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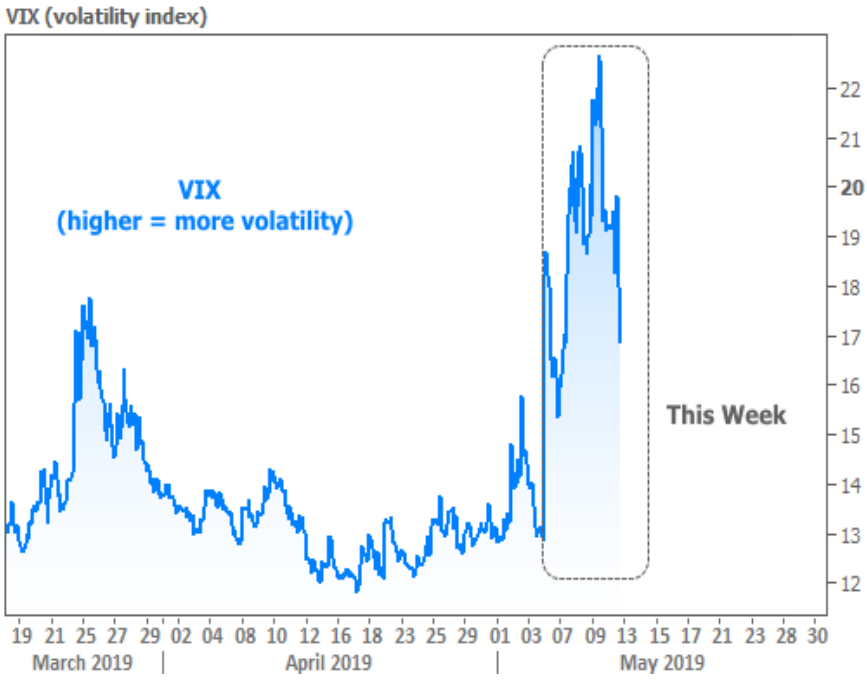
Why Aren't Mortgages Falling as Fast as Other Rates?

10yr Treasury yields are widely thought to dictate mortgage rate movement. This week's trade war headlines caused plenty of **volatility** and a general decline in Treasury yields, but mortgage rates had a hard time keeping up.

Before we get to the finer points of Treasuries vs mortgage rates, let's recap this week's reaction to various trade-related headlines. There's no question that volatility increased in a major way, as can be seen in VIX chart below.



The **big spike** right out of the gate suggests that markets were reacting to news that hit over the weekend. Indeed, the culprit was a set of Trump tweets about raising tariff's on Chinese goods. Combined with a story from the Wall Street Journal suggesting China was considering "pulling out of trade talks," the **message to markets was clear:** something had gone wrong in the trade negotiation process.

Generally speaking, a trade deal between the US and China is almost **universally viewed as good** for global financial markets as well as the economies of both countries. Economic strength tends to coincide with higher stock prices and bond yields. As such, it was no surprise to see stocks and bond yields fall as trading began for the week.

National Average Mortgage Rates



Mortgage News Daily	Rate	Change	Points
30YR Fixed	7.33%	-0.12	0.00
15YR Fixed	6.89%	-0.10	0.00
30YR FHA	6.95%	-0.10	0.00
30YR Jumbo	7.44%	-0.06	0.00
7/6 SOFR	6.81%	-0.19	0.00
30YR VA	6.97%	-0.10	0.00

Rates as of: 11/20

MBS and Treasury

	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 6.0	99.51	+0.41
10 YR Treasury	4.9403	-0.1033
30 YR Treasury	5.3324	-0.0738

Pricing as of: 11/20 5:59PM EST

Recent Housing Data

		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	Nov 11	199.8	-2.35%
Building Permits	Oct	1.3M	-7.5%
Housing Starts	Oct	1.31M	+7.21%
New Home Sales	Sep	676K	-1.17%
Pending Home Sales	Oct	63	-4.69%
Existing Home Sales	Oct	3.99M	+0.25%
Builder Confidence	Nov	25	-13.79%

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From there on out, markets were **transfixed by trade war drama**. Here's a quick recap of the highlights and the corresponding logical impact on stocks/bonds ("bonds" = "bond yields" in this list).

