

Global Markets Analyst

Lessons From G10 Cutting Cycles

- With most of the G10 either having just begun or about to begin cutting policy rates, we look at the return potential of a variety of rates investment strategies during G10 cutting cycles over the last three decades to understand how to position once cuts begin.
- We find that outright longs generate the highest leveraged returns during cutting cycles of all types, with the 2y point consistently on average best for both total and vol-adjusted returns. 2s10s steepeners offer the best volatility-adjusted returns among curve formats. Most of the returns to longs and steepeners are generated in the months into and immediately following the initial cut.
- At current levels of front-end inversion, such as 1y1y vs 1y, it would be unprecedented to generate significant positive returns to long positions in the absence of a recession. And although non-recessionary returns to steepeners are mixed, the initial flatness of the curve suggests the risk / reward to steeper positions is likely to be better.

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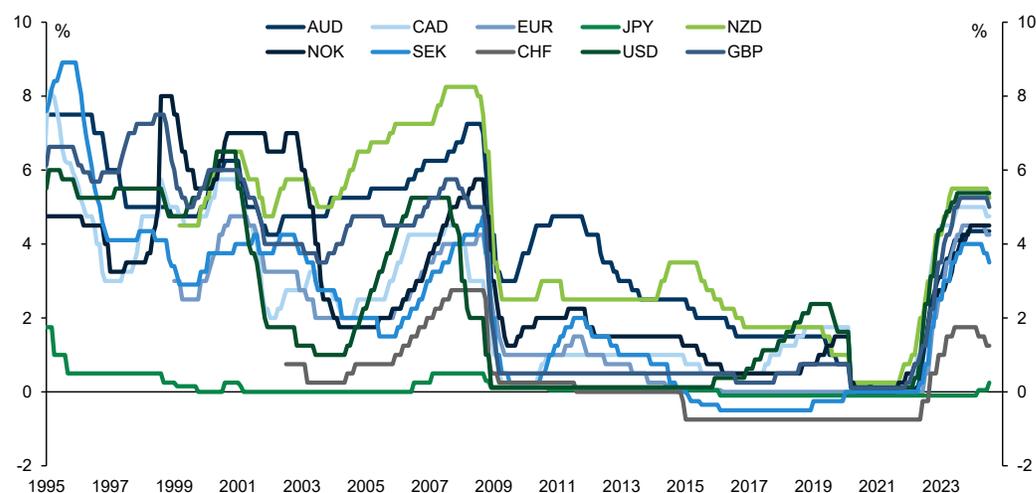
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Lessons From G10 Cutting Cycles

The majority of G10 central banks have either started or are poised to begin cutting rates. The eventual returns to fixed income will depend on the evolution of the data and the extent of cuts compared with the cuts already priced. To understand how the market has priced risks in the past and to shed light on the potential path for returns in the future, we analyse previous G10 cutting cycles and the returns to a variety of strategies across time ([Exhibit 1](#)).

Exhibit 1: G10 cuts are broadening

G10 policy rates



Source: Haver Analytics, Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

We identify 74 cutting cycles in G10 ([Exhibit 2](#)). Defining a cutting cycle does require some judgement, given that cycles are inherently uncertain and can stop and start depending on incoming data. A series of cuts punctuated by extended pauses could be considered a single cycle, or multiple smaller cutting cycles - here we separate cutting cycles if there is a pause of six months or more. In some cases we are constrained by data availability – if not for the policy rate, for market rates across the curve. In our analysis we classify cutting cycles as:

1. Initial cuts, for which we require that the prior policy rate move was a hike. This distinguishes from cuts that may be a restarting of a cutting cycle after a pause.
2. Cuts that are associated with a recession.

There is overlap between the categories, but this allows us to generate results depending on the different types of cutting cycles. Examining returns under the different flavours of cutting cycle then allows for a richer discussion of the risk / reward of each strategy given the uncertain path ahead.

