

STRATEGIC STUDIES PROGRAM

Public Opinions in the Philippines about a Taiwan Crisis

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Introduction

As tensions in the Taiwan Strait intensify, the Philippines faces increasing strategic pressure to clarify its role in a potential crisis concerning Taiwan. A central concern for policymakers is whether Philippine leaders would incur significant domestic political costs if they were to support U.S.-led action.

This policy brief presents evidence from a survey conducted in the Philippines in September 2025. The survey consists of a quantitative experimental component, the results of which are still being analyzed, and a qualitative component. We present the results of the qualitative component here, in which we asked the respondents for their thoughts on the reason why they would support or oppose Filipino leaders to intervene in a Taiwan crisis, as well as their general thoughts on the Taiwan conflicts. Further questions were related to the alliance between Philippines and the United States, as well as their perceptions of China.

A key finding emerged from our analysis is that the alliance with the U.S. plays a key role in raising the Philippines' public support for intervention in Taiwan. Respondents view fighting alongside the U.S. to be part of the obligations to the alliance. The alliance is also viewed with overwhelmingly positive sentiment among the public. The respondents consider the U.S. to be a trusted partner in both defense and economic aspects. On the other hand, the view on China is mixed: they

are seen as a bully in the West Philippine Sea, but still an important partner in trade and economic ties.

Policy Context

The Philippines occupies a uniquely exposed position in any Taiwan Strait contingency. While Manila has no formal defense obligation towards Taiwan, its alliance with the United States creates geopolitical pressures connecting its own security challenges in the West Philippine Sea. The expanded defense cooperation under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), combined with geographic proximity to potential conflict zones mean that Philippine territory, assets, and political decisions would likely be implicated early in any crisis.

This position can potentially compel Philippine policymakers to face three interrelated domestic concerns. First is alliance pressure to allow and support U.S. operations. Much speculation has been expended on this issue, but Philippine leadership has not made concrete commitments. On the other side is Chinese pressure, particularly economic loss. Third, which ties it all together, is public sensitivity to escalation and possible conflict involvement. In a democratic system, how will the Philippine electorate respond to these interrelated issues?

This policy brief will provide a glance into the perceptions of the Filipino public regarding

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intervention, and the actors involved. By analyzing both the common patterns of responses, as well as the

sentiments, it serves as the first step in investigating public opinions on this issue.

Survey Design

We conducted the survey in September 2025, with 1,200 respondents, using nationally diverse online panels. Respondents were asked to evaluate hypothetical crisis scenarios involving a Taiwan Strait conflict, with vignettes regarding a China military invasion towards Taiwan. This was followed by a call to action by the U.S. to join forces. Respondents were asked the extent to which they would approve or disapprove of the decision of the Philippine President to stay out of the conflict, or to intervene

by joining the U.S. They were then asked to write a short response to explain the reasons behind their approval or disapproval. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked on their thoughts regarding the Taiwan conflict in general, the alliance between the Philippines and the U.S., and on China.

Responses to the four open-ended items were analyzed qualitatively, with computer-assisted text analysis. The results of the analysis are presented below.³

Key Findings

The reasons behind public support for neutral or intervention

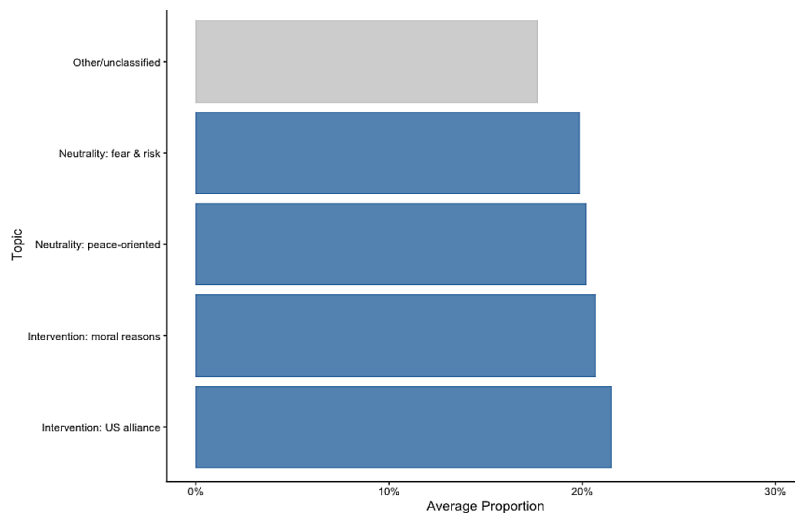
As Figure 1 showed, the most common reason provided by the Philippine public in supporting intervention is based on U.S.-alliance perception. This ranges from a very direct interpretation of the alliance relation as collective defense to respondents showing judgement based on reciprocity as to why the alliance is important. The reciprocal reasoning carries over in justifications imbued with moral overtones. Overall, this shows an acute awareness to politics of alliance maintenance and the Philippines own precarious geopolitical threats.

Respondents also expressed solidarity with Taiwan, out of a sense of facing a common enemy. This ranges from a moral responsibility for the Philippines to

equating similar threats by China to the Philippines. Another reason is respondents recognized the deep ties between Philippines and Taiwan. One respondent touched on the presence of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Taiwan, and, therefore, their contribution to the Philippine economy.

