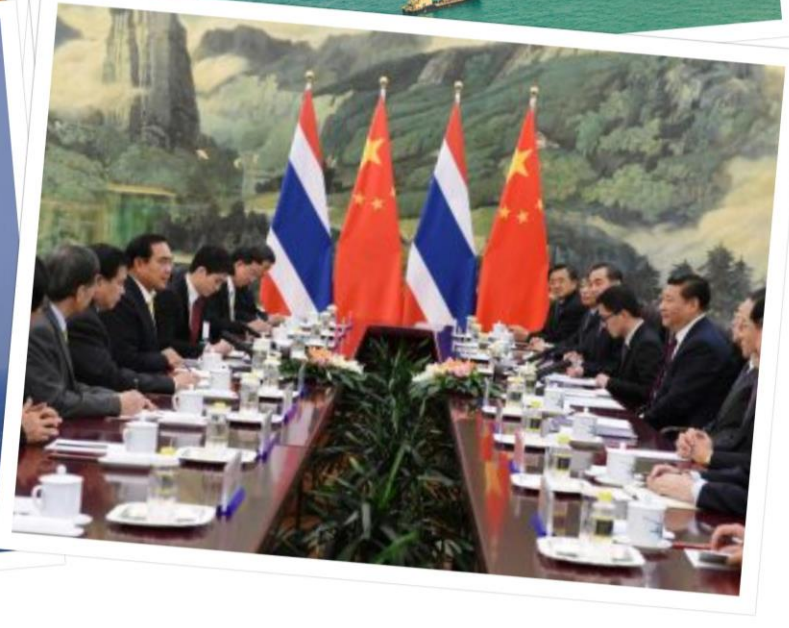# Social Risk Analysis: Strait of Malacca

"Whirling winds of change blows harshly from the South China Sea to the Straits of Malacca."

"The Chinese Communist Party loves to meddle with strategic importance of port and harbour construction giving them military access to main trade routes"

Overview

The Strait of Malacca's territorial integrity is held together by a series of inter-related complex political and social networks, which are historically influenced by U.S. strategic interests and more recently by China's expansionist efforts to secure trade routes and coastal territory. Data analytics and social media exploitation of Malaysia's, Indonesia's, and Singapore's information environments deliver unique insights, which can be used to inform the design and execution of strategic, operational, and tactical Information Operation (I/O) campaigns that reinforce US Foreign Policy objectives and promote regional stability.

Key Findings

Public perception and attitudes regarding US and Chinese influence vary within each country. However, the majority of citizens in each country are concerned with the recent increase in Chinese political, economic, and development efforts, which are used to expand Chinese influence across the region.

- Malaysia: citizens negatively view China's "One Road, One Belt" (a.k.a. Maritime Silk Road) initiative as a threat to their sovereignty and social values

- Singapore: citizens are threatened by the recent infusion of Chinese entrepreneurial immigrants and rising unemployment among its maritime population

- Indonesia: citizens are concerned with the rise in piracy in the *pelabuhan tikus* (Bhasa Indonesia = "rat harbors") in the southern portion of the Strait

Cartoon from Malaysian press depicting rich Chinese immigrants moving overseas to spend their money

Meme depicting China's dominant influence in the region once ruled by Majapahit Empire

"Whirling winds of change blows harshly from the South china sea to the Straits of Malacca."
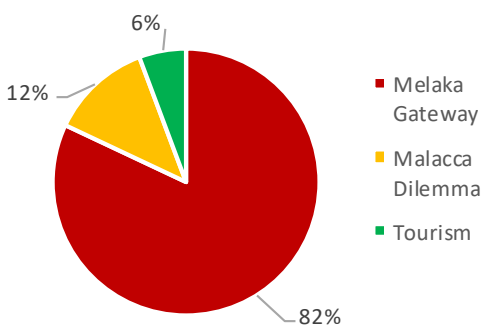
Data Analytics

A total of 23,421 Tweets, 16,541 Facebook posts, 412 Rich Site Summary (RSS) feeds, 302 Facebook videos, 217 YouTube videos, 173 Instagram posts, 95 blogs, 84 online news articles, 72 memes, and 29 political cartoons were examined to identify and measure public perceptions of US and Chinese influence in the Strait of Malacca region.
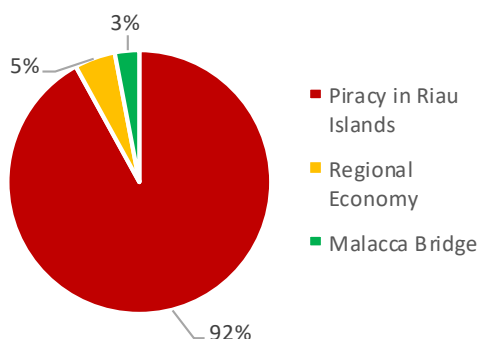
Findings: Topic Modeling

Social media discussions revealed underlying and trending topics within each nation:

