

## Market View – Falling out of love with Canada

By Warren Lovely

*Dear international investor:*

*What happened!? We used to be so good together. For years, you simply couldn't get enough of me, scooping up my assets and holding them tight in your portfolio(s). But lately, it just hasn't been the same. I know my financial system has its vulnerabilities... my commodities appear less valuable... and my government policies (yes, I can admit it) are imperfect. But it breaks my heart to see you staring at other markets the way you once lusted over me. Because the truth is: I still need you!* – Loveless in Canada

Forgive our tongue-in-cheek intro, but this note is based on Canada's fresh balance of payments data, and if you're familiar with the subject matter, you know it can use some spicing up. More specifically, we're focusing here on Canada's financial account, which provides a detailed breakdown of how a persistent trade/current account deficit is being financed. If you've lost count, Canada has run a CA deficit for 45 consecutive quarters now (dating back to the end of 2008), racking up a combined shortfall of C\$628 billion along the way. Now, the current account deficit narrowed to C\$8.8 billion in the final quarter of 2019 and the corresponding full-year tally, at C\$45.4 billion, was the lowest since 2008. But don't hold your breath waiting for our current account to swing back into surplus... not with oil where it is and non-energy export prospects cloudy. Rather, a structural trade/current account deficit means Canada must continue importing capital from abroad, akin to drawing on a heavily used credit line supplied by non-resident investors.

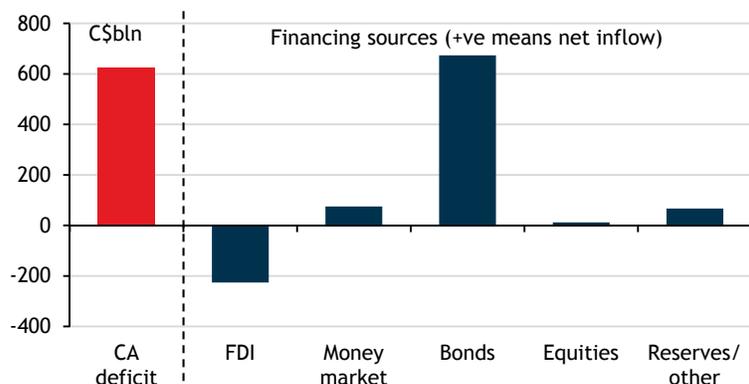
What's the big deal? Canada's been pulling in foreign capital for ages. More than anything, we've tended to rely on big-time foreign portfolio inflows (overwhelming into Canadian bonds) (Chart 1), since foreign direct investment (FDI) flows have left something to be desired. The net balance on FDI (i.e., inbound /less outbound) remains negative... for the last quarter, the last year or the last decade. For a while, Canada's chosen method of external financing—pawning portfolio securities off on investors in seemingly every corner of the globe—worked pretty well. Non-residents were only too eager to get their hands on our assets, drawn not by our scenic vistas but by the allure of a sound banking system, political stability, a sustainable general government sector, and likely further encouraged by the inclusion of the Canadian dollar in the IMF's reserve currency basket. But make no mistake, the C\$ is no safe haven... not now, not ever. And the combination of heightened global policy uncertainty and some made-in-Canada challenges (including on resource development and related infrastructure) has led to a sea-change in how investors approach Canada. No more are they indiscriminate buyers of our paper. Last year, Canadian equities saw their first net divestment by non-residents since 2007. Meanwhile, foreign holdings of C\$-denominated bonds have been cut almost C\$40 billion (or 7.5%) from their late-2017 peak.

When it comes to domestic bonds, net foreign outflows have been concentrated on the Government of Canada. Granted, we've seen periods of foreign divestment out of GoC bonds before, but this isn't the pre-crisis days of structural surpluses and falling federal debt. Today, Ottawa is running a \$25 billion deficit, and should the economic outlook continue to deteriorate we'll likely need/see extra federal fiscal stimulus. While not as acute, foreign investor detachment has also been observed in other sectors of our bond market. One exception: private corporations, where non-res holdings of C\$ bonds have actually moved up.

Simply put, foreign investors are no longer clamoring for loonie exposure... and who can blame them. If investors want to hide in a legit safe haven currency, say the US dollar for instance, certain of our issuers can oblige. Indeed, a number of Canadian public and private sector issuers have found receptive audiences internationally, placing the equivalent of C\$78 billion (net) of foreign currency denominated bonds outside the country in the last two years alone (Chart 2). But in the domestic bond market—where the majority of our issues are destined to be placed—turning foreign investors back on to Canada will likely require one thing: a cheaper currency. Until then, Canada will have to learn to love itself, relying on home-grown investor demand when and where it exists.

