

## RUSSELL INVESTMENTS CANADA LIMITED

# Late-cycle lean out

## 2017 Global Market Outlook — Q3 update

We're in a late-cycle, momentum-driven market, where valuation is at an extreme. Momentum can drive markets beyond fundamentals for an extended period. No investment process is going to pick the peak in the cycle, but we'd lean out as the risks increase.

### JUNE 2017

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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U.S. equities continue to post record highs as the economy disappoints and bond yields decline. We're cautious about the rally, and we maintain our "buy the dips and sell the rallies" mindset.

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## Venus & Mars

Bond investors are from Mars and equity investors are from Venus, or at least that's what their current behavior suggests. The unbridled optimism of record highs in the U.S. equity markets is in stark contrast to the somber mood depicted by low and declining Treasury yields.

The two will eventually reconcile, but it's possible that these contradictory views will persist for a while longer. Our cycle, value and sentiment investment process has us skeptical about U.S. equity market optimism, but it also acknowledges that momentum can push markets beyond fundamentals for an uncomfortably long time.

We're still seeing a resilient but mediocre U.S. economy and better growth prospects in the rest of the world, most notably Europe.

**Paul Eitelman** warned last quarter that U.S. growth was likely to disappoint, and the data flow has supported his judgment. He expects inflation to stay low and prevent the U.S. Federal Reserve from raising the Fed funds rate again this year. Expensive valuation and a lackluster economy underpin Paul's recommendation for remaining underweight U.S. equities.

By contrast, **Wouter Sturkenboom** thinks the good news in Europe can continue. Europe is in a sweet spot of robust growth, low inflation and strong corporate earnings. Political risk is also easing, following the election of Emmanuel Macron in France. Next year's Italian election is the main cloud on the horizon. A win by the centrist Matteo Renzi would cement Europe's political renaissance.

**Graham Harman** and **Alex Cousley** see a mixed, but mainly positive, outlook across the Asia-Pacific region. Japan is benefiting from strong exports, and there are the first signs of an inflation uptick. China's economy remains robust ahead of the five-yearly meeting of the National Congress later this year. Australia and New Zealand remain lackluster.

The lifting of political risk has made **Van Luu** more constructive on the outlook for the euro. Van thinks the U.S. dollar has peaked in this cycle and that there is some upside for the undervalued Japanese yen. Brexit uncertainty and the political instability caused by the minority government in the UK should keep the British pound in a 1.20-1.30 range.

The models estimated by **Kara Ng** and **Abe Robison** are largely unchanged from the previous quarter. The U.S. business cycle index model continues to show low recession probabilities. Their models for U.S. equities versus fixed income remain firmly in the neutral zone.

We're more inclined to side with the bond market than the equity market at this late stage of the cycle. As we look ahead to the second half of 2017, like Paul McCartney's lyrics, we're sitting in the stand waiting for the show to begin when Venus and Mars align again. ■

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# Investment strategy outlook

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We still want to buy dips and sell rallies against the backdrop of an expensive U.S. equity market, a broadly neutral earnings outlook, and sentiment indicators that point to complacency. Europe and, to a lesser extent, Japan and emerging markets (EM) have better cycle support. Government bonds are expensive, but a lack of global inflation pressure should keep yields in a range.

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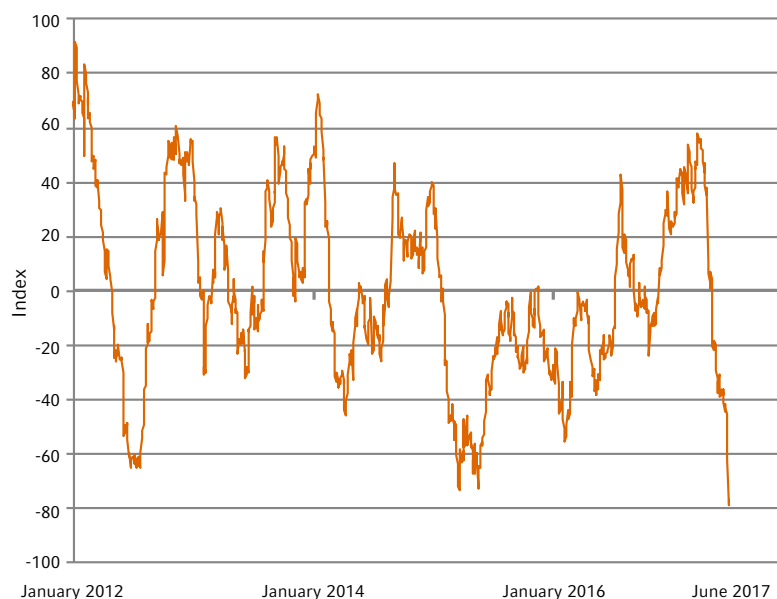
## Late-cycle lean out

In our previous quarterly report, we cautioned that investors were becoming overoptimistic about near-term U.S. economic growth prospects. Disappointment seemed likely, creating the potential for market volatility. Sure enough, U.S. economic data subsequently began to disappoint. The Citigroup Economic Surprise Index, which tracks U.S. economic data releases against consensus forecasts from economists, plunged from +60 in mid-March to -80 in late June.

The shift from positive to negative economic surprise triggered a 45-basis-point decline in the U.S. 10-year Treasury yield and a 5% fall in the U.S. Dollar Index. It hasn't, however, generated a meaningful pullback in equities.

This points to the role of declining interest rates in supporting U.S. equity market valuation. Investors have embraced a type of cognitive dissonance; sky-high U.S. equity valuations say the outlook is fantastic, but low Treasury yields warn that the growth outlook is lackluster. The U.S. equity market is being supported by a view that growth will remain reasonable and interest rates will stay low. This means the market is vulnerable to either of those assumptions being questioned: either a recession scare or a rising interest rate scare. We believe both scenarios seem unlikely in the near term.

### U.S. economic surprise index



Source: Citigroup, last observation June 21, 2017.

Performance quoted represents past performance and should not be viewed as a guarantee of future results. Indexes are unmanaged and cannot be invested in directly.

Our cycle, value and sentiment investment analysis process tells us to be cautious about U.S. equities.

The challenge of 2017 is that we are in a late-cycle, momentum-driven market where valuation is at an extreme. Momentum can drive markets beyond fundamentals for an extended period. No investment process is going to pick the peak in the cycle, but it should lean out as the risks increase.

Our cycle, value and sentiment investment analysis process tells us to be cautious about U.S. equities. Expensive valuation implies asymmetry in the return outlook, where the potential downside is larger than the upside. But the absence of significant U.S. recession risk means the cycle is broadly neutral for equities. This stops us from being too bearish. Overbought sentiment stops us from chasing the current momentum-driven rally. We're still in a "buy the dips and sell the rallies" market environment. We want to lighten up in the current rally and look to buy the next dip.

