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Winter is Coming, But That's Good For Rates

Winter is coming, both literally and figuratively. While the fallout remains to be seen, financial markets are already reacting.

In the literal sense, colder ambient temperatures are generally correlated with increased covid case counts. The following chart shows per capita covid hot spots juxtaposed with a low temp map from 2 weeks prior.

National Average Mortgage Rates



	Rate	Change	Points
Mortgage News Daily			
30 Yr. Fixed	6.89%	0.00	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	6.33%	+0.01	0.00
30 Yr. FHA	6.33%	+0.01	0.00
30 Yr. Jumbo	7.05%	0.00	0.00
5/1 ARM	6.58%	0.00	0.00
Freddie Mac			
30 Yr. Fixed	6.77%	-0.09	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	6.05%	-0.11	0.00

Rates as of: 7/22

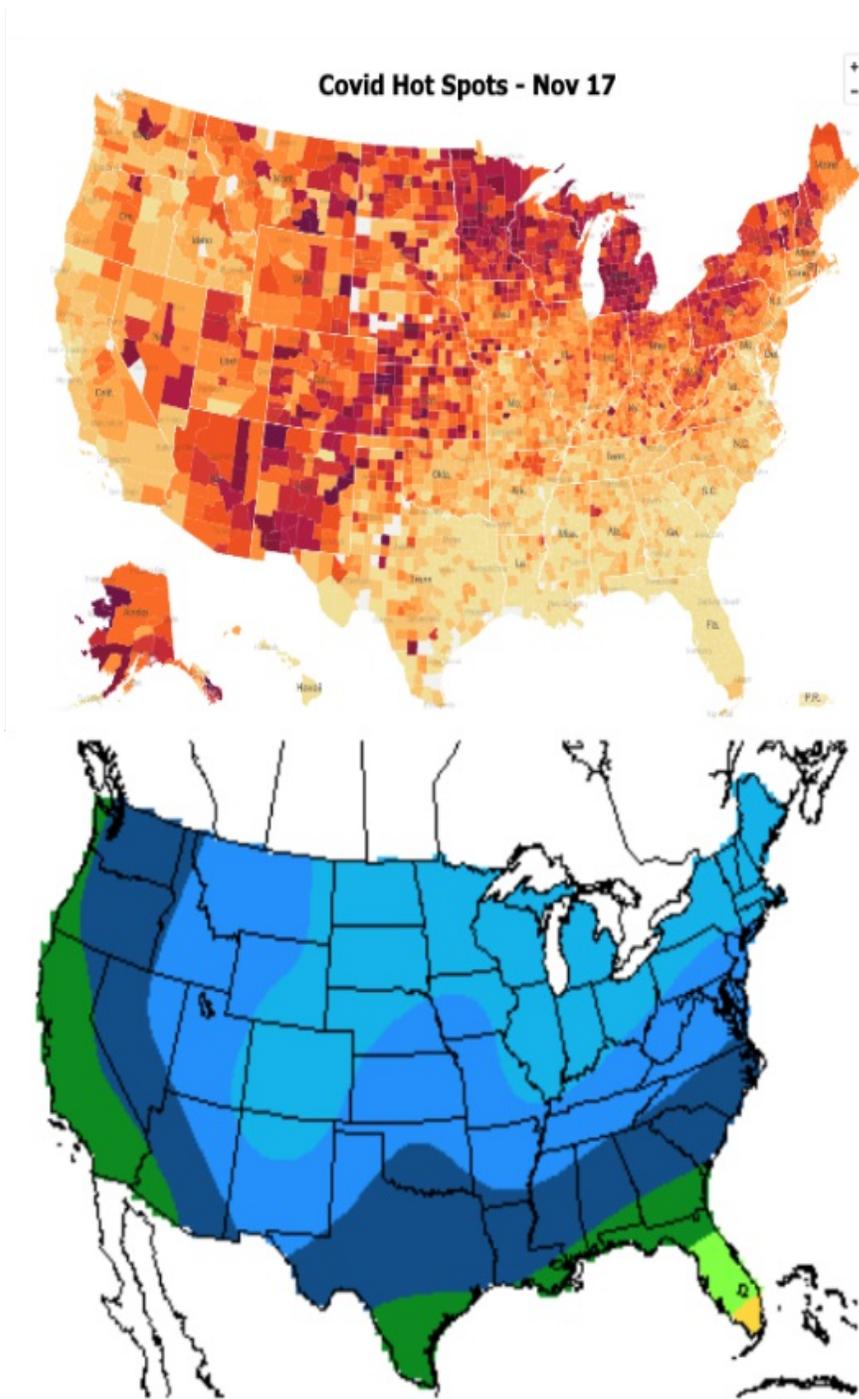
Market Data

	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 5.5	99.39	-0.01
MBS GNMA 5.5	99.78	+0.00
10 YR Treasury	4.2525	+0.0146
30 YR Treasury	4.4725	+0.0257