- Malaysia
    - Melaka Gateway: China's $10B harbor project as a cover for a naval base
    - "Malacca Dilemma": China's plans to construct other sea routes (e.g. OBOR)
    - Tourism: "Encore Malaysia" knowledge transfer from China to Melaka
- Indonesia
    - Piracy in Riau Islands: Piracy along southern Malacca is the highest in the world
    - Regional Economy: Impact of U.S.-China trade on Indonesia's economy
    - Malacca Bridge: Renewed interest in connecting Sumatra to Melakah
- Singapore
    - Security in Singapore Strait: Piracy flowing from Strait of Malacca in the north
    - Chinese Immigrants: Concerns about Chinese immigrants on espionage missions
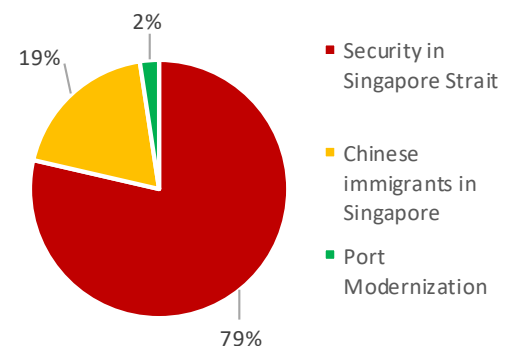   - Port Modernization: Singapore's $1.1B port improvement mega-project

Malaysia

- Melaka Gateway — 82%
- Malacca Dilemma — 12%
- Tourism — 6%

Indonesia

- Piracy in Riau Islands — 92%
- Regional Economy — 5%
- Malacca Bridge — 3%

Singapore

- Security in Singapore Strait — 79%
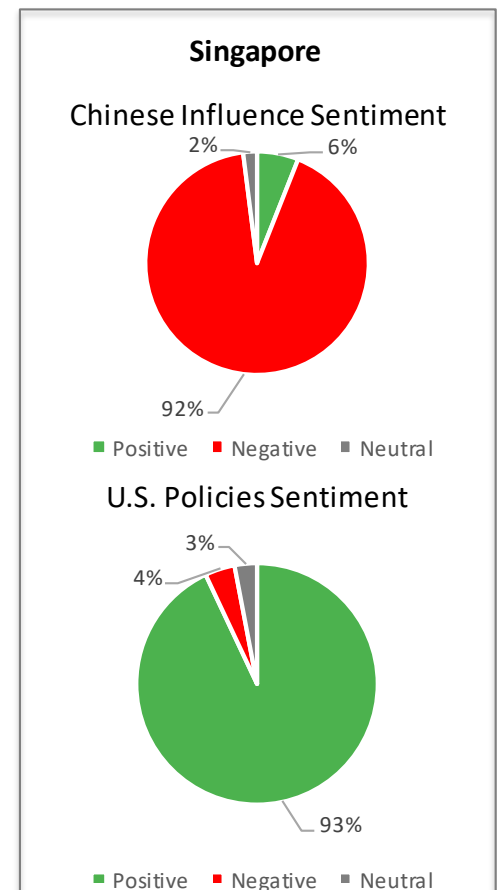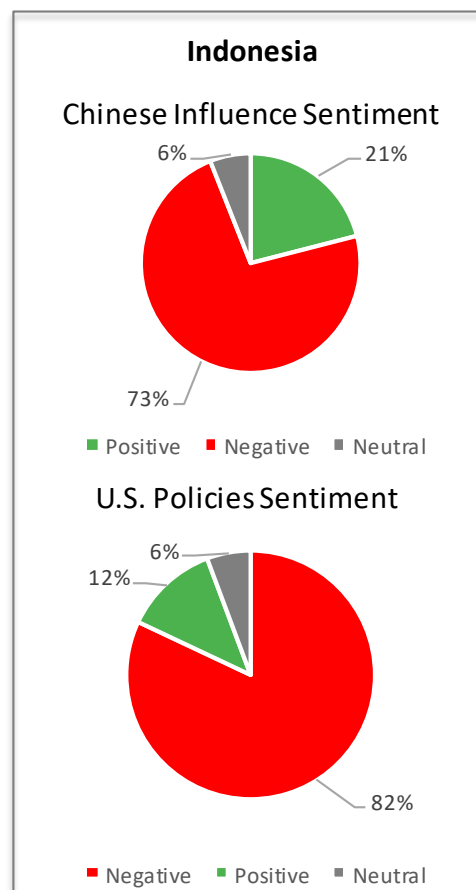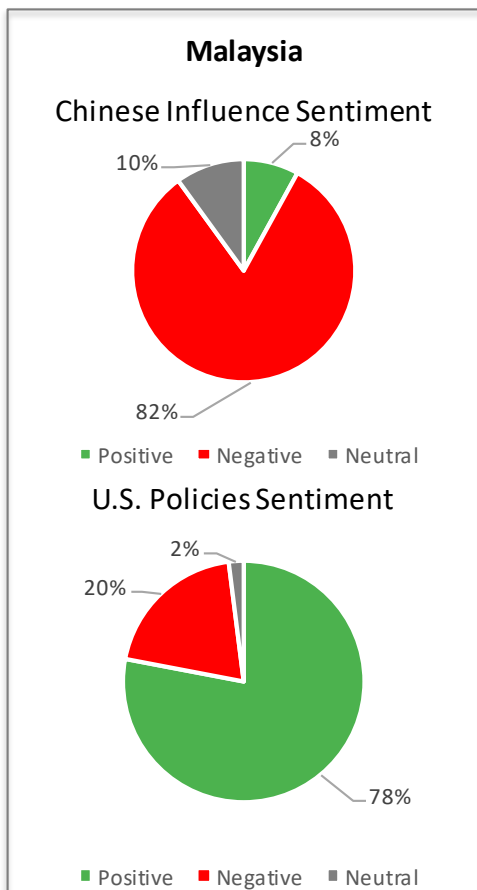- Chinese immigrants in Singapore — 19%
- Port Modernization — 2%

