatic expansion in the number of specialty finance companies operating in North America following the GFC<sup>9</sup> (also plotted in the chart).

Recent estimates point to more than 1,000 specialty finance companies operating across the U.S. and Canada, and hundreds more in Western Europe.<sup>10</sup> More than half of these have been formed since the GFC. The specialty finance market has never been bigger, busier... or more fragmented.

Who finances these new lenders and lends against the assets they are originating? Alternative Credit investors like Ares. FinCo lending, structured lending and asset-backed lending by

Alternative Credit institutions have continued to displace traditional investors and public securitization markets – filling the massive gap left in the wake of the GFC.

In this fragmented landscape, we believe Alternative Credit managers who have invested heavily in origination capabilities can create significant competitive advantages. Managers who have raised dedicated capital in scale can have significant competitive advantages when vying to work with specialty finance companies who want a capital partner who can grow with them. Managers whose scale capital is also flexible have significant competitive advantages in developing creative solutions across a broader spectrum of opportunities.

Specialty finance companies likewise face a fragmented market of potential capital providers. Consequently, we find that they favor Alternative Credit managers who can differentiate themselves in five key areas:

- 1 Reputation and Experience
- 2 Compatibility of Capital
- 3 Scale of Capital
- 4 Flexibility of Capital
- 5 Execution Speed and Certainty

Few Alternative Credit managers can deliver in every area. Those who do can develop strong, long-term relationships with counterparties and enjoy the benefits of incumbency. Furthermore, specialty finance companies are often willing to pay a premium to access Alternative Credit capital due to its greater flexibility and independence from public securitization markets.

### WORKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Wall Street excels at syndicating risk that fits neatly inside the demarcations of traditional capital markets activity. Regulations, market structure, liquidity constraints, rating agency criteria, and many other factors together create ‘the box’ into which borrowers must fit if they want to enjoy the benefits of efficient, capital markets execution of their debt.

However, borrowers often find capital markets execution overly restrictive or misaligned with their businesses. They are increasingly looking for capital solutions that are outside the capital markets box; they are often willing to pay a premium for a solution that is a better overall fit or that acts as an ‘insurance policy’ against the risk that their access to traditional markets is interrupted due to market dislocation or volatility.

### ALTERNATIVE CREDIT CASE STUDY

**Counterparty:** Large U.S. insurance company

**Situation:** A large subset of its asset portfolio was disproportionately affecting their regulatory capital and operational overhead.

**‘In the Box’ Options Considered:** Asset disposition or reinsurance. Asset disposition was rejected due to its negative impact on portfolio yield. Reinsurance was rejected as it did not alleviate the operational burden and reduced portfolio yield.

**‘Outside the Box’ Solution:** Ares provided financing using securitization technology to reformat and transform the assets into (mostly) investment-grade rated securities.

**Value Creation for Counterparty:** Greater yield preservation, significantly better regulatory capital treatment, and significantly reduced operational burdens.

**Value Creation for Ares Investors:** Origination of a large, unique investment opportunity having an attractive risk and return profile.

In many cases, borrowers are not seeking to displace traditional sources of capital but rather use Alternative Credit solutions as a complement. They will exploit the benefits of traditional, efficient markets for the ‘vanilla’ portion of their financing needs but will then partner with an Alternative Credit manager to create customized, ‘out of the box’ solutions that address specific needs.

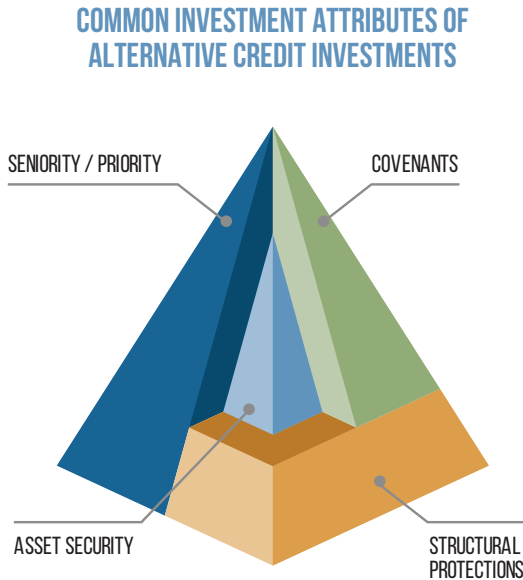
Increasingly, we are finding that many counterparties’ needs extend beyond trying to simply minimize financing costs. As regulatory and operational burdens have increased, more companies are looking at their business models and capital holistically. Many are turning to Alternative Credit managers for solutions.