Pricing as of: 7/22 5:59PM EST

Recent Housing Data

		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	Jul 10	206.1	-0.19%
Building Permits	Mar	1.46M	-3.95%
Housing Starts	Mar	1.32M	-13.15%
New Home Sales	Mar	693K	+4.68%
Pending Home Sales	Feb	75.6	+1.75%
Existing Home Sales	Feb	3.97M	-0.75%
Builder Confidence	Mar	51	+6.25%

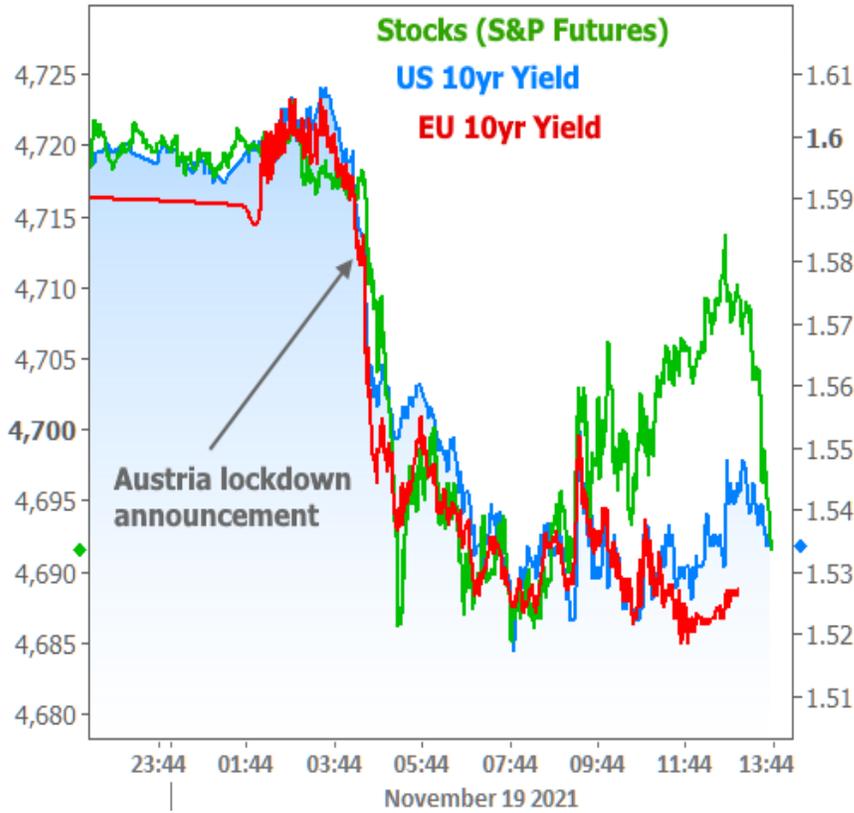


Low Temps 2 weeks prior

source: NYT and NOAA

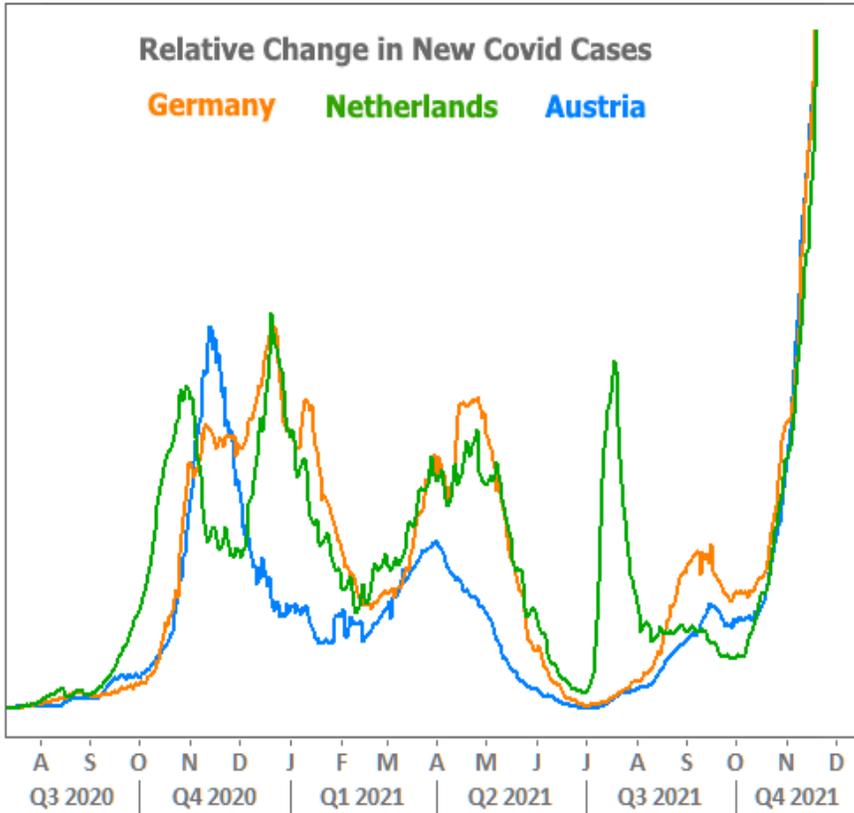
Market participants aren't necessarily epidemiologists, but the correlation is simple enough for the average trader to act upon. In this sense, the market is pricing in the metaphorical winter of a slower global economy due to covid-related lockdowns (or other measures that inhibit the free flow of business).

The latest example arrived at the end of the week as Austria announced new lockdown measures and vaccine mandates. Here's how the market reacted:

