

Indonesia Investments

'Indonesia-US Relations'

- Waiting for the Official US Election Results
- Will Indonesia-US Relations Change under Biden?
- Why the US GSP Facility Matters for Indonesia
- Indonesia in the World's Biggest Trading Block
- Indonesian Economy Enters Recession in Q3-2020
- Concern about Growing COVID-19 Cases
- First Corruption Case in Widodo's 2nd Term
- Economy to Remain Under Pressure in 2021
- Indonesia's Unemployment Rate Jumps
- Bank Indonesia Surprises by Cutting Rate Again
- And more...

NOVEMBER 2020

Van Der Schaar Investments B.V.
CV Indonesia Investments

Indonesia Investments

Monthly Report – November 2020

‘Indonesia-US Relations’



Table of Contents

<u>Preface</u>	5
<u>Introduction</u>	11
<u>Contact</u>	25
<u>Coronavirus Tips: How to Protect Yourself and Others</u>	26

Analyses & Columns – Economy, Politics & Social Developments

• <u>2020 US Presidential Election; Donald Trump or Joe Biden in the White House? Will It Matter for Indonesia?</u>	29
• <u>Why Extension of the US Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) Facility Matters for Indonesia</u>	51
• <u>The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP); the World's Largest Trading Block</u>	63
• <u>Economic Update Indonesia: For the First Time in 22 Years Indonesia Falls into an Economic Recession</u>	98
• <u>Bank Indonesia Goes for Another Interest Rate Cut in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis</u>	116

Updates Indonesia – Macroeconomic Indicators

• <u>Consumer Price Index; Inflation Accelerates in November as Prices of Food and Drinks Increase</u>	125
• <u>Manufacturing Activity Expands in November but the Question Is Whether It Is Structural</u>	131
• <u>What Made the Indonesian Rupiah Exchange Rate Appreciate Versus the US Dollar in November 2020?</u>	136
• <u>Trade Balance of Indonesia; Another Big Trade Surplus in October 2020</u>	146
<u>Public Holidays Indonesia</u>	158
<u>Forecast Macroeconomic Indicators Indonesia</u>	159
<u>Back Issues Monthly Reports and Research Report</u>	161

Preface

The monthly report of Indonesia Investments is written and published by Van Der Schaar Investments B.V., located in Delft, the Netherlands. The report aims to inform the reader of the latest, most relevant, political, economic and social developments in Indonesia as well as those crucial international developments that impact on the economy of Indonesia or on its politics.

Our reports are intended for a diverse audience, including individual and corporate investors, financial market participants, diplomats, policymakers, decision-makers, academics, journalists, and analysts.



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stands in a tradition that stretches back to urban development in the Dutch capital city of Amsterdam in the early 20th century.

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Introduction – November 2020 Report

November 2020 was certainly a month to remember. Internationally, there were the controversial US elections and (continued) COVID-19 pandemic concerns that made headlines around the globe.

Meanwhile at home, important news stories were Indonesia falling into an economic recession for the first time since 1998 (with the country's gross domestic growth, or GDP, now having contracted for two consecutive quarters, namely in Q2-2020 and Q3-2020 as the result of the COVID-19 crisis), the first high-profile corruption case in the 2nd administration of Indonesian President Joko Widodo (involving Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Minister Edhy Prabowo), and new confirmed COVID-19 cases in Indonesia reaching a (daily) record high of 6,267 cases on 29 November 2020.



US Presidential Election

Particularly the 2020 US presidential election was an important event as its outcome essentially has important implications for the entire world. It actually seems to be

an election that is more than a race between two men or a race between two parties. It also seems a race between the nationalists (who seek to preserve their national traditions, borders, sovereignty, identities, and cultures) and globalists (who seek open borders, immigration yet no cultural assimilation, and who like to see political power move away from the nation state to transnational powers and organizations).

