

# *Annual Review of Financial Economics*

## Exchange-Traded Funds

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Annu. Rev. Financ. Econ. 2017. 9:169–89

First published as a Review in Advance on August 11, 2017

The *Annual Review of Financial Economics* is online at [financial.annualreviews.org](http://financial.annualreviews.org)

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-financial-110716-032538>

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JEL codes: G12, G14, G15

### Keywords

ETFs, mutual funds, investment managers, volatility, arbitrage, fund flows

### Abstract

Over nearly a quarter of a century, exchange-traded funds (ETFs) have become one of the most popular passive investment vehicles among retail and professional investors because of their low transaction costs and high liquidity. By the end of 2016, the market share of ETFs exceeded 10% of the total market capitalization traded on US exchanges, representing more than 30% of overall trading volume. ETFs revolutionized the asset management industry by taking market share from traditional investment vehicles such as mutual funds and index futures. Because ETFs rely on arbitrage activity to synchronize their prices with the prices of the underlying portfolio, trading activity at the ETF level translates to trading of the underlying securities. Researchers have found that although ETFs enhance price discovery, they also inject nonfundamental volatility into market prices and affect the correlation structure of returns. Furthermore, ETFs impact the liquidity of the underlying portfolios, especially during events of market stress.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1990s, exchange-traded funds (ETFs) have become a popular investment vehicle because of their low transaction costs and intraday liquidity. ETF sponsors issue securities that are traded on the major stock exchanges, and, for the most part, these instruments aim to replicate the performance of an index. ETFs have shown spectacular growth. By the end of 2016, they represented over 10% of the market capitalization of securities traded on US stock exchanges, more than 30% of the overall daily trading volume, and about 20% of the aggregate short interest.

This article synthesizes the academic literature on ETFs with a focus on trading and markets. First, we provide a brief overview of the mechanics of ETFs. Second, we analyze the research that explores the popularity of passive asset management in general and ETFs in particular. Third, we survey the literature that discusses the effects of ETFs on the quality of financial markets.

In the first part of this article, we describe how ETFs work and what distinguishes them from other pooled investment vehicles. ETFs either hold a basket of securities passively (physical replication) or enter into derivative contracts delivering the performance of an index (synthetic replication), or they do a mixture of the two. They issue securities that are claims on the underlying pool of securities.<sup>1</sup> ETF shares are traded on stock exchanges, and investors can take either long or short positions. Two mechanisms keep ETF prices in line with those of the basket that they aim to track: primary and secondary market arbitrage. The first mechanism involves the creation and redemption of ETF shares by special intermediaries called authorized participants (APs). When ETF prices and the prices of the underlying securities diverge, APs typically buy the less expensive asset (ETF shares or a basket of the underlying securities) and exchange it for the more expensive asset, leading to the creation or redemption of ETF shares. The second mechanism is arbitraging ETFs and their underlying portfolios (through long and short positions) by market participants in an attempt to benefit from the closing of price discrepancies between the two assets. The price pressure from the trades leads to convergence of the prices. Because such trading involves the risk that, in any finite time horizon, prices will not converge, it is an arbitrage only in a loose sense.

The second part of this article describes the rise of passive investment and the role of ETFs in the passive asset management space. Passive asset management has expanded in recent decades, raising questions about what is driving this phenomenon and about its implications for financial markets and investors. Whereas some researchers view this trend as evidence that financial markets are becoming more efficient, others warn that passive investments may have adverse effects on price efficiency and welfare. Several studies document that ETFs capture market share that was previously taken by traditional passive investment vehicles such as index mutual funds, closed-end funds, and index futures.

The third part of this article focuses on how ETFs impact financial markets. In general, researchers disagree about the effects of ETFs on the securities market. In principle, the positive and negative effects of ETFs are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Some researchers argue that ETFs have little adverse effect on financial markets and even present some evidence of improved price efficiency, whereas others present evidence that ETFs lead to negative consequences to markets by increasing nonfundamental return volatility, altering correlation patterns, and reducing the

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<sup>1</sup>Exchange-traded pooled investment vehicles are collectively designated as exchange-traded products (ETPs). These include ETFs; exchange-traded notes (ETNs), which are senior debt notes and do not invest in a portfolio of securities or a portfolio of derivatives on those securities; and exchange-traded commodities (ETCs), which provide investors exposure to individual commodities or baskets and can be structured as funds or notes. In this review, we restrict our attention to ETFs, which have been the main focus of the literature, given that they represent 95% of the ETP value in the United States.

liquidity of securities. In particular, scholars have raised the concern that the mechanical basket arbitrage trading that characterizes ETFs can propagate liquidity shocks across markets and thus deteriorate the quality of prices. This concern is especially acute given that ETFs are traded by high-turnover investors, who potentially create liquidity shocks that impound prices at high frequencies. Also, ETF ownership appears to induce excessive correlation of the securities in the ETFs' baskets. Finally, recent episodes of extreme market turbulence (e.g., the Flash Crash on May 6, 2010, and the market selloff of August 24, 2015) have revealed that the liquidity provision in ETFs is subject to sudden dry-ups.

Overall, ETFs have transformed the asset management world by introducing low-cost investment vehicles that are traded continuously. The academic literature acknowledges this financial innovation but also points to some potential weaknesses that appear to be sufficiently important to draw regulatory scrutiny.

## 2. THE MECHANICS OF EXCHANGE-TRADED FUNDS

ETFs are investment entities that issue securities that trade continuously on public exchanges. Most ETFs are legally structured as open-end investment companies,<sup>2</sup> and the majority aim to track a securities index. Unlike mutual funds, which allow investors to acquire or redeem shares only at the end of the trading day, ETFs enable investors to trade their shares continuously throughout the trading day.

ETFs combine features of both open- and closed-end funds. Like open-end mutual funds, ETFs allow the creation and redemption of shares in the fund. Like closed-end funds, the shares of ETFs are traded on exchanges. However, the open-end property creates a much greater opportunity for effective arbitrage in ETFs than in closed-end funds, which explains the significantly smaller deviations of ETF prices from the net asset value (NAV) than occurs with closed-end funds (Lee, Shleifer & Thaler 1991; Pontiff 1996).

There are two major types of ETFs, which differ in how they replicate the underlying index: physical ETFs and synthetic ETFs. Physical ETFs attempt to closely follow the return of their benchmark index by holding all or a representative sample of the index stocks in their portfolios, with weights to closely mimic those in the index. In contrast, synthetic ETFs track an index by entering into derivative contracts, such as total return swaps on the benchmark index. The creation of ETF shares occurs most often in kind for physical ETFs and in cash for synthetic ETFs. Synthetic ETFs are more popular in Europe than in the United States.