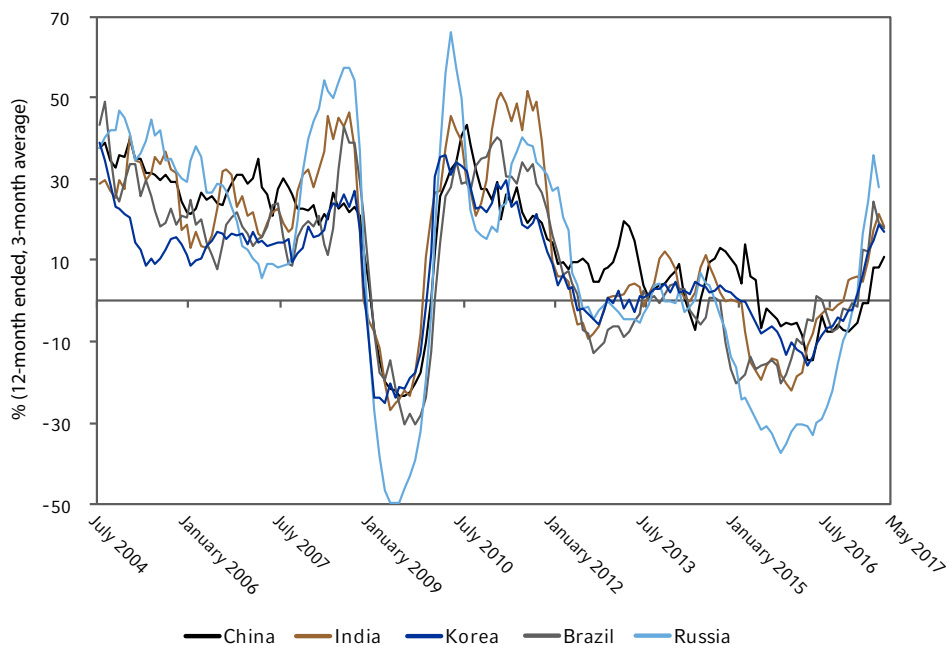
## Key indicators update

Our 2017 annual outlook report listed three indicators we would watch closely in 2017: U.S. wage measures, fiscal policy announcements and emerging markets exports.

- › **U.S. wage growth** has moved sideways this year, despite the unemployment rate declining to 4.3% in May. This is reducing the pressure on the U.S. Federal Reserve (the Fed), which is under pressure to lift interest rates further. We expect that the Fed funds rate will be held steady for the rest of 2017.
- › **Fiscal policy** is providing a modest boost to growth this year, but the recent news is mixed. President Trump's plan for tax cuts and infrastructure spending looks delayed until 2018. His slim Senate majority means that stimulus is likely to be modest. Newly elected President Macron in France is promising fiscal restraint. By contrast, the UK's conservative government is planning to ease back on fiscal austerity after nearly losing the recent general election.
- › **Emerging markets** exports remain robust, but there are tentative signs of a peak.

The indicators point to an easing of U.S. inflation pressures, a still modest boost from fiscal policy, and continuing strength in global trade.

### Exports by selected EM countries



Source: Thomson Reuters Datastream, as of May 15, 2017.

▶ We're still in a "buy the dips and sell the rallies" market environment. We want to lighten up in the current rally and look to buy the next dip.

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## Global equities: cycle, value, sentiment

Our investment process is based on the building blocks of cycle, value and sentiment.

- › **Business cycle:** It's a mixed-cycle outlook for global equities. Cycle tailwinds for equities appear strongest in Europe, followed by emerging markets, and Japan. The U.S. cycle score is neutral. Economic growth is near trend and corporate earnings growth is limited by high margins and a lack of pricing power. Tax cuts and infrastructure spending could provide a fiscal policy boost, but if enacted, are likely to be offset by further Fed tightening.
- › **Valuation:** U.S. equities are very expensive. The Shiller P/E ratio, which uses the 10-year average of inflation-adjusted earnings, is the highest it's been outside of 1929 and the late-1990s Internet bubble. European equities have moved to slightly expensive after their recent run. Japanese equities are around fair value, while emerging markets are still reasonably cheap.
- › **Sentiment:** Price momentum is positive across all regional markets, but a range of indicators still suggest markets are overbought and complacent. The most prominent contrarian indicator is the CBOE Volatility Index® (VIX®) otherwise known as the "fear index." It has fallen to levels last seen in 2006.
- › **Conclusion:** We're still cautious on the near-term outlook for global equities, with the expensive U.S. market the most vulnerable. Europe is slightly expensive after its recent run, but has good cycle support. Japan and emerging markets have some modest cyclical tailwinds, with EM having some valuation support as well.

## Treasuries: The cycle has become more neutral

Government bonds are still expensive in all regions. They are closest to our fair value estimate in the U.S. and furthest from fair value in Germany and the UK.

The main change is that the cycle view for U.S. Treasuries has moved from negative to broadly neutral. Economic disappointment, the stalling in wage acceleration, and the lack of pricing power have generated some disinflationary forces in the U.S. economy that look likely to persist for the next few quarters.

Cyclical forces look broadly neutral in Japan and the eurozone. The Bank of Japan has recently reaffirmed its policy of targeting zero percent for the 10-year bond yield. The European Central Bank has signaled that it will continue with negative rates and asset purchases until at least the end of 2017.

The cycle is slightly negative for UK gilts, where the large post-Brexit referendum British pound sterling devaluation is pushing up inflation.

Our sentiment indicators are mostly neutral, save for the U.S. being slightly overbought after the recent rally. Broadly, our process points to yields remaining in a range for the next few months, but expensive valuation means the medium-term trend is upward. ■

▮ Cycle tailwinds for equities appear strongest in Europe, followed by emerging markets and Japan.

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## Canada market perspective

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The Bank of Canada (BoC) has changed its tune and is preparing markets for an eventual rate hike, despite stubbornly low inflation and wage growth which is tepid at best. That said, while housing concerns are paramount, what cannot be ignored are encouraging growth trends as the oil price shock moves further into the rearview mirror.

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### The elusive economy

Forward assessment of the Canadian economy requires balancing what appear to be reasonable growth trends with the potential negative effects from an eventual housing correction.

The central watch point remains housing fundamentals, which in the bubbly markets of Toronto and Vancouver have softened as listings of homes for sale increase, suggesting price gains should moderate in the months ahead. That said, as illustrated in the chart on the next page, despite diminishing housing affordability, mortgage rates remain near historic lows, which continue to cushion any impending housing shock. The BoC has hesitated to raise rates thus far, concerned about potentially tipping off a housing correction. However, not acting may contribute to ongoing imbalances as financing conditions remain accommodative and economic growth resilient. This is what likely prompted BoC's Senior Deputy Governor Wilkins as well as Governor Poloz to suggest in separate speeches recently that monetary conditions may eventually need to be tightened.<sup>1</sup>

Thus far, we believe three key ingredients have been missing for the BoC to raise rates: 1. inflationary pressures, 2. non-energy export growth and 3. business investment. The lack of inflationary pressures, more diversified export growth and subdued investment have provided reasonable cover, justifiably, to stay sidelined despite accelerating growth.