Exhibit 2: G10 cutting cycles

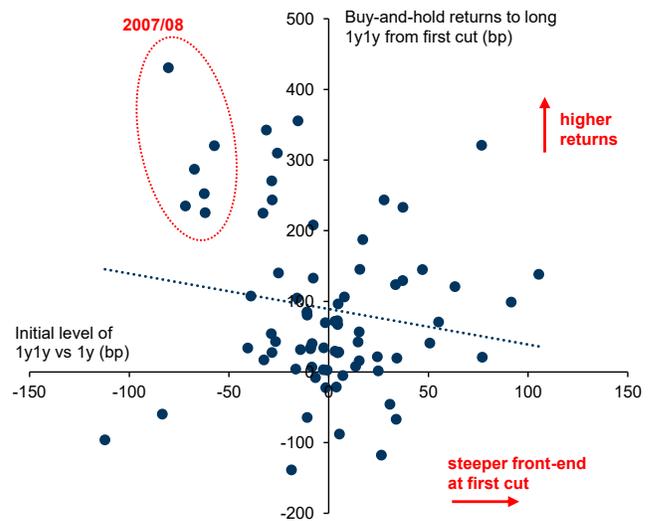
Assumes cutting cycle ends if rates on pause for at least 6m

G10 cycles	no. of cycles	Average length (m)	Average depth (bp)
Australia	11	7	-124
Canada	8	11	-220
Euro area	6	10	-125
Japan	6	6	-43
New Zealand	5	9	-190
Norway	9	10	-197
Sweden	8	11	-191
Switzerland	4	5	-100
US	8	8	-180
UK	9	6	-137
G10	74	8	-155

Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Exhibit 3: Deep recessions influence front-end return averages

1y1y realised returns vs initial 1y1y vs 1y level



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

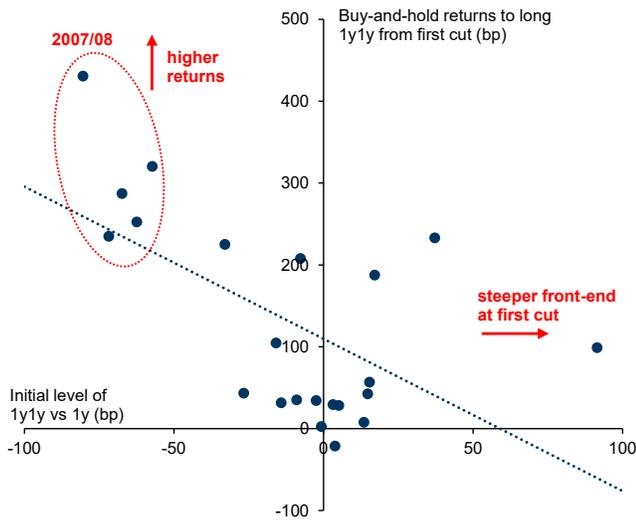
Long 1y1y: better returns when curve is steeper, unless in recession

The first strategy we consider is simply receiving and holding to maturity 1y1y rates across cutting cycles. This tests the degree of inversion and/or premium against the realised value for 1y rates in one year’s time. [Exhibit 3](#) shows the initial front-end inversion, measured by 1y1y – 1y swap rates, vs. the gains made by receiving 1y1y rates for 1-year. In this instance, the y=x line would represent exactly meeting the forward curve.

We find that returns are generally positive, indicating the existence of positive risk premium. A reasonable prior is that returns would be positive when the curve is steep – this is indeed what we see in the top right quadrant. But the overall relationship in the full sample is not positive – and in particular receiving inverted curves has generated significant profits in the past (circled points). These points are, however, G10 cutting cycles through 2007-2009, where meaningful cut pricing was eclipsed by the eventual cuts central banks ultimately delivered.

Exhibit 4: Recessions generate returns to 1y1y longs despite inversion

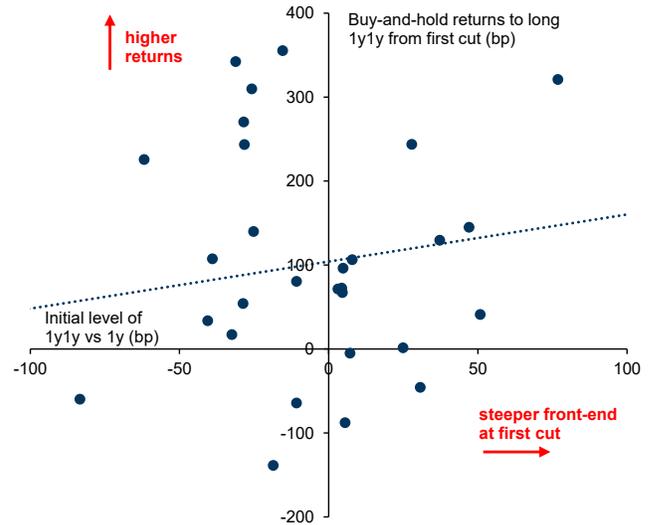
1y1y realised returns vs initial 1y1y vs 1y level in recessions