By providing unique solutions to *borrowers*, Alternative Credit managers can, in turn, provide unique solutions and opportunities to *investors*. That nexus lays at the heart of value creation and value capture in Alternative Credit.



## THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES

While Alternative Credit presents investors access to investments across a range of asset types and formats, the investments share certain attributes that together contribute to an overall outcome that many investors are seeking today.



Above are four key attributes<sup>11</sup> that we find in virtually every Alternative Credit investment. In combination, these features contribute to an overall profile that can be highly resilient to stress and protective of value while still offering attractive returns (with yields often in excess of 10%).<sup>1</sup>

For example, *asset security* is protective of value in three different ways.

- ❖ First, the assets – not the counterparty – generate the cash flows that repay principal and interest on our investment. This minimizes (and can eliminate) counterparty credit risk.
- ❖ Second, in most cases there are hundreds or even thousands of individual assets forming the security for a single investment. This inherent granularity contributes to stable performance and cash yield.
- ❖ Third, historically, various types of discrete asset portfolios have shown very low performance correlation, creating an attractive complement to Corporate Direct Lending and other fixed income.<sup>12</sup>

Similar observations can be made with respect to structural protections, covenants and seniority features of Alternative Credit investments. Taken together, these features create investments that typically have durable cash flows, downside protection, shorter duration and low performance correlation.

As a long-standing Alternative Credit manager, we would highlight a few other features that are admittedly more qualitative in nature but are nonetheless top of mind for many CIOs, portfolio managers, risk managers and consultants.

**Diversification.** Cycle-tested investors understand that traditional conceptions of diversification do not go far enough to attenuate risk in high correlation environments. Such investors seek opportunities to create *risk firewalls* that serve to reduce portfolio contagion risk. Alternative Credit can offer such an opportunity as it provides investors access to discrete risks with assets and capital structures that are typically independent of markets.

**Direct origination.** One of the laments one hears quite frequently today is the ‘race to the bottom’ as issuers and their advisors seek to exploit excess demand, investor competition and market liquidity. Alternative Credit managers, like Ares, can side-step such markets by orienting our sourcing efforts toward proprietary investments that are originated outside of a competitive environment and with a different objective in mind than ‘optimized execution’ for the issuer.

**Pro-cyclical expansion.** When disruption impacts traditional markets, issuers and their bank advisors face increased execution risks. IPOs may get pulled or postponed; debt offerings may get hung; warehouse or aggregation facilities may get shut down. Thus, we find that both the opportunity set and potential value capture can expand – sometimes dramatically – in volatile markets.

**Complementary duration profile.** In times of stress, many Alternative Credit investments are designed with protections that can result in shortened tenors, creating a complementary cash flow profile vs. other asset classes (e.g. corporate debt) that can experience extension risk.

WE SEE STRONG SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TODAY'S  
ALTERNATIVE CREDIT MARKET AND THE CORPORATE  
DIRECT LENDING MARKET FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

BY PROVIDING UNIQUE SOLUTIONS TO BORROWERS,  
ALTERNATIVE CREDIT MANAGERS CAN, IN TURN, PROVIDE  
UNIQUE VALUE AND SOLUTIONS TO INVESTORS

A common challenge investors face is how to enhance returns without simply adding risk. We believe Alternative Credit investments and strategies provides a real solution to that challenge. The attributes that we typically find in Alternative Credit investments contribute to performance stability and resiliency to stress. By providing capital solutions that traditional markets do not or cannot, Alternative Credit managers can create and capture value, and deliver that excess value to investors. That risk-return profile can make a big difference to the risk-return efficiency of most investors' portfolios.

## WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE DO THIS?

All of these apparent benefits beg the question: *why doesn't everyone do this?* In many cases, the answer is as obvious as it is ironic: investors have gaps and boxes of their own!

Has the following scenario ever happened to you, or in your firm? You have a meeting with an asset manager who presents a market opportunity or strategy where you currently have no exposure. It is interesting, compelling, diversifying – everything you could hope for. But you have a dilemma: where do you put it and which team at your firm will evaluate it?

