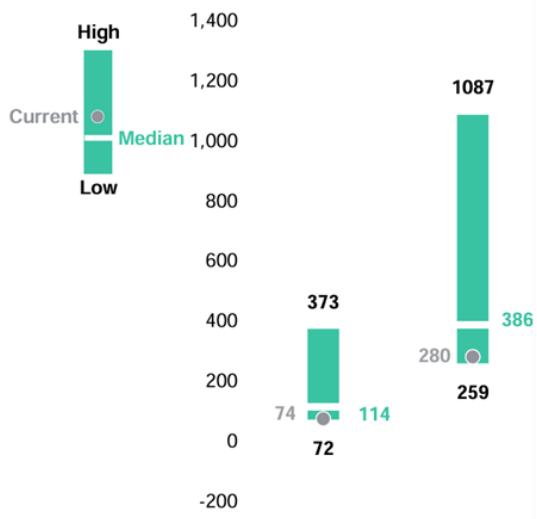
BCA Market Perspective ©
The Impact of Private Lending on Public Debt
October 2025

Corporate bonds, both investment-grade and high-yield, have long served as a barometer for investors' risk appetite. Today, credit spreads remain near historic lows, signaling high investor confidence. Yet, such tight spreads may also suggest that investors are not being adequately compensated for credit risk. Should investors be concerned about the current level of risk premium? One structural factor that may be contributing to persistently low spreads is the explosive growth of private credit (or private lending).

Domestically, the private credit market has expanded from roughly $46 billion in 2000 to about $2.5 trillion in 2025. This asset class sits at the intersection of traditional banking and public debt, and institutional investors have shown a voracious appetite for it.

The expansion of private lending has been driven by a lighter regulatory environment as traditional banks continue to face increased oversight, and by institutional investors' search for higher yields. On the surface, the unintended consequences of this growth appear positive, with the broader financing ecosystem benefiting from the fresh infusion of liquidity, supporting greater deal activity and capital formation.

Anecdotally, a few cracks have emerged, with several failed deals surfacing and the recent bankruptcies of Tricolor and First Brands highlighting pockets of strain. By and large, however, private credit funds continue to find ample deal flow as demand for capital remains robust.



	Corporate	High Yield
Max Spread Date	3/23/2020	3/23/2020
Min Spread Date	9/19/2025	1/22/2025
Spread on 12/31/24	80	292
Spread on 12/31/23	99	334
Spread on 12/31/22	130	479

The asset class has grown too large to overlook. Major institutional investors are increasingly embracing the opportunity, along with the risks that accompany it. Earlier this year, JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon warned of "asset bubble-like conditions," particularly stemming from the rapid and largely unregulated expansion of private credit. Nonetheless, JPMorgan itself has allocated $50 billion from its balance sheet, plus another $15 billion through co-lenders, to meet client demand in this space.

How has the rise of private credit influenced the public debt markets? Some market participants argue that private lenders have absorbed a disproportionate share of "bad deals," while public corporate bonds today may carry less credit risk than in previous cycles. Indeed, CCC-rated corporate bonds' default rates currently hover around 1.7%, well below the 25-year average of 6.5%.

In the private markets, however, we could expect to see a wave of defaults in the coming years. According to Franklin Templeton, an analysis of non-accrual rates by origination vintage reveals meaningful differences across lending cycles. As of December 31, 2024, the 2021 vintage displayed the highest level of non-accruals—indicating that loans originated during that period face elevated default risk.

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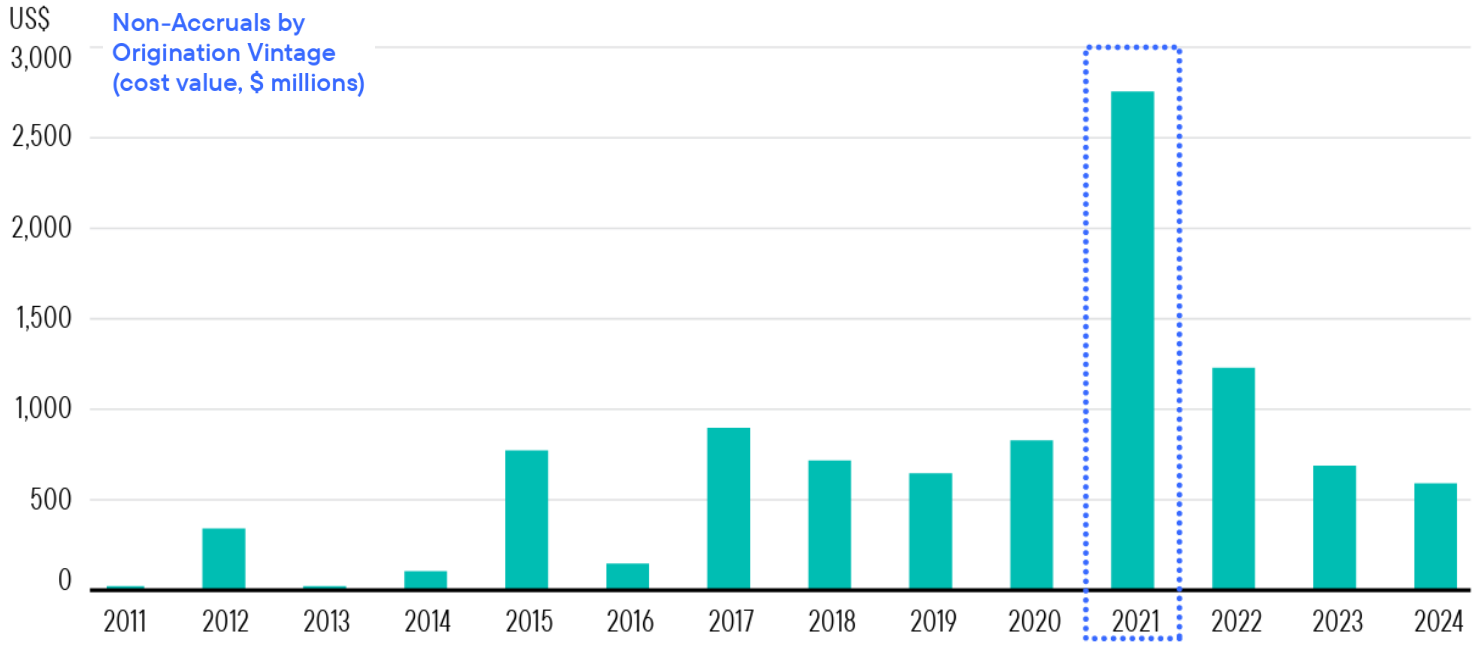

Sources: Cliffwater Direct Lending Index, Morningstar LSTA US Leveraged Loan Index. As of December 31, 2024.

Why 2021, and when might these private loans default? As billions of dollars poured into private credit, managers were pressured to deploy funds rapidly. This was particularly evident in 2020–2021, when near-zero interest rates drove both lenders and investors to chase yield rather than hold risk-free assets with minimal returns. The result was a loosening of underwriting discipline, marked by weaker covenants, aggressive EBITDA adjustments, and higher leverage multiples.

Separately, most private credit vehicles are structured as closed-end funds with 10-year lifecycles, which can obscure or delay defaults in the early years. By around year five, however, these funds begin returning capital to investors, potentially revealing weaker loans that have yet to surface. If this dynamic plays out, one could argue that publicly traded corporate bonds, by contrast, are exhibiting stronger fundamentals, helping justify today's tighter spreads and the case for maintaining higher-quality exposure.