It is a battle between two ideologies that is becoming increasingly fierce in the West, especially Europe and the USA. A victory for incumbent US President Donald Trump (Republican) in this election would be a win for the nationalists (right), while a Joe Biden victory (Democrat) would be a win for globalists (left). However, since the US is not only the world's biggest economy but also a massive global political power – hence the US president is often called the 'Leader of the Free World' – the outcome of the 2020 US election would also give enormous moral support to nationalists or globalists in the other parts of the world (with Europe in particular being a continent where this clash is growing). In other words, a Trump victory could frustrate the trend of rising globalism in the West. However, at this moment, it seems that the US 2020 presidential election will become a victory for the left.

Based on reports in the mainstream media, which are mostly run by globalists, Biden is the winner of the presidential election. However, Trump – who has always been a controversial character in the White House – does not accept defeat (yet) and argues that massive fraud has prevented the election from being fair. Thus, we will now need to wait for the completion of a series of court cases, possibly up to the Supreme Court.

Indeed, we too – when following the live updates on US Election Day – noticed some anomalies (which we will discuss in the first chapter of this report). However, at this moment we still expect Trump to leave the Oval Office in the same fashion he came in four years earlier: in a controversial fashion.

The question for us is whether Trump's exit will have a positive or negative impact on Indonesia-US relations? This question too will be discussed in more detail in the first chapter of the report. But we can give a little sneak preview here by mentioning that we see positive and negative aspects for Indonesia.

For example, tensions between the US and China are expected to ease with Biden in office. This should allow China's economic recovery to accelerate (there is a chance that Trump's higher import tariffs – that were behind the recent tensions between both economic giants – will be rolled back, or partially rolled back, by Biden). Due to Indonesia's intense economic ties with China (in terms of trade and investment), this should also lead to higher economic growth for Indonesia. An increase of one percent in China's economic growth is estimated to trigger an increase of 0.3 – 0.6 percentage points in Indonesia's economic growth.

And while the rolling back of high US import tariffs on Chinese goods does mean that companies can leave their factories in China (with the need to relocate to other Asian nations to enjoy lower US import tariffs easing significantly), for Indonesia this does not really matter since Southeast Asia's largest economy was essentially unable to

attract these ‘relocators’ over the past couple of years. Vietnam, for example, was much more successful in terms of welcoming the companies that decided to relocate from China. Why? Well, first, Indonesia’s investment and business environments are still complex. And second, unlike Vietnam, Indonesia does not have a free trade deal with the USA. So, those who would relocate their factories to Indonesia in search of lower import tariffs into the USA, would be disappointed. Well, unless they focus on goods that fall under the US Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). However, in this report we will also explain why it would be quite risky for a foreign investor to invest in Indonesia to take advantage of the US’ GSP facility.

And with Joe Biden in the White House’s Oval Office, we expect it will become more difficult for Indonesia to reach a (limited) bilateral trade agreement with the US as we assume that Biden’s administration will be much more interested in the larger-scale (multilateral) trade deals, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). While the Barack Obama administration (where Biden was involved as Vice President) was very keen on joining the TPP, Trump decided to withdraw the US from the TPP in early 2017 as he considered it to “undermine the US economy”.

Indonesia, however, has been hesitant to join the TPP. Indeed, Indonesian President Widodo had already declared the country’s intention of joining the TPP back in 2015 (and this was reconfirmed by Indonesian Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati in 2018) but joining the TPP is not an “economic priority” for the central government at the moment.

This would mean that Indonesian exporters cannot enjoy preferential tariffs to the US anytime soon, implying that Indonesian exporters miss out on competitiveness compared to certain foreign counterparts. Vietnam, for instance, has a bilateral trade agreement with the US, allowing import tariffs on Vietnamese shipments to decline from an average of 40 percent to an average of three percent.

However, the central government of Indonesia did sign the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in mid-November 2020 which could be a sign that the Indonesian government is becoming less fearful of participating in multilateral free trade deals. Indonesian society has always been a bit hesitant to engage in such deals because it is feared that having a big-sized and increasingly wealthier population in combination with domestic companies missing out on competitiveness compared to their foreign counterparts will lead to a situation in which Indonesia simply becomes the net importer of goods; and those domestic companies that once produced goods simply turn into importers of the same goods (a form of deindustrialization).



