

US Rates Watch

Rates relative value update with PCA

Using PCA to identify RV opportunities

In this note we give an update on relative value developments in the rates space using principal component analysis on rates, vols, breakevens, and swap spreads.

The root-mean-square error (RMSE in basis points) across the US rates curve shown in Exhibit 1 is a measure of the average deviation of rates across the maturity spectrum from what would be implied by the PCA framework. We view this measure as a proxy for overall liquidity (higher measure = larger deviation from framework = lower liquidity). In March 2020 the RMSE spiked, but then found a new high in summer 2022. The current level is the second highest of its range versus the past few years. We think it is due in part to thinning year-end liquidity but also a function of the major pivot in rates markets starting in mid-October. Before the big rates rally, this metric was relatively low. This supports the Fed's view that illiquidity naturally rises with high market and economic volatility.

Exhibit 1: 3-factor RMSE across US rates (bp) indicates low level of liquidity

US rates this year have a high level of idiosyncratic movements vs history



Source: BofA Global Research

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Global 10y rates: pivot timing differentials

To compare across rates markets, we ran a 3-factor PCA back to 2012 with 10y rates in US, Germany, UK, Canada, and Australia. Global rates were quite close to fair value back in September before the market began pivoting on central bank expectations (Exhibit 2). The dramatic rally over the past couple months created large dislocations across these countries with US and EUR cheapening relative to CAD and AUD 10y. This corresponds to an earlier pivot by the BoC and RBA versus others which in the PCA framework appears as a richening of CAD and RBA. CAD 10y rates were equal to US 10y at the end of August, and now CAD 10y is 71bp lower than US 10y. We think the rate sensitivity of the Canadian economy likely justifies this move, and our bias would be for US to cheapen further vs CAD if US payrolls remains resilient and US inflation does not keep surprising as strongly to the downside.

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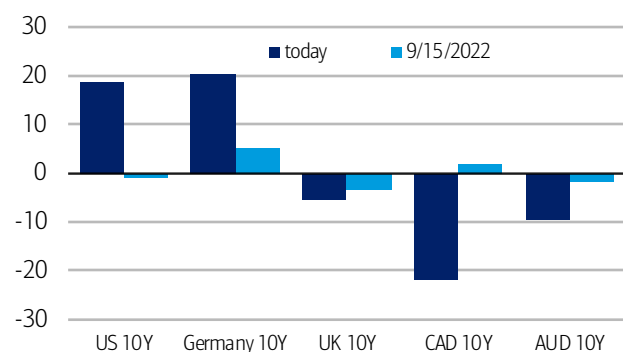
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Exhibit 2: Global 10y rates residuals (bp)

EUR & US 10y rates appear relatively cheap vs CAD 10y which led the pivot



Source: BofA Global Research

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Global breakevens: oil price the main driver

10y breakevens across US, UK, AU, JP, EU, and CAD for at least 6 years appear to be responding to a single overall driver (Exhibit 3). While central bank policy is certainly a factor for the global inflation market – especially around pivots or other surprises – we find that the first principal component (PC1) explains 85% of the variance in global breaks and is highly correlated with the price of oil.

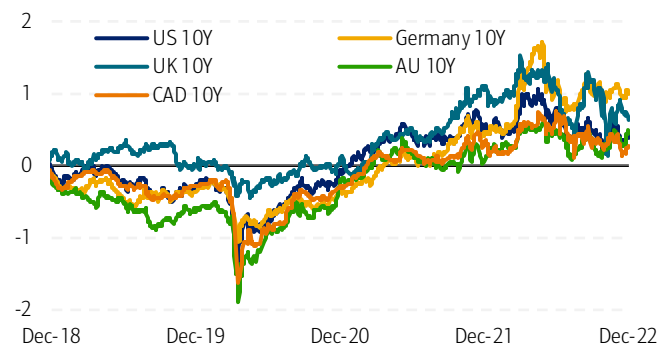
This suggests that oil has become the primary factor driving global inflation expectations for several years now, rather than monetary policy or anticipation around supply chain reopenings etc. It also implies that any single central bank has very limited impact on its domestic inflation expectation markets. Rather, the expectations channel across countries appears more driven by a global energy factor, outside of central bank reach – although monetary policy should indirectly influence oil prices through how it influences overall aggregate demand. The Fed may be somewhat misinterpreting well-anchored 10y breakevens as evidence markets think they will win the inflation fight. Instead, the anchor seems more likely created by a range-bound oil market, with US reserves demand providing a soft price floor and demand destruction providing a ceiling perhaps somewhere around \$130 per barrel.