### Chart 1: How we've funded the current account

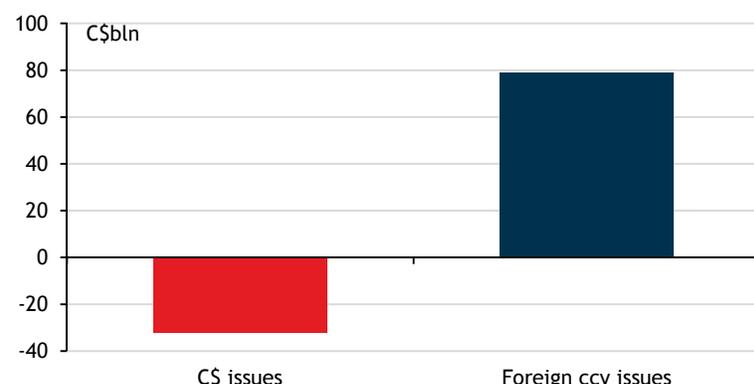
Sources of financing Canada's current account deficit (since 2008:Q4)



Source: NBF, StatCan | Note: Figures are cumulative totals for 45Q period

### Chart 2: C\$ bonds fall out of favour

Net foreign purchases of Canadian bonds by currency of issue (2018 & 2019)



Source: NBF, StatCan | Note: Foreign ccy issuance converted to C\$ at prevailing FX rate



## Economics and Strategy

### Montreal Office

514-879-2529

#### Stéfane Marion

Chief Economist and Strategist  
stefane.marion@nbc.ca

#### Matthieu Arseneau

Deputy Chief Economist  
matthieu.arseneau@nbc.ca

#### Krishen Rangasamy

Senior Economist  
krishen.rangasamy@nbc.ca

#### Paul-André Pinsonnault

Senior Fixed Income Economist  
paulandre.pinsonnault@nbc.ca

#### Marc Pinsonneault

Senior Economist  
marc.pinsonneault@nbc.ca

#### Kyle Dahms

Economist  
kyle.dahms@nbc.ca

#### Jocelyn Paquet

Economist  
jocelyn.paquet@nbc.ca

#### Angelo Katsoras

Geopolitical Analyst  
angelo.katsoras@nbc.ca

### Toronto Office

416-869-8598

#### Warren Lovely

Chief Rate Strategist, Economics and Strategy  
warren.lovely@nbc.ca

#### Taylor Schleich

Associate, Rates Strategist, Economics and Strategy  
taylor.schleich@nbc.ca

### General

This Report was prepared by National Bank Financial, Inc. (NBF), (a Canadian investment dealer, member of IIROC), an indirect wholly owned subsidiary of National Bank of Canada. National Bank of Canada is a public company listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange.

The particulars contained herein were obtained from sources which we believe to be reliable but are not guaranteed by us and may be incomplete and may be subject to change without notice. The information is current as of the date of this document. Neither the author nor NBF assumes any obligation to update the information or advise on further developments relating to the topics or securities discussed. The opinions expressed are based upon the author(s) analysis and interpretation of these particulars and are not to be construed as a solicitation or offer to buy or sell the securities mentioned herein, and nothing in this Report constitutes a representation that any investment strategy or recommendation contained herein is suitable or appropriate to a recipient's individual circumstances. In all cases, investors should conduct their own investigation and analysis of such information before taking or omitting to take any action in relation to securities or markets that are analyzed in this Report. The Report alone is not intended to form the basis for an investment decision, or to replace any due diligence or analytical work required by you in making an investment decision.

This Report is for distribution only under such circumstances as may be permitted by applicable law. This Report is not directed at you if NBF or any affiliate distributing this Report is prohibited or restricted by any legislation or regulation in any jurisdiction from making it available to you. You should satisfy yourself before reading it that NBF is permitted to provide this Report to you under relevant legislation and regulations.

National Bank of Canada Financial Markets is a trade name used by National Bank Financial and National Bank of Canada Financial Inc.

### Canadian Residents

NBF or its affiliates may engage in any trading strategies described herein for their own account or on a discretionary basis on behalf of certain clients and as market conditions change, may amend or change investment strategy including full and complete divestment. The trading interests of NBF and its affiliates may also be contrary to any opinions expressed in this Report.

NBF or its affiliates often act as financial advisor, agent or underwriter for certain issuers mentioned herein and may receive remuneration for its services. As well NBF and its affiliates and/or their officers, directors, representatives, associates, may have a position in the securities mentioned herein and may make purchases and/or sales of these securities from time to time in the open market or otherwise. NBF and its affiliates may make a market in securities mentioned in this Report. This Report may not be independent of the proprietary interests of NBF and its affiliates.