Collating these countervailing forces, we believe the BoC has finally embarked on preparing markets for eventual rate increases.

That said, the saga which engulfed the troubled alternative mortgage lender Home Capital Group should serve as a reminder that lending practices may not be as sound as we may have believed and housing-related risks will be with us for some time. This leads us to conclude the BoC will take a measured approach in messaging forward guidance. A mere thaw versus an outright contraction in the housing market may justify a rate increase from the BoC's perspective. Ultimately, it is reasonable to infer that the next move from the BoC may well be an increase in the target rate, sooner than market participants, us included, may have anticipated a quarter ago.

The comments made by the BoC governors has also contributed to a rollercoaster ride for the Canadian 10-year bond yield. Prior to the U.S. elections in November, the 10-year yield was at 1.1%, after which it bolted to a high of 1.9%, only to fall back as expectations on the timeframe of the lofty tax reform and growth agenda in the U.S. were pared back. Sentiment, however, has rapidly shifted recently due to the comments made by the respective central bank governors. The 10-year yield, which on June 6 was at 1.39%, had risen to 1.6% on June 28. Although a partial reversal of the recent move should not be discounted, the general trend is in line with our 2017 year-end forecasted range of 1.6-1.9% for the Canadian 10-year yield.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-investor/inside-the-market/market-updates/loonie-notches-two-month-high-as-poloz-comments-support-rate-hike-view/article35296237/>



Like the 10-year yield, the Canadian dollar (CAD) has also reasserted itself as markets reprice central bank intentions. Still, we believe the CAD/USD will continue to trade within a range of 0.72-0.78, albeit with the skew towards the upper end of that range in the interim. Additionally, given the resiliency of the housing market and strong first quarter annualized Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 3.7%, we have upgraded our 2017 GDP growth forecasted range to 2.2-2.6% from 1.6-2.0%.

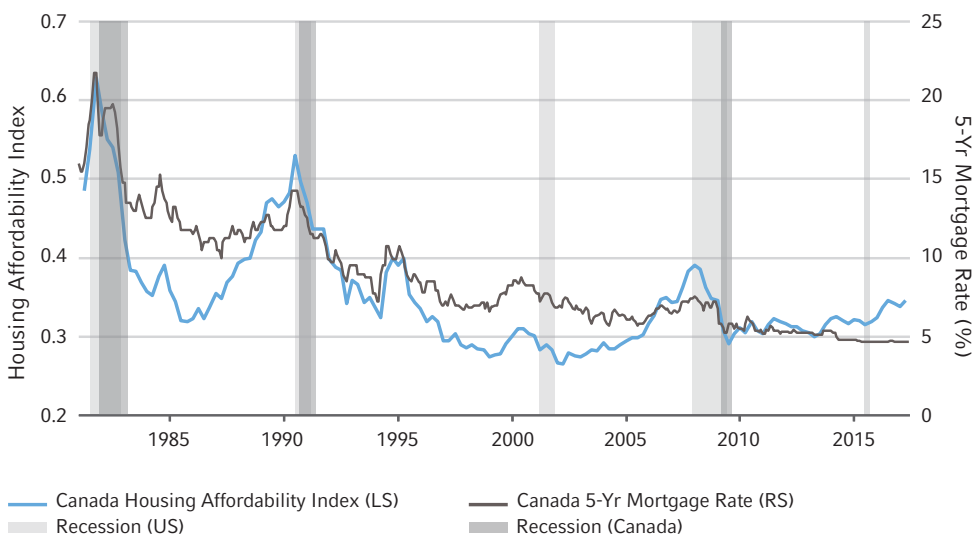
## Canadian equity outlook — rangebound

Last quarter we surmised that Canadian equities were primed for a “breather.” Indeed, the S&P/TSX Composite Index has settled down and underperformed its U.S. and global counterparts year-to-date as of May 31, 2017. That said, for a view ahead, we look to our building blocks of business cycle, valuation and sentiment to assess the current state of Canadian equities:

- › **Business Cycle:** Economic backdrop remains supportive, as validated by our upgrade in 2017 GDP growth. Monetary policy is roughly neutral but on watch due to central bank comments noted above. Fiscal stimulus, however, should remain supportive over the forecast horizon.
- › **Value:** Although earnings growth has improved, valuation remains stretched. What is a concern looking ahead is the downturn in the price of oil since the start of the year. This may portend weaker earnings growth in the back half of 2017.
- › **Sentiment:** With the S&P/TSX Composite Index roughly flat since the start of the year, contrarian sentiment indicators are neutral.
- › **Conclusion:** We maintain our neutral view towards domestic equities. While the cycle remains supportive for 2017, the “known unknown” is the magnitude of a potential housing correction. In addition, we continue to monitor central bank intentions and look to the next BoC policy meeting in mid-July for more “formal” views.

Given the resiliency of the housing market and strong first quarter annualized gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 3.7%, we have upgraded our 2017 GDP growth forecasted range to 2.2-2.6% from 1.6-2.0%.

### Housing affordability and mortgage rates



Source: Thomson Reuters Datastream, Russell Investments.  
Housing Affordability as of 1Q2017, Mortgage Rates as of 5/31/2017.

Note: An increase in the blue line representing Canada Housing Affordability suggests decreasing housing affordability, and vice versa. In broad terms, higher mortgage rates tend to be associated with decreasing housing affordability.

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## United States: Strike three on inflation?

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The U.S. economy still looks resilient but mediocre. Incoming data during the second quarter proved consistent with our below-consensus growth forecast for 2017. The bigger surprise has come from the sharp slowdown in core inflation. We think this should put a halt to further Fed funds rate hikes this year. The lack of pricing power also poses a medium-term threat to corporate profitability.

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### U.S. mediocrity saved by global strength

In mid-March, we shifted to a below-consensus real GDP growth outlook for 2017. That timing proved prescient, as cited earlier in this report, when the Citi U.S. Economic Surprise Index subsequently fell a staggering amount during the second quarter.

Our central thesis for the U.S. economy is unchanged: The economy is resilient. The business cycle index model suggests that recession risks are contained. But the economy remains mediocre with fiscal stimulus increasingly looking like a 2018 story and businesses being incentivized to sit on the sidelines until these favorable policy initiatives take effect. We continue to look for an “air pocket” scenario of weaker growth this year. Stronger economic conditions in 2018 will require that Republicans deliver on their promised growth agenda in Congress.


Economic mediocrity has not translated into earnings mediocrity. Earnings growth for S&P 500® Index companies accelerated to +14% in the first quarter. There were two catalysts for this strength. First, the stabilization in commodity prices relative to early 2016 provided a large boost to earnings in the energy and materials sectors. This tailwind is likely to prove transitory. But the second force boosting profitability was more fundamental. S&P 500 companies source almost half of their revenue from abroad, and the cycle in Europe and the emerging markets has strengthened notably over the past year.

