



Trend-following, Risk-Parity and the influence of Correlations

Risk-Based and Factor Investing Conference
Imperial College Business School

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Introduction – Motivation

- Trend-following:
 - Long-short systematic strategy
 - Across multiple asset classes
 - Signals: buy rising assets, sell falling assets
 - Weighting scheme: inverse-volatility
- Poor performance during 2009-2013 (following double-digit returns in 2008)
 - The post-crisis period has been characterised by substantial asset co-movement
 - Inverse-volatility weights ignore pairwise correlations
 - Accounting for correlations would require the use of risk-parity
- Extend risk-parity to a long-short framework
 - Significant improvement in the performance of a trend-following strategy
 - Especially during periods of extreme correlation

Related Literature

- **Trend-Following:**

- Covel (2009), Szakmary, Shen & Sharma (2010), Burnside, Eichenbaum & Rebelo (2011), Hurst, Ooi & Pedersen (2012, 2013), Moskowitz, Ooi & Pedersen (2012), Baltas & Kosowski (2013, 2014), Clare, Seaton, Smith & Thomas (2014), Hutchinson & O'Brien (2014)

- **UBS Research Notes:**

1. *"Trend-following meets Risk-Parity"*, December 2, 2013

- **Risk Parity & Low-Risk investing:**

- Maillard, Roncalli & Teiletche (2010), Bhansali (2011), Inker (2011), Lee (2011), Menchero & Davis (2011), Anderson, Bianchi & Goldberg (2012), Asness, Frazzini & Pedersen (2012), Bhansali, Davis, Rennison, Hsu & Li (2012), Clare, Seaton, Smith & Thomas (2012), Leote de Carvalho, Lu & Moulin (2012), Lohre, Neugebauer & Zimmer (2012), Steiner (2012), Bernandi, Leippold & Lohre (2013), Fisher, Maymin & Maymin (2013), Lohre, Opfer & Orszag (2013), Jurczenko, Michel & Teiletche (2015)
- Ang, Hodrick, Xing & Zhang (2006, 2009), Baker, Bradley & Wurgler (2011), Frazzini & Pedersen (2014).

- **UBS Research Notes:**

1. *"Low-Risk Investing"*, September 23, 2011
2. *"Understanding Risk Parity"*, February 7, 2013
3. *"Risk Parity with Different Risk Measures"*, July 10, 2013
4. *"Risk-Parity versus Mean-Variance"*, May 16, 2014
5. *"Correlation, De-correlation and Risk-Parity"*, 27 June 2014

- **Volatility Targeting:**

- Hallerbach (2012, 2014), Daniel & Moskowitz (2013), Barroso & Santa-Clara (2014).

- **UBS Research Notes:**

1. *"Understanding Volatility Targeting"*, October 4, 2011
2. *"Beyond Volatility Targeting"*, June 18, 2012
3. *"Extending Volatility Targeting"*, September 2, 2013

Data Description

- Futures Data

- Source: **Bloomberg** [see the Appendix A for details on the construction of continuous series]
- Daily closing futures prices for **35 assets** over the period **January 1987 – December 2013**:

- **6 Energy contracts:**

Brent Crude Oil, Gas Oil, Gasoline,
Heating Oil #2, Light Crude Oil, Natural Gas

- **10 Commodity contracts:**

Metals: Cooper, Gold, Silver

Meat: Live Cattle

Grains: Corn, Soybeans, Wheat

Softs: Coffee "C", Cotton #2, Sugar

- **7 Equity contracts:**

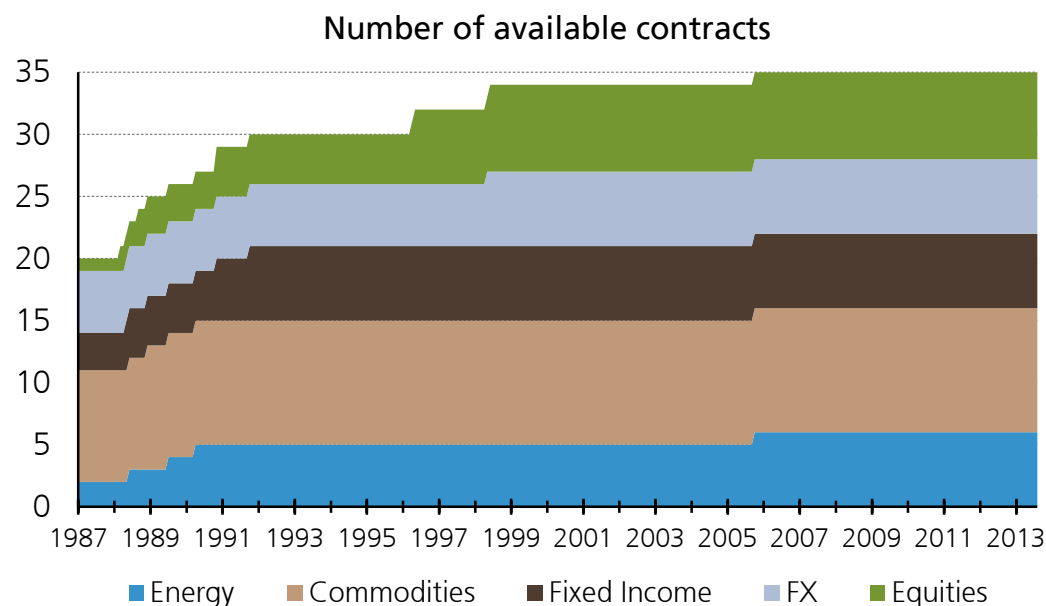
DAX, Eurostoxx 50, FTSE 100, KOSPI 200,
NASDAQ Composite, Nikkei 225, S&P500.

- **6 Currency contracts:**

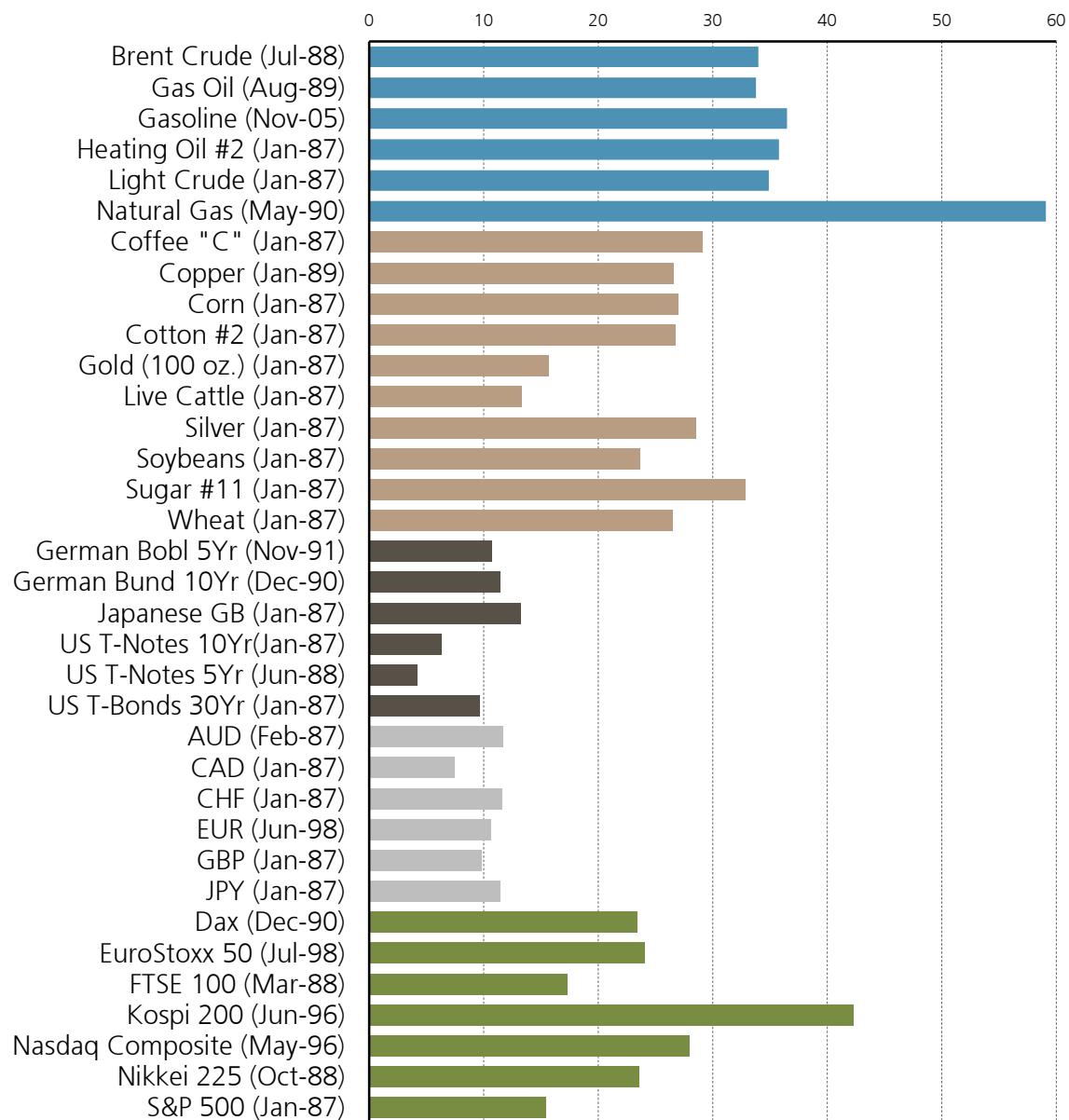
AUD, CAD, CHF, EUR, GBP, JPY.

- **6 Government Bond contracts:**

US T-Note 5Yr, US T-Note 10Yr, US T-Bond 30Yr,
German Bobl (5Yr), German Bund (10Yr), JGB 10Yr.



Unconditional Asset Volatilities



- Large **cross-sectional dispersion** of volatilities...
- Must be taken into account when constructing a cross-asset portfolio.

Source: UBS Quantitative Research

Trend-Following Strategies

- Trend-Following (*TF*) strategy:
 - Assume N_t available assets at the end of month t .
 - Look-back 12 months
 - Buy/sell signal = sign of past return.
 - Hold the portfolio for 1 month and rebalance:

$$r_{t,t+1}^{TF} = \sum_{i=1}^{N_t} \underbrace{\text{sign}(r_{t-12,t}^i) \cdot w_t^{i,Gross}}_{w_t^{i,Net}} \cdot r_{t,t+1}^i$$

where $\sum_{i=1}^{N_t} w_t^{i,Gross} = \sum_{i=1}^{N_t} |w_t^{i,Net}| = 100\%$ and $\sum_{i=1}^{N_t} w_t^{Net,i} \leq 100\%$.