COVID-19 Situation in Indonesia

While we detected a decline in new confirmed COVID-19 cases in Indonesia in late-October 2020, we already noted that this may not be the start of a retracting COVID-19 virus across Indonesia as data showed that the number of daily COVID-19 tests had also declined.

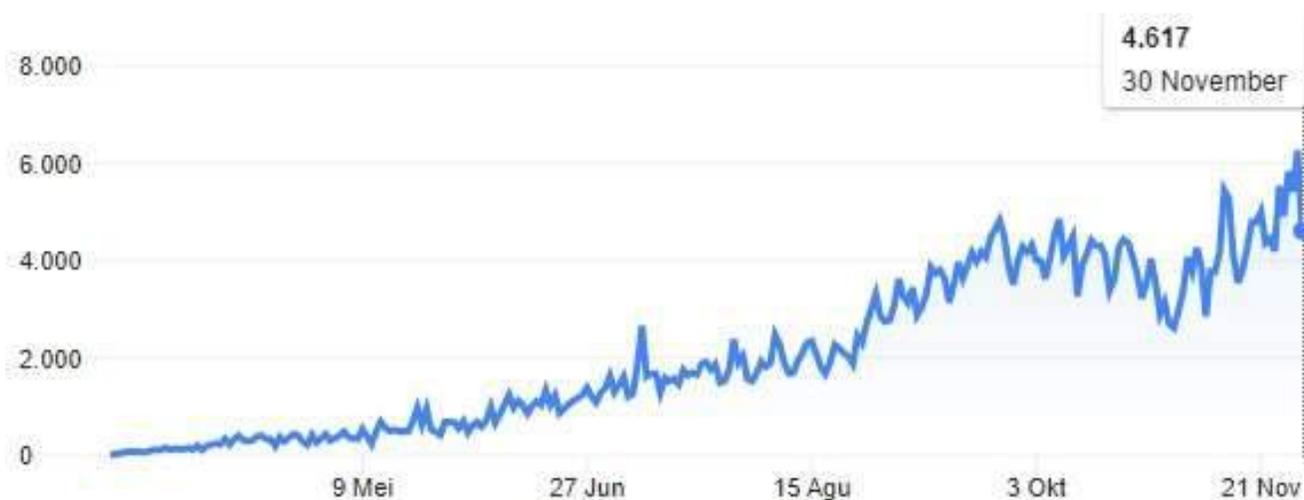
Based on our assumption that the more tests are conducted, the more positive tests are found - and vice versa, the fewer tests are conducted, the fewer positive tests are found - the drop in new COVID-19 cases across Indonesia in late-October 2020 made sense.²

Apparently, one key reason why Indonesia's COVID-19 testing capacity fell sharply in late-October 2020 was because of the holiday period (28-30 October 2020 being public holidays). Hence, the decline in new COVID-19 cases was indeed no reason for relief.

² What is not less alarming is that there exists growing doubt about the accuracy of the PCR test that is being used around the world. A growing number of experts in the fields of biology and medicine warn about the high rate of false positives (possibly as high as 1 percent) as well as the true meaning of 'correct positives' as various experts claim they have detected mistakes in the design of the PCR test. This is very alarming because it means that when testing capacity rises there will automatically be a rise in infections (partly due to false positives). This, in turn, means that policymakers are making decisions that have enormous economic and social consequences based on incorrect data.

In fact, the number of new confirmed COVID-19 cases across Indonesia reached a new record high of 6,267 cases on 29 November 2020. However, as the graph below shows, there remains quite some volatility in terms of new daily COVID-19 cases. The bad news for Indonesia is that the increasing trend remains in place. And, this is in contrast to most other nations where you see waves in their COVID-19 graphs, with many countries now experiencing the second wave (in between those waves – in the summer period – there was a period where COVID-19 cases and fatalities were near zero). Indonesia, however, shows one big and wide wave from the start of the pandemic in early March 2020, potentially turning into a tsunami at some point.

Number of New Daily Confirmed COVID-19 Cases in Indonesia:



It is our suspicion that testing capacity rose in late-November 2020, and therefore explains the rise in COVID-19 cases (up to a new record high). Unfortunately, at the time of writing this introduction, these data had not been released yet. However, the government's COVID-19 team did already confirm that weekly testing capacity had

grown to 239,000 in the third week of November 2020, approaching the standard that is advised by the World Health Organization (WHO).