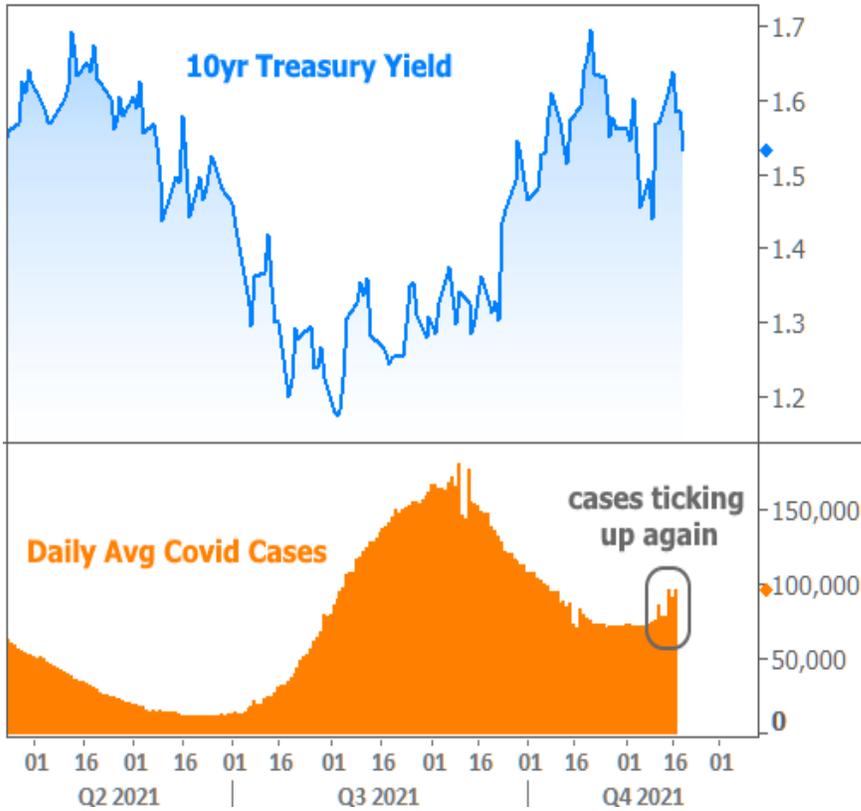


Traders can draw their own conclusions, but

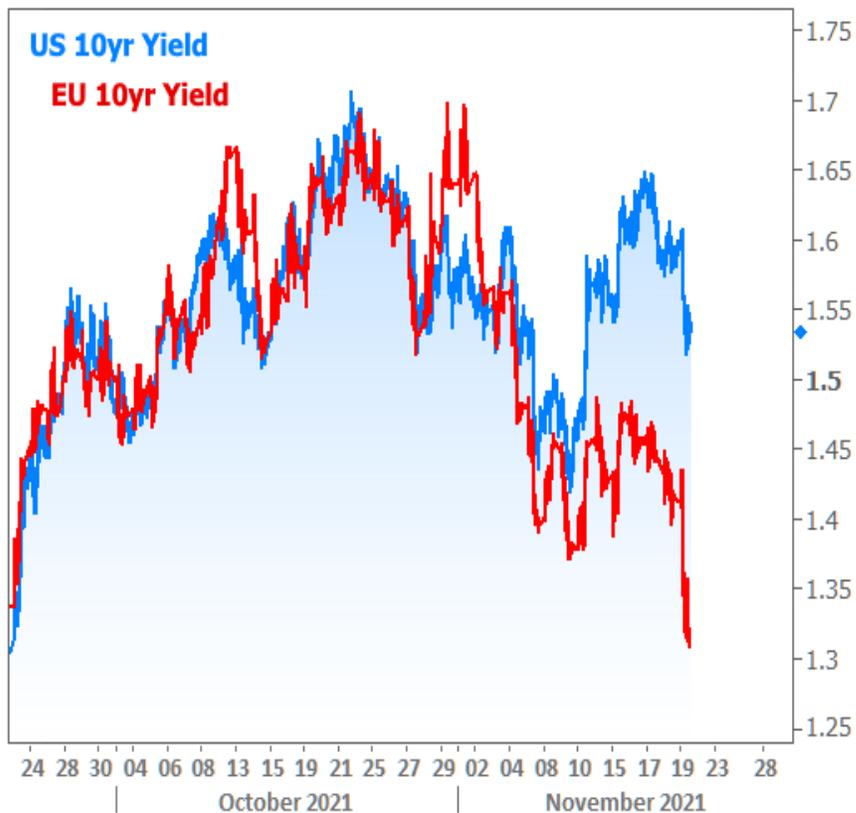
they're certainly considering the fact that Austria is not alone in its case count surge.



If it can happen there, it can happen here. The specifics don't even need to line up. The bottom line is that "more covid" = "downward pressure on rates," all other things being equal. That's why we've revisited this chart in recent weeks as declining case counts leveled off and reversed course in the U.S.