- Constant-Volatility Trend-Following (*CV:TF*) strategy:
 - Assuming a desirable target level of volatility σ_{TGT} (10% for our purposes):

$$r_{t,t+1}^{CV:TF} = \frac{\sigma_{TGT}}{\sigma_t} \sum_{i=1}^{N_t} w_t^{i,Net} \cdot r_{t,t+1}^i$$

Trend-Following Strategies ... picking the weights

- Volatility Parity Trend-Following (*VP:TF*) strategy:
 - Standard approach: inverse-volatility weighted portfolio, aka "volatility-parity":

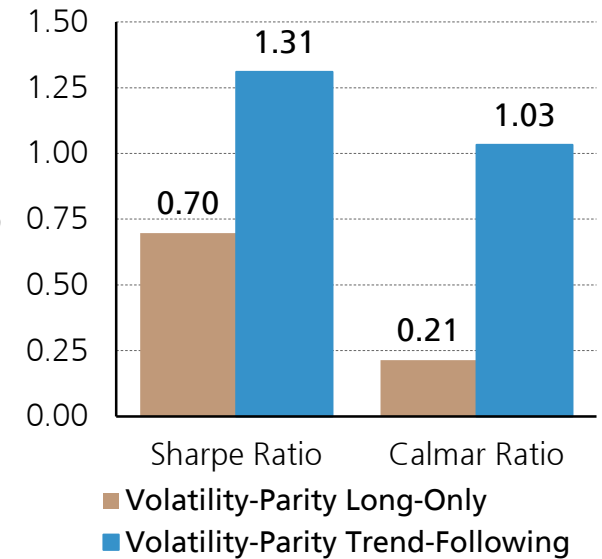
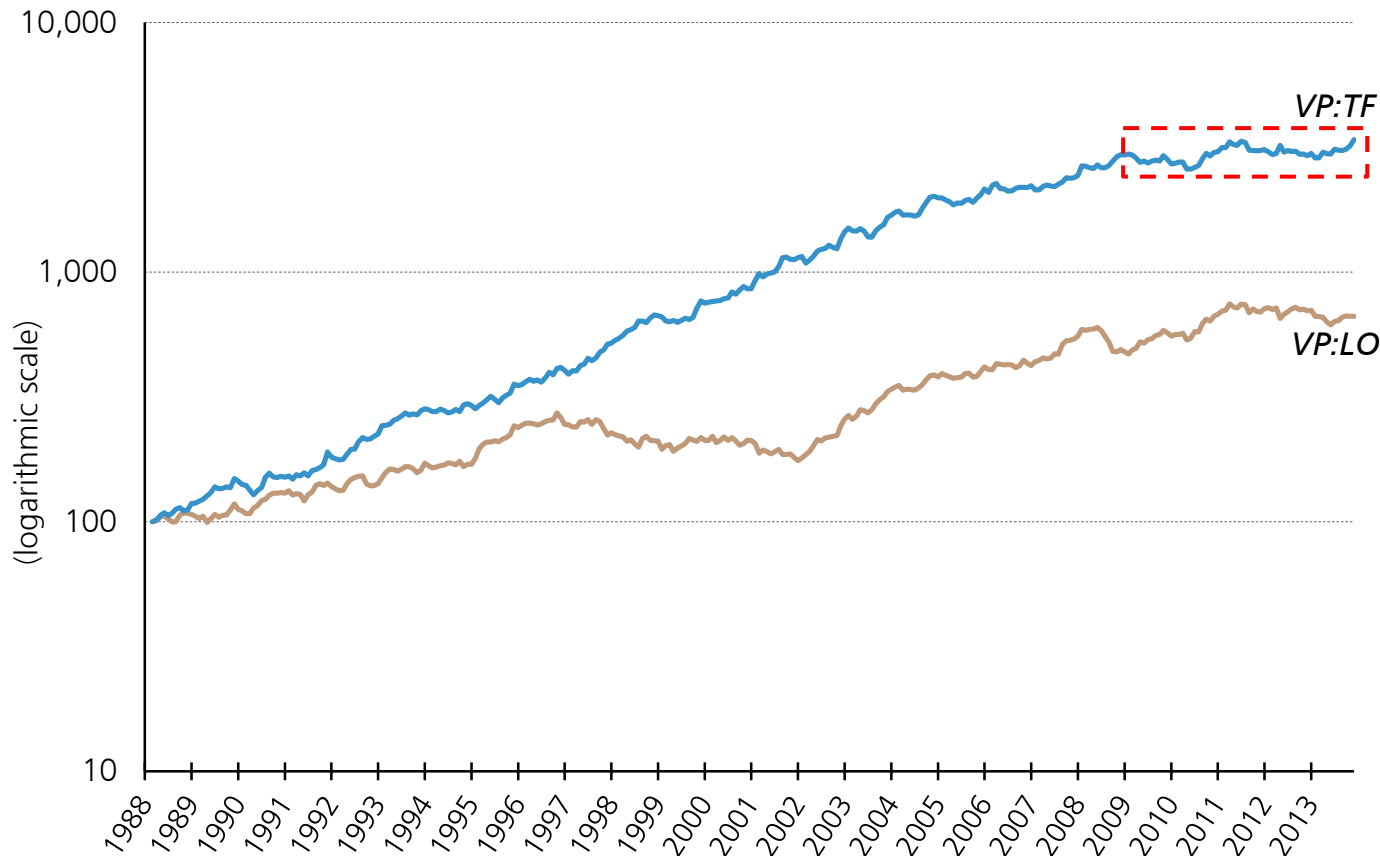
$$w_t^{i,Gross,VP} = \frac{(\sigma_t^i)^{-1}}{\sum_{j=1}^{N_t} (\sigma_t^j)^{-1}}, \forall i$$
$$\Rightarrow r_{t,t+1}^{VP:TF} = \frac{\sigma_{TGT}}{\sigma_t^{TF}} \sum_{i=1}^{N_t} \text{sign}(r_{t-12,t}^i) \cdot \frac{(\sigma_t^i)^{-1}}{\sum_{j=1}^{N_t} (\sigma_t^j)^{-1}} \cdot r_{t,t+1}^i$$

- All assets enter the portfolio with the **same volatility** (hence "volatility-parity")
 - However, the portfolio construction **ignores** all pairwise correlations
- Benchmark: Volatility Parity Long-Only (*VP:LO*) strategy:

$$r_{t,t+1}^{VP:LO} = \frac{\sigma_{TGT}}{\sigma_t^{LO}} \sum_{i=1}^{N_t} (+1) \cdot \frac{(\sigma_t^i)^{-1}}{\sum_{j=1}^{N_t} (\sigma_t^j)^{-1}} \cdot r_{t,t+1}^i$$

Cumulative Returns [Apr. 1988 – Dec.2013]

- Target volatility level $\sigma_{TGT} = 10\%$

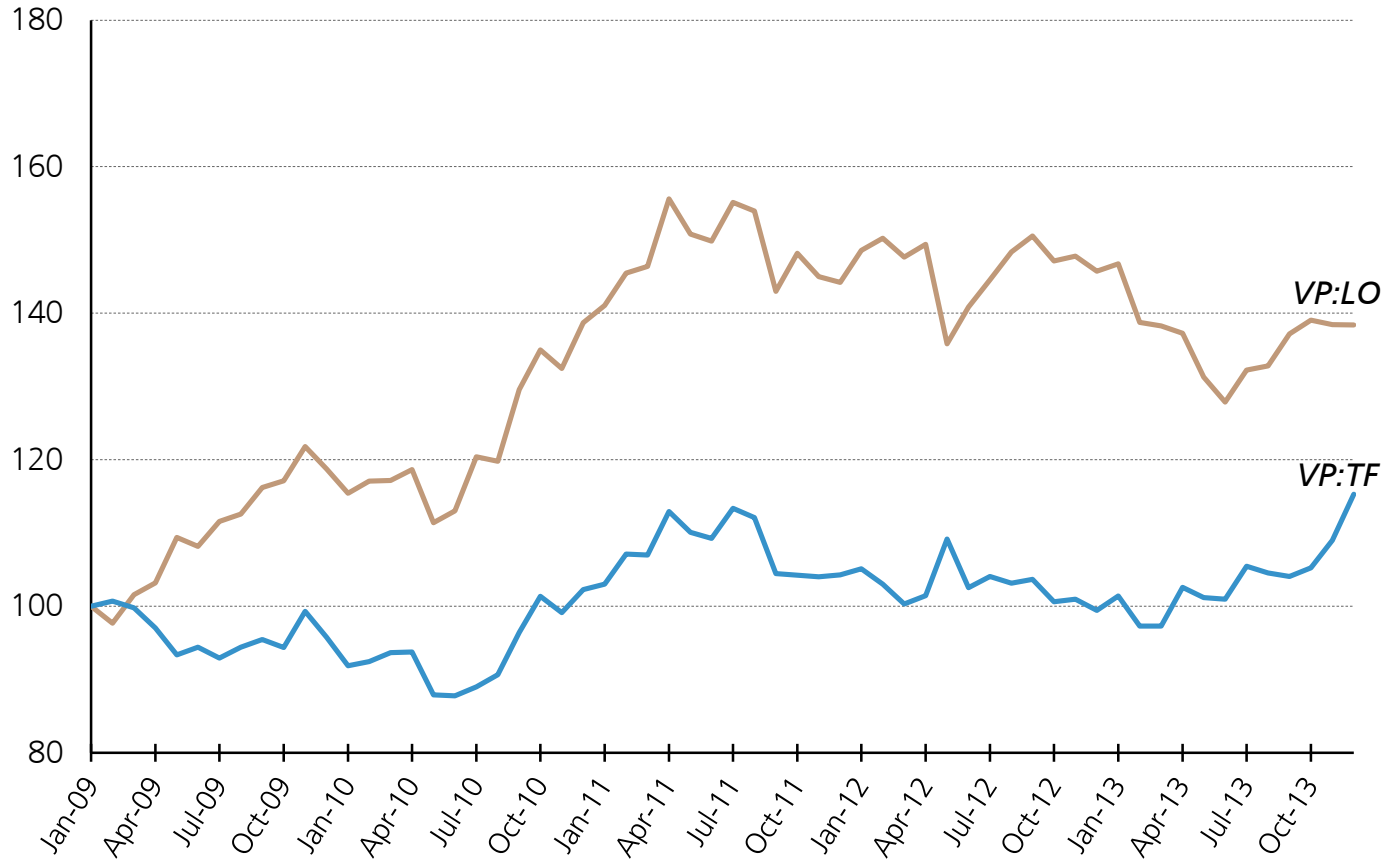


Source: UBS Quantitative Research

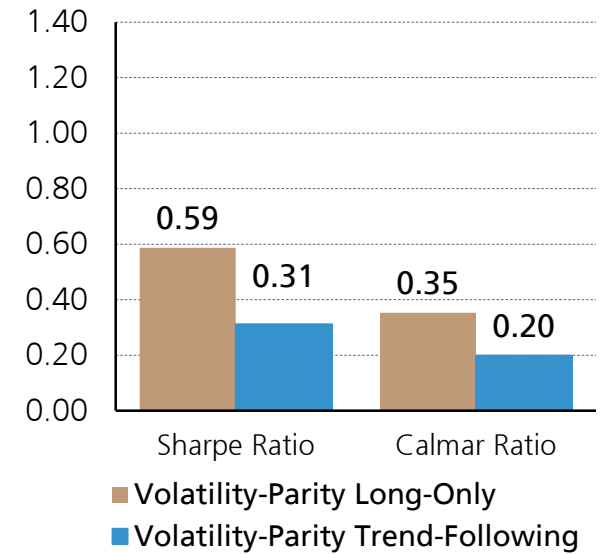
Source: UBS Quantitative Research

Cumulative Returns [Jan. 2009 – Dec.2013]

- And then trend-following **stopped working**...



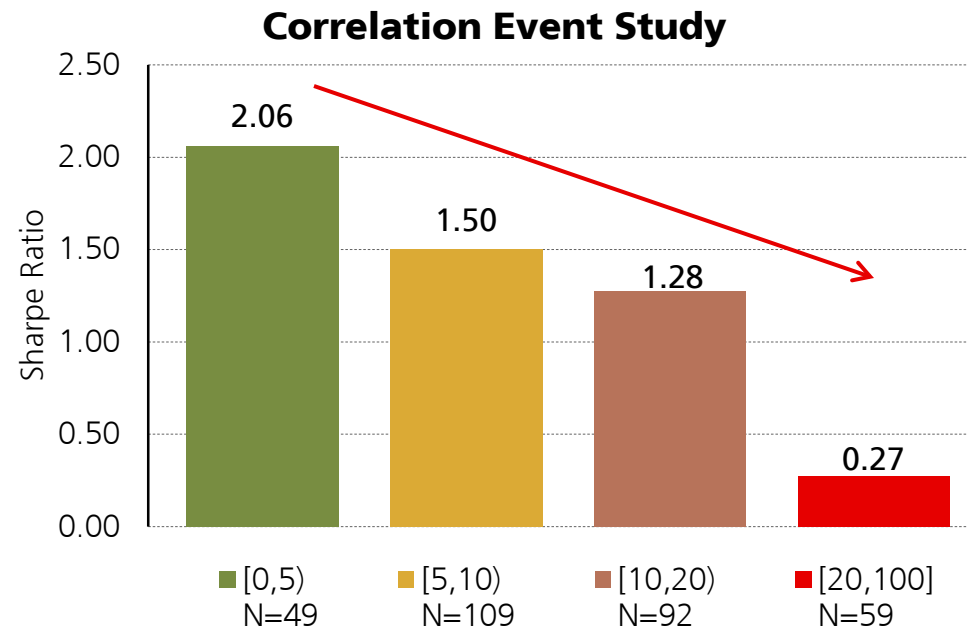
Source: UBS Quantitative Research



Source: UBS Quantitative Research

Correlation Event Study – Do correlations matter?