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Exhibit 5: In the absence of recession, steeper front end implies higher returns

1y1y realised returns vs initial 1y1y vs 1y level in non-recessionary cycles



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

To see this we break down the sample into recessionary cuts – the start of cutting cycles associated with recession within 6m – and into cuts that represent the start of a cycle following hikes (as opposed to a paused cutting cycle) and that are non-recessionary. This latter category fits our modal macro forecasts most closely. [Exhibit 4](#) and [Exhibit 5](#) show this breakdown. We can see that the negative relationship is driven by recessionary cuts – when there is a recession, central banks reliably cut more than is initially priced.

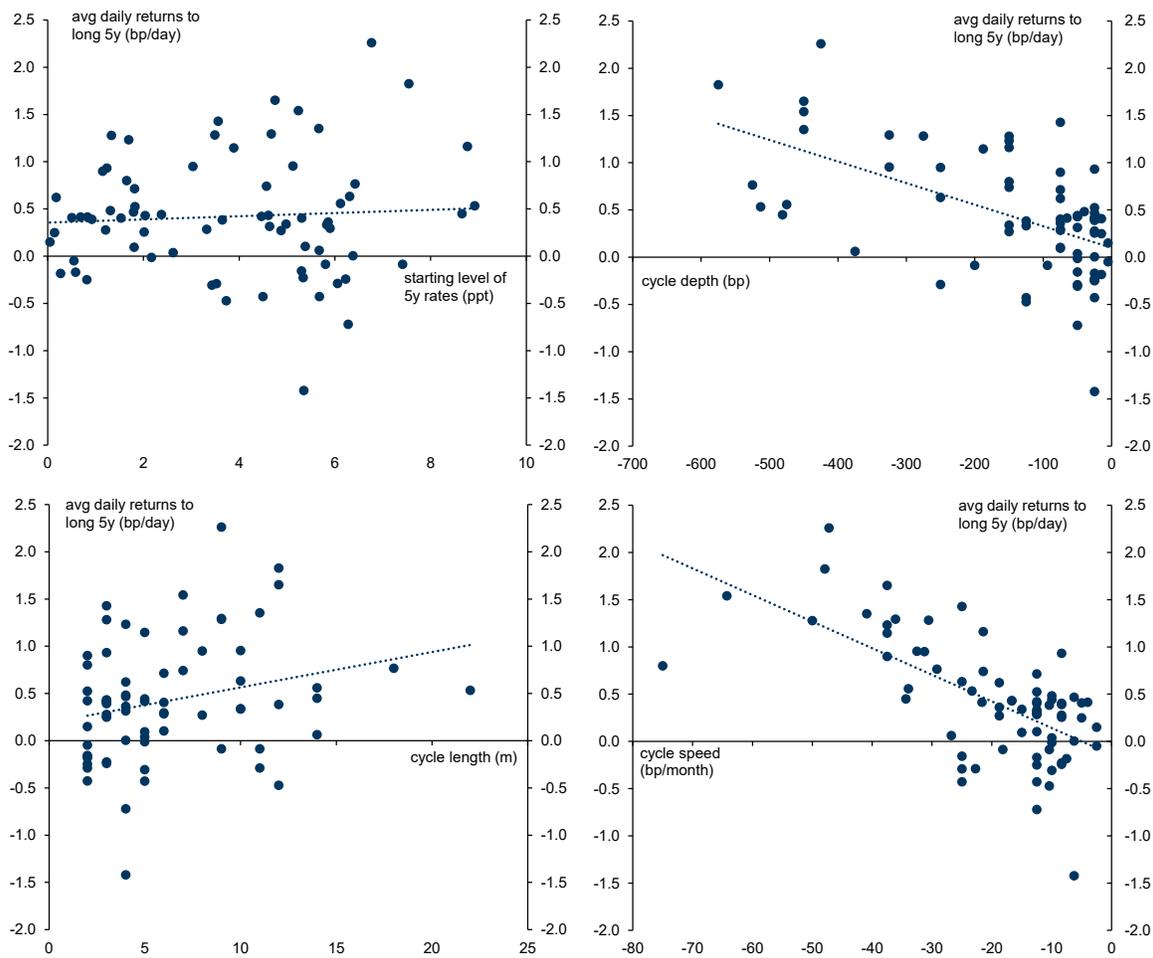
In contrast, when cuts follow hikes and there is no subsequent recession, returns are more mixed – there are certainly still positive returns, but they are slightly positively correlated with initial inversion, such that greater inversion implies lower returns on average. This is particularly relevant given that current 1y1y-1y levels are close to or beyond the maximum levels of inversion we have seen at the start of previous hiking cycles.

