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Canada Economics and Global Macro Strategy | North America

BoC Reaction: Shift in Tone

As we expected, the Bank of Canada left its policy rate unchanged at 5.00%. The Bank signaled a softer tone in line with recent weakness seen in the data. Nonetheless, we still believe the focus remains on the trajectory of inflation and inflationary pressures going forward.

Economics: The Bank of Canada (BoC or The Bank) left its policy rate unchanged at 5.00% at its September meeting. The Bank signaled a softer tone in light of the recent weakness in the economic data. We maintain our call for the key benchmark rate to stay at 5.00% for the rest of the year. The trajectory of excess demand, wage growth, inflation expectations, and corporate pricing behavior still remain the key determinants in the Bank's decision-making going forward.

Global Macro Strategy: The BoC removed the word "persistent" to describe the remaining excess demand in the Canadian economy. Instead, the rate announcement noted that "excess demand in the economy is easing." We expect markets to price in more easing in 2024 given the BoC's [focus on excess demand](#) as the driver for underlying inflationary pressures. Our economist expects an additional ~65bp of rate cuts relative to what current market pricing implies. We continue to recommend receiving the December 2024 BoC meeting.

MORGAN STANLEY & CO. LLC

Lenoy Dujon

US/Canada Economist

Lenoy.Dujon@morganstanley.com

+1 212 761-2779

Andrew M Watrous

Strategist

Andrew.Watrous@morganstanley.com

+1 212 761-5287

Zoe K Strauss

Strategist

Zoe.Strauss@morganstanley.com

+1 212 761-0407

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Canada Economics

Lenoy Dujon

The Bank of Canada held its policy rate unchanged at 5.00% at its September meeting. The hold was in light of **"recent evidence that excess demand in the economy is easing"**, coupled with the acknowledgement from the Governing Council of the **"lagged effects of monetary policy"** still in the pipeline. Given this, we believe the Bank will opt for the "higher-for-longer" approach. **We maintain our call for the key benchmark rate to remain at 5.00% for the remainder of 2023.**

Today's decision came with a shift in tone that was softer than we had expected, as the economy shifts towards a period of weak growth. Today's statement noted that the Canadian economy is off to a weak start in the 2H23. Second-quarter GDP contracted due to declines in residential investment, household spending, and the impact from the wildfires. Further, the Bank noted that household credit growth slowed as the impact of tighter monetary policy continued to restrain spending among borrowers.

The Bank also highlighted that tightness in the labor market continues to ease gradually. This comes as the unemployment rate has risen to 5.5% in July, from 5.0% in April, and job vacancies have fallen to their lowest level in over two years. However, the Bank did caution that wage growth continues to hover around the 4%-5% level — **a level that is not consistent with its 2% inflation target.**

On inflation, though inflation has come down from its peak last year, the statement reflected that **recent CPI pressures remain broad-based.** Both the three-month measures and year-over-year measures of core inflation are running ~3.5%, indicating **that more progress is still needed on the inflation front.** Given this, the Governing Council cautioned that "the longer high inflation persists, the greater the risk that elevated inflation becomes entrenched, making it more difficult to restore price stability."

We still note that despite today's decision to hold rates unchanged, **the Bank maintains its hawkish tilt in its monetary policy stance.** As highlighted prior, today's statement highlighted that the Governing Council **"remains concerned about the persistence of underlying inflation pressures"**, and cautioned that it is prepared to **raise rates further if needed.** The Bank reiterated that the Governing Council will continue to assess the dynamics of core inflation, as well as the outlook for CPI inflation. Specifically, **excess demand, wage growth, inflation expectations, and corporate pricing behavior** remain the key measures that the Governing Council is watching to gauge whether inflation is moving back to target.

Looking ahead, we expect economic growth and inflationary pressures to continue to slow in the back half of the year. We expect tight monetary policy to continue to weigh on business investment, household spending, and the labor market. Further, we see export growth weakening as global demand slows.

Governor Macklem will speak tomorrow at the [Calgary Chamber of Commerce](#), where we will be attentive to any further details on today's decision.

Global Macro Strategy

Zoe Strauss, Andrew Watrous

As markets anticipated, the Bank of Canada kept its policy rate unchanged at 5.00%.

Observers expected an incrementally more cautious tone on the economic outlook after the downward surprise in 2Q GDP and the downward revision to 1Q data.

