



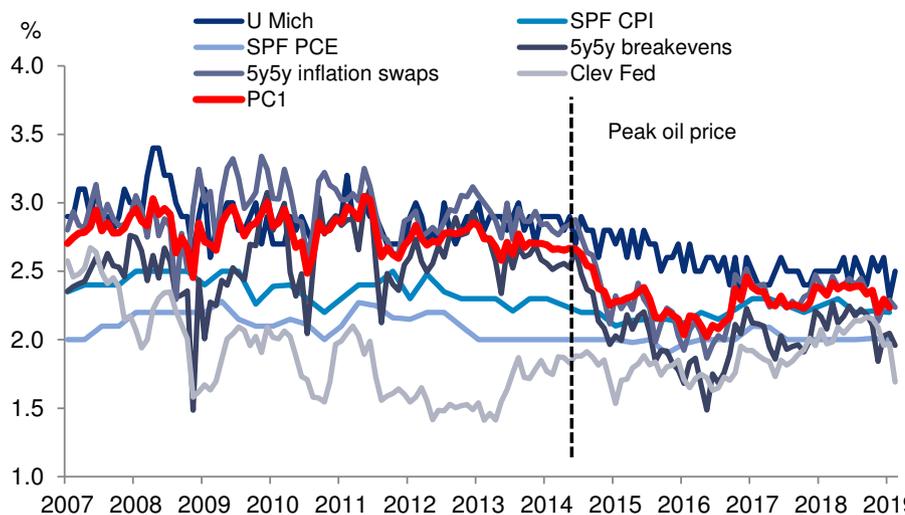
## Inflated fears about falling inflation expectations?

- As inflation has once again disappointed in recent months, Fed officials have expressed greater concern about the possibility that persistently below-target inflation could erode what have been, at least up until now, well-anchored inflation expectations. With low inflation expectations acting as a catalyst for the Fed’s framework re-think, we discuss three observations that, at the margin, argue that the perceived slippage in inflation expectations is less worrying.
- These observations include: inflation expectations fell in response to the 2014 oil price decline but have stabilized; lower inflation expectations are driven by a compression of the upper end of the inflation expectations distribution for surveys and the inflation risk premium for market measures; and market measures of inflation compensation have been driven primarily by oil price fluctuations.

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Figure 1: Inflation expectations fell with oil price shock but have been stable



Note: PC1 is the first principal component from a PCA on different measures of inflation expectations. Source: Univ. of Michigan, FRB Philadelphia, FRB Cleveland, Bloomberg Finance LP, Haver Analytics, Deutsche Bank




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## Introduction

As inflation has once again disappointed in recent months, Fed officials have expressed greater concern about the possibility that persistently below-target inflation could erode what have been, at least up until now, well-anchored inflation expectations. Indeed, the minutes to the March FOMC meeting highlighted that, “Several participants suggested that longer-term inflation expectations could be at levels somewhat below those consistent with the Committee’s 2 percent inflation objective and that this might make it more difficult to achieve that objective on a sustained basis.”

In normal times, a modest undershoot of the Fed’s inflation objective – core PCE inflation rose 1.8% over the twelve months through January – and a few tenths slippage in inflation expectations would have little impact on the direction of Fed policy. These are not normal times. The Fed is in the midst of a review of their policy framework, including whether a redefinition of the 2% inflation objective could improve their ability to meet their dual mandate objectives. Under consideration are “make up” strategies, in which the Fed should aim to hit above 2% inflation following periods when inflation has run persistently below 2%.

With low inflation expectations acting as a catalyst for the Fed’s framework re-think, we discuss three observations that, at the margin, argue that the perceived slippage in inflation expectations is less worrying.

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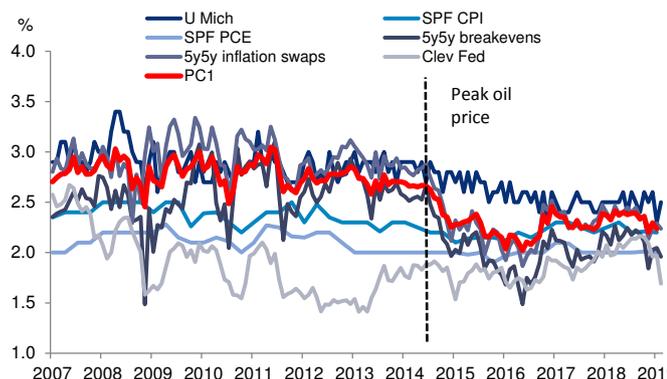
### 1. A regime change: Expectations lower but stable after 2014 oil shock

***Inflation expectations are not gradually grinding lower as inflation continues to fall short of the Fed’s objective.*** Instead, the recent experience with inflation expectations is better described as a regime change triggered by the sharp plunge in oil prices in 2014. This oil price shock led to a reassessment of inflation risks and a decline in inflation expectations to a new, lower level. Since that initial reassessment inflation expectations have generally remained stable within their new range. This experience mirrors the mid-1980s, the last time when a supply-side shock caused an oil price decline (see [Trapped in a low inflation expectations regime? Lessons from the 60s and 80s](#)).

