



FOMC – Two-sided dissents?

- We expect a 25bps cut and little market-moving guidance for December
- It is possible there will be both a hawkish and dovish dissent
- We expect QT to end despite Bowman's somewhat hawkish comments on balance sheet size

Not many stones to turnover at this FOMC

Since the government shut down began in early October, expectations for the effective fed funds after the 29 October meeting have ranged from 3.848% to 3.863%. With almost no data being released, there hasn't been much basis for changing views, and Fed Chair Powell has signalled that 25bps cuts seem appropriate. We expect a 25bps cut in October and Powell to reiterate that they will do the best they can to figure out the state of the economy given the government shutdown. Powell will likely lean towards a 25bps cut in December, but we expect him to be non-committal on 2026 cuts.

Miran is likely to dissent again, pushing for a 50bps cut. We think there is a 40% chance of a hawkish dissent, most likely from Kansas City President Schmid but possibly also from St Louis Fed President Musalem, although Musalem's language in discussing policy has been careful to include the possibility of further gradual cuts. We have been surprised by Goolsbee's ongoing hawkishness, but we doubt he will dissent.

We expect the Fed to end QT, but curiously, Vice-Chair for Regulation Bowman has stated "over the longer run, my preference is to maintain the smallest balance sheet possible with reserve balances at a level closer to scarce than ample". There is a case for her dissenting in favour of letting QT continue somewhat longer, but that would be very unusual for a Vice-Chair for Regulation.

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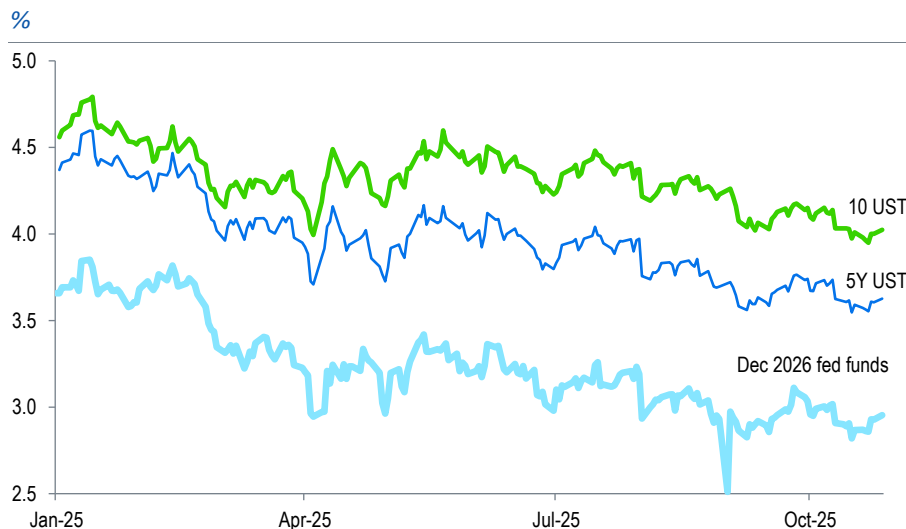
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Figure 1: Rates have not moved much since the last FOMC



Source: Bloomberg, Standard Chartered Research

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We think Powell’s comments on the economy will be the most powerful in moving markets. We are sceptical that the Fed has any definitive private-sector data that can substitute for government data not being released. Any effort on Powell’s part to look through the shutdown could be somewhat market moving. He may be asked whether he sees any direct economic impact from the absence of data or whether it is clearly leading to policy mistakes. But we don’t see much reason for him to stick his neck out. Similarly, questions on AI seem to be ubiquitous and even casual comments could drive markets, no matter how tentatively they are expressed.

Balance-sheet runoff: The last gasp

Why do we think the Fed should stop QT this month?

We think it would be prudent to halt QT this month, in line with our long-held view that the Fed would opt to conclude QT in Q4. Powell’s recent comment that QT would likely stop “in coming months” supports this, but the timeline has likely been moved forward – especially if the Fed is still aiming to stop when reserves are “somewhat above the level it judges to be consistent with ample”.