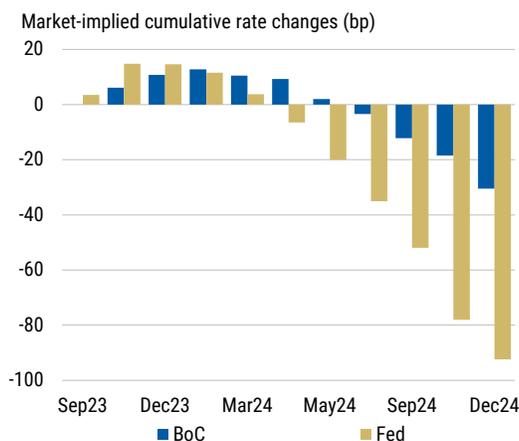
However, the September statement sounded marginally more cautious than those expectations given that the statement removed the word "persistent" in relation to excess demand in the Canadian economy.

Instead, the Governing Council noted that excess demand is "easing"

Given the significant shift in the BoC's tone following recent data softening, we expect pricing for late 2024 policy to shift in a CAD-negative direction.

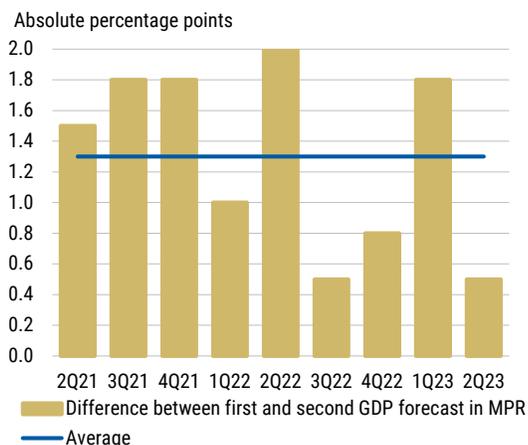
We continue to see room for markets to price in additional easing by the end of next year and recommend receiving the December 2024 BoC meeting ([Exhibit 1](#)).

Exhibit 1: We see room for market pricing of BoC policy to reflect additional easing in 2024



Source: MS STIRT Desk, Morgan Stanley Research

Exhibit 2: Revisions between the first estimate and second estimate of quarterly GDP have been relatively large



Source: Bank of Canada, Morgan Stanley Research

Excess demand is no longer "persistent", it is "easing": The final paragraph of the July announcement stated that both excess demand and core inflation were "proving more persistent."

In September, the BoC refrained from characterizing the remaining excess demand as being "persistent," and used the word "easing" instead.

The paragraph focused on the state of the Canadian economy changed significantly as well.

In July, the BoC described the Canadian economy as being "stronger than expected" due to higher-than-expected consumption and a pickup in housing activity.

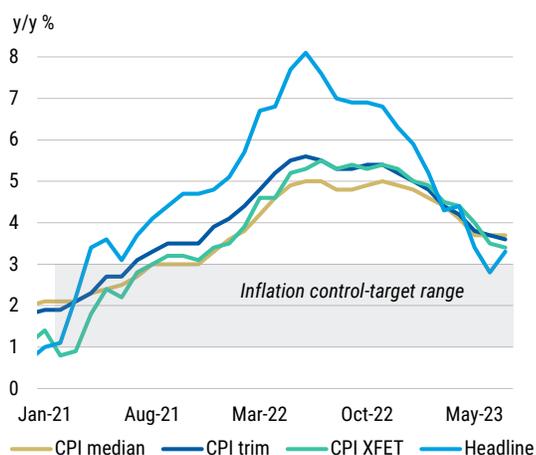
In September, the Governing Council announced that the Canadian economy "has entered a period of weaker growth," reflecting slowdown in the consumption growth and the housing market.

The notable shift in language raises the risk of a large revision to the Canadian growth outlook at the October MPR and the [timing of the output gap closure](#).

We have seen relatively large revisions from the first to the second forecast of quarterly GDP numbers in recent MPRs ([Exhibit 2](#)). Our economist expects 3Q GDP growth of 0% q/q SAAR. The BoC projected a 1.5% increase in its first forecast for 3Q GDP in the July MPR, which it may have to revise if recent weakness in economic data persists.

We expect investors to price in additional easing in 2024 for the BoC given that excess demand has been one of the main indicators driving the BoC's reaction function.

