

Credit Suisse Supertrends webinar series 2020: Dissecting the US Election & the new world order



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Steven Okun, Former Deputy General Counsel in the Clinton Administration at the Department of Transportation, Governor of the American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore, Founder and CEO of APAC Advisors, Senior Advisor for geostrategic consultancy McLarty Associates and renowned expert on US politics and trade

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Dissecting the US Election and the new world order

The upcoming US presidential election will be one of the most-watched of all time, coming on in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, rising unemployment rates, an incumbent President under investigation for potential fraud and an on-going trade war with China.

The 10th edition of the Credit Suisse Super-trends webinar series examined the implications of this landmark election on US-China relations, as well as its impact on Asia and financial markets.

To explore this issue further, CNBC Anchor Amanda Drury spoke with Steve Okun, former Deputy General Counsel in the Clinton Administration at the Department of Transportation, Governor of the American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore, Senior Advisor for geostrategic consultancy McLarty Associates and Founder and CEO of APAC Advisors.



America is a country divided and is reeling from the effects of an ongoing trade and tech war with China and the challenging COVID-19 pandemic. On the home front this pandemic is changing, even accelerating, the nature of the presidential election campaign, bringing to the fore issues such as health care, social, and economic challenges and prompting voters to reconsider what they want.

Benjamin Cavalli, Chief Executive Officer, Singapore and Head of Private Banking, South Asia, Credit Suisse

And the winner is...

According to forecasting models, Democratic nominee Joe Biden is the heavy favourite in the race, as the incumbent has traditionally lost re-election when the country is in recession, said Mr Okun. The Economist, for instance, has given Mr Biden an 83% chance of winning in the Electoral College.

"If there is no recession and a President runs for re-election, he wins. If there's a recession, and the President is running for re-election, he loses; with one minor exception in the 20s. That's one reason why the models are so much against Donald Trump for re-election," he said.



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Campaign strategy

Despite the odds, President Donald Trump will not just “sit back” and bank on a repeat of the 2016 elections, warned Mr Okun. Instead, he is likely to pursue a three-pronged strategy to win the Electoral College.

This involves deepening his base by getting more of the demographic who voted for him in 2016 – predominantly white people without college degrees – to come out to vote for him again. He also needs to win over some black voters and, finally, keep the white suburban college-educated who voted for him to do so once again. “If he can do these three things, then he has a much better chance to get re-elected,” he said.

Mr Biden, meanwhile, is going to focus on the pandemic and healthcare, as well as the social unrest happening in the cities across the US. Mr Okun noted that the election is also a referendum on President Trump, and whether he has done a good job in his first term.

“If the focus is on the 200,000 plus deaths and on unemployment, Trump is going to lose. But if he can make it a choice between him and Biden by saying ‘I’m going to help the economy and I’m going to keep you safer,’ then he has a chance to win.”

US-China relations

The outcome of the elections will have a significant impact on the direction of strained US-China relations. While President Trump's policy towards China focused on confrontation, Mr Biden is likely to be more moderate in his approach.

"We're not solving the climate crisis without cooperation between the US and China. And we're not going to solve the pandemic either without cooperation between the US and China."

Mr Okun also advised the audience to watch the two-month period between election night and inauguration day. If President Trump loses, his administration is likely to "really hit China hard" before Mr Biden is inaugurated. "They're going to try and put policies and laws in place that the Biden administration wouldn't be able to overturn. So I think before we can figure out what's going to happen, I wouldn't start looking to January 2021, I'd be looking at November and December of 2020. If Trump loses it could get even more aggressive than if Trump were to win and stay in power."



Trump's policy towards China is all confrontation. We're confronting China in the South China Sea, we're going to confront China on trade, and we're going to confront China on technology. I think a Biden Administration would say that there is time for confrontation, but there are also times you need to cooperate with them.

Steven Okun, Former Deputy General Counsel in the Clinton Administration at the Department of Transportation, Governor of the American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore, Founder and CEO of APAC Advisors, Senior Advisor for geostrategic consultancy McLarty Associates and renowned expert on US politics and trade

A potential constitutional crisis

One worrying outcome of the election is if President Trump declares victory on election night before all mail-in votes are counted. This election is expected to see a large number of mail-in votes – mostly from democratic voters - because of the pandemic. Mail-in ballots have to be received by election day, but most do not get counted till after election day.

“You’re going to have swarms of lawyers descending on the state capitals as they’re counting votes, and they’re going to be lodging protests and it’s going to be terrible. The one scenario that doesn’t lead us to this is that Joe Biden wins by so much that even Trump can’t say something. It’s going to be so clear that he lost that we’re not going to get to that scenario.”



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Implications of a Blue Wave

If Mr Biden wins by a landslide, there is a good chance that Democrats will also hold on to the House of Representatives and take the Senate; an outcome that Mr Okun described as the “blue wave”. If that happens, the Democrats will spend the first two years focused on pushing through their agenda; which is likely to include issues such as improving China relations, climate change, green energy, gun control and healthcare. Infrastructure spending is also likely to get a boost.



It is going to be a massive movement on the Hill with Joe Biden in the White House to get all of this done while the Democrats control all levels of government. There could be a lot of change coming your way if we have this blue wave. It is something investors should be thinking about, the policy implications of a Democratic blue wave.