One of the reasons Corporate Direct Lending took many years to become an established sector among institutional investors is because investors struggled for so long to resolve this exact dilemma. Fixed income investment teams struggled to identify an appropriate benchmark and were not always sure that Corporate Direct Lending did not belong in Private Equity buckets due to its liquidity profile. Private Equity investment teams, in many cases, did not know what to do with a corporate debt strategy that presented lower returns despite illiquidity.

Some investors face a similar dilemma today with Alternative Credit. Although there are many more investors these days who have addressed such gaps in their strategies and in the capabilities of their investment teams, it remains a work-in-progress for a host of others. This has kept the investor base for Alternative Credit somewhat concentrated among very large, sophisticated institutions and otherwise fragmented among a number of smaller, focused investors.

We see strong similarities between today's Alternative Credit market and the Corporate Direct Lending market *circa* 2005. Early adopters of Corporate Direct Lending have reaped a significantly greater reward than those who only discovered the sector last week. We believe the same may be said one day of early mover investors who can address today's opportunities in Alternative Credit.

## THE CHALLENGES OF A DIVERSIFIED APPROACH

The other tendency we encounter with institutional investors is that where they do access Alternative Credit, it is typically within a fairly narrow band of sectors. Investors identify a market opportunity in a particular niche or specialty, find a manager who focuses in that sector, and design an investment mandate that represents a 'pure play' in that specialty.

Consultants and other advisors have built entire businesses around supporting this approach to investing: creating diversified portfolios by collecting many discrete strategies and managers. While it is a fairly popular approach, most investors recognize the inherent challenges and complications it creates. Those we hear most frequently are:

- ❖ Identifying and evaluating managers is time consuming and costly – and there is often a limit to the total number of managers and strategies that investors want to have in their portfolios
- ❖ Specialist managers tend to advocate for their niche, thereby placing the burden of objectively assessing the sector's relative value and risk back on the investor
- ❖ Reporting standards and transparency can vary widely from manager to manager, strategy to strategy... creating difficulties downstream for risk management and stakeholder reporting
- ❖ Many specialist managers are very small and sub-scale, making it difficult for larger institutional investors to access certain opportunities or to deploy capital in sufficient size to move their needle

These challenges in particular have tended to hinder investors from taking a diversified, relative value approach to investing in Alternative Credit. Consequently, we find most investors accessing only the larger sectors and in strictly-defined, pure-play formats. Some of the sectors receiving recent focus and capital allocations include: CLOs; ABS; marketplace loans; transportation equipment leases (e.g. commercial aircraft and railcars, especially); regulatory capital trades; and NPLs.

In our view, the main deficit of this limited focus and pure-play approach is that it barely scratches the surface of the Alternative Credit market opportunity and is rarely executed with a relative value discipline.

It is one (non-trivial) matter to determine all that is on the Alternative Credit menu; it is another matter entirely to subject each opportunity to a relative value standard and then allocate capital on that basis. The approaches we typically see generally fail to resolve either matter, which is one reason why gaps and boxes in investors' portfolios persist.

## TAKING THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

The key question for many investors is: have I defined my businesses or organized my resources such that I have inhibited access to strategies and investment opportunities to which my stakeholders would want exposure? The answer to this question presents both a challenge and a potential reward.

The challenge lays first in identifying where gaps may exist. In a recent conversation with a large pension fund, the new CIO observed that his investment teams were organized well for strategies designed to achieve 4% to 7% returns, and other strategies designed to achieve returns of 12% or greater. Their performance was solid and by all appearances they felt they were delivering on these mandates as defined. But, he confessed, they had no natural home for strategies seeking 8% to 12% returns – a common range for Alternative Credit strategies. In this case there were multiple reasons why this gap in their capital had formed and persisted, some of which stemmed from guidelines and investment opportunities designed many years ago in a different market environment.

Addressing this particular gap was this new CIO's top priority. His fresh perspective on the matter is starting to make a big difference. He is opening up his portfolio to more diversity, creating greater operational flexibility for his investment teams and engaging his portfolio managers in a more objective evaluation of risk and relative value across their portfolios.

IT IS ONE MATTER TO DETERMINE ALL THAT IS ON THE ALTERNATIVE CREDIT MENU; IT IS ANOTHER MATTER ENTIRELY TO SUBJECT EACH OPPORTUNITY TO A RELATIVE VALUE STANDARD, AND THEN ALLOCATE CAPITAL ON THAT BASIS

This particular pension fund is hardly alone. This is a story we have heard countless times from nearly every corner of the world, and from all types of investors. The good news is that these issues are getting attention. As investors, we have a duty to regularly step back, elevate our perspective to see the big picture and challenge our assumptions. Very often we will discover gaps and boxes of our own creation.