The second principal component of breakevens accounts for 9% of the variance – which results in a total of 94% covered by 2 factors. We found PC2 correlates well to global financial stress and the Fed's published real rate term premium. Exhibit 4 shows that 10y breakevens in Canada and US look low vs the oil and stress factors while EU appear high. This likely corresponds to the recent downside inflation surprises in North America versus the upside surprises in Europe combined with the higher uncertainty of its energy shock.



Exhibit 3: Global 10y inflation breakevens since 2018

10y inflation breakevens are very similar across regions

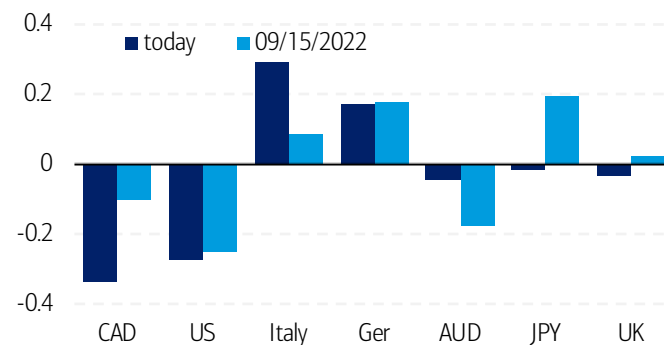


Source: BofA Global Research, Bloomberg

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Exhibit 4: Breakeven rich/cheap today vs September

Positive values indicate break is wide vs PCA framework

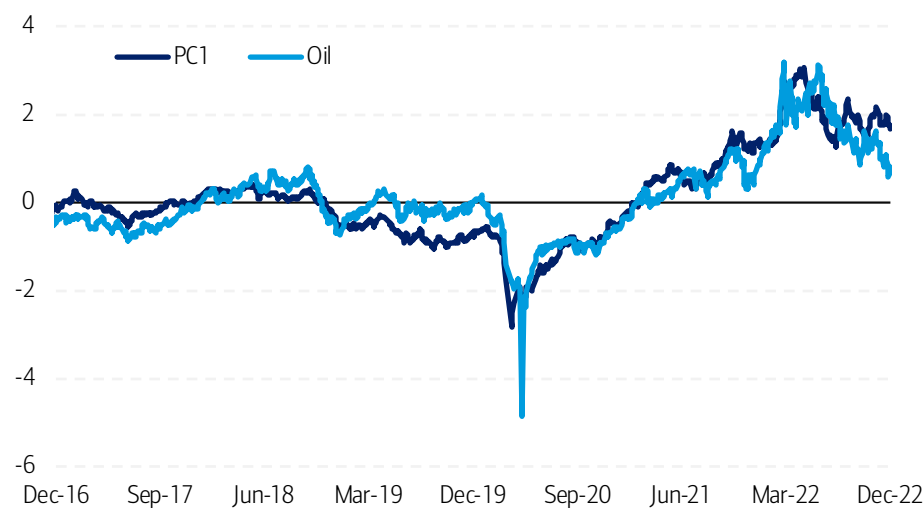


Source: BofA Global Research

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Exhibit 5: First factor of global BE closely matches 1st crude oil futures