Indeed, the earnings growth of more globally oriented U.S. businesses was double that of their domestic counterparts in the first quarter. However, we believe it will be very difficult to sustain this strength over the course of 2017. The J.P. Morgan Global Purchasing Managers' Index has already started to moderate from a very high level, and risks are skewed towards “still healthy, but slower growth” in the months ahead. Translation: The first quarter is likely to be as good as it gets for U.S. earnings growth in 2017.

### Inflation: a sharp turn in the wrong direction

In her June press conference, Fed chair Janet Yellen noted that “core inflation... edged lower” and that “recent lower readings on inflation have been driven significantly by... one-off reductions in certain categories.” In our view this belies a much more significant inflation problem. Core consumer price index (CPI) inflation was effectively flat over the three months through May (as indicated by the blue line in the chart on the next page), which is the worst sequential run rate since the 2008 financial crisis. And relative to consensus expectations, this was the worst three-month period for core CPI ever in records dating back to 1997.

The Fed's preferred measure, core personal consumption expenditure (PCE) inflation, is likely to dip to 1.4% in May, moving away from the Fed's 2% inflation target. A key question for our mid-year outlook is whether this recent disappointment simply represents

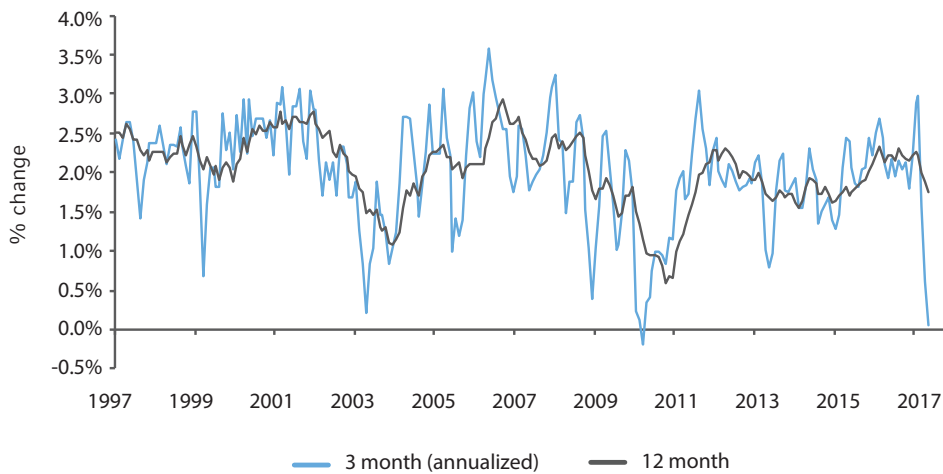
 The Business Cycle Index model suggests that recession risks are contained. But the U.S. economy remains mediocre.



noise in the data (as Yellen is suggesting). We think the downside to inflation could prove more persistent for several reasons: A price war in the telecom industry has had an outsized impact on the official inflation statistics, but shows no signs of abating in June; oversupply problems in the automobile industry are dampening pricing power and likely to persist; a significant build-out in multifamily homes is dampening rental price inflation; and technological change is exerting a disruptive, disinflationary force on the retail sector.

Given our caution around the near-term outlook for both growth and inflation, we think the Fed will be forced to stop its hiking process for the remainder of the year. The Fed does seem very committed to winding down its balance sheet, and we expect them to start that process later this year. The key for fixed income markets is that the Fed wants to do this in a gradual and predictable way. Our analysis suggests that balance sheet normalization should add only one- or two-tenths of a percentage point to U.S. 10-year Treasury yields each year. As such, we continue to look for the yield to slowly shift up to 2.5% over the next 12 months.

### Core inflation is headed in the wrong direction



Given our caution around the near-term outlook for both growth and inflation, we think the Fed will be forced to stop its hiking process for the remainder of the year.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Russell Investments calculations. Based on core CPI data through May 2017.

## Strategy outlook

- › **Business cycle:** Corporate profits recovered to +14% growth in the first quarter reporting season. But this is likely as good as it gets for the remainder of 2017. The U.S. economy is resilient but mediocre. We don't see enough cyclical support to extend the U.S. market rally at these valuation levels.
- › **Valuation:** U.S. equities are very expensive. The Shiller P/E ratio for the S&P 500 stands at 30x as of mid-June — its highest level ever outside of 1929 and the late 1990s.
- › **Sentiment:** Price momentum is strong, but partially offset by our contrarian indicators that show signs of complacency in the market.
- › **Conclusion:** We continue to have an underweight preference for U.S. equities in global portfolios primarily on the back of their expensive valuations. ■

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## The eurozone: Markets are closing the gap

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In the past quarter, eurozone markets started to close the gap between strong fundamentals and weak relative performance. A "good news" show coming from the economy, political developments, earnings growth and monetary policy pushed markets higher. Although this rally has stretched near-term sentiment, we expect the eurozone to continue to do well in the medium term.

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### The good news show


From a eurozone perspective, the past few months have resembled a good news show. Virtually nothing went wrong and all the important stuff went right. Of course, the most important piece of good news came out of France, where Emmanuel Macron won the presidency and his party En Marche won an absolute majority in the Assembly. Not only did this eliminate the tail risk of a win for the euro-skeptic Marine Le Pen, but it also highlighted the potential of a political renaissance in the eurozone.

A refurbished Franco-German engine can revive important reforms on the banking union and permanent stability mechanism, for instance. And in the face of Brexit, unity between France and Germany is important to safeguard the future of the monetary union. Obviously, Brexit itself is still somewhat of an economic risk, especially after the Tories lost their majority in the House of Commons. However, that risk lies more with the UK, and the political unity that Brexit is fostering amongst EU members is probably more valuable than any economic disruption Brexit may cause. Finally, if Matteo Renzi can win the Italian elections in 2018, it is very likely that eurozone political developments will become a source of upside potential, which is a big positive change from representing downside risk.

On the monetary policy front, the news was also good. ECB President Mario Draghi made it clear he will be slow to remove the amount of stimulus, eliminating fears of an abrupt end to quantitative easing at the end of 2017. In line with our expectations, a quick decline in inflation helped underline his position that inflation was still being driven by transitory forces as opposed to sustainable drivers. There is simply still too much slack in the eurozone economy to worry about inflation.

