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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Darwis, D., & Irwanto, S. S. (2023). Analysis of the Decline in Indonesian Coal Exports to China during the Covid-19 Pandemic between 2019 and 2020. *Papua Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, 3(1), 60-73. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-86602-1>

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# Analysis of the Decline in Indonesian Coal Exports to China during the Covid-19 Pandemic between 2019 and 2020

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyses the decline in Indonesian coal exports to China during the Covid-19 pandemic from 2019 to 2020. The timeframe was selected due to a decline in Indonesian coal exports to China during that period. Although literature reviews indicate that several previous articles have discussed Indonesia's coal exports to China, they do not cover the timeframe during the Covid-19 pandemic, as is the case in this study. Consequently, this article is novel and contributes to the discussion in that area. This study was conducted qualitatively, as well as using the library research method to collect information from a variety of secondary sources. The findings of this study indicate that the decline in Indonesian coal exports to China during the Covid-19 pandemic from 2019 to 2020 occurred as the result of China's domestic problems. These domestic problems include the decline in production in China's industry because of the lockdown policy carried out during the pandemic. The pandemic significantly limited import activities and slowed down domestic production, in addition to the overall slowdown of the world economy which led to a decrease in demand for coal. All these factors affected supply from Indonesia.

## KEYWORDS

Coal Export; China; Covid-19; Indonesia

## INTRODUCTION

The economic development of a country is going well when it is positively influenced by its relationship with other countries. This fact stimulates various kinds of cooperation that intend to support mutual benefits. Matters that impact state policy to build cooperative relations with other countries include the political views of a country, the influence of the international environment, and the reputation of a country in giving opinions to other countries.

In this article, we will explore to effect on these relations by the global Covid-19 pandemic that originated from Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic led several countries in the world to tighten their territorial sovereignty by curtailing human travel and limiting export and import of goods to prevent the broader spread of Covid-19. The global Covid-19 pandemic challenged international cooperation because each country began to focus on securing its territory through policies that aimed to keep the virus at bay. With respect to industrial production, China is the second most industrialized country globally, requiring significant energy resources to drive its industrial activities. Coal is one of the main energy resource commodities used to operate industrial activities in China. Indonesia is a country that currently has a high level of cooperation with China and offers opportunities for the country to cooperate in the field of economics. Despite a tug-of-war between the two countries, Indonesia and China,

both need each other, one of which is in the financial area. Indonesia is also a partner country for the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) project initiated by China, which continues strengthening the cooperative relationship between Indonesia and China in various fields. In general, China is the primary market for Indonesian coal exports. Over the past five years, Indonesia's coal exports to China have doubled, from 75 million tons in 2015 to 130 million tons in 2019, with an average annual growth rate of around 13.3% (Umah, 2020).

Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment revealed during a China-Indonesia import coal procurement meeting that based on volume, China was Indonesia's largest coal export destination, followed by India, South Korea, and Japan from 2017 to 2019. He also conveyed that the Chinese market has contributed to Indonesia's GDP in the coal export sector with an estimated US\$ 5.8 billion in 2019 (Alvendo, 2022).

Even though there was a significant increase in Indonesian coal exports to China from 2015 to 2019, data from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources for 2022 regarding the realization of coal exports, suggest that there was a decrease from 2019 to 2020. This decline in coal exports reached 26.97% where in 2019 the realization of coal exports was 454.5 million tons to 331.94 million tons in 2020 (Jayani, 2022). According to data from the Central Statistics Agency regarding coal exports by the destination country, it turns

out that Indonesia's coal exports to China decreased from 2019 to 2020, namely 65.67 million tons in 2019 to 62.49 million tons in 2020 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021). Chinese Customs and Excise data also shows Indonesia's overall exports to China for coal products, primarily HS 2701, HS 2702, and HS 2704, in January - September 2020 period reaching \$4.9 billion, down from total exports in the same period in 2019 with up to 5, 8 billion dollars. Meanwhile, data from Refinitiv shows that China imported coal from Indonesia from January to October 2020 of 86.88 million tons. This figure decreased by 24.5% from 115.03 million tons in the same period in 2019 (Umah, 2020).