Figure 2 shows this history from a time series perspective. We use a principal component analysis on six measures of long-term inflation expectations – University of Michigan consumer expectations, Survey of Professional Forecasters (SPF) CPI expectations, SPF PCE expectations, Cleveland Fed expectations, 5-year, 5-year (5y5y) breakevens, and 5y5y inflation swaps – to summarize the experience across the various measures. Evident is the fact that inflation expectations have remained broadly stable since falling in 2014. This lesson is clear in Figure 3 as well, which extends a table presented by NY Fed President Williams at the US Monetary Policy Forum in February. There is little evidence that inflation expectations declined compared to their pre-crisis levels prior to 2014. Nearly all of this decline occurred post that period.



Figure 2: Inflation expectations fell with oil price shock but have been stable



Note: PC1 is the first principal component from a PCA on different measures of inflation expectations.  
Source: Univ. of Michigan, FRB Philadelphia, FRB Cleveland, Bloomberg Finance LP, Haver Analytics, Deutsche Bank

Figure 3: Inflation expectations were steady through 2013

	Measures of Expected inflation				
	2005-2007 (a)	2012-2013 (b)	2017-2018 (c)	(b) - (a)	(c) - (b)
Michigan survey (5 year)	2.97	2.9	2.5	-0.07	-0.40
Philly Fed SPF CPI inflation expectations (10 year)	2.46	2.32	2.25	-0.14	-0.07
Philly Fed SPF PCE inflation expectations (10 year)	2.05	2.08	2.025	0.03	-0.06
Cleveland Fed inflation expectations (10 year)	2.48	1.57	1.98	-0.91	0.41
Breakeven inflation rate (5y5y)	2.47	2.66	2.1	0.19	-0.56
Breakeven inflation swap (5y5y)	2.9	2.9	2.4	0.00	-0.50

Note: The above table displays average values for various measures of expected inflation, over periods listed in each column.

Source: Univ. of Michigan, FRB Philadelphia, FRB Cleveland, Bloomberg Finance LP, Haver Analytics, Deutsche Bank

The fact that the decline in inflation expectations in recent years was triggered by the 2014 oil price shock and that, since that time, inflation expectations have stabilized at lower levels, could provide some comfort to Fed officials. So far at least, it does not appear that inflation expectations are slowly grinding lower as inflation persists below 2%.

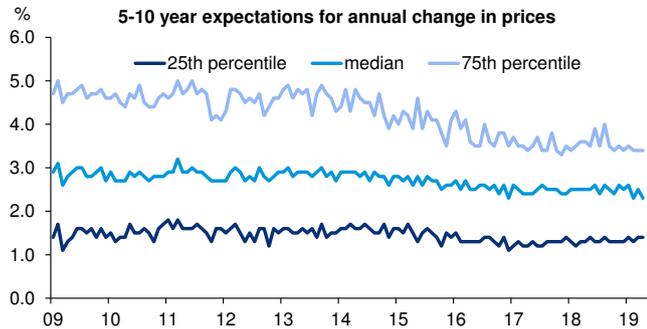
## 2. Lower expectations driven by a lower inflation risk premium

**Lower inflation expectations reflect a collapse in the upper-end of the inflation expectations distribution more than a downward migration in the entire distribution.** In other words, the decline in inflation expectations is more about lower expectations for those that had historically expected higher inflation than everyone believing inflation will be lower going forward.

This fact is evident from the long-term inflation expectations in the University of Michigan consumer survey. The 75th percentile of inflation expectations has fallen about 125bp from its 2013 average level, while the bottom 25th percentile has only drifted slightly lower (Figures 4 and 5). Moreover, there is some tentative evidence that inflation expectations at the bottom of the distribution are actually moving higher. After bottoming around mid-2017 on a 6-month average basis, the 25th percentile of inflation expectations has actually moved about 14bp higher, reaching its highest level in nearly three years (Figure 6).

