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SPIKES® Volatility Index Methodology Guide

Introduction

The SPIKES Volatility Index (SPIKES) is a measure of expected 30-day volatility in the SPDR® S&P 500® ETF (SPY), the largest exchange-traded fund in the world that tracks the most widely-followed stock index in the United States. With over \$38 billion in daily notional value traded per day, SPY is the world's most actively traded ETF.¹

A by-product of SPY's popularity is a highly liquid market for its associated options, accounting for a daily notional trading value of \$140 billion.² SPIKES is calculated using live prices on options linked to SPY and represents the market's expectation of price movements in SPY over the next 30 days.

To best align to the way the trading community models risk and hedges exposure, SPIKES is constructed using the well-known variance swap methodology using live options prices to calculate volatility. SPIKES can be physically replicated with a strip of options, and can easily be incorporated into the existing ecosystem of volatility-based products, which include options, futures, and ETPs.

In addition, SPIKES incorporates material enhancements in its calculation to help improve index stability - namely its proprietary "price dragging" technique, which is designed to reduce erratic movements in the index during periods of high volatility and/or low liquidity in the broader market. Options are often quoted in bulk by market makers, which in some cases cause a divergence from orthodox supply-demand dynamics as quotes are constantly updated across a series of strikes throughout the day. As a result, there can be more notable movements within the bid/ask spread that impact the calculation of an index based on mid-point prices. SPIKES proprietary price dragging technique has been designed to mitigate this effect, producing a more stable index value.

Moreover, to calculate the index, SPIKES uses highly-active, electronically-traded multi-listed SPY options over singly-listed S&P 500 index options. This better reflects the nature of today's high-velocity, and principally electronic, options market.

¹ Source: Yahoo Finance - based on 2020 H1 figures

² Source: iVolatility

The SPIKES Formula

Like most indices, SPIKES has a defined rules-based approach to selecting components—a series of options on SPY—and weighting them to derive a single price for the index.

The formula for expected T-term variance is as follows:

$$\sigma^2 = \frac{1}{T} \left[2e^{RT} \sum_i \frac{\Delta K_i p_i}{K_i^2} - \left(\frac{e^{RT} (p_{ATM}^c - p_{ATM}^p)}{K_{ATM}} \right)^2 \right]$$

p_{ATM}^c Price of the at-the-money (ATM) SPY call option
 p_{ATM}^p Price of the ATM SPY put option
 K_{ATM} Strike closest to the point where linearly interpolated SPY call and put prices intersect

T Time to options expiration (in years, with 1-second precision)
 K_i, p_i A list of unique SPY options strikes, ordered from lowest to highest, and corresponding SPY options prices; of a call if $K_i > K_{ATM}$; and of a put if $K_i < K_{ATM}$; if $K_i = K_{ATM}$ then an average between the ATM SPY put and call prices
 ΔK_i Half the difference between the strikes on either side of K_i

$$\Delta K_i = \frac{(K_{i+1} - K_{i-1})}{2}$$

For the last (highest and lowest) selected strikes, ΔK_i is simply the absolute difference between K_i and the nearest selected option's strike

R Risk-free interest rate to option's expiration

Calculation Methodology

SPIKES is calculated using only standard options on SPY that expire on the third Friday of each calendar month. Although weekly options on SPY are available, these are **not** used in the calculation of the SPIKES Index.

The calculation linearly interpolates between the variances of two monthly expirations—near-term (the closest expiration more than two full days into the future) and next-term (the monthly expiration following the near-term). This expiration selection method is used to avoid using highly irregular option prices close to the options settlement date.

The 30-day point is typically in between these two expirations and the index value is interpolated between the volatilities of these two terms. When the closest expiration is too close to expiry (less than two full days), rolling to the third-closest expiration occurs. This rolling rule serves to reduce spurious variability in the index by means of minimizing the period of “extrapolation” between the two expirations. The switch from closest to third-closest expiry rarely has any noticeable impact on the index value, as the weight of the switched term is close to zero.