- Split months in correlation buckets and estimate Sharpe ratio per correlation regime



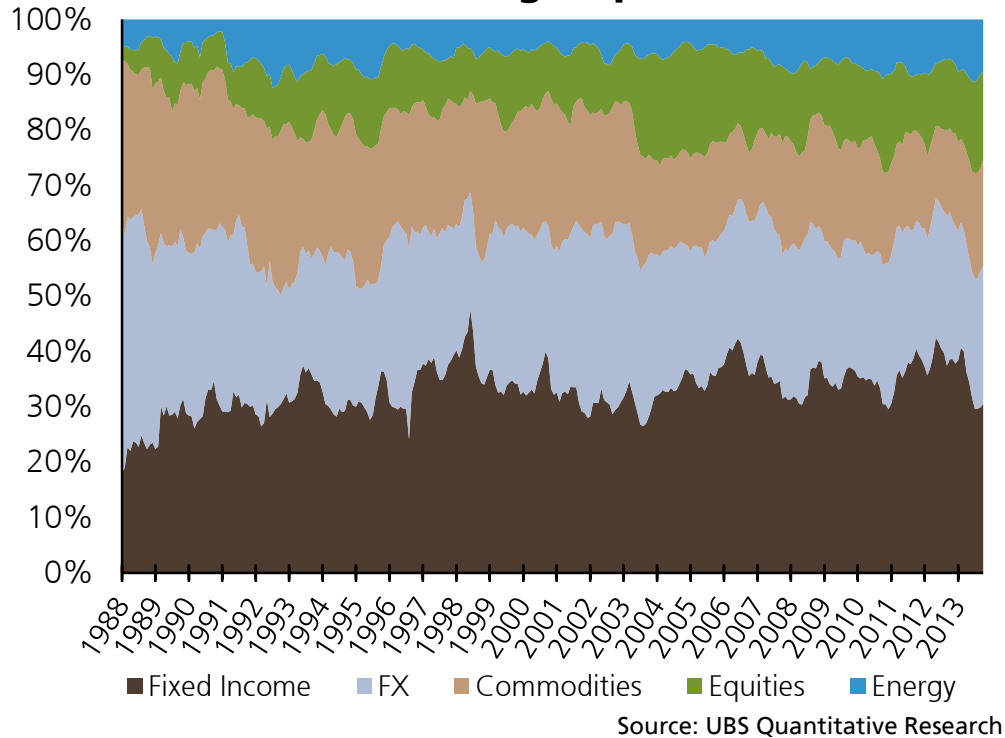
Source: UBS Quantitative Research

- Could this be due to the recent increases in correlations? "Risk On – Risk Off" ...?
- *Volatility-Parity* ignores the effect of pairwise correlations, hence "*Naïve Risk Parity*"

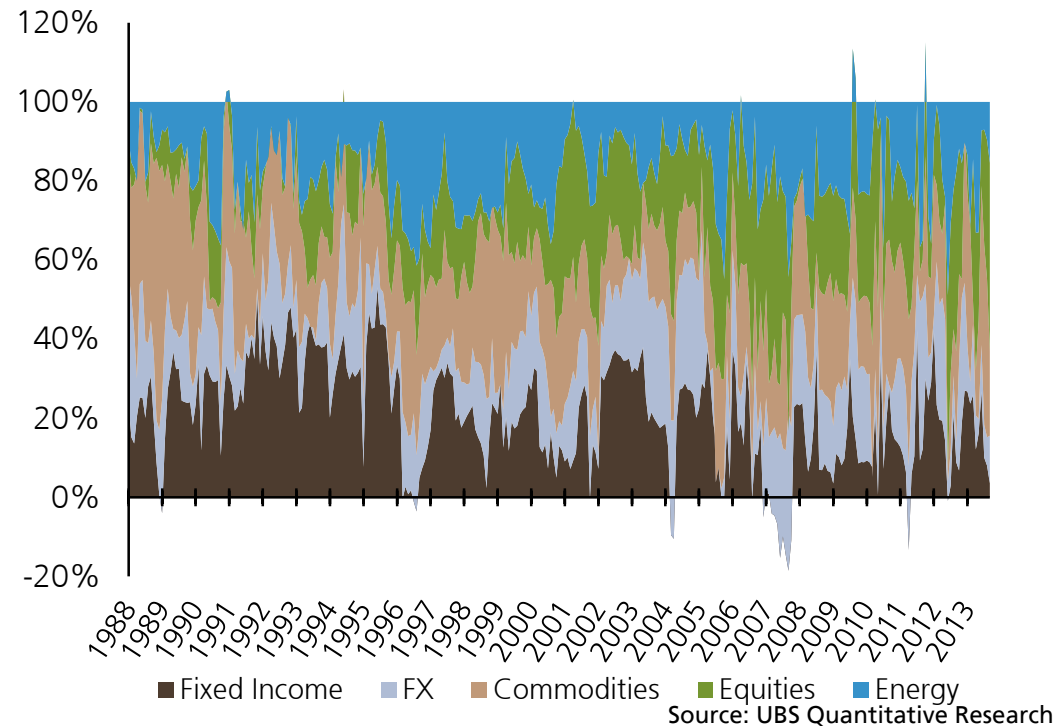
Volatility Parity ignores the Pairwise Correlations

- Let's look into *gross weight allocation* and respective *risk allocation* per asset class

Sum of Gross Weights per asset class



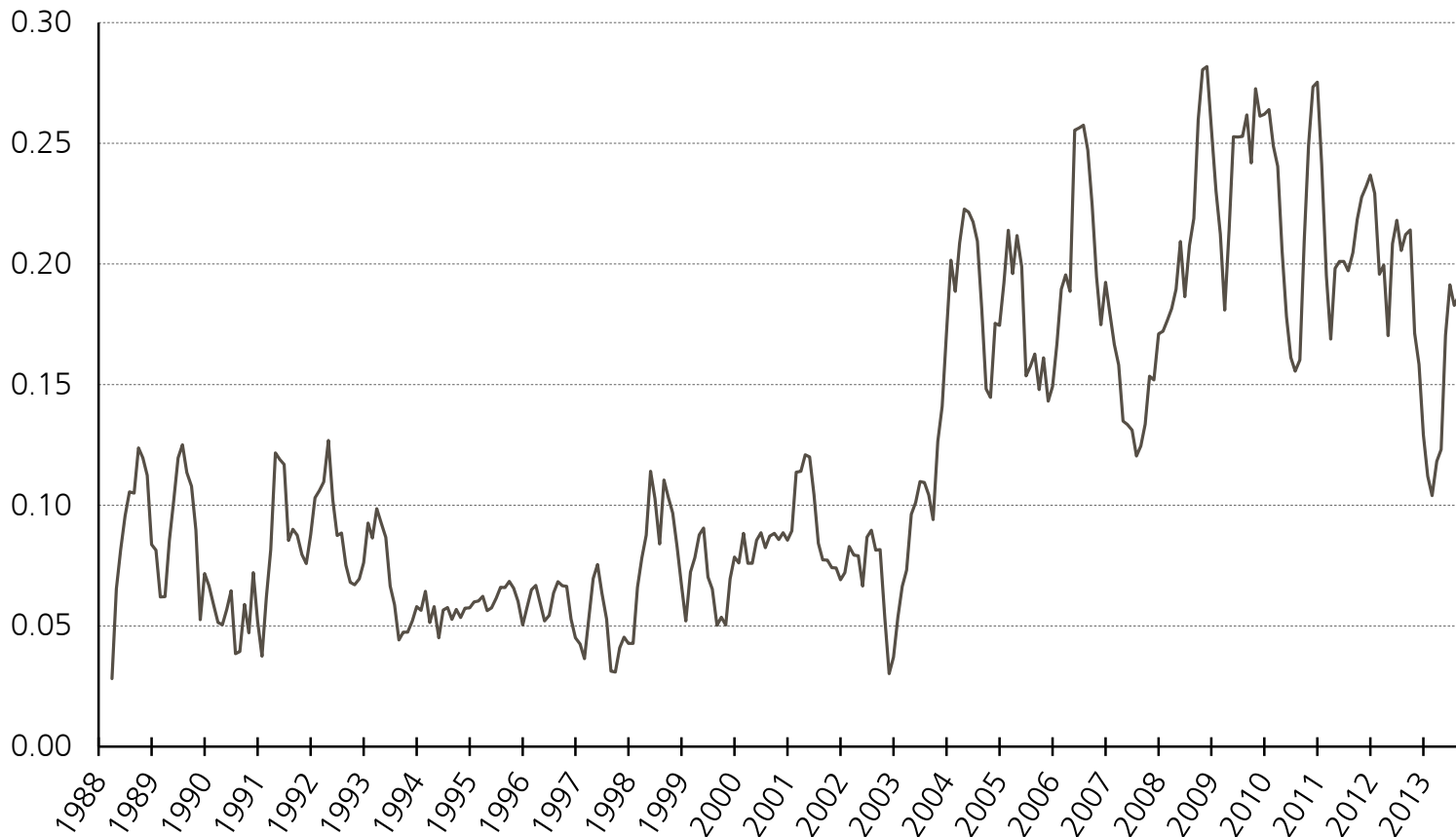
Percentage contribution to risk per asset class



- There is **No Equal Contribution to Risk**
- ...clearly due to *asset pairwise correlations* not being equal

Volatility Parity ignores the Pairwise Correlations

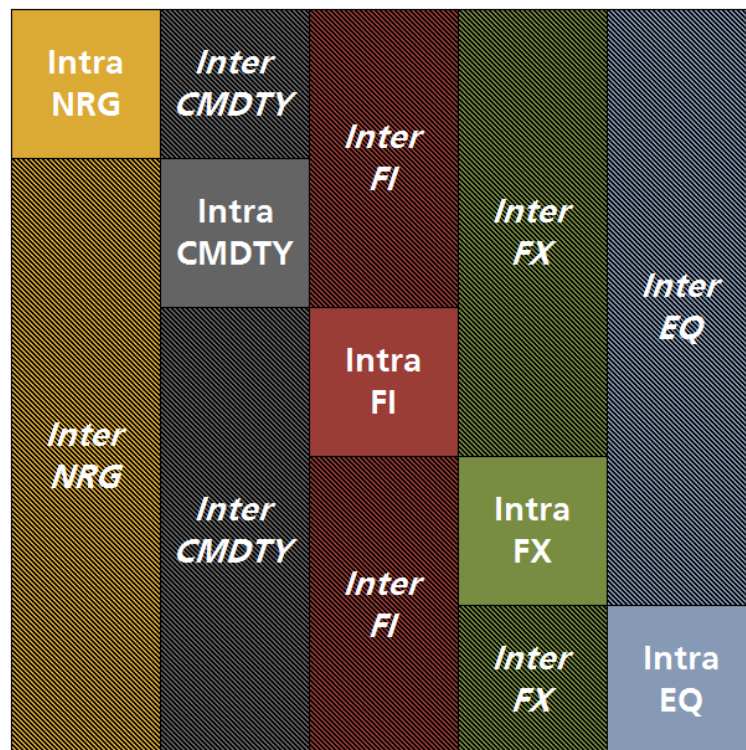
- We next plot 90-day rolling estimates of **average pairwise correlation** over time.