1. Initial tariff tweets cause immediate drop in stocks/bonds, but markets bounce back amid an absence of additional news for most of the day on Monday.
2. Monday, close of business. US Trade official Lighthizer: China has backed away from agreements. This caused another move lower in stocks/bonds, both on Monday afternoon and again when markets opened on Tuesday
3. Early Wednesday morning, Reuters exclusive detailed how China had "backtracked on almost all aspects of trade deal." Stocks/bonds fall again
4. Mid-morning, White House reports that China is sending a delegation and "wants to make a deal." Stocks and bonds move back up briefly
5. Wednesday evening, at a campaign rally, Trump says China "broke the deal. They can't do that, so they'll be paying."
6. Thursday mid-day, Trump says he received a "beautiful letter" from President Xi, and cites Xi as saying "let's work together to see if we can get something done." Stocks and bonds bounce.
7. Finally, stocks and bonds fall back in line with lows as trade talks conclude for the week, only to bounce back up to the day's highs following positive comments from Trump in the afternoon (not highlighted below)



Before this fairly wild week, it looked like **rates had decided to move higher** after being unable to break below key levels last week due to Fed Chair Powell's press conference on Wednesday. Stocks didn't love what they heard from Powell but were nonetheless able to hold near all-time highs.

Powell aside, stocks and bonds were both moving gradually higher anyway. Viewed in the bigger picture, this week's trading resulted in a fairly **obvious reversal** of those trends.

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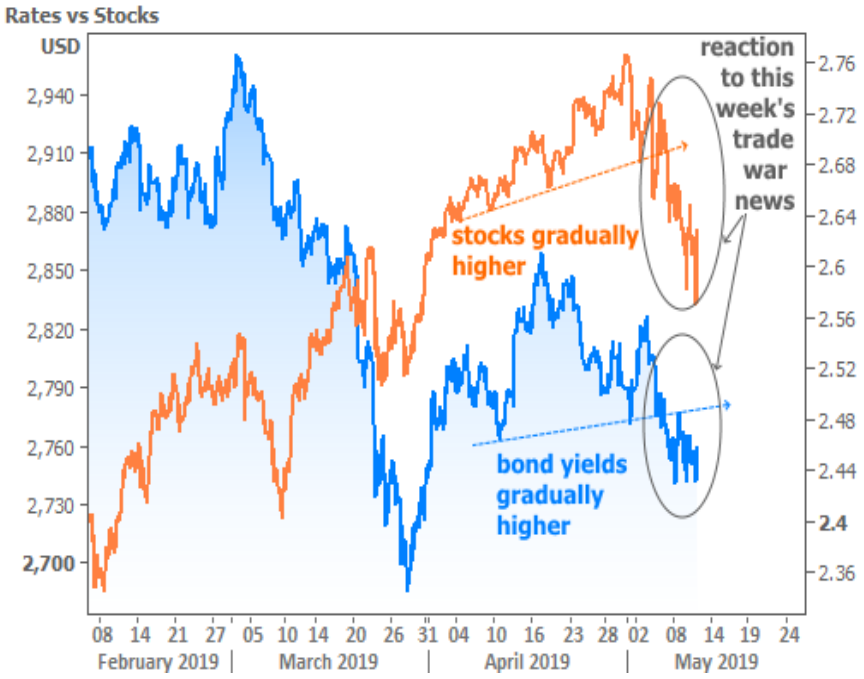
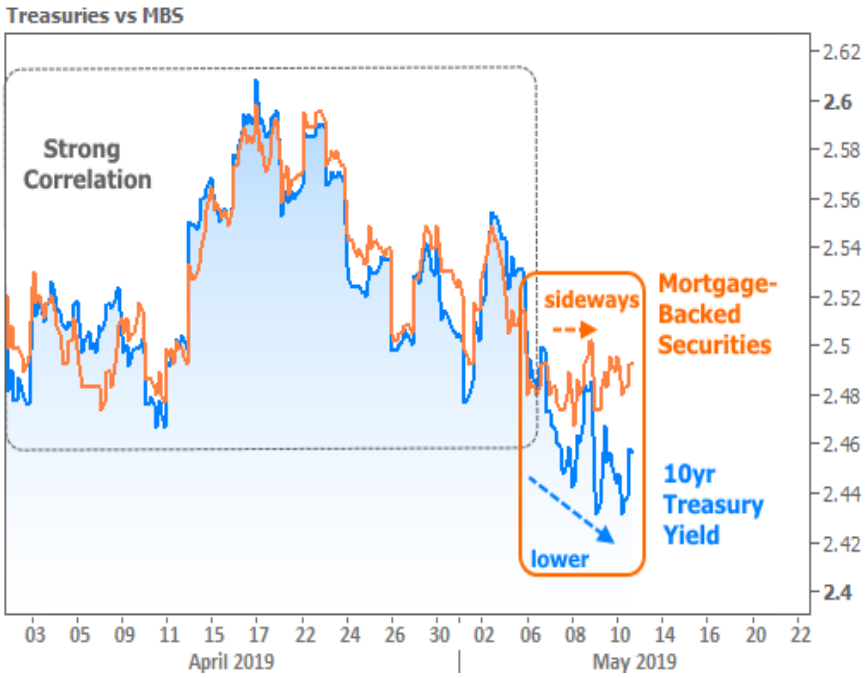