Outright longs vs curve trades & trade timing

The next set of strategies we analyse are leveraged expressions on the spot curve. We look at leveraged long positions in 2y, 5y, 10y and 30y rates, as well as curve steepener positions across all combinations: 2s5s, 2s10s, 2s30s, 5s10s, 5s30s, and 10s30s. We base our total return series on swap rates and cap duration once yields go negative. We take the total return for each curve point net of the total return to long 3m rates. To allow for comparison between curve points and curve strategies, we match the dv01 of each expression by adjusting for the duration of the position. We calculate the average daily returns to each strategy from the month prior to the first cut, and then for the following six months or the end of the cutting cycle, whichever is shortest.

Exhibit 6: Fast and deep cutting cycles generate the returns, regardless of starting level of rates

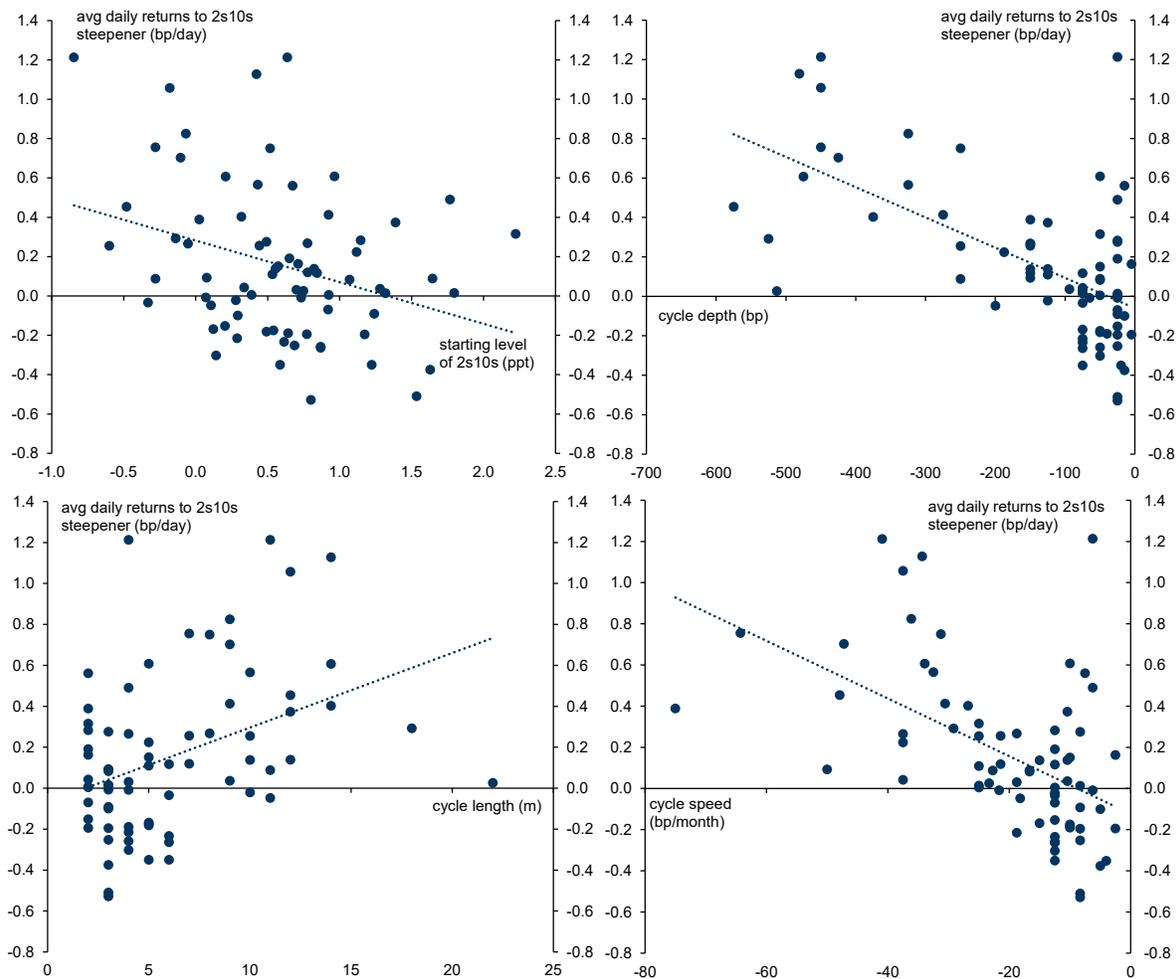
Returns to long 5y outright vs initial 5y level, cycle length, depth and speed