Source: UBS Quantitative Research

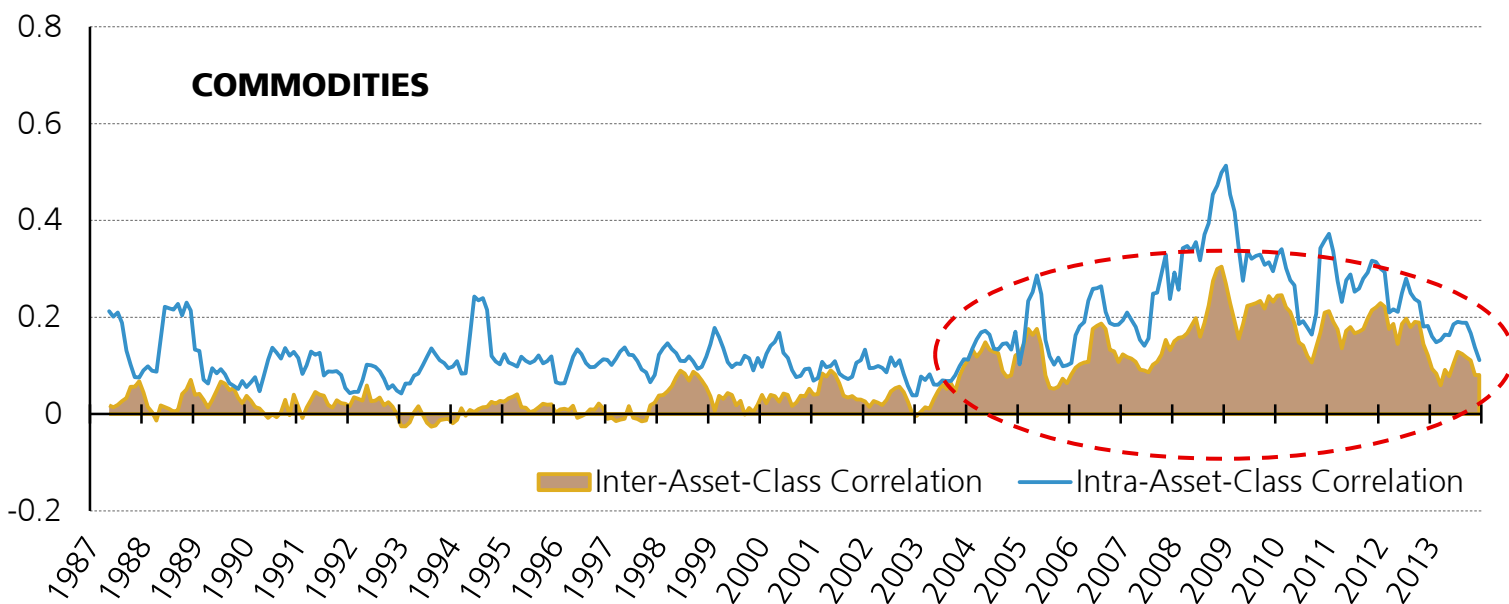
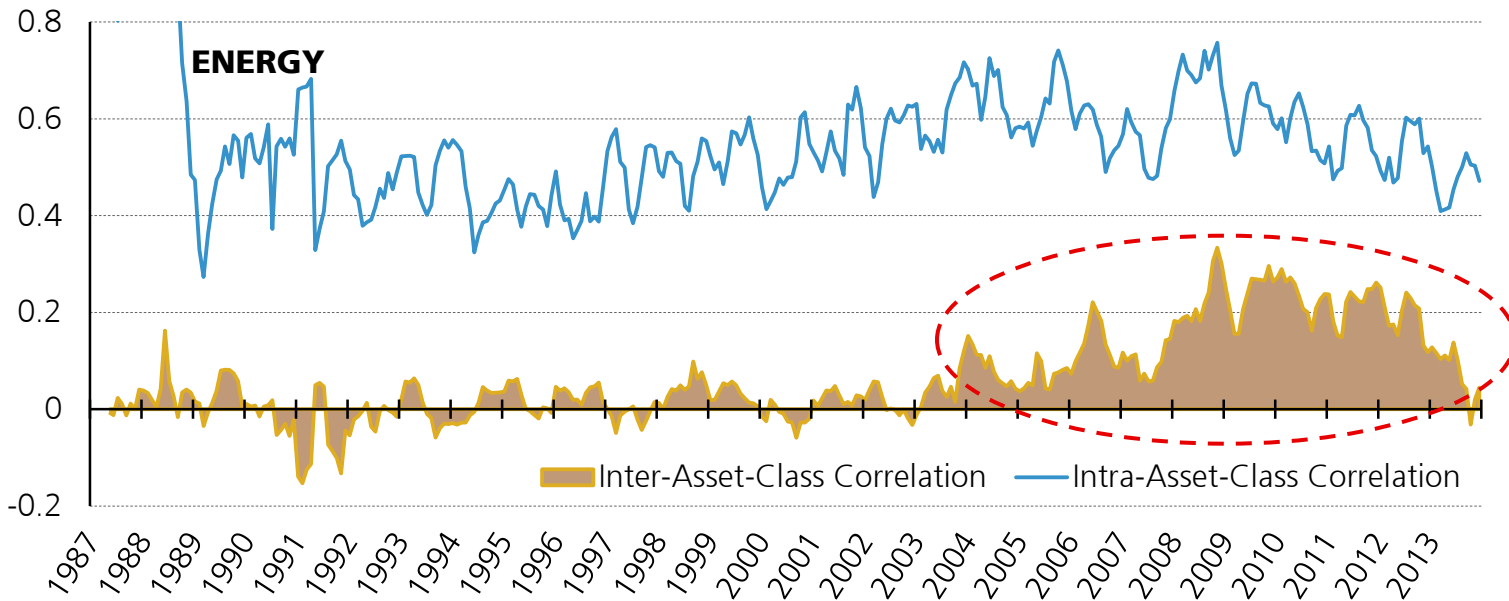
Volatility Parity ignores the Pairwise Correlations

- We next plot 90-day rolling estimates of **intra and inter asset-class correlations** over time.



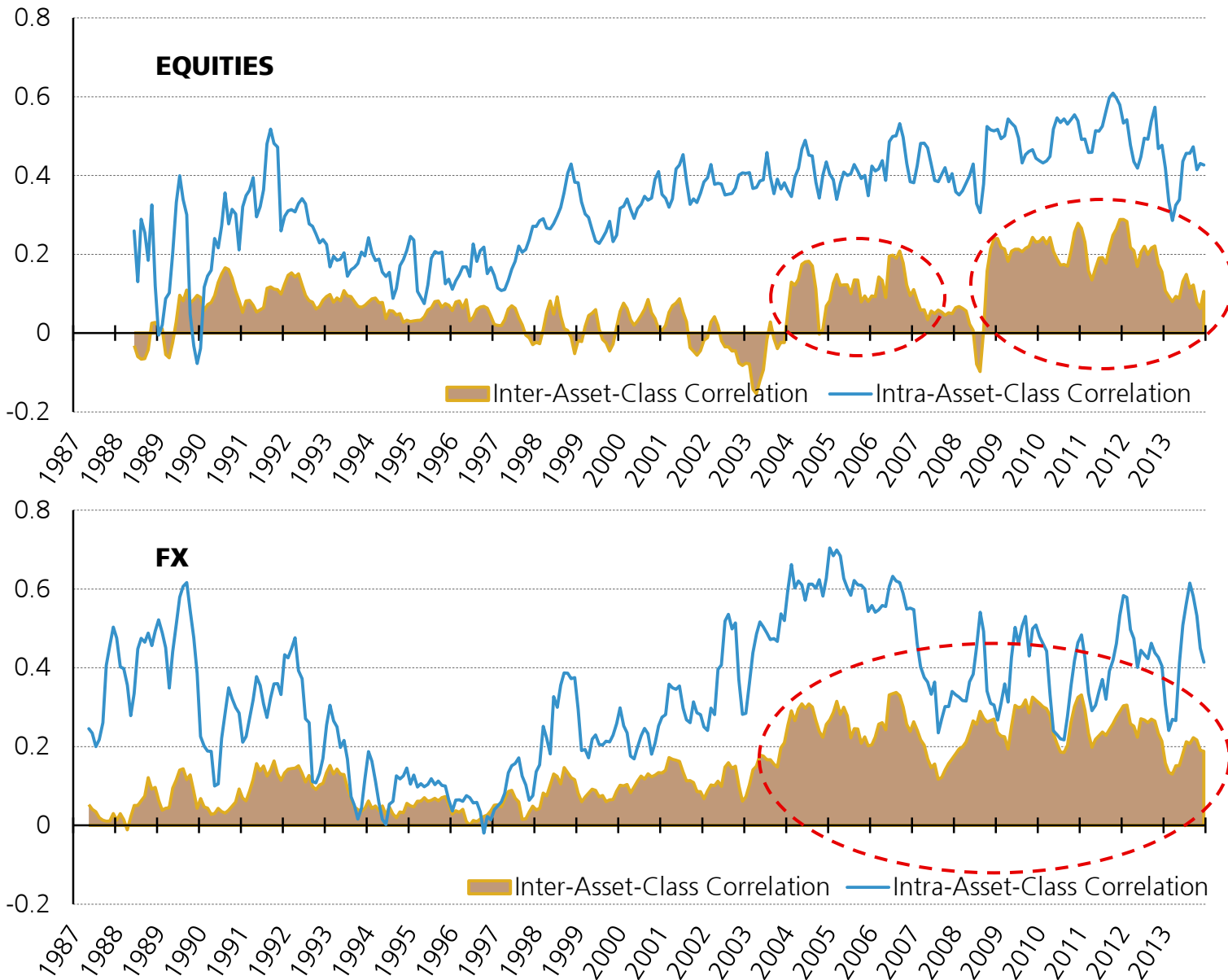
Source: UBS Quantitative Research

Intra and Inter Asset-Class Correlations



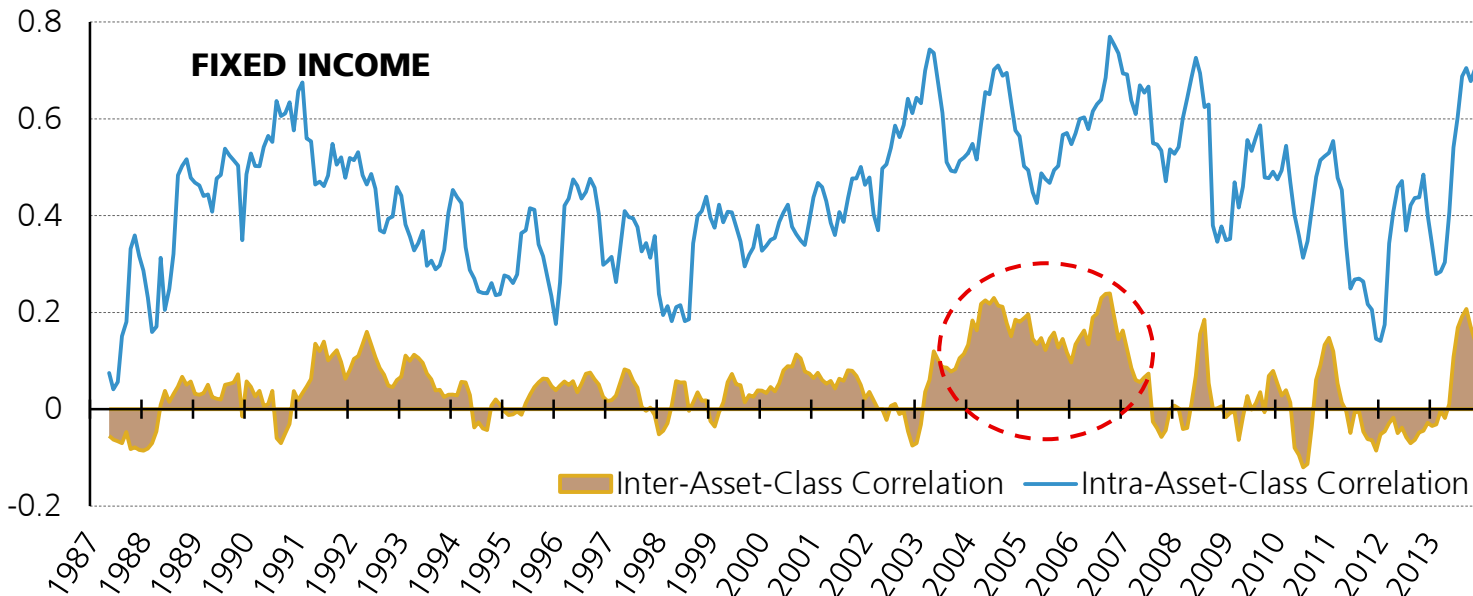
Source: UBS Quantitative Research

Intra and Inter Asset-Class Correlations



Source: UBS Quantitative Research

Intra and Inter Asset-Class Correlations



Source: UBS Quantitative Research

- The degree of co-movement has dramatically increased post-2004
- However, fixed income assets have been become de-correlated after 2007
- Two **rough clusters**: Fixed Income and non-Fixed Income → "**Risk on/Risk off**"
- Pairwise correlations are ignored by a **Volatility-Parity** allocation.
- How to account for such information in portfolio construction?... "**True Risk Parity**"

