

News Release

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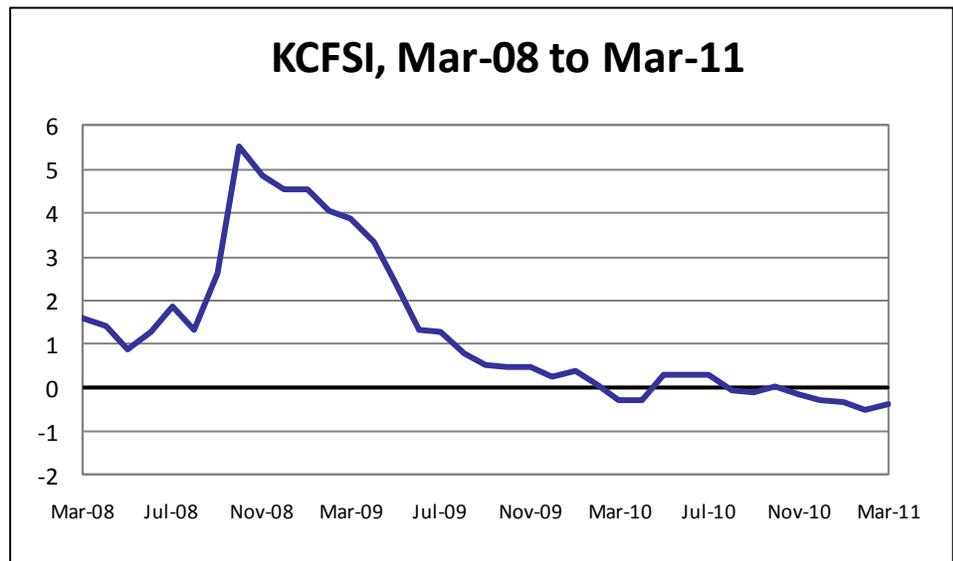
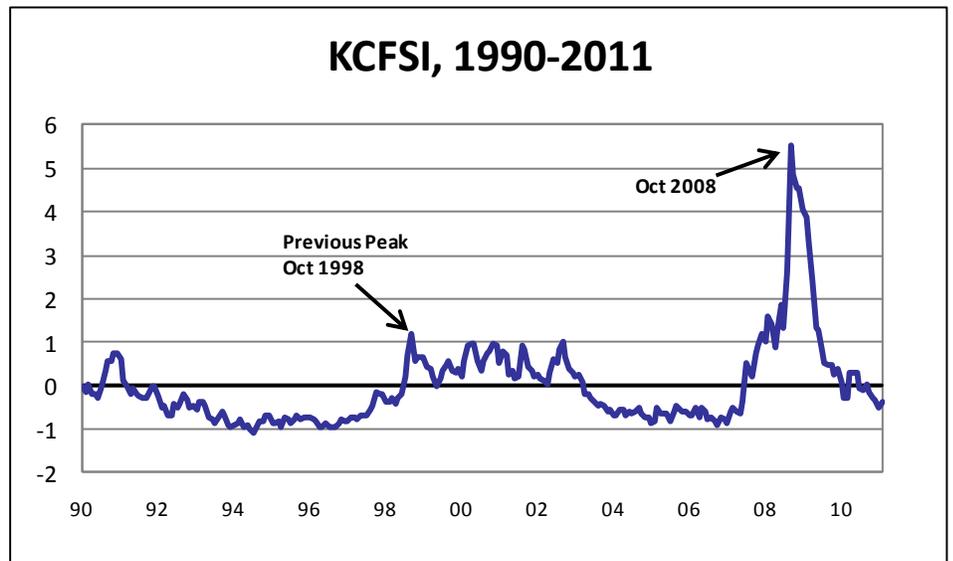
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The KCFSI suggests financial stress edged back up in March but remained below its long-run average.

The Kansas City Financial Stress Index (KCFSI) was -0.37 in March, up modestly from -0.50 in February. The increase in the index in March followed a string of declines since October of last year. As a result, the KCFSI remained below its long-run average of zero for the fifth consecutive month.

Two of the eleven variables making up the KCFSI declined from February to March, while eight variables increased. Changes in measures of asset price behavior boosted the KCFSI by a total of 0.06 point, and changes in yield spreads raised the index by another 0.06 point. The variable with the biggest negative contribution to the change in the index was the cross-section dispersion of bank stock returns, which subtracted 0.05 point. The variables with the greatest positive contributions to the change in the KCFSI were the implied volatility of overall stock prices (VIX), which added 0.05 point, and the idiosyncratic volatility of bank stock prices, which contributed 0.03 point.



KCFSI for October 1998, October 2008, and the last six months								
KCFSI	Oct '98	Oct '08	Oct '10	Nov '10	Dec '10	Jan '11	Feb '11	Mar '11
Current	1.18	5.51	0.04	-0.13	-0.30	-0.33	-0.50	-0.37
Previous	1.17	5.50	0.04	-0.13	-0.30	-0.33	-0.50	NA
Note: Previous index values are from the March 8, 2011 release. NA = not applicable								

Sources of Change in KCFSI from February 2011 to March 2011		
Variable	Contribution to change in index	Rank (lowest to highest value)
Yield spreads	0.06	
3-month Libor/3-month Treasury (TED) spread	0.01	4
2-year swap spread	-0.00	3
Off-the-run/on-the-run 10-year Treasury spread	0.02	9
Aaa/10-year Treasury spread	0.02	6
Baa/Aaa spread	-0.01	2
High-yield bond/Baa spread	0.01	5
Consumer ABS/5-year Treasury spread	0.02	7
Behavior of asset prices	0.06	
Correlation between stock and Treasury returns	0.02	8
Implied volatility of overall stock prices (VIX)	0.05	11
Idiosyncratic volatility of bank stock prices	0.03	10
Cross-section dispersion of bank stock returns	-0.05	1
Total	0.13	
Note: The contribution of each variable equals the change in the standardized value of the variable times the coefficient of the variable in the index. Contributions may not add to totals due to rounding.		

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the KCFSI? The KCFSI is a monthly composite index of 11 variables reflecting stress in the U.S. financial system. These variables fall into two broad categories--average yield spreads, and measures based on the actual or expected behavior of asset prices. The index is calculated using the principal components procedure. Under this procedure, the coefficients of the 11 variables are chosen so that the index explains the maximum possible amount of total variation in the variables from February 1990 through the current month. Further details on the variables and the construction of the index can be found in Section II of “Financial Stress: What Is It, How Can It Be Measured, and Why Does It Matter?” by Craig S. Hakkio and William R. Keeton, *Economic Review*, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Second Quarter 2009.

Why are past values of the index sometimes revised? Most revisions are due to recalculating the index using the additional data from the current month. These revisions are inherent in the principal components procedure and are explained in more detail in Appendix B of the article by Hakkio and Keeton. Other changes in past values of the index may result from revisions to the data used to construct the variables. Finally, the index may occasionally be revised due to a change in the data sources or in the method of constructing a variable. In this last case, an explanation for the revision is included in the monthly summary.

How should the index be interpreted? A positive value of the KCSFI indicates that financial stress is above the long-run average, while a negative value signifies that financial stress is below the long-run average. A useful way to assess the level of financial stress is to compare the index in the current month to the index during a past, widely-recognized episode of financial stress, such as October 1998. For more information on interpreting the index, see Section III of the article by Hakkio and Keeton.