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

The panels in [Exhibit 6](#) & [Exhibit 7](#) show the unconditional results, where the returns to a subset of strategies – long 5y and 2s10s steepeners – on the vertical axis are scattered against a variety of cycle parameters, such as the length, depth, and speed of the cutting cycle, as well as the starting level of the curve slope (this has a better relationship than the starting level of the policy rate). Intuitively, and perhaps arithmetically, longer, deeper and faster cutting cycles are associated with higher returns to outright longs and curve steepeners. Steeper initial curves are weakly associated with lower returns.

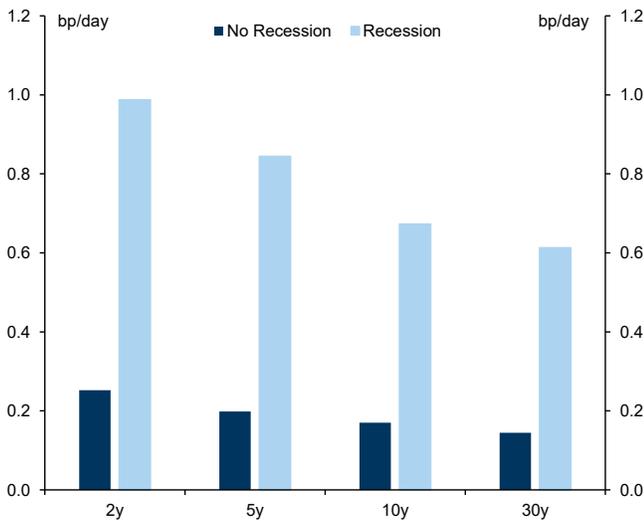
Exhibit 7: Curve steepener returns improve when curves are initially flat
 Returns to 2s10s steepeners vs initial 2s10s level, cycle length, depth and speed



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

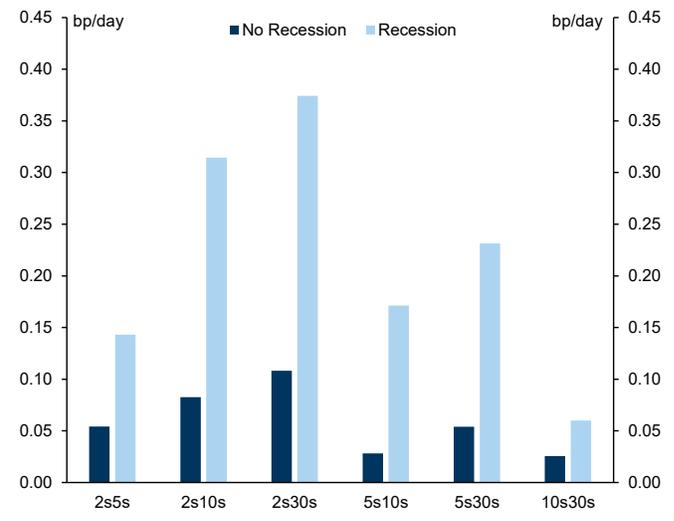
Once again, we can undertake a similar breakdown by cycles associated with recessions, and those representing non-recessionary cuts following hikes. When we do so, we see that average returns are higher to outright longs during recessions ([Exhibit 8](#)). In contrast, non-recessionary cuts have much lower returns on average. We also see that for curve trades, steepening expressions such as 2s10s, 2s30s generally offer the highest returns – this is intuitive given the highest absolute returns are generated by outright longs in the front-end ([Exhibit 9](#)).