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Benjamin Cavalli

Chief Executive Officer, Singapore and
Head of Private Banking, South Asia,
Credit Suisse



Mr. Benjamin Cavalli is a Managing Director, and was appointed to the role of Head of Private Banking South Asia in August 2018, based in Singapore. In addition, he took on the role of Singapore Chief Executive Officer from January 2017.

In his senior leadership role, Mr. Cavalli leads the Private Banking business in South Asia. He also focuses on collaboration opportunities within Credit Suisse to capitalize on the synergies and business opportunities in the region, drive profitable business growth and advance market share.

In his role as Singapore CEO, Mr. Cavalli works closely with the business heads in Singapore to support the bank's business and client strategy. He also works with the Corporate Functions to ensure that the requisite governance and control framework is in place for the bank's business in Singapore.

Mr. Cavalli joined Credit Suisse in November 2009 from UBS Wealth Management, where he was a Managing Director and the Head of Key Clients Singapore. He started his career in the Export Finance department at UBS in Switzerland in 1992 and headed the Commodities, Structured Trade and Export Finance at UBS Investment Bank in Hong Kong from 1997 to 2000, before beginning his career in wealth management.

He has over 25 years' experience in both Investment Banking and Wealth Management across Switzerland and Asia, 18 of which were focused on the Singapore market and in senior management capacity.

Mr. Cavalli is accredited under IBF Advanced (IBFA) by the Institute of Banking and Finance (IBF) in Singapore.

Steven Okun



Former Deputy General Counsel in the Clinton Administration at the Department of Transportation, Governor of the American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore, Founder and CEO of APAC Advisors, Senior Advisor for geostrategic consultancy McLarty Associates and renowned expert on US politics and trade

The Founder and CEO of APAC Advisors, Mr. Steven Okun is a leader in the business community across Asia Pacific on government relations and public policy, communications, sustainability and stakeholder engagement. He has lived and worked in Singapore since 2003.

A sought-after expert on US politics and trade, he speaks frequently to businesses, universities and at conferences across the region. In addition to providing analysis on a regular basis for both CNBC and Channel NewsAsia, Mr. Okun has been a guest on ABC (Australia), the BBC, NHK (Japan), TRT World (Turkey) and Yahoo Finance (USA).

He contributes commentary on a regular basis on the US government, politics and elections for Singapore's The Straits Times, often with his co-author Thurgood Marshall, Jr.

Awarded a Special Service Commendation, he served as Deputy General Counsel in the Clinton Administration at the Department of Transportation following serving as a staff attorney in the White House.

From 1988-2000, he worked on the primary and presidential campaigns of Democratic candidates, in addition to having worked at the Democratic National Conventions of 1988, 1996 and 2000.

In his 12th year as a Governor of the American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore (AmCham Singapore), he previously served three terms as its Chair.

Mr. Okun was KKR's first Director of Asia Public Affairs from 2011-2017. Previously, he created and led Asia public affairs for global logistics firm UPS.

In addition to his own clients in the financial services sector, he serves as a Senior Advisor for geopolitical strategic consultancy McLarty Associates and as the ASEAN Representative for the Emerging Markets Private Equity Association.

He received his B.A. from the University of Virginia and his J.D. from the University of Virginia School of Law.

Amanda Drury

Anchor, CNBC



Ms. Amanda “Mandy” Drury has had a 22-year career working at the pinnacle of global business. She has worked extensively with leading television networks CNBC, Bloomberg TV, NBC, MSNBC and Australia’s Channel 7.

Ms. Drury has interviewed political and business heavyweights such as Rupert Murdoch, President Donald Trump, US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, Mitt Romney, John McCain and Jamie Dimon as well as Australian politicians such as Paul Keating, John Hewson, Wayne Swan and Joe Hockey. She also co-anchored CNBC’s “The Call” with current Director of the US National Economic Council, Larry Kudlow, in New York.

Working extensively in the Asia-Pacific arena, she has also interviewed and worked with Prime Ministers, CEOs, central bankers and finance ministers in that region. Ms. Drury has also had the pleasure of interviewing personalities from the celebrity world, such as Kylie Minogue, Curtis Stone, Mike Tyson, and the Sharks from Shark Tank in the US.

In addition, Ms. Drury is a sought-after moderator on the world stage. She has moderated conferences for organizations such as Credit Suisse, Charles Schwab, TD Ameritrade, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Standard Chartered Bank and LinkedIn, as well as for non-profits such as the United Nations on topics ranging from women’s issues, microfinance and climate change. She has also moderated events in emerging industries like New Frontier Data’s Global Cannabis Town Hall.

Ms. Drury is a seasoned MC for events such as Rotary International conventions, Advance Global Australian Awards, Platts Global Energy Awards, and the Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism. She also enjoys being able to contribute her time for charity, volunteering for Rotary, the Wayside Chapel, and emceeding fundraising events for pet rescue shelters, cancer prevention, autism, St Andrew’s Cathedral Choir and local schools.

She is an alum of Melbourne University and has worked in New York, Tokyo, London, Singapore and currently lives in Sydney with her husband and two boys.



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