To come back to our original thesis, although we are certainly seeing a general decline in Treasury yields this week, mortgage rates are just as certainly **having a hard time keeping up**. This will be especially puzzling to anyone laboring under the misapprehension that Treasury yields always dictate mortgage rates.



While it is very true that Treasuries represent the benchmark/core of the US interest rate market, and also very true that mortgages tend to correlate **almost perfectly** with Treasury movement, there are notable exceptions. Mortgages are actually driven directly by mortgage-backed securities (MBS). Simply put, these are bonds composed of groups of mortgages for the purpose of managing risk and providing liquidity among mortgage investors.

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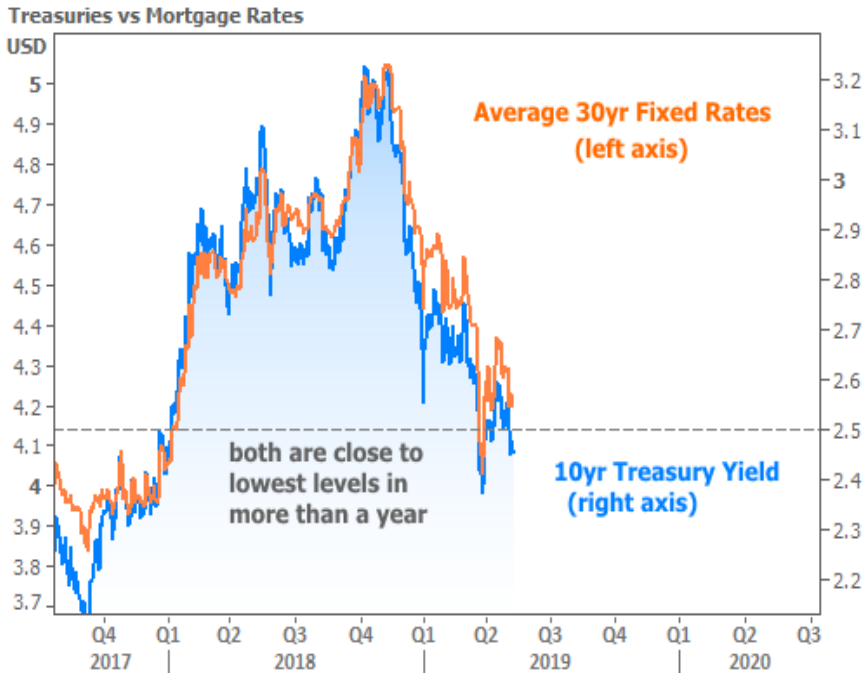
Because the government took control of the two biggest issuers of MBS during The Financial Crisis, MBS returns are **just as guaranteed** as Treasury returns. If that were the only thing investors cared about, MBS would always move in lock-step with Treasuries.