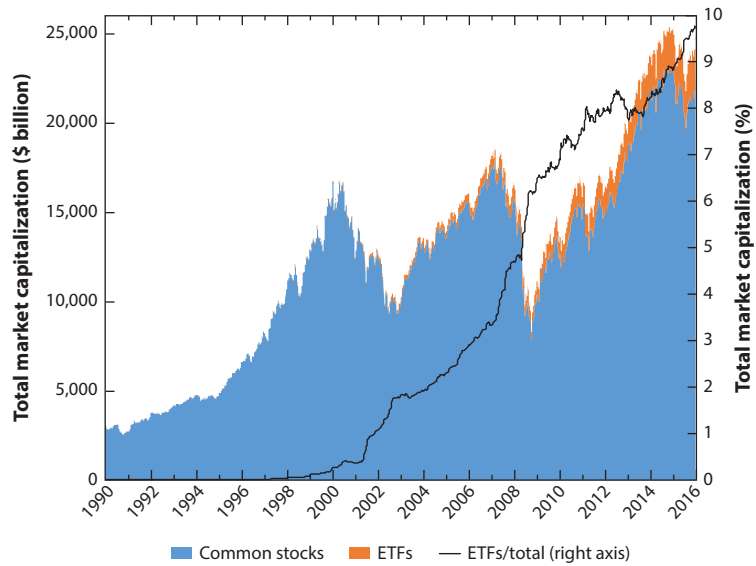
The two types of ETFs are subject to different sources of counterparty risk. Physical ETFs engage in security lending (see, e.g., Blocher & Whaley 2016), which exposes the fund to the risk of default of the security borrower. Synthetic ETFs are exposed to the risk of default of the counterparty in the derivative contract. Of course, both types of agreements require collateral.

The popularity of ETFs has skyrocketed in recent years. ETF daily trading volume exceeded 36% of overall stock market trading volume in the first half of 2016, despite the fact that ETFs' capitalization is only about 10% of the market (see **Figures 1** and **2**). ETFs are also popular instruments for short-selling purposes (hedging or directional bearish bets), with about 20% of the overall short interest on US exchanges being in ETF shares (see **Figure 3**).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Some ETFs are classified as unit investment trusts (such as the SPY, the ETF on the S&P 500 sponsored by State Street). Unit investment trusts may not engage in security lending of their portfolio securities, which is one of the main differences with other ETFs organized as open-end investment companies.

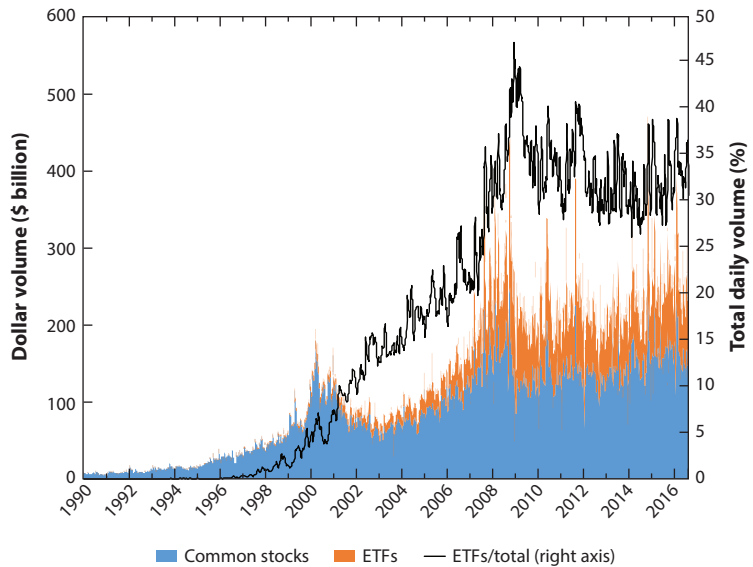
<sup>3</sup>SPY is considered the most traded security in the world, with an average daily volume of more than 115 million shares in 2017.



**Figure 1**

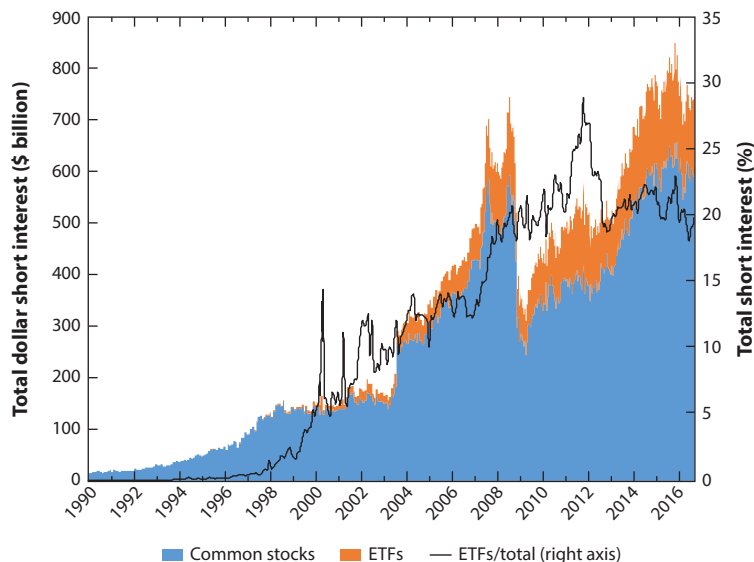
Time series of the total market capitalization and the assets under management of ETFs.

The market price of ETF shares often diverges from the NAV of the underlying basket because of asynchronous trading of the ETF and the underlying assets. This fact can generate an opportunity for arbitrage between the ETF shares and the underlying basket of securities when the



**Figure 2**

Time series of daily trading volume.



**Figure 3**

Time series of short interest.

discrepancy exceeds the transaction costs. Two types of market participants are poised to benefit from such differences in prices: APs and secondary market arbitrageurs.<sup>4</sup>

APs are a small group of institutions that are allowed to trade directly with the ETF sponsor in the primary market. These transactions typically take place in kind, with securities being exchanged for ETF shares. The APs help to eliminate price discrepancies by purchasing the cheaper asset on the market and selling the more expensive one. When the ETF price is lower than the NAV, the APs purchase ETF shares and redeem them for the underlying securities. When the ETF price is higher than the NAV, the APs purchase the underlying securities and exchange them for newly issued ETF shares. Finally, the APs turn back to the market and sell either the underlying securities that they received or the newly issued ETF notes. These trades apply downward pressure on the prices of the expensive asset and upward pressure on the price of the less expensive asset, so price discrepancy is kept under narrow bounds.<sup>5</sup> Arbitrageurs can monitor the ETF price as well as the intraday indicative net asset value (IIV or INAV) of the ETF basket during the day on most financial platforms. ETF INAVs are computed using the intraday dollar values of the ETF creation baskets and are published every 15 seconds for underlying baskets that trade continuously in US markets.

The primary market transactions to create or redeem ETF shares occur in large blocks called creation units. Although more than 70% of the ETFs traded in the United States have creation units with blocks of 50,000 ETF shares, a few ETFs have larger creation units, equivalent to more than 100,000 shares. A daily creation basket provides the specific names and quantities of securities or other assets designed to track the performance of the portfolio as a whole, and which the APs

<sup>4</sup>These could be market makers or other investors such as hedge funds and proprietary trading desks.

<sup>5</sup>Broman (2016a) estimates the distribution of the extent of the discrepancy between ETF prices and the NAV values based on ETF mid-point quotes at the end of the day over the 2006–2012 period. He documents that the standard deviation of the discrepancy is about 0.10% for large ETFs and 0.15% for small ETFs; see also Petajisto (2017).

need to deposit in exchange for an ETF creation unit.<sup>6</sup> The AP generally pays all of the trading costs associated with the operation along with an additional creation/redemption fee paid to the ETF sponsor. This fee averages \$1,047 per creation unit, with a median fee of \$500 per creation unit (less than 1 basis point for most ETFs). According to Antoniewicz & Heinrichs (2014), there are, on average, 34 APs per ETF. Some AP firms also function as ETF market makers by providing continuous quotes and liquidity for an ETF's shares in the secondary market. In the process of creating and redeeming ETF shares with domestic underlying securities, APs are generally not required to post collateral up front unless they fail to clear these transactions within a  $T + 3$ <sup>7</sup> settlement date.<sup>8</sup> In some cases, certain APs have three additional days to settle trades (a total of  $T + 6$ ) if their failure to deliver is the result of bona fide market making. Further details about the mechanics and operation of ETFs are provided by Antoniewicz & Heinrichs (2014), Hill et al. (2015), and Hill (2016).