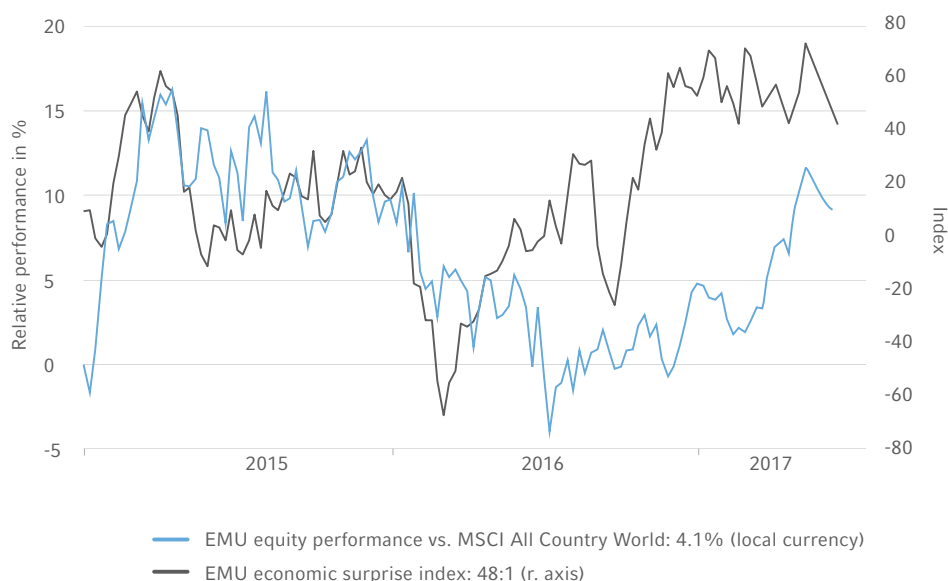
On the economic growth front the news was also good. GDP growth continues to accelerate and is close to 2%. Consumer and business confidence are riding high and credit growth is positive. As a result, consumer spending, corporate investment, and housing are all doing well. On top of this, companies are reporting strong earnings growth driven by both margin and revenue expansion.

In the face of such a good news show, it was nice to see eurozone markets finally pushing hard to close the gap between weak relative performance and strong fundamentals. In the very near term such a rally is risky because a sentiment reversal is possible, but in the medium term we expect the fundamental tailwind to continue to support eurozone markets.

 In the face of such a good news show, it was nice to see eurozone markets finally pushing hard to close the gap between weak relative performance and strong fundamentals.



## EMU\* economic surprise index vs. equity performance



Source: Thomson Reuters Datastream, 6/19/2017.

\*EMU refers to the Economic and Monetary Union, which includes the 19 eurozone states as well as non-euro European Union states.

Performance quoted represents past performance and should not be viewed as a guarantee of future results.

Indexes are unmanaged and cannot be invested in directly.

## Strategy outlook

- › **Business cycle:** Strong GDP growth, loose monetary policy, and corporate earnings growth of approximately 15% adds up to a positive business cycle score.
- › **Valuation:** Eurozone equities have pushed into slightly expensive territory, but are still cheap relative to the U.S. In eurozone core government bonds we remain neutral with yields still in our range of 0-0.5%. Peripheral bonds have done well lately and yields have returned to our range of 1-2%. However, in our view, there is still a smidgen of value left with spreads slightly above fair value.
- › **Sentiment:** A combination of positive price momentum and overbought contrarian signals have kept our sentiment score for eurozone equities in negative territory. Sentiment for core government bonds is still neutral. The rally in peripheral bonds means they are no longer oversold but they are not yet overbought either.
- › **Conclusion:** The strong rally in Q2 has pushed eurozone equity valuation and sentiment down, which means we need to be careful in the very near term. In fact, over the past few weeks eurozone equity outperformance has already paused. However, beyond that near-term pause we continue to believe in the reflation trade where strong fundamentals and attractive relative valuation drives markets higher. The eurozone is on solid footing both economically and politically. Of course, with respect to the latter, we continue to monitor developments in Italy. The next, yet unscheduled, election is still most likely a 2018 story, and in the meantime we were happy for the sake of the eurozone to see that the euro-skeptic Five Star Movement lost the local elections in April. But because of Italy's importance to the eurozone, we must be vigilant. ■

Although we are careful in the very near term, we continue to believe in the medium-term reflation trade.

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## Asia-Pacific: tortoise and the hare?

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The developing Asia-Pacific economies are powering ahead like the speedy hare in the classic fable, although we are less optimistic on the outlook for some of the more developed regional countries that plod along like the fable's tortoise. Resilient global trade continues to be a tailwind, and Asia-Pacific equities currently appear slightly expensive after a strong second-quarter performance.

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The Asia-Pacific region remains resilient, and we continue to expect GDP growth of around 5%. Along with strong domestic demand in some countries, global demand (particularly inter-region demand) is proving a significant boost for export-oriented companies. The forward 12-month earnings growth expectation for the MSCI AC Asia Pacific Index is 12% as of June 16, 2017. We expect the developing countries within the region to outperform through 2017, while the outlook for the developed countries is far more mixed. The three key threats to our outlook are a global slowdown, a follow-through on some of the recent protectionist trade threats coming out of the United States, and high levels of debt in a rising interest rate environment.

Looking first at developed Asia-Pacific countries, the **Japanese** economy is benefiting from strong demand for exports, but remains lackluster as personal consumption lags. Inflation continues to be sluggish; however, we see anecdotal signs of inflation beginning to come through. Some very visible prices are rising for the first time in years (for example, postage stamps and beer). Monetary policy has been accommodative, and we expect the Bank of Japan to maintain this through the remainder of the year.

The **Australian** economy has been stumbling along recently, while **New Zealand** finds itself in a better state. New Zealand's exposure to soft commodities (which have been performing well) is beneficial, as compared to Australia's exposure to hard commodities (which have struggled). Both countries are facing a slowing housing market, while slow wage growth has meant the Australian consumer is becoming cautious. We look for an outperformance by New Zealand versus Australia through the remainder of the year.

In **Singapore**, consumption and investment have been declining, despite strong regional demand for exports. We expect to see domestic demand remain weak, as consumers face weak wage growth. The one fully positive story among developed Asia-Pacific economies is **Hong Kong**, where growth has been accelerating off the back of strong external demand and robust investment. We expect decent growth for the rest of the year, with an overheated property market becoming the key threat to the economy.

In comparison, the developing economies in the region continue to show strength. Growth in **China** remains robust, and we maintain our constructive outlook on the Chinese economy. Despite concerns around heightened debt levels, industry surveys of business activity and indicators of growth (such as rail freight volumes) point to further expansion. The government will be focused on stable growth in the lead-up to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China later this year, an important planning session for the Chinese government every five years.