Based on the data presented above, it is interesting to note that there has been a decline in Indonesian coal exports to China from 2019 to 2020. Therefore, this article attempts to answer the apparent question of "why has there been a decline in Indonesian coal exports to China during the Covid-19 pandemic from 2019 to 2020?" This article will provide an analysis and explanation regarding the relationship between the global COVID-19 pandemic and the decline in Indonesian coal exports to China from 2019 to 2020. This period was selected because the world began to experience the Covid-19 pandemic and for this period we also have at hand data regarding the decline in coal exports from Indonesia to China during that time.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, the literature review in this study relates to the following key concepts around exports, international trade, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Export

Exporting certain goods or commodities from one country to another is part of the business process (Wardhana, 2011). The determinants of exports of a product or commodity include several macroeconomic variables, such as gross domestic product, inflation, the US dollar exchange rate, and foreign investment (Septina, 2020). In addition, exports are also influenced by exchange rates, protection between countries, and the country's competitiveness and economic conditions. The benefits of exports include expanding employment, increasing the country's exchange rate, increasing market share, and establishing cooperation with other countries (Wardhana, 2011). Indonesia's exports are classified into two commodities: oil and gas, and non-oil and gas. Oil and gas exports are gasoline, diesel, petroleum, and natural gas. Meanwhile, non-oil and gas exports include livestock, agriculture, plantations, mining, industry, and so on (Igir et al., 2020; Prasetya et al., 2022).

An account of the trade balance records the exports and imports of goods over a given period of time. A country experiences a trade surplus when the value of goods exported exceeds that of substances. This also affects the balance of payments, which is a record of cash flows

showing the value of trade transactions and money flows between a country and other countries during a particular year. A surplus in the balance of payments means that foreign revenue exceeds expenditure abroad (Wiryanti, 2015; Prasetya et al., 2022).

### **International Trade**

International trade is a tool for increasing economic growth. Trade has traditionally been driven by a country's scarcity of resources. This problem can be overcome by obtaining through trade routes with other countries (Ibrahim et al., 2016). An international trade is an economic activity that takes place between residents of one country and residents of another country on a mutually beneficial basis. Many countries make international trade a factor in the growth of national income (GDP) (Dermawan, 2021). In theory, international trade has advantages, namely excess exchange. Countries can produce products that exceed domestic demand through trade and export extra supply to global markets (Ibrahim et al., 2016).

International trade theory uses the principle of comparative advantage, in which countries produce unique products and buy goods from abroad that are not domestic specialties (Carbaugh, 2019). During times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, exports and imports will undoubtedly be affected. The effect is that export barriers and values tend to fluctuate more widely due to export bans and restrictions imposed by Presidents abroad, especially in China. This was also

one of the reasons for the drop in export values during the pandemic because the demand for Indonesian products abroad had also decreased due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Pramudita & Yucha, 2020). Indonesia has also restricted imports of imported goods from China out of concern over the spread of Covid-19 in Indonesia (Pramudita & Yucha, 2020). Covid-19 is a pandemic that has spread across almost all countries, increasing imports of goods abroad, but restrictions and bans on imports also pose a significant obstacle. However, in the Indonesian context, the implications are more likely beyond exports during the pandemic. This is because consumer behavior and the Covid-19 pandemic made domestic prices rise more than they did abroad (Sari, 2021). The pandemic also caused a trade deficit (Sari, 2020). A deficit happens when a country's imports exceed domestic exports, meaning that people depend more on foreign products than domestic production (Pradipta & Swara, 2015).

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the coronavirus or Covid-19, a pandemic because the virus spread to several countries, including Indonesia. The pandemic began to affect all areas of life, such as education, society, and the economy. The pandemic also caused a slowdown in economic growth in all countries because many economic activities, including international trade, were disrupted by measures to curtail the

spread of the virus. Covid-19 is an upbeat single RNA virus that infects the respiratory tract (Yuliana, 2020). When someone is infected with this virus, the symptoms are fever, cough, flu, shortness of breath, and others.