That is where the potential rewards may be found. Increasingly investors are discovering such rewards in their evaluation of Alternative Credit. Because Alternative Credit sectors and investments sit between or adjacent to traditional markets, the territory is often not only familiar but also complementary. With that foundation, investors can focus on how best to capture or create value using Alternative Credit strategies.

*... I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

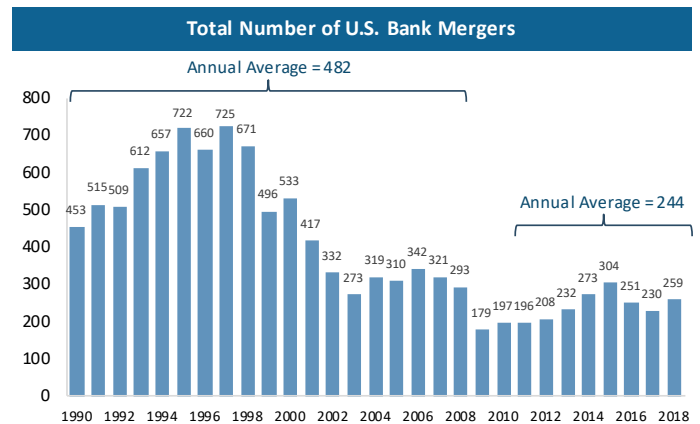
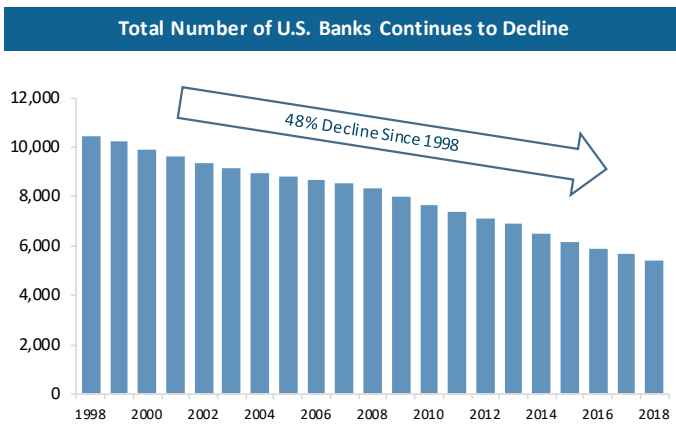
When Robert Frost penned his famous poem, 'The Road Not Taken,' it was a provocation to consider one's alternatives. That which is commonplace and familiar remains so because it requires little explanation or new effort. Nothing is inherently wrong with efficient and economical. Its deficiency, as Frost saw it, is that it also lacks impact. It is in taking the road less traveled that makes all the difference.

**Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Based on Ares Alternative Credit team’s observations. There is no assurance that target returns can or will be achieved.
- <sup>2</sup> For additional insights into the Corporate Direct Lending market, please refer to Ares’ [Opportunities in Global Direct Lending](#) whitepaper. Source: Bain and Company, Market Watch, Wall Street Journal, Houlihan Lokey, Coral Capital Solutions, Equipment Leasing and Finance Foundation, Real Capital Analytics, Commercial Finance Association, J.P. Morgan, AIMA, S&P Capital IQ, Credit Suisse, Bloomberg, SIFMA, Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance and Ares’ market observations.
- <sup>3</sup> Ares has organized all Alternative Credit sectors into five general categories: asset-backed securities (‘ABS’), collateralized loan obligations (‘CLO’), specialty assets, real assets and finance company lending & solutions (‘FINCO’). The table below provides Ares’ general view and our assessment of each category, based on our investment experience, which is intended to be illustrative and indicative only. A specific investment in any category may have a materially different profile or set of characteristics.