The second mechanism through which ETF and NAV prices are arbitrated is the trading activity of market participants. Specifically, secondary market arbitrageurs are market makers or traders who take a position (long or short) in the ETF and an opposite position in the main components of the index or a closely related instrument (e.g., another ETF or futures contract), hoping that the discrepancy in prices will eventually disappear. This, of course, is not pure textbook arbitrage because it entails the risk of widening price discrepancy between the ETF and the underlying securities, and the horizon over which convergence will occur is uncertain (Shleifer & Vishny 1997). In today's markets, such trading activity is often performed by hedge funds through automatic algorithmic trading or by some of the same firms that make markets for ETFs.

### 3. THE RISE OF PASSIVE INVESTING

Investment managers in the asset management industry can be broadly classified as engaging in either active or passive investing. Active managers engage in stock-picking securities and market timing to beat a benchmark or to generate an absolute return. In contrast, passive managers construct a portfolio that aims to replicate the performance of an index, such as the S&P 500. Whereas the performance of active investors is typically measured as absolute returns or index-adjusted returns (alpha), the performance of passive investors is measured by their ability to minimize the tracking error with respect to the index. ETFs are passive investment vehicles in nature; they own a basket of securities that mimics an index. Active ETFs, a recent innovation in the ETF space, try to beat their benchmark much like active mutual funds. To date, however, they represent only 1.8% of the assets under management (AUM) in the US equity ETF market (see **Table 1**).

ETFs began trading widely in the mid-1990s [the first ETF in the US market was the Standard and Poor's Depository Receipt (SPDR), identified by the ticker SPY, which began trading in 1993], and their popularity has expanded rapidly ever since. **Table 1** presents time-series statistics about US and foreign stock ownership by active mutual funds, passive mutual funds, and ETFs, in addition to ownership by fixed-income funds. In mid-2016, ETFs directly owned about \$1.35 trillion of the US common stock market, compared with the approximately \$6.8 trillion

<sup>6</sup>In certain cases (e.g., some fixed income ETFs), the creation or redemption basket might contain different combinations of securities and/or cash relative to the overall ETF portfolio. In other cases, actively managed ETFs, for example, are required to publish their complete portfolio holdings in addition to their creation and redemption baskets. For further information, see Shreck & Antoniewicz (2012).

<sup>7</sup>The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) adopted a  $T + 2$  settlement cycle effective in September 2017 (SEC 2017).

<sup>8</sup>Creation and redemption orders are processed by the National Securities Clearing Corporation (NSCC), a subsidiary of the Depository Trust and Clearing Corporation (DTCC). The creation and redemption baskets are maintained at the DTCC on a daily basis by the ETF sponsor.

**Table 1** Time series of assets under management

US equity funds					Foreign equity funds				Fixed-income funds			
ETFs			Mutual funds		ETFs		Mutual funds		ETFs		Mutual funds	
Year	Index	Active	Index	Active	Index	Active	Index	Active	Index	Active	Index	Active
1999	31.2	0.0	334.9	2,632.6	2.0	0.0	19.1	504.3	0.0	0.0	20.0	2,181.3
2000	63.0	0.1	327.1	2,586.2	2.0	0.0	19.2	457.5	0.0	0.0	23.9	2,403.0
2001	78.7	0.0	308.3	2,231.8	2.9	0.0	17.7	364.5	0.0	0.0	33.5	2,890.1
2002	91.8	0.0	255.3	1,708.5	5.3	0.0	18.3	310.4	3.9	0.0	42.6	3,007.6
2003	131.0	0.0	365.1	2,325.1	13.9	0.0	31.5	448.5	4.7	0.0	46.1	2,887.2
2004	183.6	0.1	443.6	2,687.7	33.1	0.0	51.1	601.7	8.5	0.0	54.3	2,803.5
2005	219.9	0.0	486.3	2,918.1	64.0	0.0	79.1	791.4	15.0	0.0	63.6	2,953.1
2006	282.5	0.5	592.0	3,299.1	107.7	0.0	125.9	1,105.3	20.5	0.0	75.9	3,364.7
2007	384.3	2.4	665.5	3,532.0	169.7	0.0	177.7	1,396.4	34.3	0.0	109.5	4,242.7
2008	289.9	11.3	479.2	2,323.7	104.2	0.1	102.4	845.5	55.6	0.0	134.3	5,001.6
2009	435.5	10.5	660.0	2,998.9	199.1	0.3	130.0	1,185.1	100.1	0.0	185.8	4,986.8
2010	565.8	11.6	823.5	3,496.8	260.0	0.8	184.1	1,383.6	132.3	1.5	233.9	4,910.5
2011	612.2	11.7	856.9	3,349.6	223.0	0.0	179.8	1,190.3	183.1	3.8	276.1	4,913.6
2012	755.7	11.3	1,024.5	3,662.9	305.0	0.0	234.6	1,424.3	235.7	9.7	319.8	5,292.1
2013	1,012.7	13.2	1,432.8	4,774.0	378.1	0.0	306.1	1,799.4	227.7	10.9	324.2	5,127.9
2014	1,233.1	19.5	1,706.2	5,065.8	396.7	1.2	357.5	1,778.9	280.5	9.8	397.5	5,282.8
2015	1,235.3	22.5	1,688.7	4,975.7	455.3	0.8	319.5	1,953.4	324.9	12.8	427.9	5,266.5
2016	1,329.4	24.0	1,805.6	5,044.1	434.5	0.9	349.2	1,958.9	381.6	15.5	481.1	5,458.8

The table presents the time series of assets under management in billions of US dollars. Index funds include both traditional index funds and smart-beta index funds. Source: authors' calculations and the Center for Research in Securities Prices. Abbreviation: ETF, exchange-traded fund.

owned by mutual funds.<sup>9</sup> **Table 1** shows that the growth rate of AUM is dramatically different across fund types. From 1999 to 2016, US equity index mutual funds grew from \$0.3 trillion to \$1.8 trillion, and actively managed US equity mutual funds grew from \$2.6 trillion to \$5.0 trillion. In contrast, US equity ETFs grew from \$0.03 trillion to \$1.3 trillion. Trends are similar for foreign equity funds and fixed-income funds.

### 3.1. Migration from Active to Passive Investment

In recent decades, index investing has become popular among both individual investors and institutions. This change has prompted researchers to attempt to explain trends in the asset management space and explore their implications for market quality (French 2008, Stambaugh 2014).