This virus is straightforward to spread and contagious, especially if you are in close contact with an infected person (Yuliana, 2020). One way to break this virus's transmission chain is to isolate infected people and their close connections. In addition, the government, as a regulator, issued various policies to prevent the spread of this virus. One of the measures is restrictions on community activities (Permatasari, 2021). Such human mobilization limitations also impact international trade (Kementerian Keuangan Republik Indonesia, 2020).

Sari (2020) also conducted a study on Indonesia's economic and employment conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic, which concluded that economic phenomena, including exports, weakened during that time. This occurred because the Covid-19 pandemic affected all elements of the economy, which impacted one another. A study by Rohmi et al. (2021), who researched the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international trade, found that the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia affected oil and gas exports, commodity imports, and capital goods to Indonesia and had no impact on non-oil and gas exports and imports of consumer goods. The results of this study were obtained from the processed data using the paired sample t-test method with data

between November 2018 and January 2021.

Research conducted by Tobing and Panday (2021) on the value of non-oil and gas exports before and during the Covid-19 pandemic also found that the value of non-oil and gas exports before and during the Covid-19 pandemic did not have a significant difference. In other words, the pandemic has not significantly affected the value of non-oil and gas exports in Indonesia.

Mobarok et al. (2021) undertook research in Bangladesh on the relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and policies on the rice market and food security in that country. They found that increased import tariffs disrupted rice accessibility due to restrictions even though the increase in import tariffs increased food self-sufficiency status. On the other hand, research from Angehelache et al. (2021) conducted in Romania stated that during the Covid-19 pandemic, imports were more significant than exports, or the trade balance experienced a deficit. This deficit condition indicates that during the pandemic, Romania's imports exceeded its exports. This means that the needs of the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative effect and caused export values to decrease—import values to increase from conditions before the crisis. The data in this study were processed using simple linear regression to see the correlation between international trade and GDP.

Another study conducted in Romania by Girip et al. (2021) found that

the Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted international trade in the country. The value of imports was more significant than exports, resulting in a trade balance deficit. The condition of the Covid-19 pandemic has reduced the importance of international trade and the increasing non-oil and gas imports. In the following study, Wei et al. (2021) examined imports in China, Japan, and South Korea, and concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic had no significant effect on these three countries. Still, the value of exports in Japan was negatively affected. This study uses data from 2020 when the pandemic had just spread to several countries. The results of this study were obtained through correlation tests between nations and the variables used (Covid and international trade).

The work of Prasetya et al. (2022) on Indonesia's international trade aim to examine whether the Covid-19 pandemic has affected export and import activities with oil and gas and non-oil and gas types. The data used in this research is the value of exports and imports, both in total, oil and gas and non-oil and gas, from August 2018 to September 2021. Thus, there were nineteen months before the Covid-19 pandemic and nineteen months during the Covid-19 pandemic which obtained from the Monthly Trade report published by the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia with data analysis techniques Paired Sample T Test with Mann-Whitney U Test. This study found that there was no difference in the value of non-oil and gas imports before and during

the Covid-19 pandemic. In contrast, oil and gas exports, non-oil and gas exports, total imports, and oil and gas imports experienced significant changes and differences in value before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Indonesian economy during the Covid-19 pandemic turned out to be stronger on the import side because the value of non-oil and gas imports did not show a significant difference before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the description of the literature review presented above, there are various views on international trade, both exports and imports and how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted this international trade. Sari (2020) and Wei et al. (2021) argue that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the international trade, especially exports in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Tobing & Panday (2021) believe that non-oil and gas exports in Indonesia are not affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Research by Rohmi et al. (2021) shows that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected oil and gas exports, imports of raw materials, and imports of capital goods in Indonesia. Furthermore, research by Prasetya et al. (2022) is of the view that there was no difference in the value of non-oil and gas imports before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, while total exports, oil and gas exports, non-oil and gas exports, total imports and oil and gas imports experienced changes. Or a significant difference in value in the period before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Indonesian economy was

more robust on the import side, especially non-oil and gas imports.