Risk-Parity (aka Equal Risk Contribution - ERC)

- Define Marginal Contribution to Risk (*MCR*): $MCR_i = \frac{\partial \sigma_P}{\partial w_i}$, where σ_P denotes portfolio volatility
- It can be trivially shown that:

$$\sum_{j=1}^N w_j \cdot MCR_j = \sigma_P$$

❖ Contrast this with: $\sum_{j=1}^N w_j \cdot \sigma_j \geq \sigma_P$

- RP Objective: equate the weighted *MCR*'s:

$$w_i^{RP} \cdot MCR_i = \text{constant}, \forall i$$

- Optimisation:

Maximise: $\sum_{i=1}^N \log(w_i)$

Subject to: $\sigma_P(\mathbf{w}) = \sqrt{\mathbf{w}' \cdot \boldsymbol{\Sigma} \cdot \mathbf{w}} \leq \sigma_{TGT}$

- Initial weights: $w_i^{RP,init} = w_i^{VP} = \frac{(\sigma_i)^{-1}}{\sum_{j=1}^N (\sigma_j)^{-1}}, \forall i$

- **Post-optimisation rescaling** of weights is permitted so to get weights in [0,1].

- Logarithmic weights are also used by Kaya (2012), Kaya and Lee (2012) and Roncalli (2014).



Note: For comparison between VP and RP see Appendix B.

Risk-Parity

- Advantages:

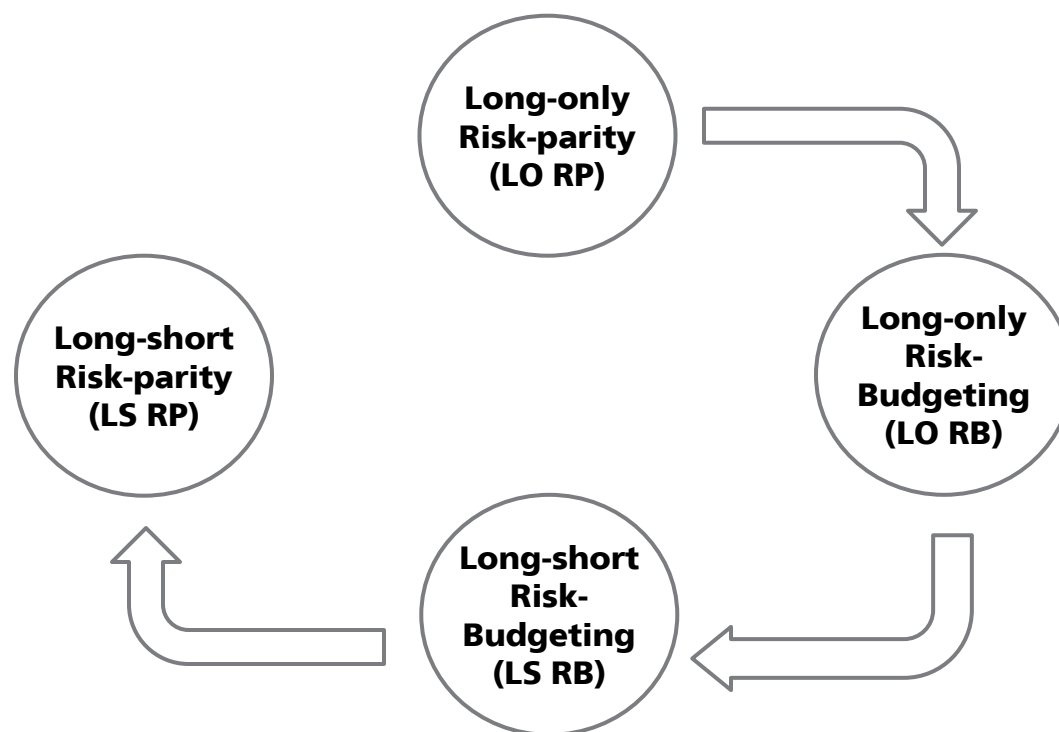
- Attractive risk-return profile
- True **equal distribution of risk** across portfolio constituents
- **Robust** against parameter estimation error (acts like shrinkage)
- **Naturally constrained** (the optimisation does not allow negative weights or position flips)
- **Lower turnover** than minimum-variance or mean-variance portfolios

- Criticisms:

- No information about expected returns is used
- Substantial **leverage for low-volatility assets** (e.g. bonds)
- Does not offer guidance as to which assets should be included in the portfolio; whatever enters the optimisation will bear a non-zero weight.
- Highly correlated assets will bear a larger aggregate weight than what a single asset would bear ("**identical asset problem**")

Extending Risk-Parity to a Long-Short Framework

- The risk-parity formulation that has been presented only applies to long-only portfolio
 - ❖ If anything, $\log(w_i)$ can only be defined for positive weights.
- How to go from long-only risk-parity to a long-short one:
 1. Start with **long-only risk-parity**
 2. Introduce/extend to **long-only risk-budgeting**
 3. Extend **long-only risk-budgeting** to **long-short risk-budgeting**
 4. Simplify **long-short risk-budgeting** down to **long-short risk-parity**



Long-Only Risk-Budgeting

- Risk-parity equates the weighted marginal contribution to risk from all assets
- **Risk-budgeting** (RB) allocates weights so that the assets contribute an amount to the overall portfolio volatility that is **proportional** to a certain **positive asset-specific score, s_i**
- From RP objective:

$$w_i^{RP} \cdot MCR_i = constant, \forall i$$

- To RB objective:

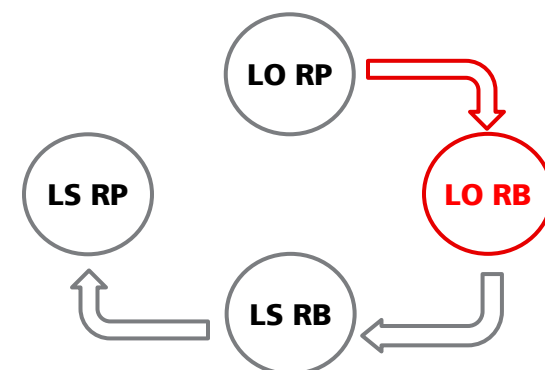
$$w_i^{RB} \cdot MCR_i \propto s_i, \forall i$$

- Optimisation (also shown in Kaya and Lee, 2012):

$$\text{Maximise: } \sum_{i=1}^N s_i \cdot \log(w_i)$$

$$\text{Subject to: } \sigma_P(\mathbf{w}) = \sqrt{\mathbf{w}' \cdot \Sigma \cdot \mathbf{w}} \leq \sigma_{TGT}$$

- Initial weights: $w_i^{RB,init} = \frac{s_i \cdot (\sigma_i)^{-1}}{\sum_{j=1}^N s_j \cdot (\sigma_j)^{-1}}, \forall i$



Long-Short Risk-Budgeting

- Can we allow for **negative** asset-specific scores?
 - ❖ Positive scores → Long positions
 - ❖ Negative scores → Short positions
- The resulting **net** weights must agree with the asset-specific scores in their sign:

$$\text{sign}(w_i^{\text{Net, RB}}) = \text{sign}(s_i), \quad \forall i$$

- The RB objective becomes:

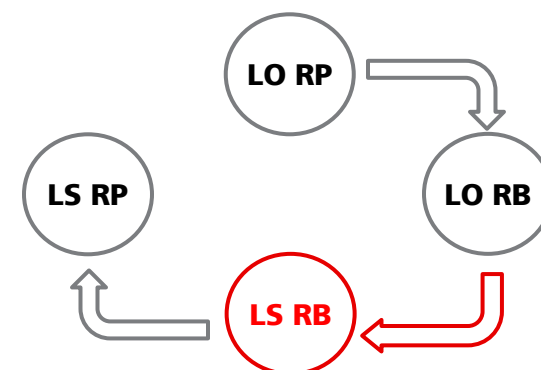
$$w_i^{\text{Net, RB}} \cdot MCR_i \propto |s_i|, \quad \forall i$$

- Optimisation:

$$\text{Maximise: } \sum_{i=1}^N |s_i| \cdot \log(|w_i|)$$

$$\text{Subject to: } \sigma_P(\mathbf{w}) = \sqrt{\mathbf{w}' \cdot \boldsymbol{\Sigma} \cdot \mathbf{w}} \leq \sigma_{TGT}$$

- Initial weights: $w_i^{\text{Net, RB, init}} = \frac{s_i \cdot (\sigma_i)^{-1}}{\sum_{j=1}^N |s_j| \cdot (\sigma_j)^{-1}}$



Long-Short Risk-Parity and Trend-Following

- Notice that if all asset-specific scores are equal in absolute value, we are back to risk-parity:

$$\text{if } |s_i| = |s_j|, \forall i, j$$

$$\Rightarrow \text{Long-Short Risk-Budgeting: } w_i^{Net, RB} \cdot MCR_i \propto 1$$

$$\Rightarrow w_i^{Net, RB} \cdot MCR_i = \text{constant}, \forall i \Rightarrow \text{Risk - Parity}$$

- However, this framework now allows for **long and short positions!**
- Trend-following signal: $s_i = \text{sign}(ret_i^{12M}) = \pm 1 \Rightarrow |s_i| = |s_j|, \forall i, j$
- Long-Short risk-budgeting optimisation boils down to a long-short risk-parity optimisation.
- Optimisation:

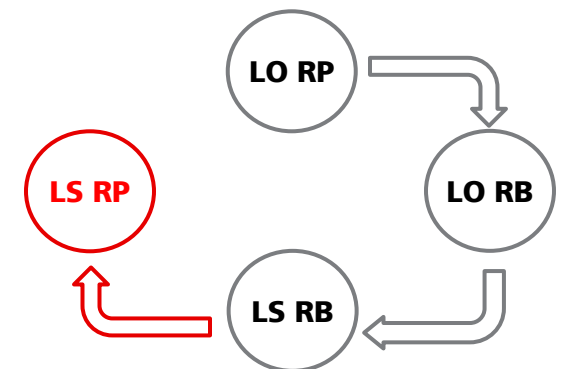
$$\text{Maximise: } \sum_{i=1}^N \log(|w_i|)$$

$$\text{Subject to: } \sigma_P(\mathbf{w}) = \sqrt{\mathbf{w}' \cdot \Sigma \cdot \mathbf{w}} \leq \sigma_{TGT}$$