There could be multiple reasons for the migration from active to passive investments. Investors could have realized that the market is more efficient than previously thought, meaning that low-cost passive investments produce comparable or even superior performance (e.g., Sharpe ratio) to after-fees active funds. Also, index funds provide a cost-efficient way to expose investors to certain common risk factors (Cong & Xu 2016). Stambaugh (2014) reports a sharp drop in the share of active funds over the past three decades and analyzes an equilibrium model in which active

<sup>9</sup>Authors' calculation. These figures show ownership by ETFs and mutual funds that are traded in the United States. In other words, they exclude commodities, futures-based instruments, fixed income, global equities, leveraged ETFs, and short bias.

and passive management coexist. Active management benefits from exploiting the noise in prices that retail traders create. In equilibrium, the remainder of capital is invested in passive funds. The increase in passive investment means that arbitrage opportunities disappear, indicating that the market is becoming more efficient. Not all researchers share the view that the rise of passive asset management is an indication of improved market efficiency. Bond & García (2016) present a model in which indexing reduces investors' welfare. The rationale is that the cash flows of some stocks have high exposure to economic shocks and therefore command relatively low stock prices. Given their small relative weight in the index, an indexing investor will have low exposure to these stocks. However, if an investor is not exposed to the same economic shocks, he or she will be better off having greater exposure to these stocks. Thus, indexing may lead to suboptimal portfolio composition for some investors. Wurgler (2011) warns against the adverse effects of rising indexation. He argues that indexing can create distortion in securities' valuations and provides examples such as inclusion and deletion effects (see, e.g., Shleifer 1986; Kaul, Mehrotra & Morck 2002; Wurgler & Zhuravskaya 2002; Greenwood 2005), comovement of the stock with the index (see, e.g., Greenwood & Sosner 2007; Basak & Pavlova 2013, 2016; Da & Shive 2014), and higher sensitivity to crashes (because many market participants change their index exposure on the basis of past performance). Baltussen, Da & van Bakkum (2016) conduct a cross-country study and find that the degree of presence of indexing vehicles (futures, ETFs, and index mutual funds) in the stock market is associated with stronger negative serial correlation of the underlying indices.

A parallel trend in the marketplace over the past few decades has been an increase in concentration in the asset management space. A likely explanation is the economies of scale that passive asset managers enjoy, which makes consolidation attractive. This trend is discussed by Ben-David et al. (2015). The researchers find that the top 10 institutional investors owned about 5% of the US stock market in 1980, and that this share had increased to over 23% by the end of 2014. The authors hypothesize that large institutional investors cause an increase in the volatility of the securities held in their underlying portfolios. The idea is that units (e.g., funds) within large institutional investors share common resources such as marketing, research, and risk management departments. As a result, fund flows are correlated across units, and investment decisions by unit managers are similar. Both factors cause units to engage in large trades, compared to what a collection of independent units would engage in. These large trades ultimately increase the volatility of the traded securities. The authors present evidence for the correlation induced by central resources: They document that mutual funds that are part of the same family have fund flows that are more correlated and their stock holdings are more similar than for independent funds. To establish causality, the authors compare the volatility of stocks before and after mergers of large institutional investors (as institutions tend to consolidate some of their central functions following mergers). Indeed, the authors find that stocks owned by the merged entity have higher volatility than they did pre-merger.

The rise in passive investment also has implications for corporate policies as the nature and composition of institutional investors change. Bradley & Litan (2011a,b) argue that ETFs and index funds are poor at corporate governance. Consequently, private firms are reluctant to list on stock exchanges because passive investors, and primarily ETFs, slow down price discovery and eventually jam value signals to managers. Empirical studies have generally found results contradicting this claim. Boone & White (2015) use the change in the ownership of institutional investors following index reconstitution to test the information production of firms. When a stock moves from being at the bottom of the Russell 1000 index to the top of the Russell 2000 index, there is a sharp increase in institutional ownership, primarily among passive indexers. They find that as ownership by index funds increases, firms become more transparent in their reporting. Appel, Gormley & Keim (2016) use a similar natural experiment to measure the effects of



ownership by passive investors on corporate governance. They show that, in fact, passive investors actively promote strong corporate governance. Ownership by passive investors has a positive causal effect on a host of issues in corporate governance, such as the removal of poison pills, restrictions on shareholders' ability to call special meetings, fewer dual-class share structures, and more independent directors.

### 3.2. Can Exchange-Traded Funds Coexist with Traditional Investment Vehicles?

Empirical studies find that ETFs gained market share at the expense of traditional indexing products. Agapova (2011) studies mutual funds and ETFs in the 2000–2004 period and finds evidence for both substitution and clientele effects. Although ETFs and mutual funds provide similar investment index exposure and thus are substitutes, the products may appeal to different types of investors. ETFs may be more tax efficient and therefore may appeal to tax-sensitive investors. Furthermore, mutual funds may appeal to short-term investors because of the absence of commission fees, whereas ETFs may appeal to long-term investors because of lower management fees. Ben-David, Franzoni & Moussawi (2013) test these propositions and find opposite results: Investors in ETFs have significantly shorter horizons. Barnhart & Rosenstein (2010) present evidence that, as ETFs gained market share in the United States, the discounts of closed-end funds widened and their trading volume declined. Market participants argue that ETFs are aggressively competing with futures to win big investors, with many ETFs having lower fees than the futures roll costs.<sup>10</sup>

Several researchers argue that ETFs and mutual funds have distinct features and therefore appeal to different audiences. Guedj & Huang (2009) propose a model that explores whether ETFs and open-end mutual funds can coexist in equilibrium. In their model, ETFs are more efficient indexers but are exposed to liquidity shocks resulting from continuous trading. In contrast, mutual funds are less sensitive to liquidity shocks and are therefore valued by investors who are averse to such exposure. In equilibrium, ETFs offer a cheaper investment option for investors who are willing to bear the liquidity shock risk, and mutual funds provide implicit insurance against such shocks. Madhavan et al. (2014) argue that ETFs are a superior investment alternative for fully funded investors over index futures because ETFs provide low transaction costs and avoid the mispricing that often occurs around the futures rolling dates.

Sponsors of ETFs also compete with traditional asset managers for fees. In addition to the management fees that are charged to the ETF fund, sponsors of ETFs benefit from fees generated from lending the securities owned by the fund. Blocher & Whaley (2016) report that lending fees are as important as management fees and that, when managers of stock ETFs have discretion, they tilt their portfolio holdings toward stocks with higher lending fees. This practice raises the concern that ETFs are exposed to collateral risk, which could occur when borrowers of shares fail to deliver promised shares at the same time that the ETF is required to redeem its own shares (Mackintosh & Lin 2011). Evans et al. (2017) report evidence that recent increases in ETF settlement failures are mainly related to the creation/redemption process when APs/market makers delay the creation and delivery settlement of ETF creation units for several days after supplying the ETF shares in the secondary market, a phenomenon called operational shorting. The authors find that high levels of ETF operational shorting and settlement failures are associated with subsequent increases in financial stress. Hurlin et al. (2014) investigate this claim among European ETFs during 6 months

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<sup>10</sup> Because futures contracts have an expiration date, one must renew the position every time the futures expires, an action that involves a cost (see Rennison 2016, Toplensky 2016).

in 2012 and find no evidence of this buildup in risk during the studied period. It is important to note, however, that the universe that they study is limited in both time and scope; thus, their results do not necessarily extend to other economic situations, such as market stress.