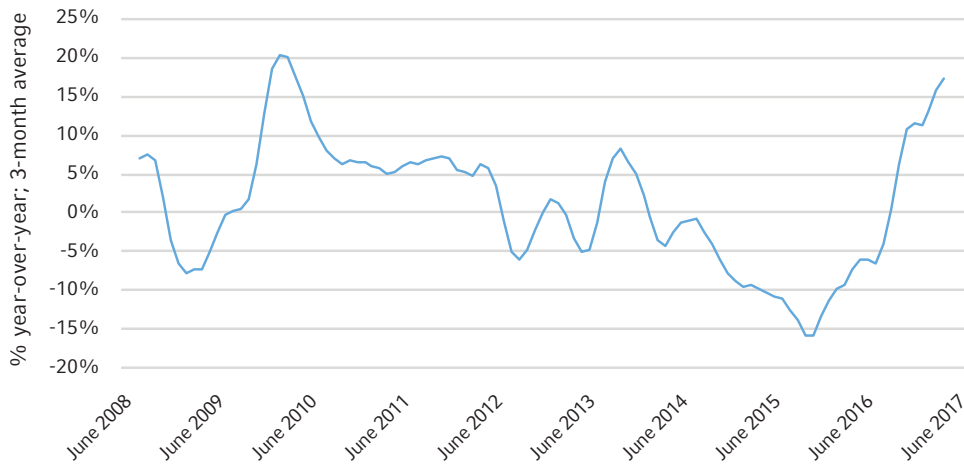
Growth in **India** has been hampered recently by the effects of the demonetization<sup>1</sup> policy. We expect this to filter out over coming months, and an acceleration in economic activity in the second half of 2017. Business and consumer sentiment have been rising in **South Korea**, which is driving a pickup in economic activity, while monetary policy remains

 We expect developing countries within the region to outperform through 2017, while the outlook for the developed countries is far more mixed.

<sup>1</sup> Demonetization is the act of stripping a currency unit of its status as legal tender. It occurs whenever there is a change of national currency: The current form or forms of money are pulled from circulation and retired, often to be replaced with new notes or coins. On Nov. 8, 2016, the government of India announced the demonetization of two widely used banknotes of the Mahatma Gandhi Series.

accommodative. Growth in the **Philippines** and **Malaysia** is accelerating, while economic activity in **Indonesia** continues to expand at around 5% per year.

### China's rail freight volumes



Source: China's National Bureau of Statistics, as of April 15, 2017.

## Investment strategy

For regional equities, we assess business cycle, value, and sentiment considerations as follows:

- › **Business cycle:** We have a positive outlook on the developing countries within Asia-Pacific; however, our view on the developed economies is less optimistic, dragging our aggregate view to neutral. China, India and South Korea, in our view, will be drivers of growth. On the developed side, Japan is expected to muddle along, while Australia and New Zealand remain lackluster.
- › **Valuation:** Asia-Pacific equity markets have performed strongly in the second quarter, adding just over 4% through June 9, according to the MSCI AC Asia Pacific Index, pushing the region into slightly expensive territory. The index currently shows stocks in the region trading on a forward price-to-earnings ratio of 16.2X, a price-to-book multiple of 1.6X and a dividend yield of 2.4%.
- › **Sentiment:** Asia-Pacific markets have been riding on a wave of positive momentum since the start of the year, while the market remains in overbought territory. The perception of the Asia-Pacific economy's health has fallen since our previous quarterly report, which is a positive for our assessment of sentiment, but overall we have a slightly negative rating on sentiment.
- › **Conclusion:** Overall, we are neutral on the Asia-Pacific region. There are pockets of strength in the region, namely the developing countries, although we are cautious to chase the hares. While the tortoise came out ahead in the fable, we expect the slower-moving developed economies to underwhelm. The strong year-to-date performance in 2017 has made valuations less attractive and, in our view, pushed the region into overbought territory. ■

Strong equity performance in 2017 has made valuations less attractive and in our view pushed the region into overbought territory.

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## Currencies: European renaissance

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The political risks to the eurozone project are fading after elections in France, Austria and the Netherlands put centrists into power. A pro-euro, pro-globalization reform agenda could make the single European currency more appealing in the longer term.

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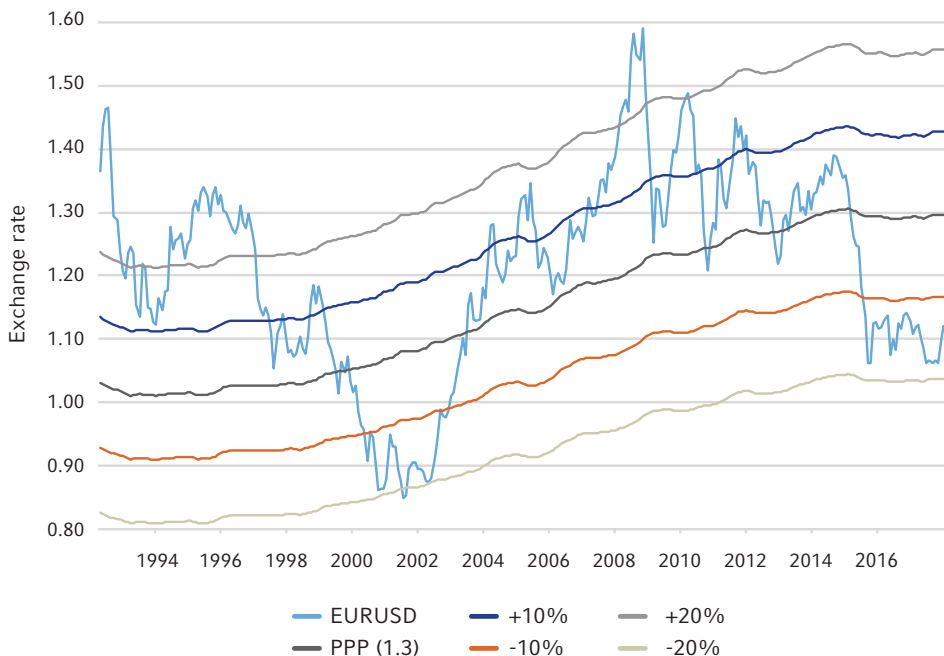
Political risks are fading in Europe. After the win of Emmanuel Macron in France's presidential election, one big threat hanging over the euro (EUR) exchange rate is now removed. Macron's rival Marine Le Pen of the National Front had threatened to take France out of the eurozone. Earlier elections in the Netherlands and Austria did not end with populist victories either, while we believe the upcoming German election in September is likely to see the prolongation of Chancellor Angela Merkel's time in office. Political headwinds for the euro are not completely gone as elections in Italy are expected in the spring of 2018, with the euro-skeptic Five Star Movement currently polling strongly. However, pro-euro and pro-globalization parties and politicians are on the rise in the countries of the single currency area, contrasting with the rise of populist movements looking to restrict free trade and migration in the U.S. and the UK.

In this edition of our quarterly outlook report, we look in detail at the prospects of the euro through the lens of our cycle, valuation and sentiment framework for market analysis:

- › **Business cycle:** Negative interest rates and quantitative easing (QE) continue to weigh on the EUR, although we believe the European Central Bank's next move will probably be to extend, but reduce its bond purchases in 2018. On the fiscal and structural policy front, President Macron may be joined by a reelected Chancellor Merkel to push for a reform of the eurozone institutions. Given euro-friendly political developments, our cycle view on the euro is modestly positive.
- › **Valuation:** The European single currency is supported by attractive valuations, and the euro trade-weighted exchange rate is low compared to history. The euro is also cheap vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar (USD) from a purchasing power parity perspective, as shown in the chart on the next page.
- › **Sentiment:** For the euro, it is positive. The currency has enjoyed a solid recovery since the beginning of the year, particularly after the French elections, without the rally becoming overheated.
- › **Conclusion:** We are becoming more constructive on the euro. Already attractively valued and buoyed by fading political risks, more pieces of the jigsaw puzzle could fall into place in the second half of the year to create a sustained rally. Other European currencies that usually correlate closely with the euro, such as the Swiss franc and the Swedish krona, could also benefit.