But MBS are subject to a **huge variable** that Treasuries never have to worry about: human behavior. Whereas the government will pay the agreed-upon yield on a Treasury security as long as it lasts, a mortgage borrower will only pay the agreed-upon yield (aka "interest") as long as they have their mortgage. For a variety of reasons, they may decide to move or refinance. When that happens, the investor is no longer receiving the stream of payments with interest that it signed up for.

The early retirement of a mortgage is referred to as "prepayment" in the secondary market, and it goes hand in hand with another MBS buzz word: "speeds." This simply refers to the speed at which certain vintages of MBS are being paid off.

To make a long story short, the monthly prepayment report showed a **drastic increase** in speeds early this week. This suggested MBS were a bit overvalued relative to Treasuries, and a logical correction ensued (even though it seemed paradoxical on the surface).

The **good news is twofold.** First, the correction is over for now and in fact, mortgages outperformed Treasuries on Friday. But more importantly, this was only ever cause for concern when looking at rate movement under a microscope. Both mortgage rates and Treasury yields are operating very close to the lowest levels in more than a year.



The week ahead should be telling for markets as traders are able to get back to business following this week's trade war diversions. Economic data will return after being mostly absent or inconsequential this week. In that regard, next Wednesday's Retail Sales report is likely the **most important data point** followed by a smattering of other mid-tier reports in the 2nd half of the week.

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Recent Economic Data

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
Tuesday, May 07				

Event Importance:

No Stars = Insignificant
☆ Low

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US Housing Market Weekly

May 10, 2019

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
1:00PM	3-Yr Note Auction (bl)	38		
Wednesday, May 08				
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index	1238.5		1228.3
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	270.2		259.4
Thursday, May 09				
8:30AM	Apr Core Producer Prices YY (%)	2.4	2.5	2.4
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	228	225	230
10:00AM	Mar Wholesale inventories mm (%)	-0.1	0.0	0.0
10:00AM	Mar Wholesale sales mm (%)	2.3	0.2	0.3
Friday, May 10				
12:00AM	Roll Date - Fannie Mae 30YR, Freddie Mac 30YR			
8:30AM	Apr Consumer Price Index (CPI) (%)	0.3	0.4	0.4
8:30AM	Apr Core CPI (Annual) (%)	2.1	2.1	2.0
Tuesday, May 14				
8:30AM	Apr Import prices mm (%)	0.2	0.7	0.6
8:30AM	Apr Export prices mm (%)	0.2	0.5	0.7
Wednesday, May 15				
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	268.5		270.2
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index	1232.6		1238.5
8:30AM	Apr Retail Sales (%)	-0.2	0.2	1.6
8:30AM	May NY Fed Manufacturing	17.80	8.50	10.10
9:15AM	Apr Industrial Production (%)	-0.5	0.0	-0.1
9:15AM	Apr Capacity Utilization (%)	77.9	78.7	78.8
10:00AM	May NAHB housing market indx	66	64	63
Thursday, May 16				
8:30AM	Apr House starts mm: change (%)	5.7		-0.3
8:30AM	Apr Building permits: number (ml)	1.296	1.290	1.288
8:30AM	Apr Housing starts number mm (ml)	1.235	1.205	1.139
8:30AM	May Philly Fed Business Index	16.6	9.0	8.5
8:30AM	Apr Build permits: change mm (%)	0.6		-0.2
Friday, May 17				
10:00AM	May 5yr Inflation Outlook (%)	2.6		2.3
10:00AM	May Consumer Sentiment	102.4	97.5	97.2
10:00AM	May 1yr Inflation Outlook (%)	2.8		2.5
10:00AM	Apr Leading index chg mm (%)	0.2	0.2	0.4
Wednesday, Jul 10				
1:00PM	10-yr Note Auction (bl)	24		
Thursday, Jul 11				
1:00PM	30-Yr Bond Auction (bl)	16		

☆ Moderate
☆☆ Important
★★ Very Important

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