Among reasons for opposing intervention, several respondents mentioned the risk of destabilizing the region. Respondents cited consequences to the economy, as well as the asymmetric balance of power between the Philippines and China. Respondents also remarked that the countries involved should resolve the conflict peacefully.

Figure 1. Reasons for Approval/Disapproval of Intervention



³ The quantitative results of the project are still being analyzed. We will publish the results when appropriate.

Opinions on the alliance with the US

The respondents overwhelmingly expressed positive sentiments about the alliance between the Philippines and the U.S. The U.S. is seen as a trusted partner, and the respondents believe the alliance will grow stronger in the future. Respondents described the alliance as “multifaceted” and “resilient,” extending far beyond strategic and security domains. Some respondents cited the positive people-to-people exchange in their assessments of the alliance. On the other hand, some respondents also expressed negative sentiments about alliance. These respondents mainly cited the fear that the Philippines might be drawn into the tensions between the U.S. and China. Some respondents even expressed concerns over the current Trump administration, as well as the state of domestic politics in the U.S.

Public views of China

Public sentiment on China is more mixed. Respondents recognized both the increasingly important role of China in the economic development of the Philippines, while noting the ongoing territorial disputes in the West Philippine Sea. Some respondents expressed wishes for the two countries to resolve the disputes peacefully, as they think it would bring mutual benefits to both sides. Several respondents noted that the relationship improved under the previous administration, relatively easing the tensions between the two countries compared to other administrations. However, China’s actions in the West Philippine Sea remains a key issue for the respondents. A proportion of the respondents expressed anger and disgust toward the “bullying” moves of China, such as ramming of the vessels. They also disliked China for not following international laws.

Public opinions on the Taiwan conflicts

As shown in Figure 4, public opinions on the Taiwan conflicts centered around several key themes. A majority of respondents expressed fear of war and escalation. Wars are seen as “bloody” and “inevitable if mishandled.” Taiwan is seen as a flashpoint, impacting the stability of the Indo-Pacific region. Respondents displayed a preference for neutrality and non-intervention, focusing on “avoid taking sides.” This preference for neutrality might stem from a distrust of great-power rivalry, with many respondents think that Taiwan is a proxy for great powers pursuing selfish interests. Respondents are also concerned over consequences conflicts might have on the Philippines,

Figure 2. Overall Polarity of Alliance Responses

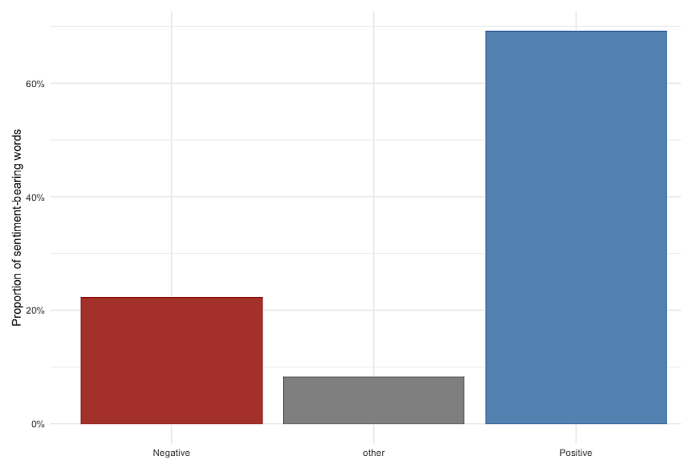
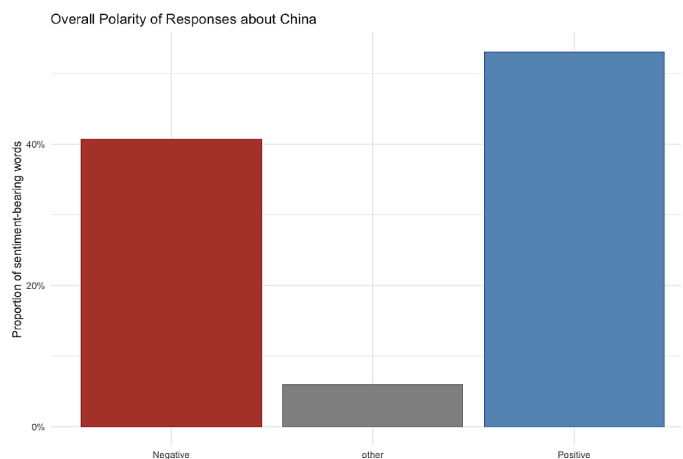
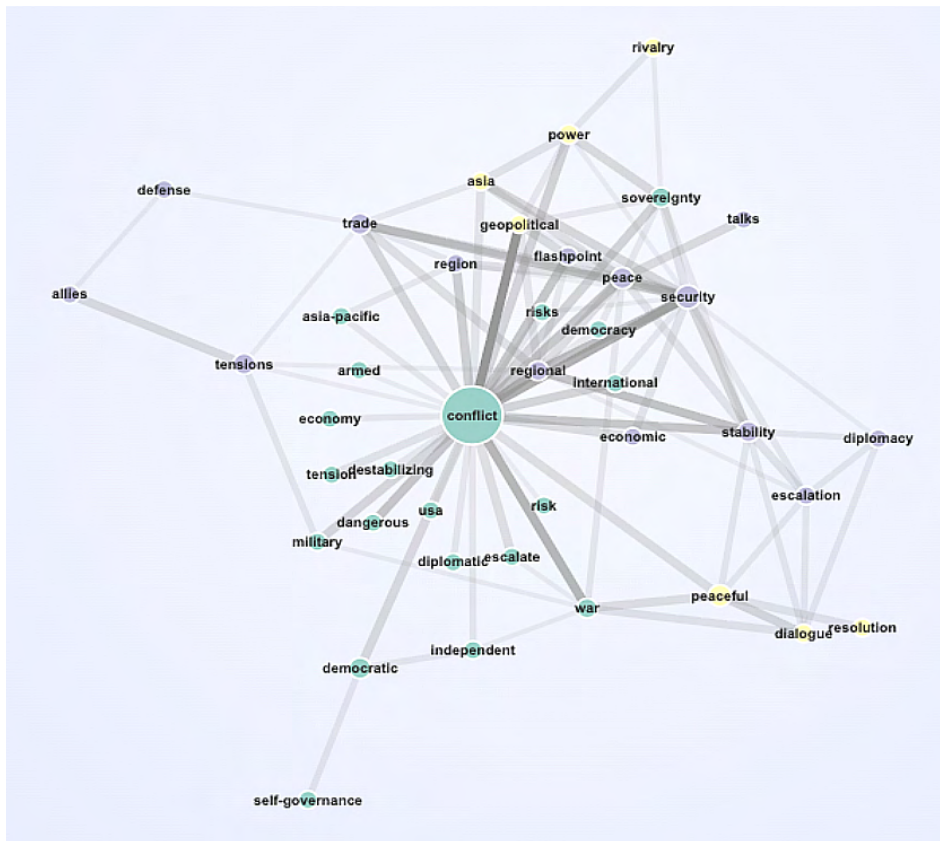