Exhibit 8: Returns to long duration much higher in recession
Leveraged total returns to outright longs 1m prior to 6m into cycle



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

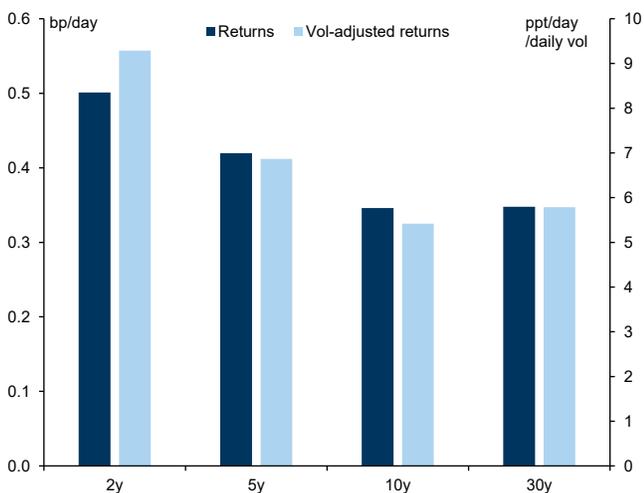
Exhibit 9: Returns to steepeners much higher in recession
Leveraged total returns to curve steepeners 1m prior to 6m into cycle



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

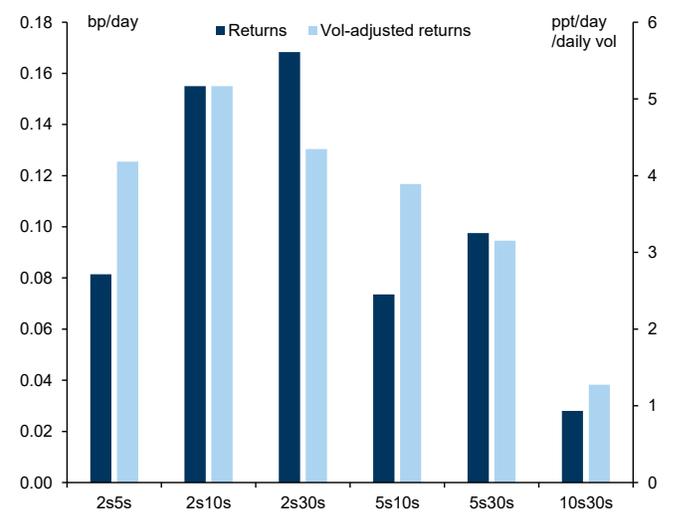
Little changes for the rank order of outright longs when we adjust by volatility (or by maximum drawdown, which is almost perfectly proportional to the daily vol of returns) – long 2y remains the best expression (Exhibit 10). But curve trades become more attractive, with 2s10s and 2s30s competing with outright long duration (10y and 30y) on a risk-adjusted basis (Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 10: 2y long optimal for outright and vol-adjusted returns
Leveraged total returns and vol-adjusted returns to longs 1m prior to 6m into cycle



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Exhibit 11: 2s10s offers best vol-adjusted returns for curve steepeners
Leveraged total returns and vol-adjusted returns to curve steepeners 1m prior to 6m into cycle