So, there is certainly room for concern about the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The pandemic is clearly not under control (contrary to most other Asian countries), although – as mentioned in the footnote above – the more tests are conducted, the more false positives come into play as well. Moreover, in the rainy season – when people tend to stay indoors – it is particularly easy for any virus to spread.

We therefore assume that the number of new COVID-19 infections in Indonesia will continue to show an increasing trend in the months to come. Only if the government imposes a big lockdown (for example in the urban centers on Java), the numbers can ease (provided the number of tests conducted also drops). However, a big lockdown will have devastating economic and social costs as millions of people can lose their jobs and fall into poverty. This too can lead to an earlier death (on the long term), while the inability to pay for children's education (or healthcare) makes it hard for the next generation to escape poverty and optimize their potential.



For now, Indonesian policymakers seem to prefer imposing somewhat loose social and business restrictions, while encouraging health checks and hygiene protocols at public and private spaces (such as stations, airports, shopping malls, restaurants, and offices). But essentially policymakers are waiting for a safe and effective vaccine to become available. And once a significant portion of the Indonesian population has been vaccinated, the economy can be reopened fully.

However, a COVID-19 vaccine that is made 'in a hurry' (meaning its long-term effects on people's health have not been tested properly) is certainly not without risks too. Those who get vaccinated in 2021 are basically taking part in the experimental stage of the vaccine. Moreover, most experts (including the WHO) agree that the mortality rate of COVID-19 has already fallen below 0.2 percent, which is still a conservative estimate (meaning COVID-19's mortality rate is quite similar to the mortality rate of influenza).

However, that does not alter the fact that COVID-19 is a very dangerous virus for those who are vulnerable, namely those who have weakened immune systems, such as elderly and those who have serious underlying illnesses. Once a safe and effective vaccine comes on the market, it is this relatively small group that needs the vaccine.

It also means that these are very rough times for policymakers. On the one hand, it is the obligation of society to protect the vulnerable. But, on the other hand, should that protection come at all costs? Including having millions of people lose their jobs

and businesses, pushing many into full-blown poverty (ruining not only their futures but also the futures of their offspring), disrupting global food chains (causing rising starvation in certain parts of the world), and so forth.

It is a huge dilemma that is faced by policymakers. And whatever decision they make, it is bound to lead to casualties, either in the near or long term.

First High-Profile Corruption Case in the Second Widodo Administration

Indonesian Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Minister Edhy Prabowo was among the 17 people who were arrested by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), the country's corruption watchdog, on 25 November 2020. Prabowo, who is a member of the Gerindra Party (not to be confused with Gerindra Party Chairman Prabowo Subianto, who is Indonesia's Defense Minister), was apprehended at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Tangerang (Banten) after returning from the US where he had conducted a working visit.

The KPK detained Prabowo for allegedly receiving some IDR 3.4 billion (approx. USD \$242,000) and USD \$100,000 in bribes related to a lobster larvae export permit. This case is linked to Prabowo's decision (via Ministerial Regulation No. 12/2020) to roll back his predecessor Susi Pudjiastuti's policy against exporting lobster larvae.

Prabowo allegedly obtained the bribe from two shareholders of Aero Citra Kargo, the local company which was assigned to perform the lobster larvae exports. In turn,

these shareholders are suspected of having received the bribe money from several other businessmen and companies that are involved in these lobster larvae exports.

These developments are obviously a disappointment for Indonesian President Joko Widodo (who may ask Susi Pudjiastuti to fill the vacancy), but also a disappointment for Indonesian society. Political corruption is a structural problem in Indonesia that seems very hard to get rid of. In fact, in a recent Indonesia Investments' poll where we asked website visitors '*what do you think is the biggest obstacle in Indonesia's investment environment?*' the number one answer was 'corruption'. Although we do not agree with that answer (because we consider regulatory uncertainty, excessive red tape and weak infrastructure development bigger problems), it does show that many people, quite rightly, perceive corruption as a huge problem in Indonesia.