Oil is a primary driver of global inflation expectations



Source: BofA Global Research, Bloomberg

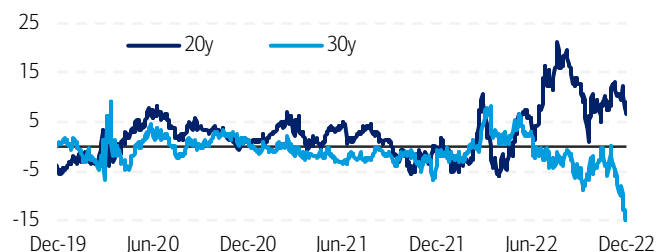
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US rates: 30Y rich on the curve

While the 20y sector has mostly normalized in our framework after looking extremely cheap on the curve, we find that the 30y sector has richened significantly during the recent “pivot rally” starting mid-October (Exhibit 6). While the previously dislocated 20y sector benefitted from increasing likelihood of a Treasury buyback program which we think could emerge next spring, the 30y sector might have richened on flows from the liability-driven investor (LDI) base, including defined benefit plans that achieved their largest funding surplus since 2010 as rates rose, according to the Milliman Pension Funding Index. Some evidence of this flow can be seen in Treasury stripping activity which shows a pickup in the pace of Treasury strips creation (zero-coupon bonds created from existing whole bonds) typically associated with LDI activity. Additional evidence might be in the relatively large increase in Treasury ultralong futures open interest relative to the classic bond futures. As 30y rates richened versus the PCA framework, we also had a large increase in 30y swap spreads (richening of cash versus swaps). The richness in the 10y rate point that we had highlighted in our last report has faded in the PCA framework.

Exhibit 6: 20y and 30y US rate residuals (bp)

20y has richened but still cheap, while 30y has richened



Source: BofA Global Research

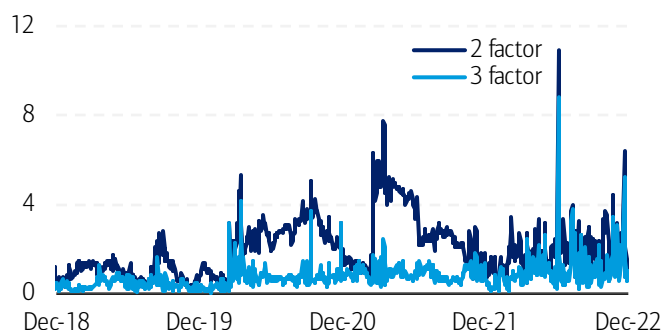
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US volatility: Expect left side vol to continue to come down

In 6m expiries on the vol surface, overall levels have normalized across the grid recently (Exhibit 7), although we continue to see the left side trading above the right side, and gamma above intermediates. We see scope for the left side (1y and 2y tails) to continue to under-perform the right side (we recommended [selling 1y1y vol vs 1y10y in our Global Rates Year Ahead](#)) as the market prices the soft Fed pivot with more conviction, which is also likely to help on the process of normalization of the term structure of volatility (1m vs 1y expiries).

Exhibit 7: RMSE across US rates vol curve (bp)

RMSE for vol has gone up during the past month



Source: BofA Global Research

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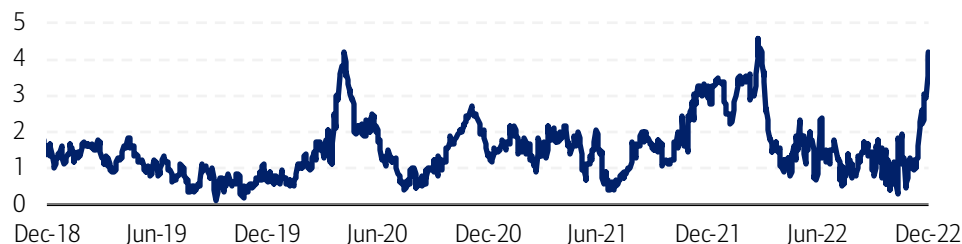
CAD rates: Overall dislocation increased in December

The overall dislocation across the CAD rates curve was low for most of 2022 but picked up notably over the past few weeks as the dislocations in the US also rose. This suggests that part of the dislocations observed in the CAD rates curve is more global and corresponds to both year end and high market volatility. On the CAD curve we find the 5y-10y slope about 13bp too steep vs the PCA framework. This curve segment was at fair value 3 weeks ago.