After the SPY options expirations used in the calculation have been selected, the calculation proceeds as follows:

1. Determine Option Prices

SPIKES uses a proprietary “price dragging” technique to capture live options prices as inputs for the index calculation. The option price inputs that result from price dragging are called Cash Reference Prices (CRPs), and determined as follows:

- Set all CRPs to 0 at SPY options market opening;
- For trades, only consider standard simple trades (conditions “space”, I, or J.)
- For quotes, only consider NBBO eligible bids and offers from all eligible exchanges (quote conditions A, B, C, O, or “space”)
- Block trades, out of sequence prints, as well as trades resulting from complex transactions and stopped orders are ignored.
- On the opening quote, the opening **bid** is used as the CRP;
- When there is a trade, the CRP is set to trade price;
- For newly-placed ask (bid) quotes, if the ask (bid) is lower (higher) than current CRP, the CRP is set to ask (bid).

This method should materially reduce erratic movements of the index value as quotations on out-of-the-money (OTM) options are rapidly altered during times of low liquidity and or high volatility.

2. Select the Options Used in the Calculation

For each of the expirations, the options to be used in the calculation are then selected by removing in-the-money (ITM) and far OTM options:

- To determine the at-the-money (ATM) strike, only use strikes for which both the call and put prices are available. For each strike, find the absolute value of the call CRP minus the put CRP, and select the strike where that value is closest to zero. In the case of a tie, select the lower strike.
- Stepping away from the ATM, (for puts going to the next lower strike, and for calls the next higher strike) when two consecutive options with CRPs of 5 cents or less are reached exclude all options further away from the money.

3. Weight the Options and Estimate Volatility

For each term, the volatility is estimated using the variance swap formula, with the selected options' CRPs weighted according to the SPIKES formula:

$$\sigma^2 = \frac{1}{T} \left[2e^{RT} \sum_i \frac{\Delta K_i p_i}{K_i^2} - \left(\frac{e^{RT} (p_{ATM}^c - p_{ATM}^p)}{K_{ATM}} \right)^2 \right]$$

The risk-free interest rate is the yield (mid-point of bid-ask) for the United States Treasury Bill which matures on the date closest to the monthly SPY expiration--generally the day prior to the monthly expiration date. In the event of two T-Bills maturing equidistant from the monthly options expiration, use the shortest dated maturity.

4. Calculate the Index

Compute the 30-day weighted average of the near- and next-term variances, take the square root, and multiply by 100, as follows:

$$SPIKES = 100 \times \sqrt{\left(\frac{t_1}{t_M} \frac{t_2 - t_M}{t_2 - t_1} \sigma_1^2 + \frac{t_2}{t_M} \frac{t_M - t_1}{t_2 - t_1} \sigma_2^2 \right)}$$

- t_1 Time (in seconds) to near-term expiration
- σ_1 Estimated volatility computed by variance swap formula, near-term
- t_2 Time (in seconds) to next-term expiration
- σ_2 Estimated volatility computed by variance swap formula, next-term
- t_M Number of seconds in 30 days ($30 \times 86,400 = 2,592,000$)

Sample Calculation

Some examples of "price dragging" and options selection using real prices are included on the following page to help illustrate how SPIKES is calculated. Since the full calculation is very repetitive, only a select sample of the full calculation method is included.

A fully worked up example of the full calculation with formulas in Excel is available upon request.

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Price Dragging

Here “price dragging” is used for one option to determine the Cash Reference Price.

Time	Update	Cash Reference Price Update	Comment
9:30:00	Market Open	0	Initially set at zero
9:31:12	2.35 bid	Set to 2.35	Opening CRP is the bid
9:33:01	2.31 bid	Unchanged	Bid updates but is not above current CRP
9:33:48	2.37 ask	Unchanged	Ask is not below the last eligible CRP of 2.35
9:36:41	Trade at 2.37	Set to 2.37	Trade triggers CRP update to 2.37
9:38:34	2.38 ask	Unchanged	Ask is updated but is not below the last CRP
9:39:00	2.36 ask	Set to 2.36	Ask moves below the latest CRP, becomes the new CRP

Options Selection

The following calculations use historical SPY option prices (determined by using the price dragging technique) sampled on February 13th, 2015. Based on the SPIKES rules, the two closest eligible expirations are February 20th, 2015 and March 20th, 2015. Both are more than two days away from the current date of February 13th so are selected as near- and next-term.

The intersections of put and call prices are observed in between the yellow highlighted strikes. For the near-term, the absolute difference between the 209.50 strike call and put price is 28 cents, whereas for 210 it is 20 cents. Since the intersection of the price curves is closer to 210, the ATM strike is 210. Using the same logic, the next-term ATM strike would be 209.