The substitution of traditional investment vehicles with ETFs has additional implications for investors. Bhattacharya et al. (2017) report that retail traders who invest in ETFs perform worse than retail traders who stick with traditional funds. They argue that the ease of ETF trading leads retail investors to attempt to time the market. Because retail investors are bad traders in general (Barber & Odean 2000, Frazzini & Lamont 2008), this behavior results in poor performance. In the same vein, Goetzmann & Massa (2003) find that index mutual fund investors appear to chase returns: Flows are stronger following positive past returns. These flows do not have predictive power about future returns. Clifford, Fulkerson & Jordan (2014) and Broman (2016c) conduct similar analyses using more recent ETF data and find essentially similar patterns. Whereas the phenomenon of chasing returns by investors is known from active mutual funds (Berk & Green 2004), where it is often attributed to responding to news about managerial skill, it appears irrational for investors to chase the returns of a passive index.

#### **4. DO EXCHANGE-TRADED FUNDS IMPACT ASSET PRICES? THEORY AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**

Through the continuous arbitrage between ETFs and the underlying securities, ETFs create an additional layer of liquidity on top of the underlying assets. This design could cause two apparently opposite effects. The additional liquidity that ETFs add can enhance price discovery in the underlying securities, hence making them more informationally efficient. At the same time, nonfundamental trades at the ETF could propagate to the underlying securities, leading to mispricing. It is entirely plausible that these two effects coexist.

##### **4.1. Price Discovery and Liquidity**

Because of their low costs and high liquidity, many investors may view ETFs as their preferred investment vehicle for taking directional bets on the index (Stratmann & Welborn 2012, Broman & Shum 2016), therefore introducing index-related information into ETF prices. In turn, APs and arbitrageurs ensure that the prices of the underlying securities do not diverge from those of the ETF. The result is that this trading activity helps transmit systematic information from the ETF to the underlying securities and provides liquidity to the underlying securities. Thus, ETFs could potentially improve price discovery at the index level and enhance liquidity at the level of the underlying securities.

Lettau & Madhavan (2016), Madhavan (2016), and Madhavan & Sobczyk (2016) advance the view that ETFs enhance the functioning of financial markets. The researchers argue that because ETFs provide a cost-effective tool for investors who wish to make directional bets on the index, they will reflect the new information before the underlying securities. These researchers claim that, as long as arbitrage is frictionless, ETFs do not propagate shocks into securities, but rather expedite price discovery. In other words, the price discovery at the ETF level leads to price discovery at the underlying securities level.

Several studies confirm empirically that ETFs enhance price discovery. Richie, Daigler & Gleason (2008) compare the comovement of S&P 500 futures, the main ETF on this index (SPY), and the underlying portfolio. They conclude that prices deviate little between the futures contract and ETFs but that there are larger deviations from the underlying portfolio. Glosten, Nallareddy & Zou (2016) find that stocks incorporate information more quickly once they are in ETF portfolios. They argue that some of the increased comovement of stocks with indices that

has been documented by other researchers (see below) can be explained by better incorporation of systematic information into stock prices. Wermers & Xue (2015), in a study sponsored by Lyxor Asset Management, also report enhanced price discovery at the ETF level. Their goal is to separate informed trading from noise trading in ETFs. Their identifying assumption is that informed investors trade the ETF or futures. Therefore, on days when ETFs lead the underlying securities portfolio, informed trading dominates. In contrast, on days when ETFs lag the index, the ETF is primarily traded by noise traders. Using this identification strategy, they find that price movements driven by informed traders dominate and are permanent. Price movements driven by noise traders reverse on average. Also, Marshall, Nguyen & Visaltanachoti (2013) find that ETFs move ahead of the underlying portfolio, especially when the liquidity of the underlying securities is low. Li & Zhu (2016) present another mechanism through which ETFs may enhance price efficiency. They argue that arbitrageurs use ETFs to circumvent short-sale constraints at the stock level. The authors use data on short interest of ETFs to compute the indirect short interest that is applied to each individual stock through ETFs that hold it. They document that this measure of stock-level short interest predicts stock returns and conclude that ETFs help improve market efficiency through this channel.

Other researchers present evidence suggesting that ETFs degrade informational efficiency of the securities in their baskets. Da & Shive (2014) document increased comovement in returns in the stocks that are part of an index. They argue that when investors trade on news related to the index, they trade the ETF more actively. The mechanical basket trading of the underlying securities tied to the ETF through arbitrage exhibits higher return comovement with the index and a lower degree of idiosyncratic volatility. Therefore, individual stock response is expected to be less timely and less sensitive to idiosyncratic earnings news. An implication of this result is that the lagged response to idiosyncratic shocks may exacerbate certain anomalies (e.g., postearnings announcement drift). Israeli, Lee & Sridharan (2017) show that stocks owned by ETFs have higher trading costs; have higher comovement with the index; exhibit lower informational efficiency, measured as lower future earnings response coefficients; and receive less analyst coverage. Bradley & Litan (2011a,b) argue that private firms are reluctant to list on stock exchanges because passive investors, primarily ETFs, slow down price discovery. Broman (2016a) and Brown, Davies & Ringgenberg (2016) document that the degree and direction of mispricing between ETFs and their underlying securities comove across ETFs. Both groups conclude that ETFs attract short-horizon noise traders with correlated demand across investment styles. Broman (2016b) provides further evidence that ETFs attract sentiment-driven noise traders. He examines ETFs that trade on multiple countries and documents that country-specific ETF mispricings are correlated with the country-specific stock market.

Another strand of empirical studies finds that ETFs have conflicting effects on liquidity provision to the underlying securities. In one direction, as argued above, ownership by ETFs can increase liquidity in the underlying securities. This happens through the arbitrage trades that take place between the ETF and the underlying securities. Marshall, Nguyen & Visaltanachoti (2015) document patterns that illustrate the activity of arbitrageurs. They find that the liquidity of ETFs is correlated with the liquidity of the underlying stocks. The more liquid the underlying stocks are, the greater the ability of arbitrageurs to engage in arbitrage trades, making the ETF liquid as well. Agarwal et al. (2016) document that the liquidity of ETFs comoves with the liquidity of the assets in the ETF baskets. The authors show that higher ETF ownership is associated with higher comovement of liquidity among large and small stocks alike.<sup>11</sup> They further document that this

<sup>11</sup> This study is related to two previous papers. Coughenour & Saad (2004) test whether liquidity provision is correlated across stocks that are assigned to the same New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) specialists. The idea is that capital constraints are

comovement of liquidity has increased in recent years and that it is greater during crisis versus noncrisis periods. In the mutual funds market, Schultz & Shive (2016) show that ownership by mutual funds increases the liquidity of the underlying bonds through flows to and from the mutual funds, which induce trading.

Conversely, some argue that ETFs can decrease the liquidity of the underlying securities. Specifically, because ETFs provide an inexpensive way to trade, they can crowd out traders from the underlying assets and decrease liquidity. Petajisto (2017) finds a significant deviation of ETF prices from those of the underlying assets, especially for illiquid assets. Piccotti (2014) documents that in some ETFs, the deviation from the value of the underlying assets is permanent, which he argues may be the result of market segmentation. Investors may be willing to pay a premium for access to assets with greater liquidity. Dannhauser (2017) finds that the introduction of corporate bond ETFs leads to a decrease in the liquidity of the underlying bonds, suggesting a crowding-out effect. Pan & Zeng (2016) propose a complementary effect: Because APs have a dual role in financial markets—APs and market makers—they may occasionally consume more liquidity than they provide. This may happen when there is selling pressure by investors during times of market stress. APs may not be willing to engage in arbitrage when the underlying securities are illiquid. The authors present evidence that APs' trading volume declines when market volatility (captured by the VIX) is high, suggesting that APs operate like arbitrageurs who have limited capital, withdrawing from the market when volatility is high (Ben-David, Franzoni & Moussawi 2012; Nagel 2012).