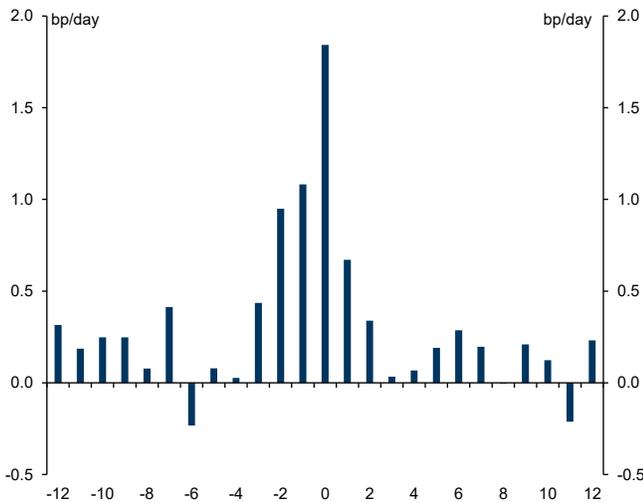


Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Next we look at when returns are generated during the cycle. To do this, we average the returns across the 12m into and out of the first cut of each cycle (note our cycles are selected to have a 12m gap in between). We find that most of the returns to long positions are generated in the months around the first cut, with limited follow-through

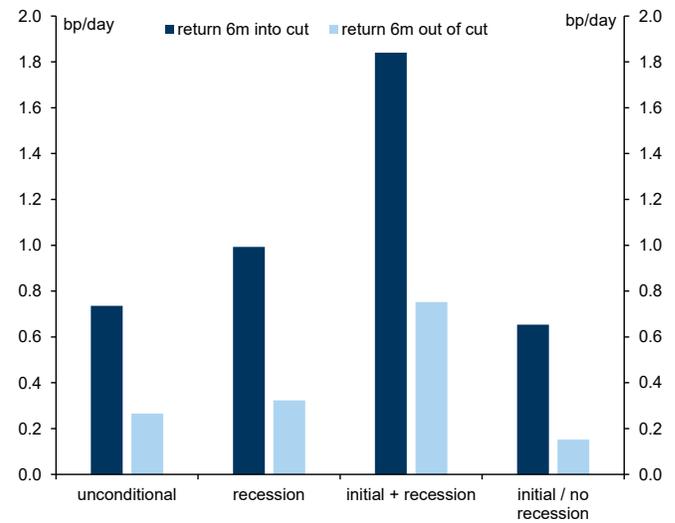
beyond two months after the first cut ([Exhibit 12](#)). This pattern is true for cutting cycles of different types, although will be strongly affected by cutting cycles in response to sudden shocks, for example the 2008 or 2020 cuts ([Exhibit 13](#)).

Exhibit 12: Returns to longs generated at time of cut
Average monthly returns to long 5y. Zero is timing of first cut



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Exhibit 13: 6m prior to cuts generates much larger returns to longs
6m pre- vs 6m post- initial cut returns to long 5y



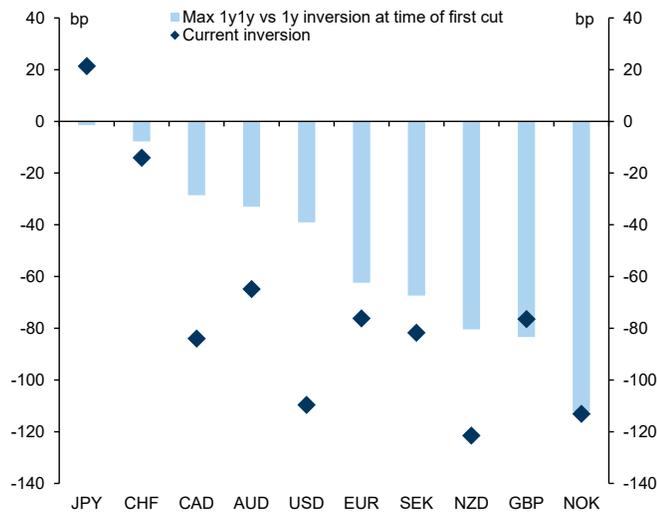
Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Flat curves point to better risk / reward for steepeners

Current levels of inversion suggest a high hurdle for front-end outperformance. [Exhibit 14](#) shows the current level of 1y1y vs 1y are almost everywhere lower than the maximum inversion at the time of previous initial cuts. In the absence of recession, this suggests that the bar to realised returns on long 1y1y is high. For 2s10s, the US, EU and Canada are more inverted than average at the time of initial cuts ([Exhibit 15](#)). This suggests that steeper risk is potentially more attractive given the flatness of the curve.