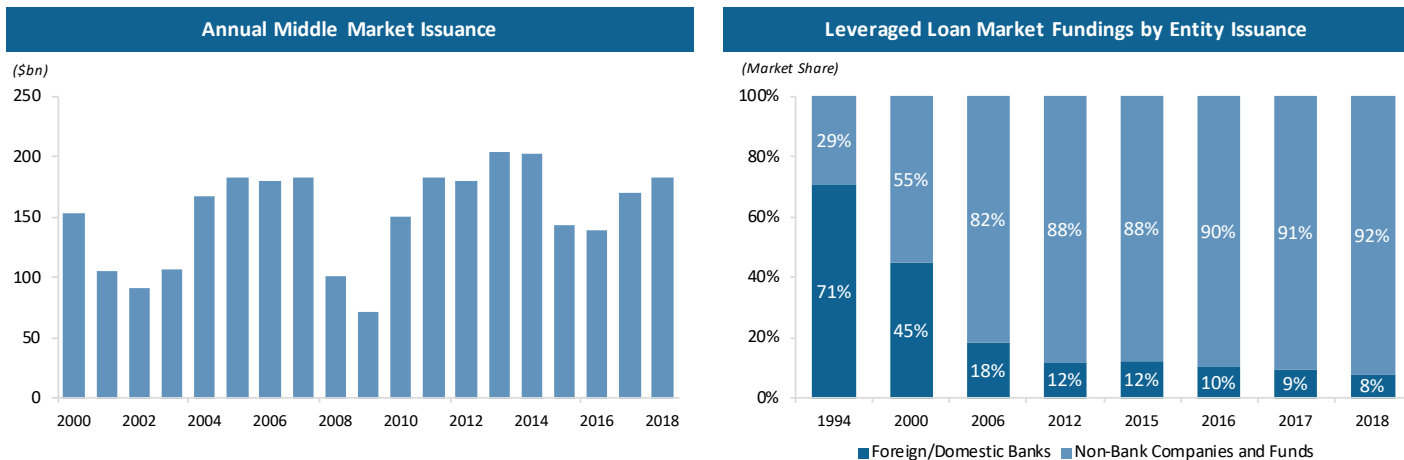
	ABS	CLO	SPECIALTY ASSETS	REAL ASSETS	FINCO
<b>ASSET SECURED</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>YIELD PREMIUM</b>	MED TO HIGH	MED TO HIGH	HIGH	MED TO HIGH	HIGH
<b>CURRENT INCOME</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>TENOR / FEATURE</b>	SHORT AMORTIZING	MED NON-AMORTIZING	MOSTLY SHORT AMORTIZING	SHORT TO MED SOME AMORTIZING	SHORT TO MED AMORTIZING
<b>CORRELATION</b>	LOW TO MED	MED	VERY LOW	LOW	VERY LOW
<b>VOLATILITY</b>	VERY LOW	MED TO HIGH	VERY LOW	LOW	LOW TO MED
<b>DIVERSIFICATION</b>	VERY HIGH	HIGH	MED TO HIGH	MED TO HIGH	MED TO HIGH

- <sup>4</sup> Source: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, ‘Quarterly Banking Profile,’ December 31, 2018. The charts below show the overall change in the number of bank institutions operating in the U.S., and the number of mergers that have occurred, with the highest consolidation rates occurring between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s.





<sup>5</sup> Source: Refinitiv, 'Middle Market Review Q4-18,' December 31, 2018. S&P LCD, 'Leveraged Lending Review Q4-18,' December 31, 2018. Excludes left and right agent commitments (including administrative, syndication and documentation agent as well as arranger).



<sup>6</sup> Note: Great Financial Crisis ('GFC') is defined as the period just prior to and following the credit market dislocation of 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Source:

- **Ratings performance:** Moody's Investors Service. 'Structured Finance Rating Transitions: 2009 – 2018H1,' October 15, 2018; 'Annual Default Study: Defaults Will Rise Modestly in 2019 Amid Higher Volatility,' February 1, 2019. J.P. Morgan ABS Research. Historical rating actions as of December 31, 2018. Tracked since 1999 for credit cards, student loans, and equipment leases. Tracked since 2002 for autos.
- **Default performance:** SIFMA, 'U.S. ABS Outstanding,' December 31, 2018. Asset-Backed Alert, 'ABS Database,' December 31, 2018. Transaction count per sector and rating agency as characterized by Asset-Backed Alert.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Asset-Backed Alert, 'ABS Database,' December 31, 2018. Deloitte, 'Fintech by the Numbers,' September 2017. Reflects cumulative number of specialty finance lenders since 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Source: Securitization Volumes from Asset-Backed Alert, 'ABS Database,' December 31, 2018. New specialty finance company formation data from Deloitte, 'Fintech by the Numbers,' September 2017. Chart reflects the cumulative number of new specialty finance lenders entering the market since 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Source: The Americas Alternative Finance Industry Report. 'Expanding Horizons,' 2018; 'Hitting Stride,' 2017; 'Breaking New Ground,' 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Source: Based on Ares Alternative Credit team's observations. Ares expects that virtually all Alternative Credit investments it pursues will feature the four following attributes.