## 4.2. Propagation of Demand Shocks to Underlying Securities

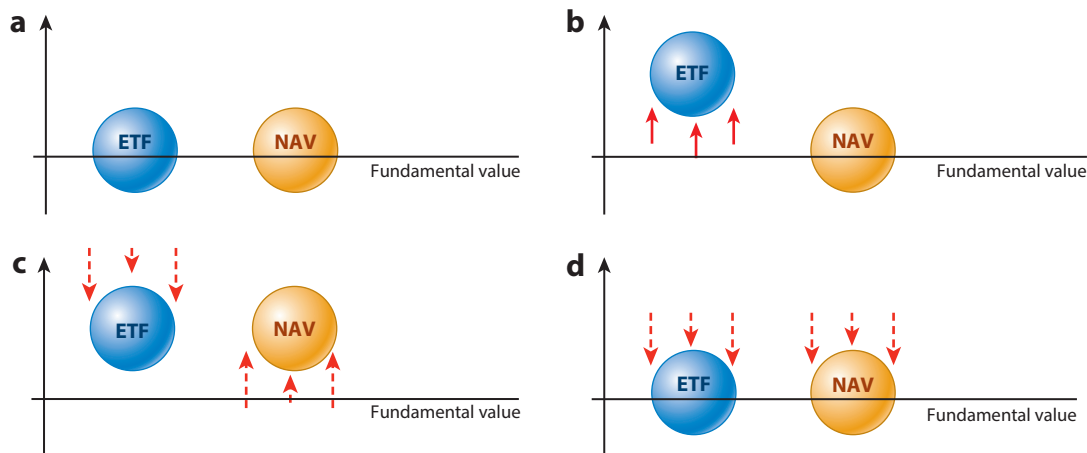
The additional layer of liquidity that ETFs provide may also serve as a transmission mechanism for nonfundamental shocks from ETFs to the underlying securities. Malamud (2015) develops a model for ETFs in which APs create and redeem ETF shares. He shows that the creation/redemption mechanism propagates temporary liquidity shocks into the underlying securities. The model also indicates that, as the liquidity of the underlying securities increases, the degree of shock propagation increases.

A key component in the proposed mechanism for noise transmission is the existence of demand shocks at the ETF level. In recent years, ETFs have seen high share turnover (see **Figure 2**) and are traded by traders with short horizons (Ben-David, Franzoni & Moussawi 2013). Many of these investors tend to make directional bets and hold the securities for a short period of time. As such, they may use ETFs as low-cost investment conduits for these bets. Stratmann & Welborn (2012) and Broman & Shum (2016) find evidence to support this conjecture. They document that investors use ETFs as a way to take short-term directional bets on the market. Previous literature on short-term investors shows the adverse effects of investors with a short horizon. Stein (1987) argues that the entry of short-term speculators lowers the informational efficiency of prices, deterring long-term investors from participating in the market. Cella, Ellul & Giannetti (2013) find that the presence of short-horizon institutional investors during market turmoil exacerbates price drops because these investors exit the market. This evidence is consistent with findings of Ben-David, Franzoni & Moussawi (2012), who show that hedge funds, which on average have higher turnover than other investors, exited the stock market during the financial crash of 2008–2009.

Some studies have tested whether ETF ownership causes higher volatility in the underlying securities. Ben-David, Franzoni & Moussawi (2013) propose that a demand shock can move the

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common per specialist. Koch, Ruenzi & Starks (2016) provide evidence that stock-level liquidity is correlated across stocks with common ownership.



**Figure 4**

Illustration of the propagation of liquidity shocks via arbitrage. (a) Initial equilibrium. (b) Liquidity shock to ETF. (c) Initial outcome of arbitrage: The shock is propagated to the NAV and the ETF price starts reverting to the fundamental value. (d) Equilibrium reestablished: After some time, both the ETF price and the NAV revert to the fundamental value.

ETF price away from the fundamental value (**Figure 4a,b**). If there is limited liquidity in the underlying securities' market, the underlying securities' prices are temporarily pushed away from the fundamental value (**Figure 4c**). In the long run, liquidity flows back into the market, and both the ETF price and the underlying securities' prices revert back to their fundamental value (**Figure 4d**). The repeated arrival of demand shocks in the ETF market, through a mechanism like the one just described, can create a link between ETF ownership of stocks and return volatility. Ben-David, Franzoni & Moussawi (2013) identify a causal effect of ETF ownership on stock volatility using an exogenous shift in ETF ownership that occurs annually through the Russell 1000/2000 reconstitution. Stocks that switch indices experience a sharp change in ETF ownership. The Russell 1000 and Russell 2000 indices are based on stock market capitalization: The Russell 1000 includes the largest 1,000 traded stocks in the United States, and the Russell 2000 tracks the performance of the next 2,000 smaller stocks. Once per year, Russell reconstitutes the indices, and some stocks switch membership according to a mechanical rule. Some stocks in the Russell 2000 that have experienced an increase in their market capitalization switch to the Russell 1000, and those whose market capitalization has decreased switch from the Russell 1000 to the Russell 2000. The researchers use an identification strategy based on the idea that ETF ownership is higher for the top stocks in the Russell 2000 than for the bottom stocks at the Russell 1000, despite the fact that members in the latter group have larger market capitalization than those in the former group. The authors control for changes in other types of institutional ownership and document that the effect of ETF ownership is statistically and economically significant. Using this identification strategy, the authors conclude that stock volatility increases substantially following this exogenous increase in ETF ownership. Furthermore, the authors show that ETF flows correlate with price movements in the same direction as the flows. This price movement partially reverts over the next few days, consistent with the initial shock being liquidity motivated. These findings suggest that the increased volatility is, at least in part, nonfundamental. Krause, Ehsani & Lien (2014) also find that stocks owned by ETFs have higher volatility and higher volume. Their setting, however, lacks a strategy to identify exogenous variation in ETF ownership. Thus, the higher volatility may be a result of a selection process in which ETFs end up holding more liquid—and thus more volatile—stocks.

Other researchers argue that price reversals at the underlying securities level could be evidence of ETF flows putting temporary price pressure on the underlying stocks, which ultimately revert. Staer (2014) finds that ETF flows are contemporaneous with index returns and that these price effects partly revert after a few days. Baltussen, Da & van Bakkum (2016) find that the serial correlation of stock markets became more negative following indexation. They interpret this result as evidence that index products impound nonfundamental shocks (which then revert) into the underlying security prices.

The same mechanism of propagation of nonfundamental shocks from ETFs to the underlying securities should also apply to other investment vehicles and to derivatives. Indeed, most studies in this area have found confirming evidence. Coval & Stafford (2007), for instance, find that mutual funds that experience strong outflows engage in fire sales, which have a significant and long-lasting price impact on the underlying securities. In the futures market, MacKinlay & Ramaswamy (1988) report that the volatility of index futures is higher than that of the corresponding index itself. In addition, they find that the idiosyncratic component of futures' returns tends to be autocorrelated, suggesting that it is driven by temporary mispricing. Chang, Cheng & Pinegar (1999) document that the introduction of futures trading increased the volatility of stocks in the Nikkei index. Roll, Schwartz & Subrahmanyam (2007) present evidence of Granger causality between prices in the futures and equity markets. In contrast, Bessembinder & Seguin (1992) determine that only the unexpected trading activity of stock futures is correlated with stock volatility. They conclude that these patterns are consistent with the idea that futures trading enhances the liquidity of the underlying securities without adding significant noise.