Research conducted in another country, namely Bangladesh, by Mobarok et al. (2021) showed that the increase in import tariffs resulted in the disruption of access routes to rice due to restrictions, thereby increasing the status of food self-sufficiency. Meanwhile, research undertaken by Angehelache et al. (2021) and Girip et al. (2021) in Romania shows that the Covid-19 pandemic greatly impacted international trade, like imports, were more significant than exports which resulted in a balance sheet deficit trade.

The author's article also discusses international trade, especially Indonesian coal exports to China. This article focuses on an analytical effort aimed at explaining the decline in Indonesian coal exports to China during the Covid-19 pandemic from 2019 to 2020, where previously, from 2015 to 2019, there was a significant increase in Indonesian coal exports to China. The author sees that the focus of this study is a research gap because it emphasizes, more specifically, that coal exports experienced a decline during the Covid-19 pandemic as well as an effort to analyses why this decline happened. Although in previous articles stated that the Covid-19 pandemic impacted both exports and imports of international trade, no scientific published articles specifically examine coal exports and explain why there has been a decline in these commodities during the Covid-19 pandemic, mainly from Indonesia to China.

## **METHODS**

This study uses an explanatory research method to qualitatively explain the causes of the decline in Indonesian coal exports to China from 2019 to 2020 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The data comes from secondary sources which include journals, books, internet websites, and various other sources. The technique used in collecting data is library research because the authors do not interact directly with the research object but only through other literary and written sources. Next, the collected data were analysed using qualitative data analysis techniques, which include data processing, data analysis, data interpretation, and the drawing of conclusions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Indonesia's coal exports to China are strongly influenced by the interaction of China's domestic factors, namely the demand for coal to meet China's needs in driving the country's industrial economy. The exchange between China and Indonesia is a benchmark in the smooth running of international economic cooperation. Coal is a source of energy for the production industry in China. The existence of the Covid-19 pandemic can affect Indonesian coal exports to China, and this is due to decreased production in the Chinese industry. Covid-19 attacked the production industry in China, so it became sluggish. Then China imposed import restrictions and balanced it by utilizing its domestic production because China was locking down due to the Covid



19 pandemic originating from its own country (Nursyirwan, 2020).

Even though Indonesian coal export activities to China continued during the Covid 19 pandemic, it declined from 2019 to 2020. Data from the Central Statistics Agency regarding coal exports by the destination country shows that Indonesian coal exports to China have decreased from 2019 to 2020, namely 65.67 million tons in 2019 to 62.49 million tons in 2020. Chinese Customs data also shows that overall exports of Indonesian coal products to China, primarily HS 2701, HS 2702, and HS 2704, for January - September 2020 amounted to US\$ 4.9 billion, down from the overall export period in 2019, which was US\$ 5.8 billion. Then, data from Refinitiv revealed that China's coal imports from Indonesia in January - October 2020 were 86.88 million tons, a decrease of 24.5% from 115.03 million tons in the same period in 2019 (Umah, 2020).

The decline in Indonesia's coal exports to China in the 2019 to 2020 period was due to a slowdown in the world economy, especially China, which was experiencing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, so global coal demand decreased and had an impact on Indonesia. The policy of restricting export goods implemented by China caused Indonesia's coal export performance to decline until November 30, 2020, considering that China is Indonesia's most dominant coal export market. Covid 19 was a global pandemic that resulted in a decrease in coal demand for many coal-consuming countries (Kurniawan, 2020).

Based on Refinitiv's ship tracking data from January to August 2020, there was a decline in Indonesia's exports of coal in the same period the previous year. For the January–August 2019 period, Indonesia exported 259.1 million tons of coal, but for the same period the following year (2020), Indonesia exported only 217.4 million tons of coal. There was a decrease in this figure of 16.1% annually. This happened because exports to the central destination countries experienced a slowdown.