Once the ATM strike is determined, the series is truncated after two consecutive CRPs are 5 cents or less. For the near-term, all strikes at 199 and below and 217 and above are removed as the puts encounter two consecutive CRPs below or equal to 5 cents at 200 and 199.50 and the calls at 215 and 216. Similarly, for the next-term expiration, strikes at 148 and below and 240 and above are truncated.

Near-Term (February 20th)

Strike	Call Price	Put Price
197	12.82	0.04
197.5	12.32	0.03
198	11.83	0.04
198.5	10.62	0.03
199	10.86	0.05
199.5	10.35	0.04
200	9.87	0.05
200.5	9.36	0.06
201	8.85	0.06
201.5	8.36	0.07
202	7.86	0.08
202.5	7.42	0.09
203	6.91	0.10
203.5	6.44	0.11
204	5.96	0.13
204.5	5.48	0.15
205	5.01	0.19
205.5	4.54	0.23
206	4.11	0.28
206.5	3.64	0.33

Strike	Call Price	Put Price
207	3.22	0.41
207.5	2.80	0.50
208	2.41	0.60
208.5	2.04	0.71
209	1.68	0.88
209.5	1.35	1.07
210	1.09	1.29
210.5	0.82	1.53
211	0.60	1.80
212	0.30	2.51
212.5	0.21	2.92
213	0.15	3.32
214	0.07	4.24
215	0.04	5.82
216	0.03	6.21
217	0.02	6.74
217.5	0.02	6.90
218	0.01	8.22
219	0.01	8.76
220	0.01	10.19
221	0.01	11.20

Next-Term (March 20th)

Strike	Call CRP	Put CRP
144	65.85	0.03
145	64.87	0.04
146	63.85	0.03
147	62.87	0.04
148	61.87	0.04
149	60.57	0.04
150	59.84	0.04
151	58.88	0.06
152	57.88	0.06
153	56.58	0.06
154	55.86	0.06
155	54.70	0.07
156	53.59	0.06
157	52.90	0.07
158	51.87	0.06
159	50.86	0.06
160	49.60	0.07
161	48.93	0.07
162	47.92	0.08
163	46.92	0.08
164	45.62	0.08
165	44.95	0.09
166	43.94	0.09
167	42.63	0.10
168	41.64	0.11
169	40.95	0.11
170	39.65	0.12
171	38.98	0.12

Strike	Call Price	Put Price
172	37.83	0.13
173	36.66	0.13
174	35.97	0.14
175	34.68	0.16
176	33.69	0.17
177	32.70	0.18
178	31.72	0.19
179	31.18	0.20
180	30.07	0.22
181	29.47	0.23
182	28.04	0.26
183	27.08	0.27
184	26.04	0.30
185	24.97	0.32
186	24.12	0.33
187	23.02	0.36
188	22.61	0.39
189	21.20	0.43
190	20.22	0.46
191	19.26	0.51
192	18.29	0.55
193	16.59	0.60
194	15.76	0.67
195	15.44	0.73
196	14.51	0.82
197	13.56	0.90
198	12.67	1.00
199	11.76	1.11
200	10.83	1.25
201	9.99	1.38
202	9.11	1.54
203	8.27	1.71
204	7.42	1.92
205	6.67	2.14
206	5.82	2.39
207	5.09	2.68
208	4.38	3.00
209	3.70	3.37
210	3.09	3.80
211	2.53	4.26
212	1.98	4.79
213	1.53	5.38
214	1.18	6.03
215	0.88	6.77
216	0.60	7.56
217	0.42	8.41
218	0.30	9.32
219	0.22	10.27
220	0.17	11.21
221	0.13	12.34

Strike	Call Price	Put Price
223	0.09	13.85
224	0.08	15.15
225	0.06	16.14
230	0.04	21.12
235	0.03	25.81
240	0.02	31.11
245	0.01	36.09
250	0.01	41.08
255	0.01	46.08
260	0.01	51.08

Index Dissemination

SPIKES is calculated by MIAX® and disseminated every 100 milliseconds via OPRA and the MIAX® Product Feed (MPF).

A sample of data vendors and the symbol for SPIKES from each data vendor are below:

Data Vendor	Symbol
Bloomberg	SPIKE
Thomson Reuters	.SPIKE
LiveVol	^SPIKE
Yahoo Finance	^SPIKE

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