Exhibit 3: Progress on core inflation remains more limited than headline, which the [July MPR](#) attributed mainly to excess demand in the economy



Source: Bloomberg, Macrobond, Morgan Stanley Research

Exhibit 4: Breakevens have stabilized and suggest that inflation expectations remain anchored



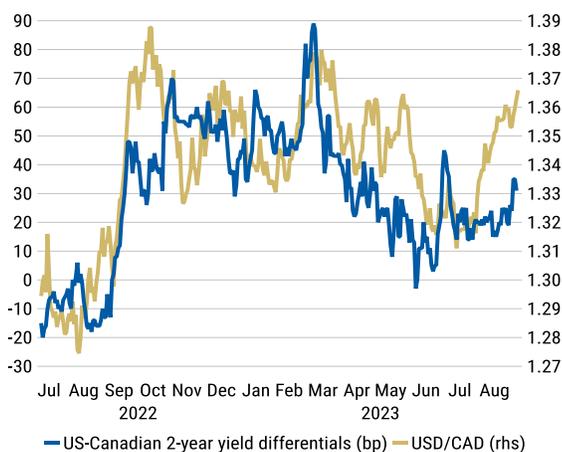
Source: Bank of Canada, Morgan Stanley Research

Risks of inflation "persistence" remain, but progress is no longer "stalling": The September statement reiterated the Governing Council's concerns about persistent underlying price pressures.

However, also on the inflation outlook the Governing Council seemed slightly more optimistic. The BoC removed language about the risks that "progress towards the 2% target could stall."

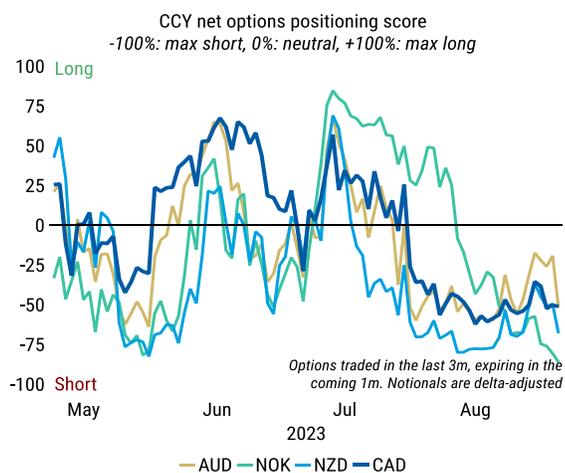
After all, the delayed return to target in the July MPR was largely a reflection of the seemingly "greater persistence of excess demand" in 2023 and "upward revision to house prices" as opposed to a significant shift in inflation expectations.

Exhibit 5: USD/CAD has traded above rate differentials over the summer



Source: Bloomberg, Macrobond, Morgan Stanley Research

Exhibit 6: Options data suggest that investors are short CAD and other risk-sensitive currencies



Source: DTCC, Macrobond, Morgan Stanley Research

Rates: The BoC's shift in tone suggests that the bar for additional tightening has been raised, while the output gap may be closed sooner than forecasted in the [July MPR](#).

We continue to see room for markets to price in additional easing by the end of next year and recommend receiving the December 2024 BoC meeting.

Lower US yields, as our US rates colleagues [expect](#), should contribute to lower yields in Canada too.

USD/CAD: We remain neutral on USD/CAD. A decline in US rates, as our [US rates strategists forecast](#), should put downward pressure on USD/CAD. USD/CAD has traded over the summer above what rate differential would suggest.

Option data also suggest that positioning is already quite long USD/CAD ([Exhibit 6](#)).

On the other hand, global growth concerns amid risks of negative spillovers from [economic weakness in China](#) and further signs of a [potential recession in the euro area](#) may spur safe haven flows into USD.

Trade idea: Maintain receive December 2024 BoC at 4.68

TRADE	ENTRY LEVEL	ENTRY DATE	RATIONALE	RISKS
Receive Dec 2024 BoC	4.29%	16-Jun-23	The BoC resumed its tightening cycle in June after pausing in March 2023. We expect that, as the BoC tightens further, more easing will be required, reflected in more cuts priced in 2024. Market pricing implies around half the amount of rate cuts in 2024 than our economist expects.	Further upside surprises to the inflation and growth outlooks could keep the BoC more restrictive for longer.

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	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total IBC	% of Rating Category	Count	% of Total Other MISC
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Not-Rated/Hold	3	0%	0	0%	0%	1	0%
Underweight/Sell	594	16%	67	10%	11%	218	14%
Total	3,628		641			1544	

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The following authors are neither Equity Research Analysts/Strategists nor Fixed Income Research Analysts/Strategists and are not opining on or expressing recommendations on equity or fixed income securities: Lenoy Dujon.

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