 The U.S. dollar index is unlikely to revisit or exceed its previous highs through the second half of 2017.

## EUR/USD: purchasing power parity (PPP)



Source: Thomson Reuters Datastream, as of June 12, 2017.

## Other major currencies

### › U.S. dollar (USD)

Long USD was a winning consensus position after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, but the greenback has reversed course since the beginning of the year. Optimism around U.S. federal tax reform (including the border tax adjustment, and corporate and personal tax cuts) proved premature and faster Fed rate hikes did not come through in early 2017. While interest rate differentials between the U.S. and the rest of the G10 countries are still supportive of the U.S. dollar, the greenback is also still expensively valued. All in all, we believe that the greenback is unlikely to revisit or exceed its previous highs in the second half of 2017.

### › Japanese yen (JPY)

From a monetary policy perspective, the JPY is subject to similar forces as the EUR. The Bank of Japan is very stimulative, having promised to keep Japanese government bond yields at zero. While this is a drag on the yen, the latter enjoys the tailwind of appealing valuation. We are also wary of the potential for a downward correction in risk markets, which could drive demand for safe-haven currencies such as JPY.

### › UK pound sterling (GBP)

After the UK general election in early June delivered a hung parliament, the ruling Conservatives managed to form a minority government propped up by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in Northern Ireland. In our main scenario, a diminished Conservative seat share may actually deliver a "softer" Brexit, which would be a positive for the pound and keep it within the 1.20 to 1.30 range to the U.S. dollar. Sterling also enjoys favorable valuation vis-à-vis the U.S. currency, which could eventually push it beyond 1.30. Due to the slim margin of safety for the government and the possibility of inconclusive new elections, there is an outside risk that Britain leaves the EU without a deal. This prospect could push the pound below 1.20, but it is a less likely scenario. ■

▮ We believe the greenback is unlikely to revisit or exceed its previous highs in the second half of 2017.

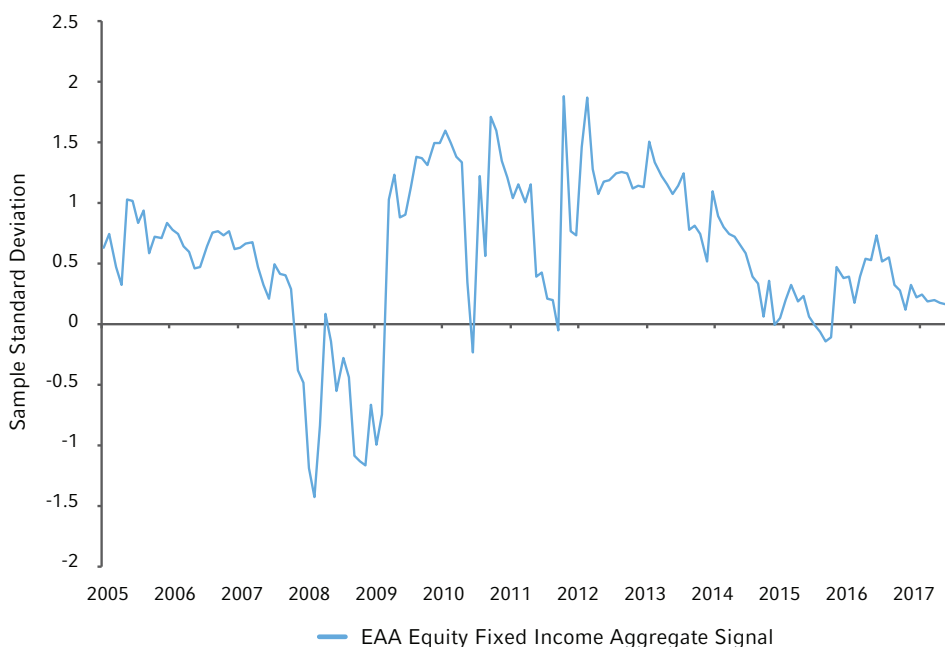
# Quantitative modeling insights: repeat performance

Our modeling inputs appear stuck in neutral for 2017, offering no reason to change our outlook on equities or recession risk.

## Neutral equity outlook

Our model for U.S. equities versus U.S. fixed income remains neutral, similar to what we reported in our annual outlook report in December and the subsequent quarterly update in March.

### EAA<sup>2</sup> U.S. equity vs U.S. fixed income aggregate signal



Source: Russell Investments, as of June 15, 2017.

Forecasting represents predictions of market prices and/or volume patterns utilizing varying analytical data. It is not representative of a projection of the stock market, or of any specific investment.

Within our cycle, value and sentiment investment framework we make the following overarching assessments based on our quantitative models.

- › **Business cycle:** Our proprietary Business Cycle Index (BCI) model uses a range of economic and financial variables to estimate the strength of the U.S. economy and forecast the probability of an upcoming recession. We conclude:
  1. A near-term U.S. recession is unlikely.
  2. We're also unlikely to see accelerating economic growth in this aging cycle. Our probit model, which incorporates the BCI's "mediocre but non-recessionary" view, gives a neutral preference to U.S. equity versus U.S. fixed income.
- › **Valuation:** Our Fed model stayed positive and increased slightly because the 10-year U.S. Treasury yield dropped while the earnings yield held constant.
- › **Sentiment:** Equities have continued to hit historic highs in the first half of 2017, but the pace of the rally has slowed. Our momentum signal as of June 15, 2017, is stable and positive, but our long-term mean reversion signal is stable and negative for equity versus fixed income.

Our momentum signal is stable and positive, but our long-term mean reversion signal is stable and negative for equity versus fixed income.