Another approach to testing for market inefficiency relates to the correlation of securities with the index, once the securities are owned by ETFs. The conjecture is that ETF prices are set by investor demand for the index, as opposed to demand for the individual securities. Therefore, ETF prices primarily reflect systematic shocks, and because of the arbitrage mechanism, the underlying securities will display greater comovement with the index. Basak & Pavlova (2013, 2016) propose a similar mechanism in the context of institutional investment. In their model, when institutional investors measure their performance relative to an index, they overweight assets that are included in the index, leading to an increase in asset prices, price volatility, and correlation with other indices.

Empirical studies have found evidence supporting this mechanism. Da & Shive (2014) show that stocks that are part of an index tend to comove with the index and thus lose their idiosyncratic volatility. The effect is stronger for illiquid stocks and at times of market turbulence. They instrument ETF ownership by the inception and closure of ETF funds. Sullivan & Xiong (2012) and Israeli, Lee & Sridharan (2017) find similar evidence in an empirical setting in which ETF ownership is endogenous. Chincó & Fos (2016) develop a model in which many ETFs need to rebalance their portfolios. They show that small changes in stock prices can trigger large rebalancing cascades that affect the prices of all the securities within the same ETF. They conclude that there is a feedback effect in which the rebalancing activity exacerbates the original price shock that prompted the rebalancing.

It is important to note that the apparently conflicting evidence about improved price discovery in the presence of ETFs and the evidence for greater inefficiencies are not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive. It is possible that prices more quickly reflect certain pieces of information, and, at the same time, also are more impacted by liquidity shocks. Bhattacharya & O'Hara (2016) propose a model in which ETFs hold assets that are less liquid than the ETF itself. Therefore, some of the price discovery happens at the ETF level. Market makers try to extract relevant information from the ETF about the underlying securities. However, market makers extract a noisy signal, which causes them to propagate noise when they trade the underlying securities.



### 4.3. Leveraged ETFs

Leveraged ETFs have attracted substantial attention from academics, regulators, and market commentators because these ETFs need to actively rebalance their portfolios on an ongoing and predictable basis toward the end of the trading day. Leveraged ETFs strive to achieve returns that are a multiple of the underlying index (e.g.,  $\times 2$ ,  $\times 3$ ), or the inverse return on the index (often called bear ETFs), as in a short strategy. To achieve their desired return patterns, these funds rely on leverage or derivatives and need to rebalance their portfolios following price movements of the underlying index. The concern expressed by several parties is that these rebalancing actions have a significant impact on the market. For example, leveraged ETFs were blamed in the 1% run-up in the last 18 minutes of trade of the S&P 500 on October 10, 2011, despite the absence of any news (Sorkin 2011). According to Cheng & Madhavan (2009), the dynamics of leveraged ETFs lead to same-direction rebalancing (even for bear funds), akin to portfolio insurance. They also argue that short-term speculators are attracted to these products because they allow traders to make short-term, highly leveraged bets. Jiang & Yan (2016) explore the nature of flows to regular and leveraged ETFs and show that regular ETF flows can be characterized as momentum traders, whereas leveraged ETF flows are contrarians.

Several studies have attempted to test the claim that leveraged ETFs create a price impact when rebalancing their portfolios. Bai, Bond & Hatch (2015) focus on the real estate sector and find that rebalancing by leveraged ETFs increases the volatility of the underlying stocks and contributes to price momentum. Tuzun (2014) calls leveraged ETFs “the new portfolio insurers” because their rebalancing reinforces the original price movement and thus increases market volatility. His estimation shows that leveraged ETFs contributed significantly to market volatility during the financial crisis of 2008–2009. Shum et al. (2016) present evidence that stock-level end-of-day volatilities are higher following the rebalancing of leveraged ETFs. In contrast, Ivanov & Lenkey (2016) argue that claims about the impact of leveraged ETFs are exaggerated. They show that flows into ETFs counterbalance the hedging demand of ETFs, mitigating their effects on the underlying securities. Despite this compelling argument, the effects documented by Bai, Bond & Hatch (2015) and Shum et al. (2016) use net rebalancing, i.e., after flows in the opposite direction are taken into account.

ETFs that track volatility indices have properties similar to leveraged ETFs. Volatility indices do not reflect the returns of a constant basket of traded assets, but rather are calculated based on prices of derivatives with weights that change daily, according to the expiration date of the derivatives (e.g., the VIX in the United States). Thus, the ETFs that track the index need to rebalance their portfolios daily in order to match the returns of the index. This setting is ideal to test whether rebalancing affects the prices of the underlying derivatives. Dong (2016) reports that the introduction of VIX ETFs, which hold VIX futures, created strong predicted demand because of rebalancing on the VIX futures and caused a predictable price impact.

### 4.4. Exchange-Traded Funds During Episodes of Market Turmoil

ETFs received much attention during several episodes when markets tumbled and ETF prices appeared to deviate from the prices of the portfolios of the underlying securities. These incidents prompted regulators to be concerned about the possibility that ETFs serve as a transmission conduit for liquidity shocks (Office of Financial Research 2013). In particular, the concern is that during market turbulence, market makers and arbitrageurs cease intermediation activity because they do not have reliable pricing information. As a result, their absence can lead to illiquidity in the underlying securities, amplification of the shock, and transmission to other assets.

During several episodes in recent years, ETFs have displayed a high level of illiquidity during times of market turbulence, which has led regulators and academics to investigate whether ETFs exacerbate liquidity shocks. Perhaps the most well-known example of a market breakdown in recent years was the Flash Crash of May 6, 2010. On that day, the market was volatile because news about the Greek debt crisis was anticipated. The breakdown in market activity started with an unusual trading volume in S&P 500 e-mini futures contracts, which spread to the equity market and caused the S&P 500 to decline by about 9% within 20 minutes. Hundreds of stocks experienced sharp declines in prices. Borkovec et al. (2010) report that the liquidity of ETFs declined dramatically during the crash: Spreads widened significantly, and the limit order book dried up. They interpret this finding as evidence that market participants exited the market once signs of extreme volatility and illiquidity appeared. As a result of the exodus of liquidity providers, price discovery no longer took place at ETFs and there was a disconnect between the returns of ETFs and the returns of the underlying securities. Madhavan (2012) reviews the academic literature discussing the causes of the Flash Crash and agrees that liquidity providers exited the market. He argues that the departure of ETF prices from those of the underlying securities was rooted in the fragmentation of markets. Madhavan claims that stocks are more sensitive to liquidity shocks when markets are fragmented. He finds evidence suggesting that these stocks lost much liquidity during the Flash Crash event and that ETFs linked to these stocks experienced the heaviest volume of canceled orders and price deviations.