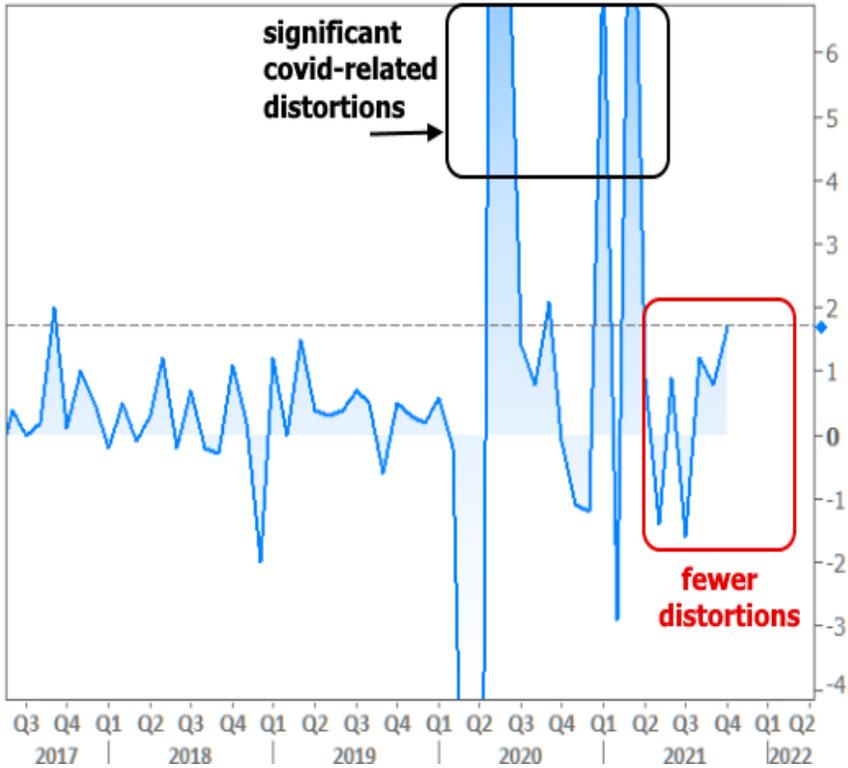
Even if the U.S. remained in better shape than Europe, it's a global economy with interconnected financial markets. Europe has already helped limit the damage that would have otherwise been seen during the most recent run-up in interest rates. If EU yields hadn't been declining in November, US yields likely would have had an easier time revisiting October's levels.