The big question always is how come these high-profile corruption cases continue to emerge while Indonesian ministers should be very well aware of the KPK's focus on their activities. Apparently, the bribe money is simply too attractive, even though those who become minister tend to be wealthy (they have to be, partly because the monthly wage for ministers is quite low).

In Indonesian media, it was mentioned that Edhy Prabowo's 2019 'wealth report' (a mandatory report submitted to the KPK by candidates for political positions) puts his wealth at IDR 7.42 billion (approx. USD \$525,000), with the majority coming in the form of property assets. While by Indonesian standards we can certainly label

him 'rich', we can imagine that some easy money – totaling USD \$342,000 in bribes – would be very attractive, and would significantly improve his financial situation.

It could be that such high-profile cases are still the tip of the iceberg only. This could explain why ministers continue to take the risk (although we would be surprised if this is really true because the KPK seems to do a good job in hunting down corrupt behavior at the country's top political level).

But these corrupt practices can also be seen in the light of certain habits (or culture). In Indonesia, it was always quite common to give a little reward to a civil servant or government official after he, or she, had helped you out with something (such as getting a permit to build a house or a business permit). This is not really a bribe in a strict sense because the payment does not influence the outcome (although by not giving a reward now, it can make officials lazy next time something is needed by the resident, for example when arranging new identity papers, meaning we do enter the 'abuse of power territory').



This habit, or culture, of rewarding someone for their help started to change at the central government after the collapse of Suharto's New Order regime (thanks to the KPK). However, at the lower government institutions and regional administrations it remains quite common today although we did see structural changes in Jakarta after Widodo and Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (also known as Ahok) had been in charge. While ten years ago, it was still common to give immigration officers in Jakarta some small money for their services, or the civil servant in one of the districts (*kelurahan*) of Jakarta, today we do not detect such rewards anymore. However, we assume that outside Jakarta, it remains widespread.

So, having this 'reward culture' in mind, we can somewhat understand these high-profile corruption cases in Indonesia as it is a smaller step to full corruption and full abuse of power. On the other hand, we do believe that 'where there is money, there is corruption', not only in Indonesia but across the entire world.

That was perhaps not the most optimistic message to conclude the introduction to this month's edition, but we do want to thank you for purchasing this report.

CV Indonesia Investments

Jakarta (Indonesia)

1 December 2020



[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Research Report 'Indonesia's Energy Sector'



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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Coronavirus Tips: How to Protect Yourself & Others

There is currently no vaccine to prevent a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

However, you can protect yourself and help prevent spreading the virus to others if you:



- **Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly** for 20 seconds, with soap and water, or alcohol-based hand rub. Remember that before your hands are clean, you should not touch your face, especially not (around) your eyes, nose and mouth as these are the key entrance points for any virus.

- **Cover your nose and mouth** with a (disposable) tissue or flexed elbow **when you cough or sneeze**. Wear a face mask when going outside (mainly to protect other people) and wash your hands often and thoroughly when back inside.



- **Stay inside**; avoid unnecessary contact with people as well as unnecessary traveling, particularly to crowded or public places. After returning home from necessary activities such as grocery shopping, do not forget to wash your hands. You may also want to wash the products you bought, because people often touch products that are put on display in the local supermarket.

- **Strengthen your immune system**; people who are healthy (which are usually young people) may not even notice that they are infected with COVID-19. The trick here is that their immune system is stronger (generally). Therefore, now is the time to take some efforts to strengthen your immune system by eating healthy (fruits and vegetables) and take some supplements, such as vitamin pills. Taking enough time to sleep is also crucial to help improve your immune system. Lastly, it is highly recommended to quit smoking (and not consume too much alcohol).



- **Ventilation**; make sure that rooms inside houses, apartments, and buildings are properly ventilated as a COVID-19 infected person can spread aerosols so small that a facemask cannot prevent them from going into the air or from going into the lungs of someone who wears a facemask. Ventilation systems need to get a good supply of fresh air from outside and/or use a good filter. It is also advised to open windows in closed spaces.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

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