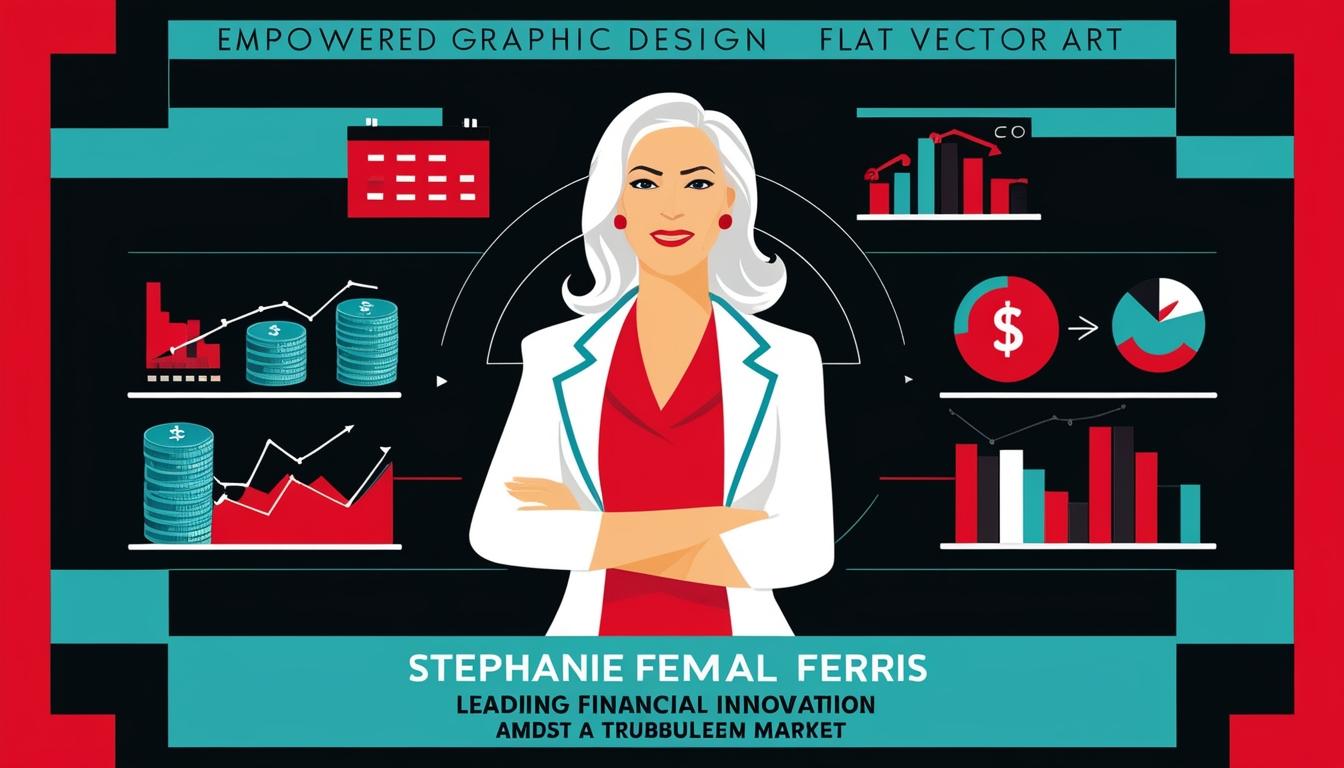
# S&P 500 ends 2024 up 23% as markets face new challenges



In a year marked by significant movements in financial markets and corporate leadership, the S&P 500 ended 2024 at 5,881.63, a notable increase of 23% despite being below its December peak of 6,090. However, the new year opened with turbulence in the Asian markets, where Chinese stock indexes experienced a decline of nearly 3%, while US futures indicated a potential for gains before market opening.

In a concerning turn of events, the FBI is probing possible connections between a tragic terrorist attack in New Orleans and the explosion of a Tesla truck outside a Trump building in Las Vegas. Both vehicles linked to the attacks were reportedly rented through the Turo app, intensifying scrutiny on ride-sharing platforms.

Amid these developments, Stephanie Ferris, CEO of Fidelity National Information Services (FIS), is marking her second year at the helm of the Fortune 500 fintech company. FIS plays a critical role in technology solutions for banks and insurance providers, facilitating global financial transactions. Ferris holds the distinction of being the first woman to lead FIS in its 50-year history. In a conversation, Ferris stated, “I have always shied away from being the female anything, because I want to be the CFO. I want to be the CEO,” underlining her commitment to meritocracy in leadership roles. She expressed pride in the advancements women have made in the corporate sector.

Ferris has taken on the formidable task of modernising the legacy technology firm through acquisitions, product innovation, and customer engagement strategies. She noted the pressures from activist investors advocating for transformative action within the company, pushing her agenda into new realms, particularly global risk management.

As she contemplates what is essential for FIS leading into 2025, Ferris commented on the importance of safeguarding both employee welfare and business operations amid geopolitical tensions. She raised questions about operational continuity, asserting the necessity of evaluating cybersecurity partnerships, particularly in regions noted for robust cybersecurity solutions, such as Israel.

Moreover, Ferris addressed the imperative of innovation driven by Generative AI technology. “There needs to be a top-down Gen AI agenda and a bottom-up approach. It allows us to change the way we work and think about everything,” she elaborated, reflecting a forward-looking perspective on technological advancement in the financial sector.

As reports from industry analysts suggest a promising outlook for private credit in 2025, Apollo Global Management highlighted the increasing divergence between credit spreads in public and private markets. The firm indicated that investors can derive a higher return by engaging in private lending.

Simultaneously, in the entertainment sector, Paramount Pictures has been navigating a challenging landscape marked by instability, leading to layoffs impacting around 2,000 employees in 2024—significantly more than seen at competitors like Warner Bros., Disney, and Netflix combined. Former employees described an environment fraught with stress and uncertainty regarding job security, as the company adapts to financial pressures.

BYD, a Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer, reported record car sales of 4.25 million for 2024, significantly closing in on competitors like Tesla and Honda. To maintain its position as the leading seller of battery electric vehicles (EVs) globally, Tesla is projected to deliver approximately 500,000 vehicles in its final quarter.

Furthermore, a study by Prudential Financial revealed that married couples aged 65 and above, with assets of at least $100,000, are withdrawing an average of only 2.1% from their savings annually, a marked reduction from typical spending rates. This behaviour reflects retirees’ concerns over financial sustainability amidst rising costs.

The narrative of the ever-evolving business landscape in 2025 is underscored by burgeoning technologies, ongoing market fluctuations, and influential corporate leadership changes, shaping the trajectory for sectors across the globe.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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