Peterffy (2010), who owns and heads one of the largest stock broker houses in the United States, testified that because of bad news from Europe, institutions sold ETF shares. Arbitrageurs bought ETF shares and sold short the underlying stocks. Because of sparse liquidity in some exchanges, some of the arbitrage programs diagnosed unreliable price data and withdrew from the market, leading to a positive feedback loop. As a result, the dry-up of arbitrage capital caused the mispricing between ETFs and the underlying stocks to widen. This mechanism is similar to the model of Pan & Zeng (2016), which attempts to explain the behavior of arbitrageurs. At times of market stress, when the securities underlying an ETF are illiquid, APs may abstain from engaging in arbitrage activity. It is important to note that prior literature has documented that arbitrageurs exit the market at times of market stress, potentially exacerbating market turbulence (e.g., Aragon & Strahan 2012; Ben-David, Franzoni & Moussawi 2012). There are also similarities to the model by Cespa & Foucault (2014). In their theory, market participants rely on information contained in the prices of one asset to price another, e.g., ETFs and the index constituents. However, when one asset becomes temporarily less liquid and its price becomes noisier, market participants are more cautious in trading the second asset, leading to lower liquidity. Thus, liquidity shocks travel across assets because they are informationally connected.

Following the Flash Crash, several regulators and market commentators voiced concerns about ETFs. Ramaswamy (2011) generalizes the findings from events of market turbulence and argues that some ETFs may pose a risk to the financial system. In particular, he argues that synthetic and exotic ETFs (e.g., leveraged ETFs, bear ETFs) use leverage, swaps, and derivatives to track the index. He says that past experience shows that assets with a long chain of intermediaries and counterparties may cause or exacerbate financial shocks via risk exposure along the chain of financial intermediaries.

After the Flash Crash of 2010, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) adopted rules to halt trading in individual securities, including ETFs, that exhibit extreme volatility swings. Subsequently, on August 24, 2015, extreme price movements triggered trading halts of 5 minutes or longer for more than 300 ETFs; 11 ETFs were halted 10 times or more (Driebusch, Vaishampayan & Josephs 2015). Following steep declines in the futures market prior to the stock market opening, there was a big run on ETF prices immediately after 9:30 AM, which caused several ETFs to trade



at sharp discounts relative to their NAV. ETF market makers and APs arguably withdrew from the market after a trading pause in the futures market, which they used to hedge their exposure in volatile trading sessions (Dieterich 2015). On August 24, 42% of the overall volume in US equity markets was ETF trading, despite a big fraction of the trading halts being attributed to US-listed ETFs. The shock that hit ETF prices was eventually transmitted to several large underlying stocks without an apparent fundamental reason (SEC 2015).<sup>12</sup> This event could very well be an example of the liquidity and arbitrage model proposed by Pan & Zeng (2016), in which arbitrageurs stay on the sidelines during market stress because of concerns that the mispricing may widen; eventually this behavior becomes self-fulfilling, as the absence of arbitrage by itself leads to greater mispricing. Agarwal et al. (2016) use the August 24 event to test whether ETFs pose a liquidity risk in times of market stress. They find improvements in underlying stock liquidity during the period when trading in the ETFs with wild price swings was halted that day. Their results suggest that ETFs create an additional layer of commonality in the liquidity of underlying securities that comes into play in times of market stress. In other words, when the price of an ETF diverges from the price of the underlying portfolio, APs and arbitrageurs trade in an attempt to correct the mispricing. This mechanical trading activity provides liquidity at the stock level; however, the direction of the liquidity (buy or sell) is correlated across the different securities that compose the ETF basket, usually a sample of the underlying index.

June 20, 2013, is another instance when the prices of ETFs plummeted because of a lack of countering arbitrage forces. On that day, the prices of stocks in many emerging markets declined sharply. The ETFs that track the indices of these emerging markets and that are traded in the United States experienced sharp price declines as well. However, because the foreign markets were closed during the operating hours of the US markets, APs and arbitrageurs appear to have abstained from the market, letting ETF prices collapse under the selling pressure of US investors (Condon & Kaske 2013).

These events show that across several market occasions, the prices of ETFs have diverged from the prices of the underlying portfolios because of a lack of arbitrage between the two assets. The model of Pan & Zeng (2016) appears to explain the withdrawal of arbitrage capital from the market. Their model suggests that at times, APs have little incentive to engage in arbitrage, for example, because of an accumulation of inventory. In these cases, they may abstain from the market, leading to greater mispricing.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

ETFs are perhaps the greatest game-changer in the asset management industry in the first decades of the twenty-first century. These investment vehicles offer a combination of features that have not been available to investors before: low-cost transactions, intraday liquidity, and passive index tracking. The rise of ETFs is part of a wider process that has taken place in the asset management industry over the past three decades: Passive management has expanded, while at the same time the asset management landscape has become more concentrated. Although some of the implications of these trends have been studied (e.g., Ben-David et al. 2015), some important research questions remain open. In particular, do the low transaction costs of ETFs enable short-term trading, creating a new breed of short-term speculators that did not exist before? In other words, do ETFs attract speculators who traded other investment vehicles before the introduction of ETFs (e.g.,

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<sup>12</sup>For example, DVY's decline of 35% caused significant price pressure on large underlying basket stocks, such as GE, which dropped by as much as 21% before reverting back to prior values after the DVY's price stabilized during the day.

closed-end funds), or did they start speculating once ETFs were available? Do these traders have a significant impact on the quality of prices?

The literature presents mixed evidence about the effects of ETFs on the informational efficiency of the underlying securities. On the one hand, researchers have found that ETFs allow information to be more efficiently impounded into security prices. On the other hand, evidence indicates that securities prices have become noisier since the introduction of ETFs. It is possible that both phenomena are taking place in parallel: Security prices impound information more efficiently once they are included in ETFs' baskets and, at the same time, become more volatile for nonfundamental reasons. Missing to date is a welfare analysis exploring the net effect of ETFs on market participants. Do ETFs increase informational efficiency overall? Are there corners of the financial markets where the informational gains are particularly large, and others where they are negative? Are there times in which ETFs increase price efficiency and market quality and others in which they detract along those dimensions?

The ability of ETF prices to truly reflect the value of the underlying securities depends on the presence of agents who facilitate arbitrage: high-frequency arbitrageurs, hedge funds, and APs. The concerns raised by academics and regulators about the risks that these classes of investors may create during events of market turbulence deserve additional investigation. Specifically, there is a concern that ETFs provide a false sense of liquidity: that they are liquid in a normal trading environment, but during turbulent times, liquidity dries up because APs and arbitrageurs stay out of the market. The effect could be exacerbated if the presence of ETFs crowds out (i.e., withdraws) liquidity from the underlying assets (e.g., corporate bonds, as in Dannhauser 2017). It is important that financial economists continue to explore the integrity of financial markets and warn against potential market breakdowns that could negatively impact the real economy and be potentially harmful for society at large.

Understanding the effects of ETFs on liquidity and efficiency as well as their mechanism is important not only from an academic standpoint, but also from a regulatory perspective. As a result of the financial crisis of 2008, and also because of a few later episodes when the ETF arbitrage mechanism has broken down, both investors and policymakers have raised concerns about the fragility of the ETF market (Rennison & Hale 2016; Wigglesworth, Bullock & Rennison 2016); for example, the former head of the SEC, Mary Jo White, recently hinted at a large-scale review of the ETF landscape by the US financial market regulator (White 2016). Our hope is that the academic research about ETFs is useful in quantifying the systemic risks that these investment vehicles pose and that it can potentially help address them.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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