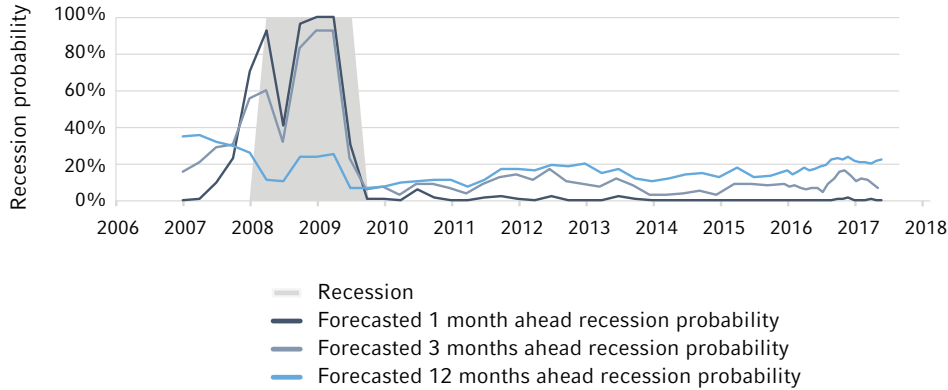
<sup>2</sup> Enhanced Asset Allocation (EAA) is a capability that builds on Strategic Asset Allocation (SAA) by incorporating views from Russell Investments' proprietary asset class valuation models. EAA is based on the concept that sizable market movements away from long-term average valuations create opportunities for incremental returns. The EAA Equity-Fixed Income Aggregate Signal is based on the S&P 500 Index and Bloomberg Barclays U.S. Aggregate Bond Index.



## BCI model: historical forecasted recession probabilities

Similar to last quarter's report, the BCI model shows near-zero risk of a recession in the near term, while probabilities for the next 12 months fluctuate between 20% and 25%.

### BCI historical forecasted recession probabilities

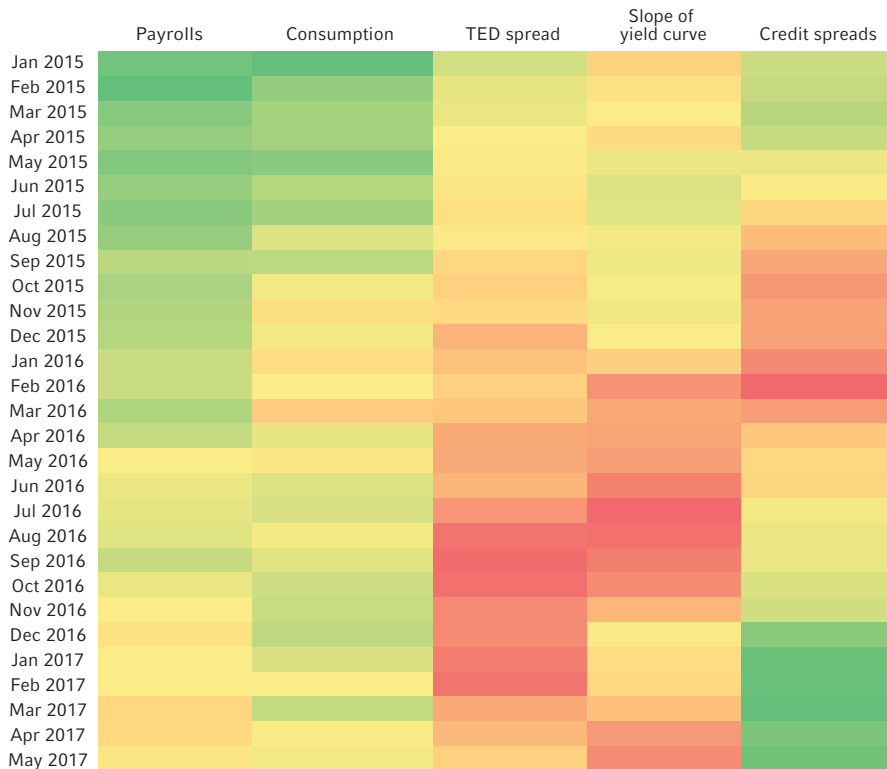


Russell Investments as of June 15, 2017.

## BCI-based heat map: ups and downs, but still neutral

The heatmap below shows payrolls and consumption have moderated in the past year, compared to 2015, while more favorable credit spreads help to offset those trends. The yield curve remains flat, which could foreshadow slower economic growth. ■

### Impact on BCI, relative to recent history



Heat map colors of green/yellow/red denote the economic variable's positive (green)/neutral (yellow)/negative (red) impact on business cycle strength relative to recent history.

Source: Russell Investments as of June 15, 2017.

Forecasting represents predictions of market prices and/or volume patterns utilizing varying analytical data. It is not representative of a projection of the stock market, or of any specific investment.

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The views in this 2017 Global Market Outlook — Q3 update are subject to change at any time based upon market or other conditions and are current as of the date at the top of the page. While all material is deemed to be reliable, accuracy and completeness cannot be guaranteed.

Please remember that all investments carry some level of risk, including the potential loss of principal invested. They do not typically grow at an even rate of return and may experience negative growth. As with any type of portfolio structuring, attempting to reduce risk and increase return could, at certain times, unintentionally reduce returns.

Keep in mind that, like all investing, multi-asset investing does not assure a profit or protect against loss.

No model or group of models can offer a precise estimate of future returns available from capital markets. We remain cautious that rational analytical techniques cannot predict extremes in financial behavior, such as periods of financial euphoria or investor panic. Our models rest on the assumptions of normal and rational financial behavior. Forecasting models are inherently uncertain, subject to change at any time based on a variety of factors and can be inaccurate. Russell Investments believes that the utility of this information is highest in evaluating the relative relationships of various components of a globally diversified portfolio. As such, the models may offer insights into the prudence of over or under weighting those components from time to time or under periods of extreme dislocation.

The models are explicitly not intended as market timing signals. Forecasting represents predictions of market prices and/or volume patterns utilizing varying analytical data. It is not representative of a projection of the stock market, or of any specific investment.

The Business Cycle Index (BCI) forecasts the strength of economic expansion or recession in the coming months, along with forecasts for

other prominent economic measures. Inputs to the model include nonfarm payroll, core inflation (without food and energy), the slope of the yield curve, and the yield spreads between Aaa and Baa corporate bonds and between commercial paper and U.S. Treasury bills. A different choice of financial and macroeconomic data would affect the resulting business cycle index and forecasts.

Currency investing involves risks including fluctuations in currency values, whether the home currency or the foreign currency. They can either enhance or reduce the returns associated with foreign investments.

The S&P 500, or the Standard & Poor's 500, is a stock market index based on the market capitalizations of 500 large companies having common stock listed on the NYSE or NASDAQ.

Performance quoted represents past performance and should not be viewed as a guarantee of future results.

Indexes are unmanaged and cannot be invested in directly. Citi tracks a measure known as the "economic surprise index" for various locales, which shows how economic data are progressing relative to the consensus forecasts of market economists.

Source for MSCI data: MSCI. MSCI makes no express or implied warranties or representations and shall have no liability whatsoever with respect to any MSCI data contained herein. The MSCI data may not be further redistributed or used as a basis for other indices or any securities or financial products. This report is not approved, reviewed or produced by MSCI.

The MSCI All Country World Index is a market capitalization weighted index designed to provide a broad measure of equity-market performance throughout the world. The MSCI ACWI is maintained by Morgan Stanley Capital International, and is comprised of stocks from both developed and emerging markets.

The MSCI AC Asia Pacific Index captures large and mid cap representation across Developed Markets countries and 8 Emerging Markets countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The index covers approximately 85% of the free float-adjusted market capitalization in each country.

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