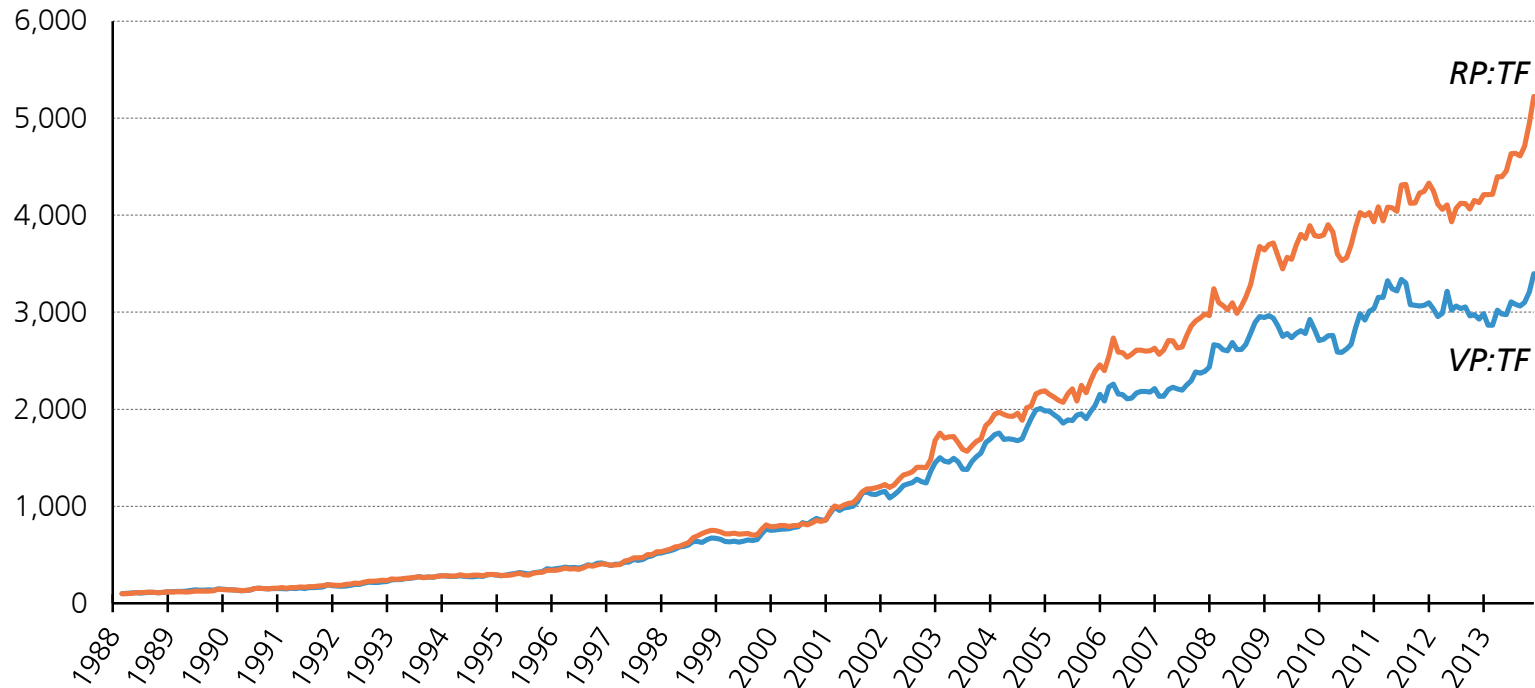
- Initial weights: $w_i^{Net, RP, init} = \text{sign}(ret_i^{12M}) \cdot \frac{(\sigma_i)^{-1}}{\sum_{j=1}^N (\sigma_j)^{-1}}$

- Risk-Parity Trend-Following (RP:TF) strategy:

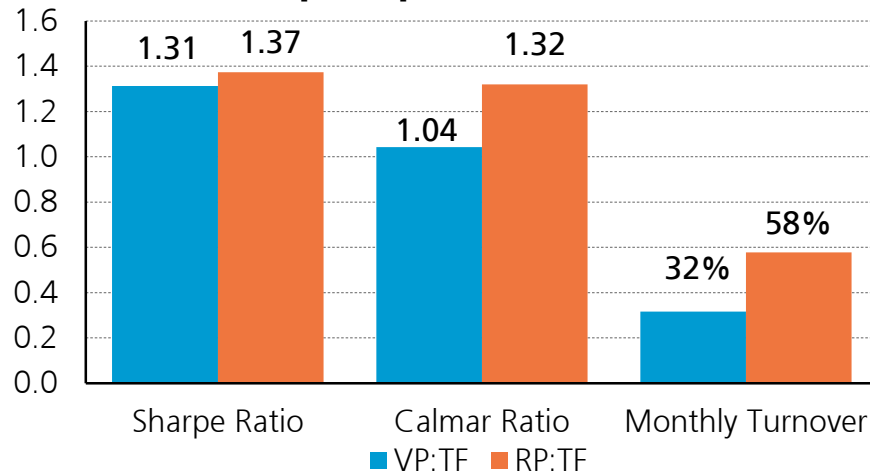
$$r_{t,t+1}^{RP:TF} = \frac{\sigma_{TGT}}{\sigma_t^{TF}} \sum_{i=1}^{N_t} w_t^{i, Net, RP} \cdot r_{t,t+1}^i$$



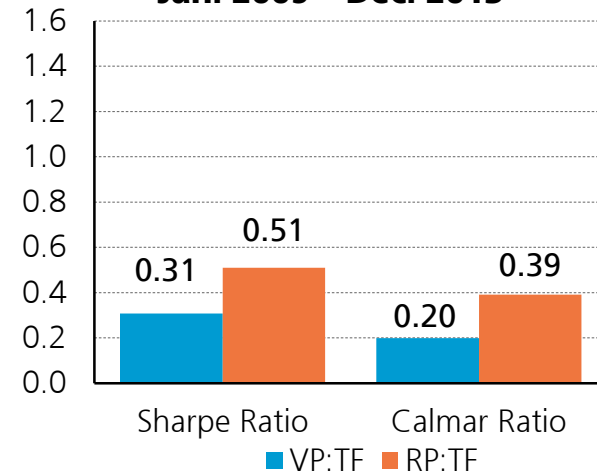
Trend-following: Performance Statistics



Full Sample [Apr. 1988 – Dec. 2013]



Jan. 2009 – Dec. 2013

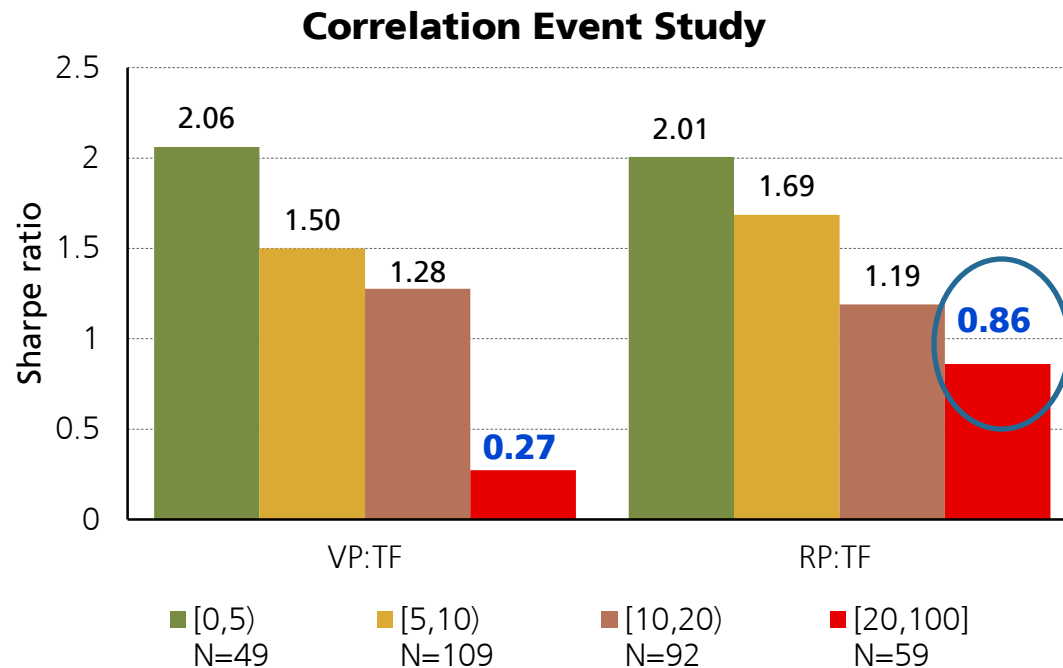


Note: For rolling Sharpe ratio see Appendix C.

Source: UBS Quantitative Research

Correlation Event Study – Revisited

- How do RP portfolios perform in extreme-correlation regimes?



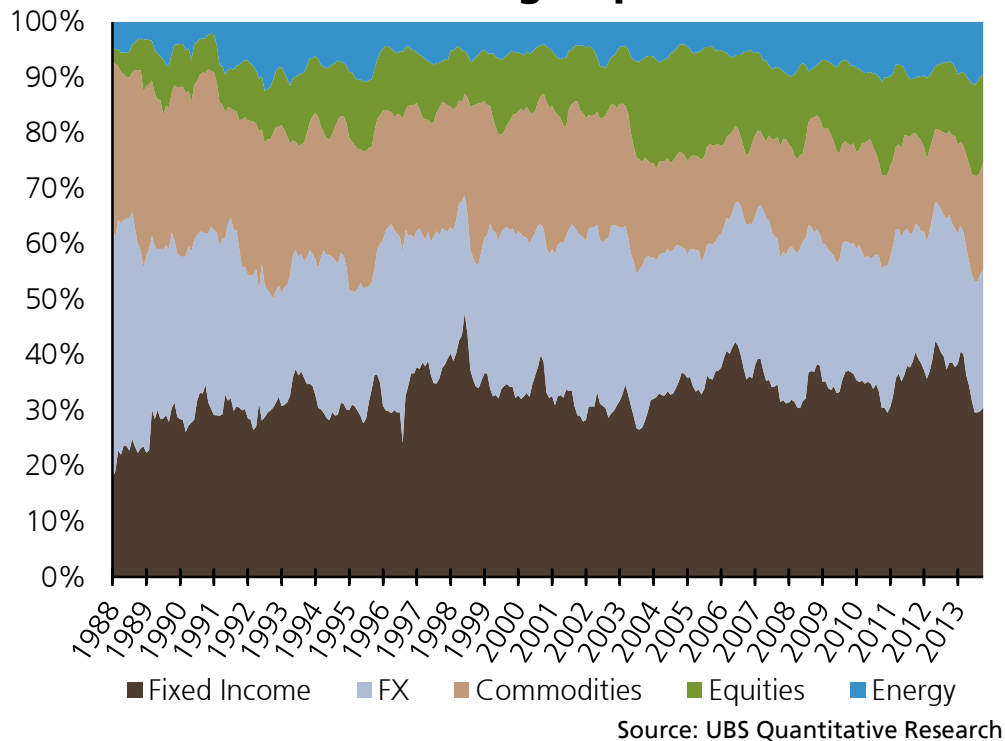
Source: UBS Quantitative Research.
For illustrative purposes only

- RP constitutes a **genuine improvement** to naïve VP, especially in periods of high correlations.
- Word of Caution: In an environment that markets do not trend at all, a more sophisticated weighting scheme like Risk-Parity can only do so much.

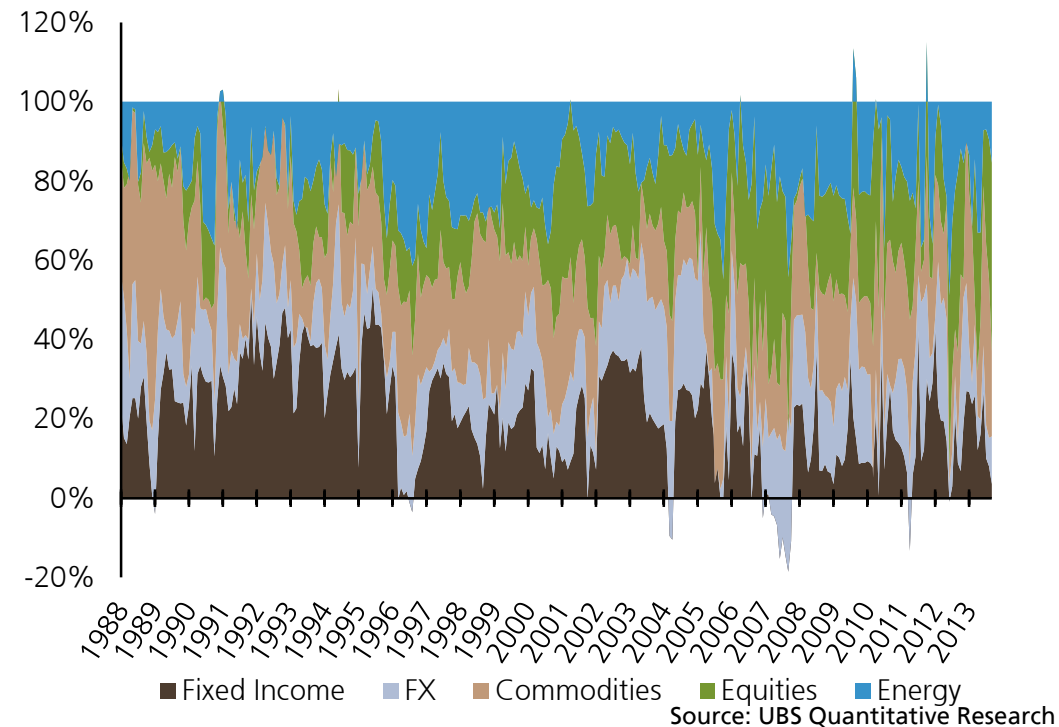
From VP to RP – Weight vs. Risk Allocation

- *Gross weight allocation* and respective *risk allocation* per asset class.
- From Volatility-Parity...