Figure 3. Overall Polarity of Responses on China



including economic, security and humanitarian crises. However, several respondents also expressed sympathy for Taiwan. This sentiment stems from two reasons. First, the respondents perceived Taiwan as also suffering from the “bullying” of China, and both the Philippines and Taiwan are stuck in the great power rivalry between China and the U.S. Second, the respondents recognized the importance of opposition to authoritarian coercion, and shared values such as democracy and freedom.

Figure 4. Topics of discussion about Taiwan conflicts

Implications for Foreign and Security Policy

The survey results suggest that Philippine foreign and security policy needs to further institutionalize and communicate the country's alliance commitments with the United States, while carefully managing escalatory risks and public anxieties about great-power rivalry. Public support for intervention is strongly rooted in alliance obligations and trust in the U.S. as a defense and economic partner, as well as in moral solidarity with Taiwan as a fellow victim of coercion. This gives policymakers a domestic mandate to deepen defense cooperation under frameworks like EDCA, as well as coordinate more closely with Washington and like-minded partners on deterrence in the Taiwan Strait and the West Philippine Sea. At the same time, the public's fear of war and preference for avoiding direct conflict underscore the importance of clear red lines, robust crisis communication, and signaling that any Philippine involvement would be calibrated and anchored in international law.

At the regional level, the mixed but pragmatic views of China indicate that Manila must continue a dual-track approach: firm on maritime rights and international legal rulings in the West Philippine Sea,

but open to economic cooperation and diplomatic engagement where interests align. The recognition of China's economic importance, alongside anger at its "bullying" behavior, suggests that over-dependence on Chinese trade or investment could be politically costly, pushing the Philippines to diversify economic partnerships with Taiwan, the U.S., Japan, and other regional partners. Given public concern on spillovers from a Taiwan crisis, Philippine policymakers need to strengthen civil defense, and contingency planning for OFWs in Taiwan. As the Philippines takes over the ASEAN chairmanship for 2026, regional diplomacy efforts should emphasize peaceful dispute resolution, respect for sovereignty, and opposition to authoritarian coercion—positions that align with public sympathy for Taiwan and the country's democratic identity.

Conclusion

In sum, the survey shows that Filipinos approach a potential Taiwan crisis with a mix of alliance-driven solidarity, moral concern, and strong anxiety about war and great-power rivalry. The U.S.–Philippines alliance is widely viewed as positive, resilient, and central to the country's security and economic well-being. However, it is also seen as a possible channel of entrapment in a confrontation with China. Public opinion

toward China is similarly ambivalent—recognizing its economic importance while resenting its coercive behavior in the West Philippine Sea. These nuanced views translate into a preference for neutrality and peaceful conflict resolution, alongside sympathy for Taiwan as a fellow democracy facing coercion. For Philippine leaders, these attitudes underscore the need to balance deeper alliance cooperation and support for international law with careful management of escalation risks, economic dependencies, and domestic concerns about being drawn into a wider regional conflict.

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