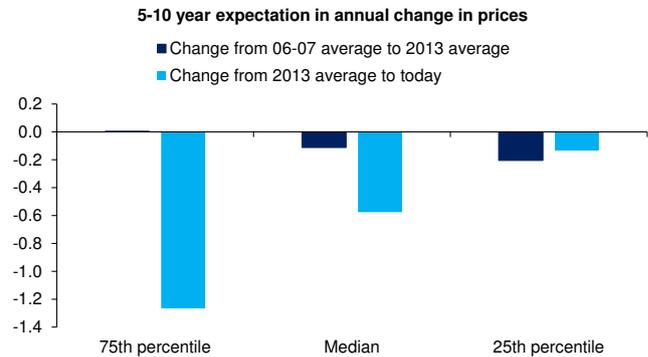


Figure 4: Inflation expectations have fallen more for upper end of distribution (i.e., those that historically expected higher inflation)



Source : Univ. of Michigan, Haver Analytics, Deutsche Bank

Figure 5: This reassessment of inflation risks occurred post-2013



Source : Univ. of Michigan, Haver Analytics, Deutsche Bank

A similar story is true for market measures of breakeven compensation. A decomposition from the NY Fed staff indicates that virtually all of the decline in long-term market breakevens is due to a lower inflation risk premium, not lower expected inflation (Figure 7). In fact, expected inflation has been remarkably stable for more than a decade near 2%. While this result is model-dependent, the fact that it is corroborated by the consumer survey data helps to reinforce the message.

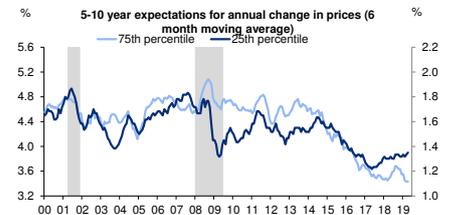
Figure 7: Inflation risk premium explains nearly all movements in breakevens



Source : FRB NY, Deutsche Bank

Should the Fed be more comfortable with lower average inflation expectations if it is driven by a “pricing out” of high inflation risks, i.e. a decline in the inflation risk premium, rather than a broad downward adjustment of inflation expectations? We think so, but so far we have not heard Fed officials use this observation as a reason to discount the apparent decline in inflation expectations.

Figure 6: Lower end of inflation expectations distribution trending higher



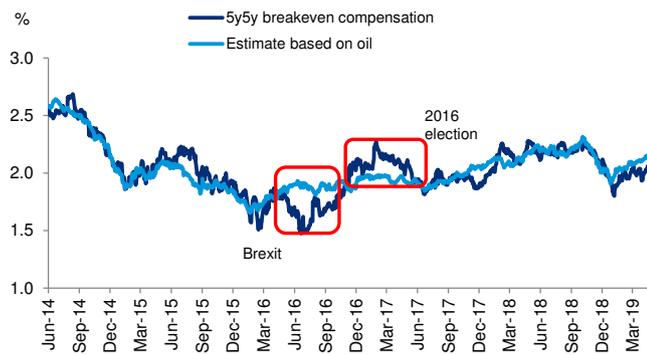
Source : Univ. of Michigan, Haver Analytics, Deutsche Bank



### 3. Market inflation “expectations” all about oil

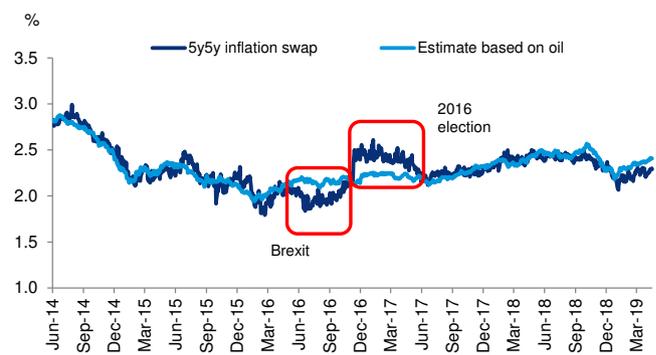
**Fluctuations in 5y5y breakevens and inflation swaps can almost entirely be explained by oil prices since 2014.** The correlations between Brent oil prices and these measures of market inflation compensation are about 85% since the oil price peak in mid-2014 (Figures 8 and 9). The only two periods where a large disconnect emerged between oil prices and inflation compensation are in response to Brexit, when market measures collapsed, and following the 2016 US election when inflation compensation spiked as the “reflation trade” was in full swing.

Figure 8: Oil can explain nearly all of the fluctuations in 5y5y breakevens...



Source : Bloomberg finance LP, Deutsche Bank

Figure 9: ...and the same is true for 5y5y inflation swaps



Source : Bloomberg finance LP, Deutsche Bank

Based on this relationship, long-term breakevens and inflation swaps remain below earlier levels because oil prices are well short of the 2014 peak, not because the market doubts the Fed’s ability to hit its inflation objective over the longer run. This observation, along with the fact that the collapse in the inflation risk premium likely explains much, if not all, of the decline in measures of inflation compensation, may suggest that the market’s long-term expected inflation rate has not fallen materially.

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# Appendix 1

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