<b>STRUCTURE</b>	We design our investments with structural protections against downside risks. These can enhance performance stability, especially in times of stress.
<b>COVENANTS</b>	Covenants are designed to give us rights, protections and dominion over the assets and a priority claim over the cash flows that support our investments.
<b>ASSET SECURITY</b>	Our investments are always secured by assets. When combined with proper structure and covenants, asset security greatly mitigates downside risks.
<b>SENIORITY</b>	As credit investors, we know that seniority and other forms of priority or control over cash flows and assets can lead to better outcomes in times of stress.

<sup>12</sup> Estimates of market correlation are not available for many Alternative Credit sectors due to lack of independent, publicly available data. However, where data is available, correlations with traditional markets have historically been quite low. The table below shows 10-year correlation statistics across a number of asset classes, with Asset-Backed Securities representative of a major sector within Alternative Credit. Observations by senior members of Ares Alternative Credit Team from over decades of investment experience also support the general view that cash flow performance, default rates and loss rates in most Alternative Credit sectors are generally not correlated with markets but tend to be idiosyncratic and specific to individual transactions.

### CORRELATION MATRIX

	U.S. Equities	Global Equities	U.S. High Yield	U.S. Leveraged Loans	European High Yield	European Leveraged Loans	U.S. IG Corporate Debt	Global Fixed Income	Asset-Backed Securities	Direct Lending
U.S. Equities <sup>1</sup>	1.00									
Global Equities <sup>2</sup>	0.97	1.00								
U.S. High Yield <sup>3</sup>	0.64	0.69	1.00							
U.S. Leveraged Loans <sup>4</sup>	0.45	0.51	0.87	1.00						
European High Yield <sup>5</sup>	0.53	0.60	0.89	0.84	1.00					
European Leveraged Loans <sup>6</sup>	0.43	0.50	0.75	0.85	0.84	1.00				
U.S. IG Corporate Debt <sup>7</sup>	0.23	0.26	0.61	0.45	0.59	0.49	1.00			
Global Fixed Income <sup>8</sup>	(0.06)	(0.08)	0.16	(0.04)	0.11	0.03	0.80	1.00		
Asset-Backed Securities <sup>9</sup>	(0.07)	(0.05)	0.45	0.51	0.55	0.45	0.53	0.39	1.00	
Direct Lending <sup>10</sup>	(0.04)	(0.03)	0.03	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.10)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	1.00

Note: As of December 31, 2018. Index data is provided for comparison purposes only. The information related to the various indices is sourced from the providers' websites. Ares is not responsible for any historic revision made to the indices. The indices include the reinvestment of dividends, interest and other earnings and have not been adjusted for management fees or expenses. Any indices that are not denominated in U.S. Dollars are hedged back to the U.S. Dollar currency for comparison purposes.

Correlation results have been calculated using the monthly returns of the below reference indices:

1. 'U.S. Equities' is represented by the S&P 500 index. The S&P 500 index is designed to be a leading indicator of U.S. equities and is meant to reflect the risk/return characteristics of the large cap universe.
2. 'Global Equities' is represented by the MSCI World Index. The MSCI World Index captures large and mid-cap representation across 23 Developed Markets (DM) countries. With 1,649 constituents, the index covers approximately 85% of the free float-adjusted market capitalization in each country. DM countries include: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the US.
3. 'U.S. High Yield' is represented by the ICE BofAML High Yield Master II Index ('H0A0'). The H0A0 consists of below investment grade U.S. dollar denominated corporate bonds that are publicly issued in the U.S. domestic and yankee bonds (issues included in the index have maturities of one year or more and have a credit rating lower than BBB-/Baa3, but are not in default).
4. 'U.S. Leveraged Loans' is represented by the Credit Suisse Leveraged Loan Index ('CSLLI'). The CSLLI is an index designed to mirror the investable universe of the \$US-denominated leveraged loan market.
5. 'European High Yield' is represented by the ICE BofAML European High Yield Index ('HE00'). The HE00 tracks the performance of EUR denominated below investment grade corporate debt publicly issued in the euro domestic or eurobond markets.
6. 'European Leveraged Loans' is represented by the Western European Leveraged Loan Index ('WELLI'). The WELLI is designed to mirror the investable universe of the Western European leveraged loan market, with loans denominated in \$U.S. and Western European currencies.