Exhibit 8: RMSE across CAD rates curve (bp)

Dislocations in CAD rates overall has increased in December



Source: BofA Global Research

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US swap spreads: 2y-5y slope dislocation mostly reversed

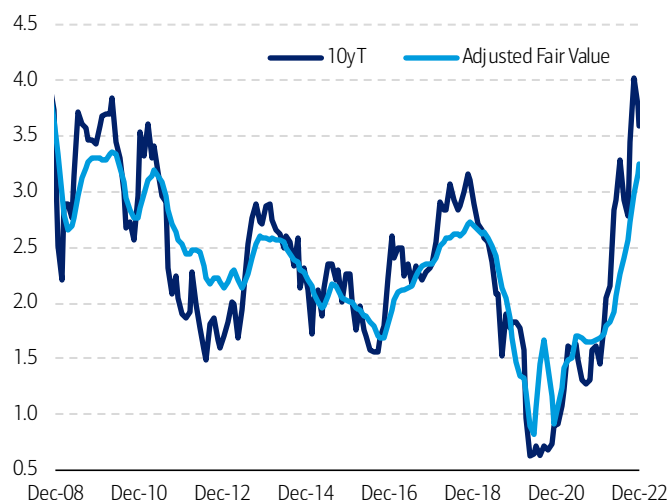
We had highlighted the 2y-5y spread slope dislocation versus PCA and this slope returned to fair value a number of times since late October. We find the slope again has become too inverted, but is less than 5bp away from the framework, which compares to a 15bp dislocation in June driven both by rich 2y spreads and cheap 5y spreads. 30y spreads have been highly directional with rates over the last 6 months, tightening with higher rates and widening with lower rates. The framework shows 30y spreads richening about 8bp in the recent widening move to just a bit above fair value.

Fair value from PCA Macro Framework

Our PCA Macro Framework suggests a 10yT fair value of c.3.25% (see Exhibit 9 and [Where is the 10yT fair value?](#)). Current levels around 3.5% are well in the context of the standard deviation of the residuals of this framework (c.35bp – see Exhibit 10). This framework suggests: (1) that the easy part of the rally is behind us, with 25bp worth of bullish dynamic left before 10yT mean revert fully to fundamental fair value; and (2) that from here the bullish dynamic may need to be supported by a more significant deterioration of macro fundamentals, and less of the mixed data context we have seen recently.

Exhibit 9: 10yT PCA Macro Framework

10yT fair value 3.25% in this framework

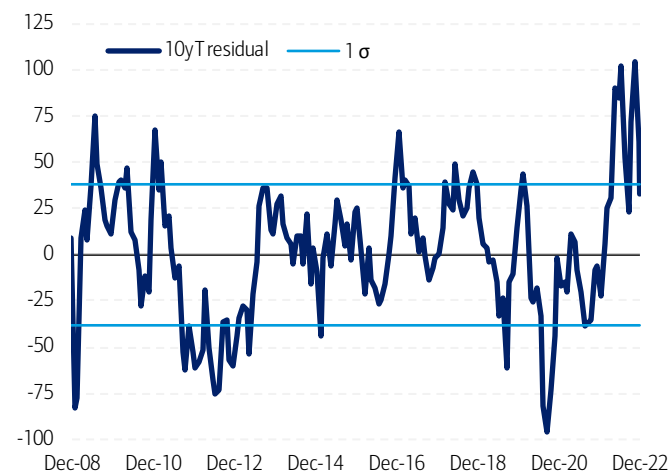


Source: BofA Global Research

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Exhibit 10: Residual of the 10y PCA Macro Framework

10yT is now trading in line with fundamentals, from a c.100bp dislocation in recent months



Source: BofA Global Research

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Trading ideas and investment strategies discussed herein may give rise to significant risk and are not suitable for all investors. Investors should have experience in relevant markets and the financial resources to absorb any losses arising from applying these ideas or strategies.