Reserves have dropped below the USD 3tn level (Figure 2), and the Overnight Reverse Repo Facility (RRP) – which is a store of excess liquidity – has been near zero for several weeks. The tri-party general collateral rate (TGCR) and SOFR have both been trending higher over the last month – with SOFR occasionally above the Fed funds target range (Figure 3) – while usage of the Standing Repo Facility outside periods of calendar-related stress has also increased (despite its additional cost).

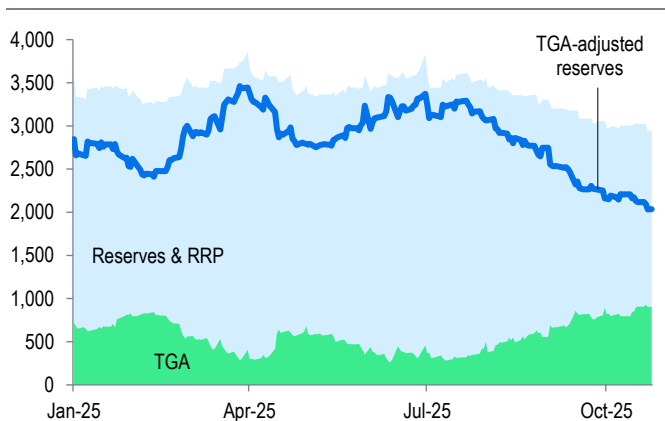
In our view, the timing and volatility of these recent rates moves (a larger and larger proportion of transactions are at rates near or above the top of the fed funds target range) is significant in light of Dallas Fed President Logan’s proposal to change the Fed’s operating target rate from federal funds to TGCR (see [Fed funds – On borrowed time?](#)). If TGCR is more representative of overnight funding costs, eventual deviations above the target range would suggest funding market conditions are tighter than the Fed is aiming for – and that raises the risk of an earlier end to QT.

Treasury cash balance build-up has also acted to reduce liquidity in the system

We are also aware of discussions in the market that the Treasury may opt to increase its cash balance target at its next quarterly refunding announcement on 5 November, amid larger-than-usual T-bill auction sizes and the elevated current balance (USD 945bn vs the USD 800bn target). Unless the Treasury announces that it will term

Figure 2: Headline reserves are now below USD 3tn, and TGA-adjusted reserves have also fallen noticeably

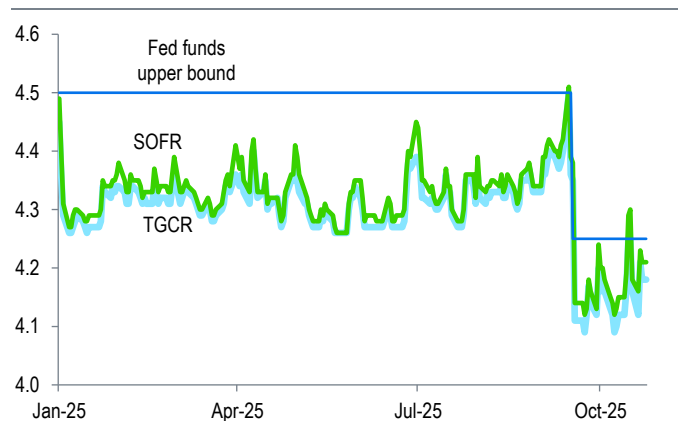
Reserve levels, USD bn



Note: TGA-adjusted reserves are calculated as the sum of reserves and RRP balances less TGA balances. Source: Bloomberg, Standard Chartered Research

Figure 3: Funding market rates are testing the top of the Fed funds target range

Rate, %



Source: Bloomberg, Standard Chartered Research



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out the debt and increase coupon auction sizes (we expect no change), this is another reason it would be prudent to end QT this month. A larger TGA balance leaves less liquidity in the system, all else equal, and TGCR has already tested the top of the fed funds target range on days of T-bill auction settlements.

If the Fed chooses not to end QT this month, the question will be whether it can afford to wait until December. The slow pace of QT – c.USD 20bn/month – is unlikely to be rapid enough to spark a crisis on its own, and the Fed's reserve demand elasticity (RDE) estimates for last month still suggested reserves were abundant. However, the increase in volatility in TGCR is a clear warning signal and we question the marginal benefit of an extra month of QT if the marginal cost could be another 'emergency' inter-meeting response, similar to that required on 11 October 2019.



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	Defensive^	Underperform	

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