This Report is not considered a research product under Canadian law and regulation, and consequently is not governed by Canadian rules applicable to the publication and distribution of research Reports, including relevant restrictions or disclosures required to be included in research Reports.



### UK Residents

This Report is a marketing document. This Report has not been prepared in accordance with EU legal requirements designed to promote the independence of investment research and it is not subject to any prohibition on dealing ahead of the dissemination of investment research. In respect of the distribution of this Report to UK residents, NBF has approved the contents (including, where necessary, for the purposes of Section 21(1) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000). This Report is for information purposes only and does not constitute a personal recommendation, or investment, legal or tax advice. NBF and/or its parent and/or any companies within or affiliates of the National Bank of Canada group and/or any of their directors, officers and employees may have or may have had interests or long or short positions in, and may at any time make purchases and/or sales as principal or agent, or may act or may have acted as market maker in the relevant investments or related investments discussed in this Report, or may act or have acted as investment and/or commercial banker with respect hereto. The value of investments, and the income derived from them, can go down as well as up and you may not get back the amount invested. Past performance is not a guide to future performance. If an investment is denominated in a foreign currency, rates of exchange may have an adverse effect on the value of the investment. Investments which are illiquid may be difficult to sell or realise; it may also be difficult to obtain reliable information about their value or the extent of the risks to which they are exposed. Certain transactions, including those involving futures, swaps, and other derivatives, give rise to substantial risk and are not suitable for all investors. The investments contained in this Report are not available to retail customers and this Report is not for distribution to retail clients (within the meaning of the rules of the Financial Conduct Authority). Persons who are retail clients should not act or rely upon the information in this Report. This Report does not constitute or form part of any offer for sale or subscription of or solicitation of any offer to buy or subscribe for the securities described herein nor shall it or any part of it form the basis of or be relied on in connection with any contract or commitment whatsoever.

This information is only for distribution to Eligible Counterparties and Professional Clients in the United Kingdom within the meaning of the rules of the Financial Conduct Authority. NBF is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and has its registered office at 71 Fenchurch Street, London, EC3M 4HD.

NBF is not authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and the Financial Conduct Authority to accept deposits in the United Kingdom.

### U.S. Residents

With respect to the distribution of this report in the United States of America, National Bank of Canada Financial Inc. ("NBCFI") which is regulated by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) and a member of the Securities Investor Protection Corporation (SIPC), an affiliate of NBF, accepts responsibility for its contents, subject to any terms set out above. To make further inquiry related to this report, or to effect any transaction, United States residents should contact their NBCFI registered representative.

This report is not a research report and is intended for Major U.S. Institutional Investors only.

This report is not subject to U.S. independence and disclosure standards applicable to research reports.

### HK Residents

With respect to the distribution of this report in Hong Kong by NBC Financial Markets Asia Limited ("NBCFMA") which is licensed by the Securities and Futures Commission ("SFC") to conduct Type 1 (dealing in securities) and Type 3 (leveraged foreign exchange trading) regulated activities, the contents of this report are solely for informational purposes. It has not been approved by, reviewed by, verified by or filed with any regulator in Hong Kong. Nothing herein is a recommendation, advice, offer or solicitation to buy or sell a product or service, nor an official confirmation of any transaction. None of the products issuers, NBCFMA or its affiliates or other persons or entities named herein are obliged to notify you of changes to any information and none of the foregoing assume any loss suffered by you in reliance of such information.

The content of this report may contain information about investment products which are not authorized by SFC for offering to the public in Hong Kong and such information will only be available to, those persons who are Professional Investors (as defined in the Securities and Futures Ordinance of Hong Kong ("SFO")). If you are in any doubt as to your status you should consult a financial adviser or contact us. This material is not meant to be marketing materials and is not intended for public distribution. Please note that neither this material nor the product referred to is authorized for sale by SFC. Please refer to product prospectus for full details.

There may be conflicts of interest relating to NBCFMA or its affiliates' businesses. These activities and interests include potential multiple advisory, transactional and financial and other interests in securities and instruments that may be purchased or sold by NBCFMA or its affiliates, or in other investment vehicles which are managed by NBCFMA or its affiliates that may purchase or sell such securities and instruments.

No other entity within the National Bank of Canada group, including National Bank of Canada and National Bank Financial Inc, is licensed or registered with the SFC. Accordingly, such entities and their employees are not permitted and do not intend to: (i) carry on a business in any regulated activity in Hong Kong; (ii) hold themselves out as carrying on a business in any regulated activity in Hong Kong; or (iii) actively market their services to the Hong Kong public.

### Copyright

This Report may not be reproduced in whole or in part, or further distributed or published or referred to in any manner whatsoever, nor may the information, opinions or conclusions contained in it be referred to without in each case the prior express written consent of NBF.