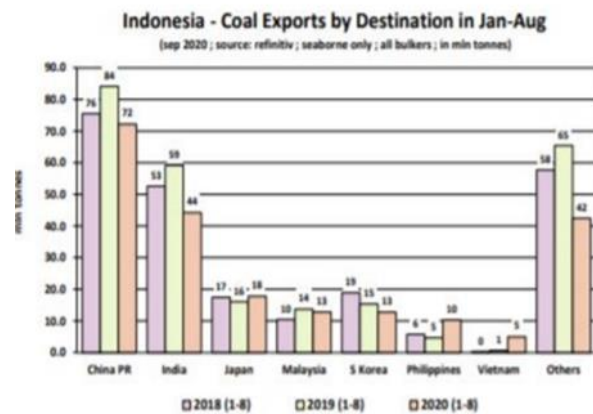


Figure 1. Indonesian Coal Exports January – August 2018 to 2020 by Destination Country. *Source:* Banhero Costa, cited in Roussanolou (2020)

Data from Banhero Costa in the graph above shows that China is the leading destination country for Indonesian coal exports. For January-August 2019, coal shipments to China were 84 million tons. This figure decreased in the same period in 2020, namely to 72 million tons. China's desire to increase national coal production seems to cause limited imports. Likewise, the industrial sector was hit hard due to

restrictions on activities to suppress the spread of Covid 19 (Zufrizal, 2020).

Even though it decreased from 2019 to 2020, coal remains the mainstay of Indonesia's commodity exports. The export contribution of these mining products is 9.39% of the total exports in 2020, which is US\$ 163 billion. The percentage value of coal was only lost to the palm oil commodity, reaching 11.9%. As a result of the covid-19 pandemic, the demand for coal decline in volume and price. These conditions, where market conditions and fees were under pressure, caused Indonesia's coal export performance to fall in 11 months of 2020. It was recorded that the volume of coal exports until November 2020 was 364 million tons. This figure decreased by 13% compared to the realization in the same period in 2019, namely 418 million tons. In terms of price, until November 2020, the value of Indonesian coal exports reached US\$ 14.8 billion, a 25% decrease compared to exports until November 2019, which was US\$ 19.86 billion (Kurniawan, 2020).

Apart from impacting volume and price, the Covid-19 pandemic also moved the actual production of Indonesian coal, which decreased by 11% in the early period of 2020. As of November 2020, Indonesia produced 510 million tons of coal. This value experienced a decrease when compared to the realization of Indonesian coal production in the same period in 2019, namely 570 million tons. In general, three factors have caused the decline in output due to the Covid 19 pandemic: First, the demand or

consumption of coal has decreased. Second, there was a decline in coal prices. Third, the mobility of employees of coal mining and logistics companies is limited due to activity restrictions which result in coal shipments being hampered or delayed (Rahmawati, 2020).

The decline in Indonesia's coal exports to China in the 2019 to 2020 period because of declining Chinese demand and concerns that China will tighten its import quotas prompted Indonesia to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to secure Indonesia's export supplies to China, as well as for China giving priority to Indonesian coal. The MoU occurred between the Indonesian Coal Mining Association and the China Coal Transportation and Distribution Association (CCTDA), intending to increase Indonesian coal exports to China to US\$ 1.46 billion or, if converted into Indonesian currency, around Rp. 20.6 trillion. Indonesia hopes the increase in coal exports to China in 2021 can reach 200 million tons. This means the coal exports to China are expected to increase by up to two times.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the causes of the decline in Indonesian coal exports to China during the Covid-19 pandemic from 2019 to 2020, this article concludes that it occurred due to decreased production in the industry. Due to China's lockdown policy during the Covid-19 pandemic, China limited import activities and utilized domestic production. In

addition, there was also a slowdown in the world economy, so demand for coal decreased, affecting supply from Indonesia.

In general, the Covid-19 pandemic has reduced the volume and price of Indonesian coal exports to China. Likewise, Indonesia's coal production has decreased. The contributing factors are threefold. First, the demand or consumption of coal has decreased. Second, the decline in coal prices. Third, employees and mining company logistics have limited access and mobility during the pandemic. Together these factors caused the declines in Indonesian coal exports to China during the Covid-19 pandemic from 2019 to 2020.

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## HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Darwis, D., & Irwanto, S.S. (2023). *Analyses of the Decline in Indonesian Coal Exports to China during the Covid-19 Pandemic between 2019 and 2020. Papua Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, 3(1), 60-73. DOI: 10.31957/pjdir.v3i1.2678