Exhibit 14: Current front-end inversion raises the bar to returns

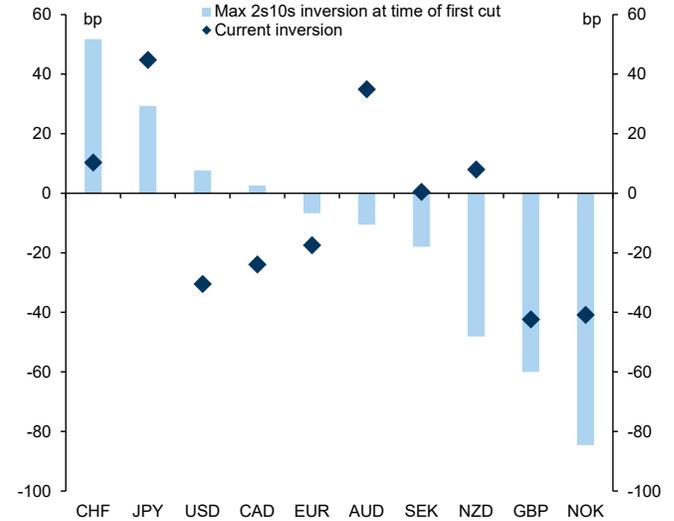
Max inversion of 1y1y vs 1y time of first cut vs current 1y1y vs 1y



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Exhibit 15: Better risk / reward to steepeners in USD, CAD, EUR

Flattest 2s10s at time of first cut vs current

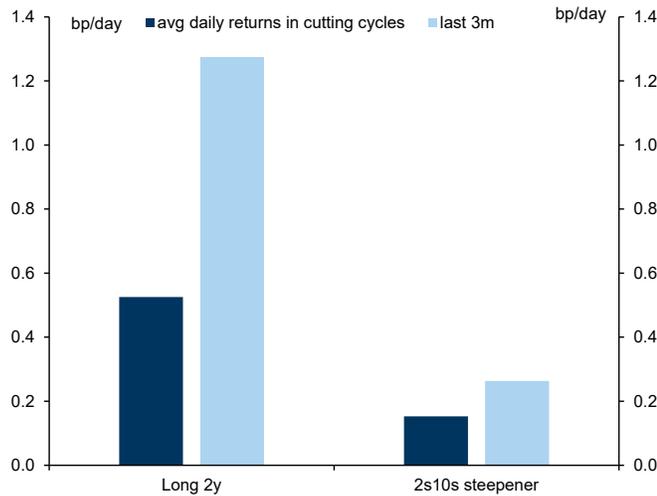


Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

However, the recent rally in rates and curve steepening in the last three months has generated returns similar to or above the average for the months surrounding cutting cycles (Exhibit 16 and Exhibit 17). Together with the initial level of inversion already priced, this suggests further activity data weakening would be necessary to generate significant returns to longs.

Exhibit 16: Recent returns have been elevated vs average around initial cuts

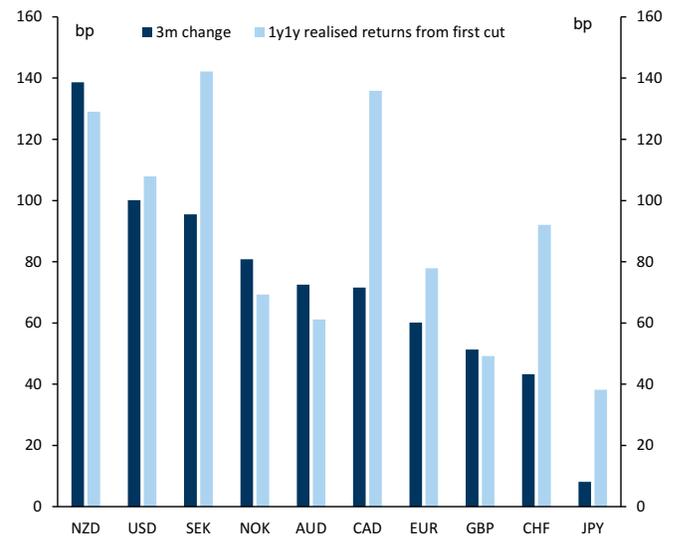
G10 average daily returns in 6m around cutting cycles vs last 3m



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Exhibit 17: 1y1y returns have been substantial in recent months

1y1y 3m change vs 1y1y cutting cycle avg realised returns



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

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Reg AC

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