Sum of Gross Weights per asset class



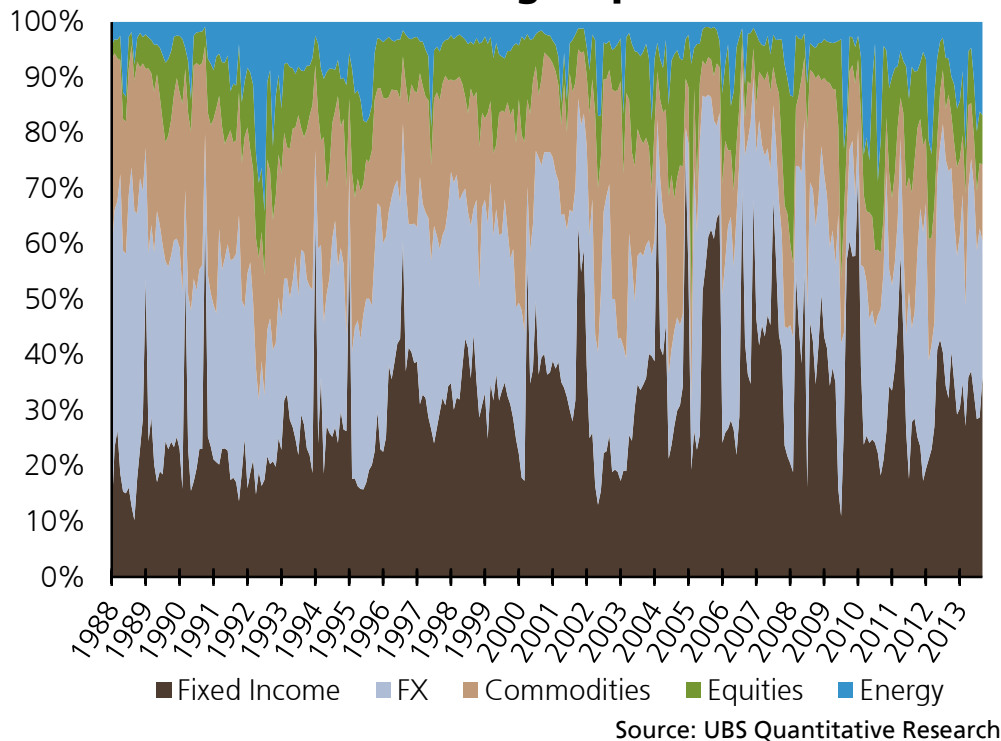
Percentage contribution to risk per asset class



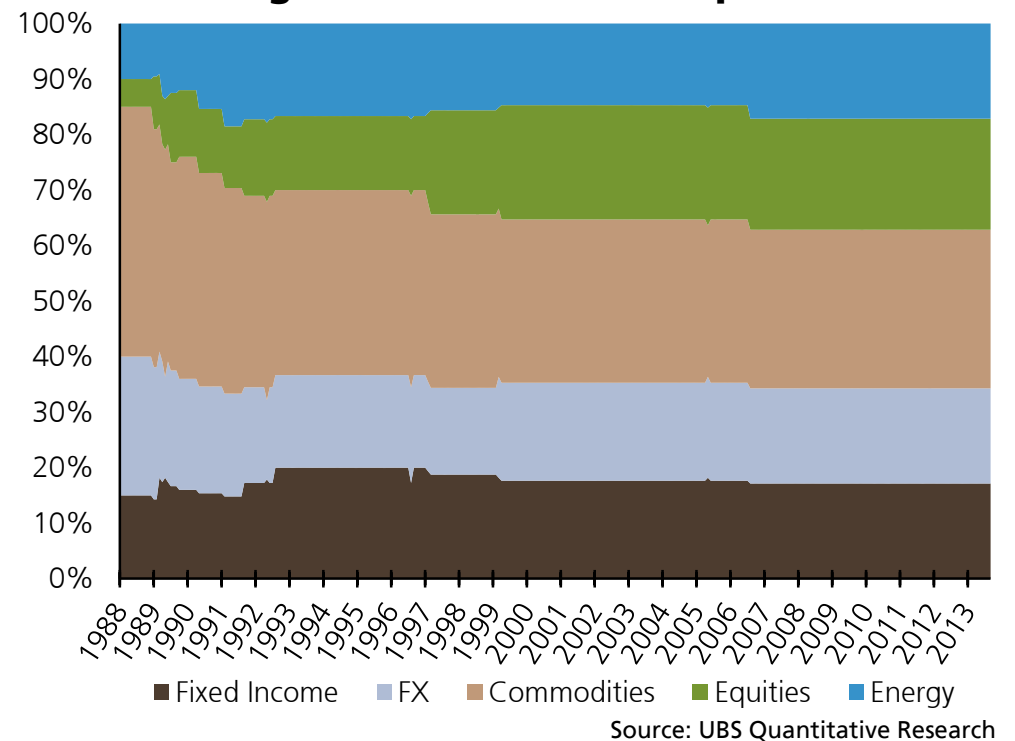
From VP to RP – Weight vs. Risk Allocation

- *Gross weight allocation* and respective *risk allocation* per asset class.
- From Volatility-Parity...to *Risk-Parity*

Sum of Gross Weights per asset class



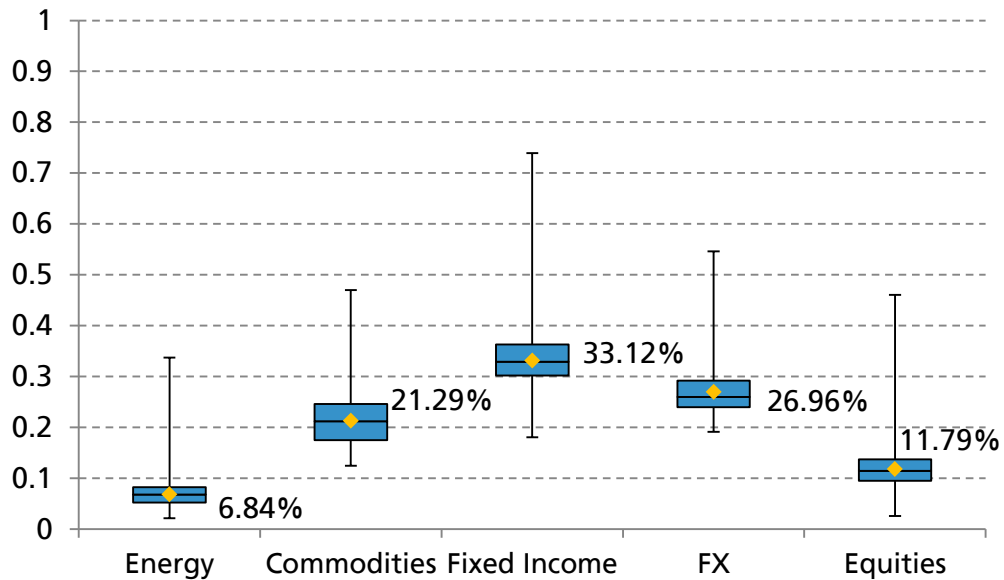
Percentage contribution to risk per asset class



- *Equal Risk Contribution* across assets and consequently asset classes.

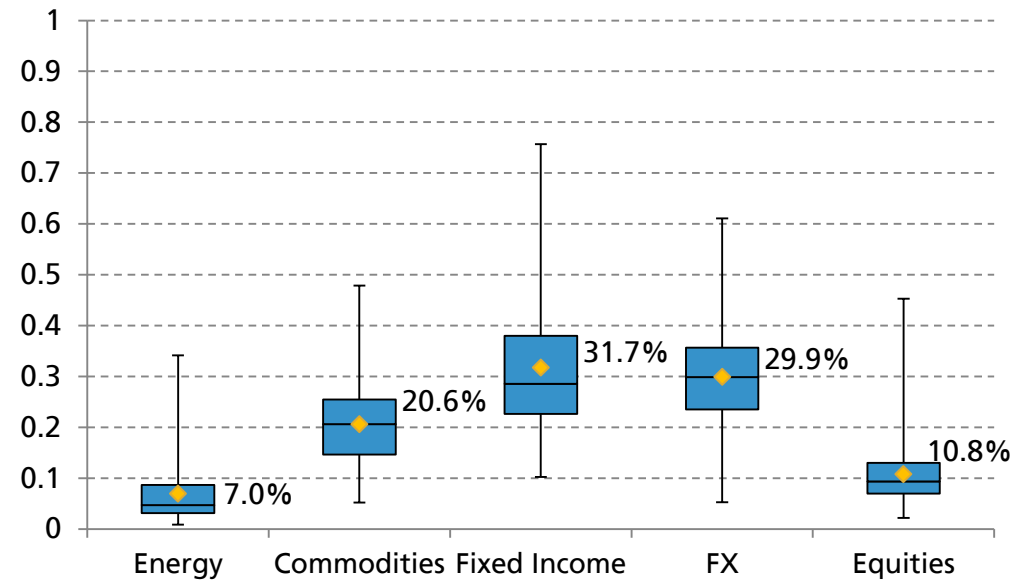
From VP to RP – Unconditional Weight Distribution

Volatility-Parity



Source: UBS Quantitative Research

Risk-Parity



Source: UBS Quantitative Research

- Similar distribution, but RP has larger interquartile ranges
- ... → larger turnover, but this was expected
- The two weighting schemes are only different because of correlations.

Concluding Remarks

- One reason for the underperformance of **trend-following strategies** in the post-crisis period has been the **substantial co-movement** of assets and asset classes
- Trend-following can benefit significantly from a **risk-parity allocation**, especially in periods of substantial co-movement.
- Risk-parity is generally considered a long-only allocation scheme
- We extend risk-parity to a **long-short framework** and show that it can significantly improve the risk-adjusted performance of trend-following in periods of high correlation.

Appendix A - Working with Futures Contracts

- Building continuous futures price-series:
 - Futures contracts are **short-lived instruments**, only active until the delivery date.
 - In theory, **unfunded investments**; in practice, initial margin payment is required.
 - We use Bloomberg's custom-made continuous *generic* price-series using *backwards-ratio price adjustment*, so that no "price jump" (fictitious return) occurs on a roll-over day.
 - Screen <GFUT> in Bloomberg provides a number of choices regarding the construction of the generic futures series.
- Construction of "excess" returns:
 - Assume a "**front**" **futures contract** priced at $F_{t,T}$ at the end of month t maturing at T .
 - Assume the contract is *not* within its delivery month, i.e. $t < t + 1 < T$.
 - At the end of month $t + 1$, it is priced at $F_{t+1,T}$.
 - Entering the contract at time t involves **initial margin** of M_t , which, in turn, grows at r_t^f
 - The **excess return** of the futures contracts in $[t, t + 1]$ is (assuming no variation margin):

$$r_{t,t+1}^{xs} = \frac{[M_t(1 + r_t^f) + (F_{t+1,T} - F_{t,T})] - M_t}{M_t} - r_t^f = \frac{F_{t+1,T} - F_{t,T}}{M_t}$$

- For a "**fully-collateralised**" position, $M_t = F_{t,T}$:

$$r_{t,t+1} \equiv r_{t,t+1}^{xs,fc} = \frac{F_{t+1,T} - F_{t,T}}{F_{t,T}}$$

- We use this formula to calculate monthly holding returns for the strategy backtesting.