7. 'U.S. IG Corporate Debt' is represented by the ICE BofAML U.S. Corporate Master Index ('COA0'). The COA0 tracks the performance of U.S. dollar denominated investment grade rated corporate debt publically issued in the U.S. domestic market. To qualify for inclusion in the index, securities must have an investment grade rating (based on an average of Moody's, S&P, and Fitch) and an investment grade rated country of risk (based on an average of Moody's, S&P, and Fitch foreign currency long term sovereign debt ratings). Each security must have greater than 1 year of remaining maturity, a fixed coupon schedule, and a minimum amount outstanding of \$250 million.
8. 'Global Fixed Income' is represented by Bloomberg Barclays Global Aggregate Bond Index. The Bloomberg Barclays Global Aggregate Bond Index is a flagship measure of global investment grade debt from twenty-four local currency markets. This multi-currency benchmark includes treasury, government-related, corporate and securitized fixed-rate bonds from both developed and emerging markets issuers.
9. 'Asset-Backed Securities' is represented by the Bloomberg Barclays Asset-Backed Securities Index. The Bloomberg Barclays Asset-Backed Securities Index is the ABS component of the Bloomberg Barclays U.S. Aggregate Bond Index and has three subsectors (credit and charge cards, autos, and utility).
10. 'Direct Lending' is represented by the NAV returns of Ares Capital Corporation ('ARCC'). Direct Lending is shown for illustrative purposes only and represents the change in net asset value (NAV) plus the value of dividends paid by Ares Capital Corporation (ARCC), a publicly traded business development company (BDC). ARCC invests primarily in directly originated debt; however, it also invests in some equity and other asset classes. ARCC performance is shown as representative of Ares' track record in direct lending, as ARCC is Ares' only direct lending fund that has been investing for over ten years. ARCC NAV and dividends are calculated on a quarterly basis, so for non-quarter end months, we assume 0% returns in order to create a monthly time series. As ARCC is a publicly traded BDC with the ability to invest in asset classes other than direct lending, its returns may be materially different than what an investor may achieve in a private fund invested solely in direct lending assets. In addition, ARCC NAV is calculated based on the fair value of ARCCs investments. Due to the illiquid nature of direct lending assets, the ability to liquidate them at their fair value cannot be assured.

## DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this article are those of the author(s) as of the date of the article. Ares has no obligation to provide updates on the subject in the future. The views are provided for informational purposes only, are not meant as investment advice, and are subject to change. Moreover, while this article expresses views as to certain credit investment opportunities, Ares may undertake investment activities on behalf of one or more investment mandates inconsistent with such views subject to the requirements and objectives of the particular mandate. Ares and its affiliates cannot guarantee the accuracy or completeness of any statements or data contained in this material.

These materials are not an offer to sell, or the solicitation of an offer to purchase, any security, the offer and/or sale of which can only be made by definitive offering documentation. Any offer or solicitation with respect to any securities that may be issued by any investment vehicle (each, an 'Ares Fund') managed by Ares Management LLC or any of its affiliated entities (collectively, 'Ares') may be made only by means of definitive offering memoranda, which will be provided to prospective investors and will contain material information that is not set forth herein, including risk factors relating to any such investment. Any such offering memoranda will supersede these materials and any other marketing materials (in whatever form) provided by Ares to prospective investors. In addition, these materials are not an offer to sell, or the solicitation of an offer to purchase securities of Ares Management, L.P. ('Ares LP'), the parent of Ares Management LLC. In the United States, Ares Fund securities may be offered through our affiliate, Ares Investor Services LLC, a broker-dealer registered with the SEC, and a member of FINRA and SIPC.

The securities/investment process mentioned in this research paper may not be suitable for all investors. This research paper does not provide tailored investment advice and has been primarily for distribution to institutional investors and market professionals. In making a decision to invest in any securities of an Ares Fund, prospective investors should rely only on the offering memorandum for such securities and not on these materials, which contain preliminary information that is subject to change and that is not intended to be complete or to constitute all the information necessary to adequately evaluate the consequences of investing in such securities. Ares makes no representation or warranty (express or implied) with respect to the information contained herein (including, without limitation, information obtained from third parties) and expressly disclaims any and all liability based on or relating to the information contained in, or errors or omissions from, these materials; or based on or relating to the recipient's use (or the use by any of its affiliates or representatives) of these materials; or any other written or oral communications transmitted to the recipient or any of its affiliates or representatives in the course of its evaluation of Ares. Ares undertakes no duty or obligation to update or revise the information contained in these materials.