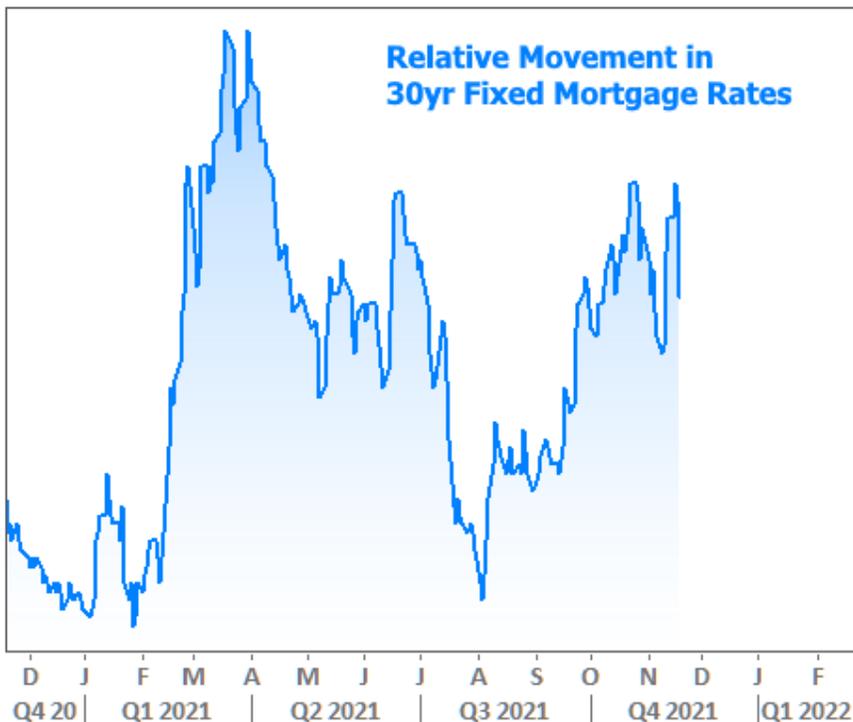
None of the above is to suggest that rates are destined to continue lower. It's simply to explain their resilience. After all, there are several important factors that suggest more upward pressure on rates than we've seen in recent weeks. These include the following, to name a few:

- Fewer bond purchases from the Fed
- More inflation
- Earlier rate hike expectations from the Fed
- An absence of runaway covid numbers in the new school year
- Fiscal policy creating bond market "supply"

In addition, several economic reports have shown faster growth than expected. This week alone, Retail Sales and the Philadelphia Fed's Business Index both came in at historically high levels (notwithstanding the more significant covid-related distortions from earlier in the pandemic).



Mortgage rates began the week in apparent trouble, moving higher at the fastest pace in months, but found their footing by Wednesday. Bond market improvements in the 2nd half of the week help to keep us solidly in the prevailing range, but still well off the summertime lows.



Thanksgiving week brings several mid-tier economic reports as well as home sales data. Treasury will also auction 2, 5, and 7yr notes. The auctions may end up being the biggest sources of volatility if the results are far from expectations. In general, volatility is a bigger risk than normal due to trading conditions associated with the holiday-shortened week (all of the above will be crammed into the first 3 days).

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Update: Buyer Broker Agreement

After requests from real estate companies, a nonprofit consumer watchdog group the Consumer Federation of America has developed a list of factors to consider when creating a buyer contract in preparation for upcoming practice changes in the industry.

CFA released its "Proposed Criteria for Evaluating Home Buyer Contract Forms" on Tuesday. The 15 criteria focus on the contracts' form – whether the documents are readable and understandable – and content – whether they are fair to homebuyers.

- the document's expiration date (CFA recommends buyers asks for a three-month contract and never sign one longer than six months)
- the right to terminate the contract
- the disclosure that compensation is negotiable
- the broker's compensation clearly stated and that the buyer broker can't receive additional compensation for facilitating a sale
- that any additional fees, such as for showing a home, will be deducted from the broker's commission if there is a successful sale
- that the commission is due only if there is a successful closing
- that buyers have an obligation – for no longer than 60 days, CFA recommends – to pay a broker who earlier showed them a home they purchased after the contract ended
- seller concessions paid directly to buyers
- dual agency not pre-approved by the contract
- an explanation of how a broker treats different buyer clients interested in the same property
- that buyers should not be required to first go through mediation or arbitration if they have a complaint

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