

RBC Select Choices Conservative Portfolio



Commentary as at June 30, 2025

Trade negotiations dominated financial markets as early optimism that the Trump administration would focus on deregulating the economy gave way to concern that he would instead implement across-the-board tariffs on U.S. trade partners. The outlook subsequently improved as the U.S. administration reached agreements that ensured a worst-case scenario would not unfold. Geopolitical turmoil in the Middle East sent oil prices surging toward the end of the period on fears of a wider conflict and instability in the region, but they came back down after tensions eased. The U.S. Federal Reserve left its benchmark interest rate unchanged on concern that the tariff war would spark inflation outweighed worries that the economy was slowing.

Government fixed income delivered overall gains, as coupon income from U.S. and Chinese bonds and rising bond prices in emerging markets offset the negative impact of rising interest rates in Europe and Japan. Investors faced challenges ranging from the effects of Trump's tariffs to the outbreak of war between Israel and Iran. Canadian bonds delivered minimal returns during the period, as the concerns regarding higher-than-expected inflation led investors to demand higher yields on most debt securities.

U.S. stocks retreated from all-time highs established early in the year after Trump announced his tariffs but then rebounded to finish the period near their highs. The Information Technology sector continued to support U.S. equities, while the Consumer Discretionary sector lagged. European stocks outperformed due to a shift by investors to euro-denominated assets, as well as Germany's decision to boost government spending after decades of conservative fiscal policy. In emerging markets, an equity recovery in China, which accounts for about a third of the emerging-market benchmark, bolstered emerging-market equity performance.

Tariffs will exert a substantial drag on economic growth in the second half but probably not cause a global recession. The portfolio manager is maintaining an asset allocation that is relatively close to neutral given heightened uncertainty in the macroeconomic backdrop and a view that the risk premium between stocks and bonds is relatively small. The portfolio manager looks for mid-single-digit returns from sovereign bonds over the year ahead, with modest valuation risk. Stocks offer slightly better return potential, particularly outside of U.S. large caps, and the portfolio manager added to the equity allocation. Within the equity regional mix, the portfolio manager has tilted away from U.S. large-cap stocks in favour of non-U.S. stocks, particularly in Europe, where valuations are more appealing.

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