Findings: Public Sentiment

Measured public perceptions of U.S. and Chinese influence across each nation's population

- Malaysia
    - 82% of the population view China's investment to build the Melaka Gateway as a threat to local economy and culture (Melaka's Chinatown)
    - 78% of the population share positive sentiment toward historical American policies in the region
        - ❑ ASEAN is viewed as an alternative to Chinese "colonialism"
- Indonesia
    - 73% of the Sumatra island population have negative sentiment toward possible Chinese intervention in Medan City
    - 82% of Indonesians along Malacca Strait have negative sentiment with U.S. anti-terrorism policies that have failed to quell radical Islam in the region
- Singapore
    - 92% of Singapore's citizens express negative sentiment particularly due to the influx of Chinese immigrants competing for local low-paying jobs
    - 93% of Singapore's citizens express favorable sentiment for U.S. policies as they see U.S. interest benefiting Singapore's economy and port modernization plans

Malaysia

Chinese Influence Sentiment

8%
10%
82%

■ Positive ■ Negative ■ Neutral

U.S. Policies Sentiment

2%
20%
78%

■ Positive ■ Negative ■ Neutral

Indonesia

Chinese Influence Sentiment

6%
21%
73%

■ Positive ■ Negative ■ Neutral

U.S. Policies Sentiment

6%
12%
82%

■ Negative ■ Positive ■ Neutral

Singapore

Chinese Influence Sentiment

2%
6%
92%

■ Positive ■ Negative ■ Neutral

U.S. Policies Sentiment

3%
4%
93%

■ Positive ■ Negative ■ Neutral

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"Went to Johor, Melaka, and Kuala Lumpur. Obviously there are so many projects owned by China. We are in big trouble man."

Findings: Comparative Analysis

Uncovered the relationship between the most significant topics across each country's populations:

- China's Expansionist Plans
  - Between 67-82% of each country's citizens express negative sentiment regarding China's use of the Strait of Malacca to expand its political and economic dominance in Asia

- Piracy Concerns
  - ~90% of Indonesia and Singapore's populations are concerned with ongoing piracy issues in the Riau Islands, south of the Malacca Strait

- "Malacca Dilemma"
  - China's "dilemma" to pursue other supply routes (e.g. Kra Canal in Thailand) have gained negative sentiment among merchants in Malaysia and Singapore
    - ❑ 80% of Middle East oil flows through the Strait of Malacca to China

- U.S. Policies
  - Overall, significant positive sentiment towards U.S. policies in the region (except for negative sentiment associated with the failed terrorism policy in Indonesia)

Nations	China's Plans	Piracy Concerns	"Malacca Dilemma"	U.S. Policies
Malaysia	82% Negative	67% Negative	78% Negative	78% Positive
Indonesia	67% Negative	92% Negative	72% Neutral	82% Negative
Singapore	81% Negative	89% Negative	56% Negative	93% Positive

"How China can solve the Malacca dilemma? Invade and annex Myanmar!"

Recommendations

- Create a long-term regional Information Operations (IO) *strategy* based on findings from the comparative analysis, which identify common beliefs , interests, and objectives across each country

  - Design and disseminate a "Master Narrative" that aligns with and reinforces the regional IO strategy (e.g., counter Chinese "colonialism" / expansion, protect national sovereignty, and safeguard the population's culture and livelihoods)

- Develop tailored, operational and tactical IO *campaigns* for each specific country and its citizens based on key and trending topics that addresses each country's unique challenges and simultaneously shapes and influences public sentiment regarding citizen's concerns

  - Design and disseminate "Sub-Narratives" that reinforce the Master Narrative and support operational and tactical IO campaigns (e.g., "Malacca Dilemma" and Piracy Concerns, and economic stability)

- Monitor changes in public sentiment through real-time social media exploitation to assess and adjust the IO campaign and master and sub-narratives based on US and Chinese activities

- Integrate social media exploitation (e.g. Twitter and Facebook) into open source collection and analysis plans to uncover unique insights into target audiences

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