The recipient should conduct its own investigations and analyses of Ares and the relevant Ares Fund and the information set forth in these materials. Nothing in these materials should be construed as a recommendation to invest in any securities that may be issued by Ares LP or an Ares Fund or as legal, accounting or tax advice. Before making a decision to invest in any Ares Fund, a prospective investor should carefully review information respecting Ares and such Ares Fund and consult with its own legal, accounting, tax and other advisors in order to independently assess the merits of such an investment.

These materials are not intended for distribution to, or use by, any person or entity in any jurisdiction or country where such distribution or use would be contrary to law or regulation.

These materials contain confidential and proprietary information, and their distribution or the divulgence of any of their contents to any person, other than the person to whom they were originally delivered and such person's advisors, without the prior consent of Ares is prohibited. The recipient is advised that United States securities laws restrict any person who has material, nonpublic information about a company from purchasing or selling securities of such company (and options, warrants and rights relating thereto) and from communicating such information to any other person under circumstances in which it is reasonably foreseeable that such person is likely to purchase or sell such securities. The recipient agrees not to purchase or sell such securities in violation of any such laws, including of Ares LP or a publicly traded Ares Fund.

In the United Kingdom, this document is intended only for distribution to professional clients and eligible counterparties, as defined by the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Financial Promotion) Order 2001, and such other persons to whom financial promotions can be issued within the scope of available exemptions. Investments should only be made by persons with professional experience of participating in unregulated collective investment schemes and any other person who receives this document should not rely upon it. In other EEA countries, these materials are available for distribution only to persons regarded as professional clients (or the equivalent) in their home jurisdiction.

Notice to Australian Residents: The financial services are provided by Ares Management LLC or Ares Management Limited; Ares Management LLC and Ares Management Limited are exempt from the requirement to hold an Australian financial services license

under the Corporations Act (Cth) 2001; Ares Management LLC is regulated by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission under U.S. laws, which differ to Australian laws; and Ares Management Limited is regulated by the UK Financial Services Authority under UK laws, which differ to Australian laws.

These materials may contain 'forward-looking' information that is not purely historical in nature, and such information may include, among other things, projections, forecasts or estimates of cash flows, yields or returns, scenario analyses and proposed or expected portfolio composition. The success or achievement of various results and objectives is dependent upon a multitude of factors, many of which are beyond the control of Ares. No representations are made as to the accuracy of such estimates or projections or that such projections will be realized. Actual events or conditions are unlikely to be consistent with, and may differ materially from, those assumed. Past performance is not indicative of future results. Ares does not undertake any obligation to publicly update or review any forward-looking information, whether as a result of new information, future developments or otherwise, except as required by law. In addition, in light of the various investment strategies of such other investment partnerships, funds and/or pools, it is noted that such other investment programs may have portfolio investments inconsistent with those of the strategy or investment vehicle proposed herein.

This may contain information obtained from third parties, including ratings from credit ratings agencies such as Standard & Poor's. Reproduction and distribution of third party content in any form is prohibited except with the prior written permission of the related third party. Third party content providers do not guarantee the accuracy, completeness, timeliness or availability of any information, including ratings, and are not responsible for any errors or omissions (negligent or otherwise), regardless of the cause, or for the results obtained from the use of such content. THIRD PARTY CONTENT PROVIDERS GIVE NO EXPRESS OR IMPLIED WARRANTIES, INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, ANY WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE OR USE. THIRD PARTY CONTENT PROVIDERS SHALL NOT BE LIABLE FOR ANY DIRECT, INDIRECT, INCIDENTAL, EXEMPLARY, COMPENSATORY, PUNITIVE, SPECIAL OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES, COSTS, EXPENSES, LEGAL FEES, OR LOSSES (INCLUDING LOST INCOME OR PROFITS AND OPPORTUNITY COSTS OR LOSSES CAUSED BY NEGLIGENCE) IN CONNECTION WITH ANY USE OF THEIR CONTENT, INCLUDING RATINGS. Credit ratings are statements of opinions and are not statements of opinions and are not statements of fact or recommendations to purchase, hold or sell securities. They do not address the suitability of securities or the suitability of securities for investment purposes, and should not be relied on as investment advice.

REF: TC-00532