Appendix B: Volatility-Parity versus Risk-Parity

- **Volatility-parity** weights:

$$w_i^{VP} \propto \frac{1}{\sigma_i}$$

- **Risk-parity** weights are such that: $w_i^{RP} \cdot MCR_i = \text{constant}, \forall i$

It can be shown that: $MCR_i = \frac{\partial \sigma_P(\mathbf{w})}{\partial w_i} = \sigma_i \cdot \rho_{i,P}(\mathbf{w})$

$\rho_{i,P}(\mathbf{w})$: correlation of asset i with the overall portfolio.

$$\Rightarrow w_i^{RP} \propto \frac{1}{MCR_i} = \frac{1}{\sigma_i} \cdot \frac{1}{\rho_{i,P}(\mathbf{w}^{RP})}$$

Caution: the above result is not a closed-form solution...

- Risk-parity over-weights:
 - **Low-volatility** assets
 - **De-correlated** assets (i.e. assets with lower correlation with the rest of the universe)

Appendix B: Volatility-Parity versus Risk-Parity

- Divide by parts:

$$\frac{w_i^{RP}}{w_i^{VP}} \propto \frac{1}{\rho_{i,P}(\mathbf{w}^{RP})}$$

Caution: this result is a proportionality statement → qualitative conclusions only

- When an asset correlates more with the universe, its RP weight falls relative to $\frac{1}{\sigma}$
- When an assets de-correlates, its RP weight increases relative to $\frac{1}{\sigma}$
- Using the weight normalisation (sum of weights is 100%), we deduce the following illustrative comparison:

$$\underbrace{w_i^{VP} = \frac{(\sigma_i)^{-1}}{\sum_{j=1}^N (\sigma_j)^{-1}}}_{\text{Closed-form Solution}} \quad \text{vs.} \quad \underbrace{w_i^{RP} = \frac{(MCR_i)^{-1}}{\sum_{j=1}^N (MCR_j)^{-1}}}_{\text{non-closed-form expression}} \rightarrow \text{Numerical Solution}$$

- The two weighting schemes are **identical if all correlations are equal** [see next page]

Appendix B: Volatility-Parity versus Risk-Parity

- The Marginal Contribution to Risk (*MCR*) is defined as the change in portfolio volatility $\sigma_P(\mathbf{w})$ for a marginal change in the weight of each asset i , w_i :

$$MCR_i = \frac{\partial \sigma_P(\mathbf{w})}{\partial w_i} = \frac{(\boldsymbol{\Sigma} \cdot \mathbf{w})_i}{\sigma_P(\mathbf{w})} \quad (1)$$

- If the pairwise correlation is constant across all pairs and equal to $\bar{\rho}$ then (1) simplifies to:

$$MCR_i(\bar{\rho}) = \frac{\sigma_i}{\sigma_P(\mathbf{w})} \left[w_i \cdot \sigma_i \cdot (1 - \bar{\rho}) + \bar{\rho} \sum_{j=1}^N w_j \cdot \sigma_j \right] \quad (2)$$

- The Risk-Parity objective is:

$$w_i^{RP} \cdot MCR_i = \text{constant}, \forall i \Leftrightarrow w_i^{RP} \cdot MCR_i = w_j^{RP} \cdot MCR_j, \forall i, j \quad (3)$$

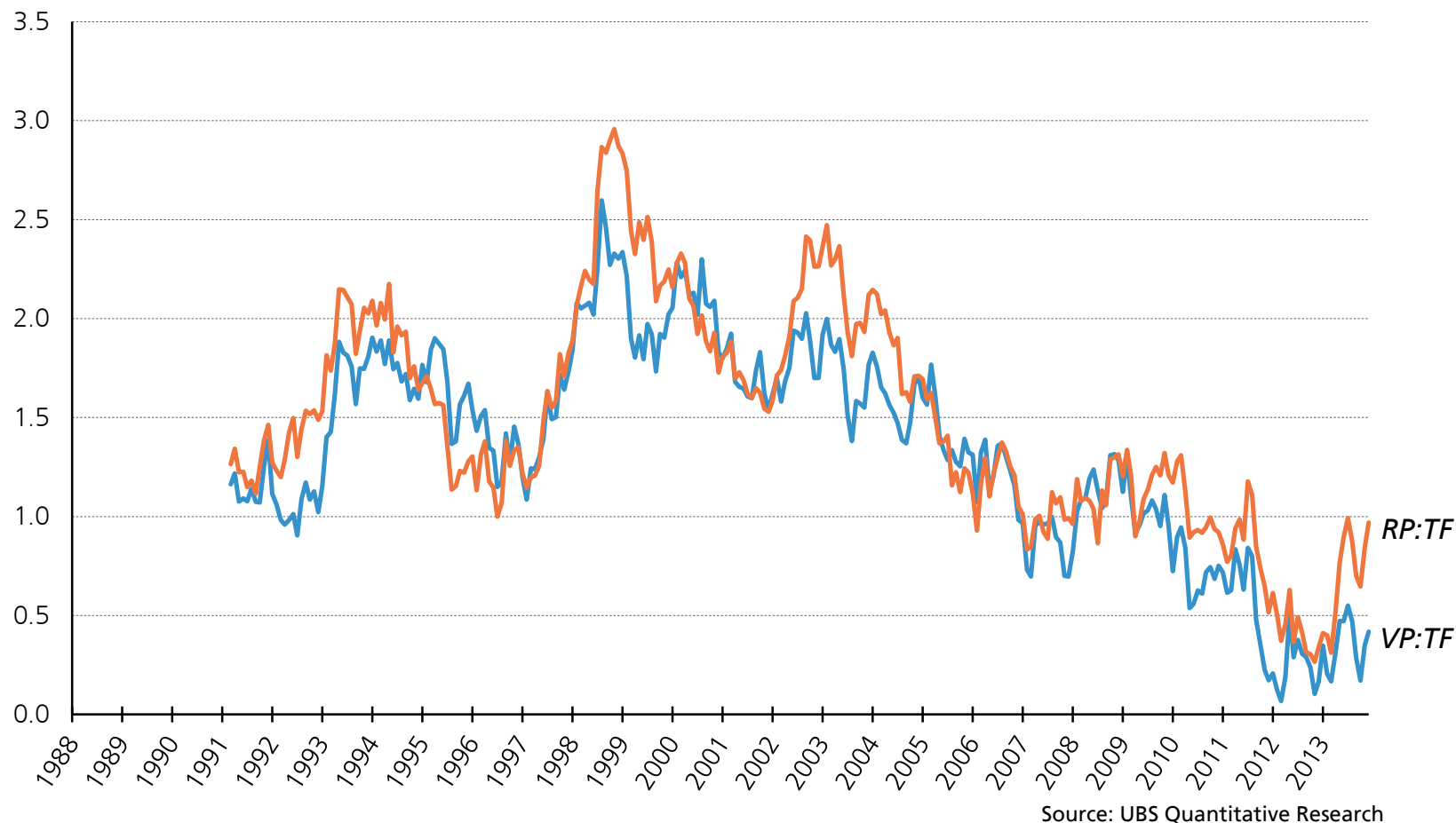
- Combining (2) – for i and j – and (3) leads to:

$$\underbrace{(w_i \cdot \sigma_i - w_j \cdot \sigma_j)}_A \cdot \underbrace{\left[(w_i \cdot \sigma_i + w_j \cdot \sigma_j)(1 - \bar{\rho}) + \bar{\rho} \sum_{m=1}^N w_m \cdot \sigma_m \right]}_B = 0, \forall i, j \quad (4)$$

- Under reasonable assumptions for B (...) the solution to (4) is $A = 0$, hence:

$$\frac{w_i}{w_j} = \frac{1/\sigma_i}{1/\sigma_j}, \forall i, j \Leftrightarrow \text{Volatility Parity}$$

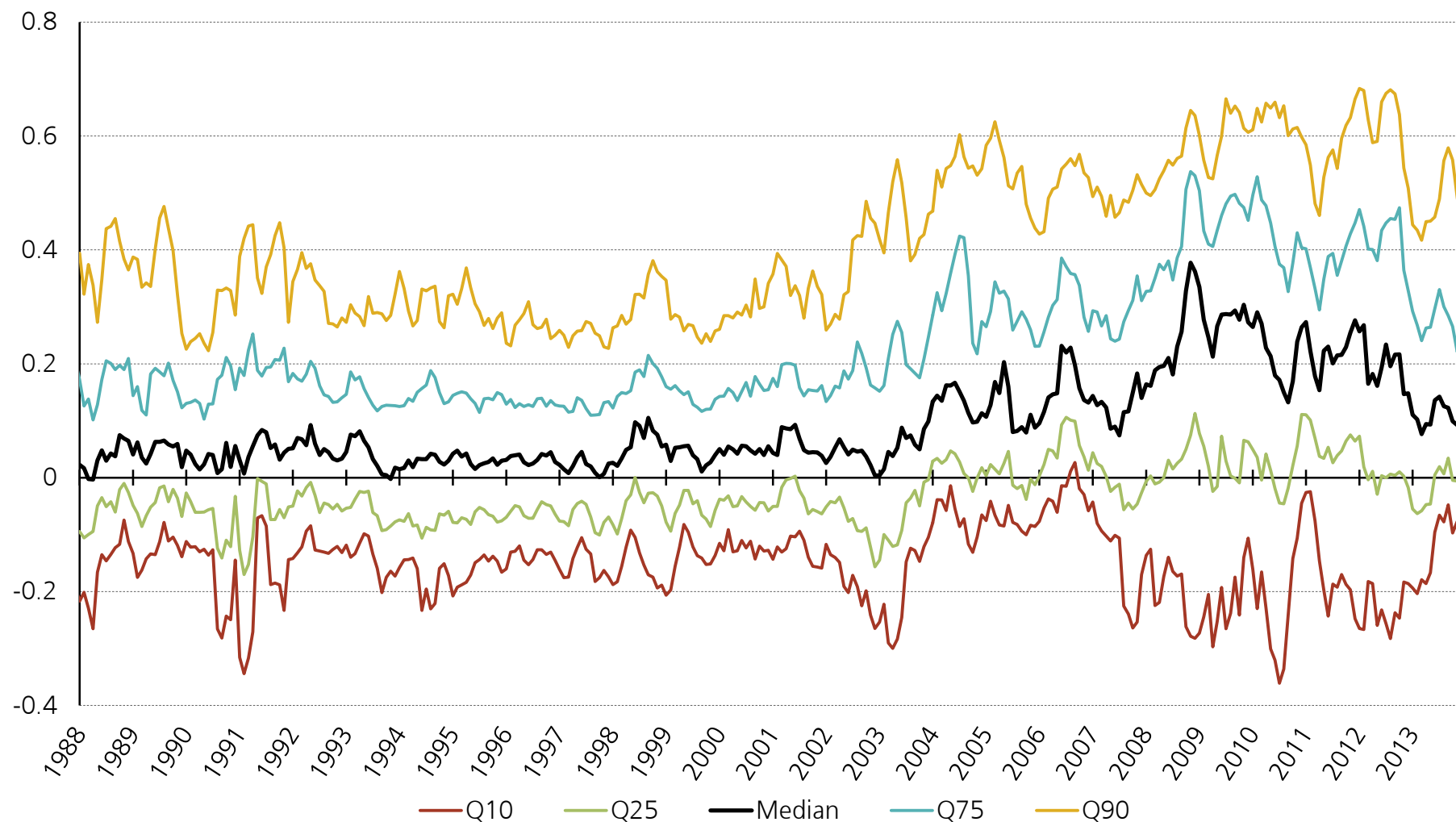
Appendix C: 36-month Rolling Sharpe Ratio



- The picture is similar (in terms of RP relative benefit) for long-only strategies.

Appendix D: Distribution of Pairwise Correlations

- We plot below the certain percentiles of the cross-sectional distribution of 90-day pairwise correlations between all the assets of our universe.



Source: UBS Quantitative Research

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