

## Thai Tourism's Antibiotic Against Political Risk

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### Abstract

Thailand has been well-known for its prolong political risk. Indeed, the prolong political risk has been mainly due to the constant coup d'états however, the sources of risk had shifted significantly beyond coups. In fact, political turmoil, regime instability and political tension are the key types of risk that defines Thai contemporary political risk. Nonetheless, political risk has caused years of high uncertainty and social instability for Thailand.

**Key words:** Political turmoil; Foreign direct investment; Tourism; Resilience

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### INTRODUCTION

Thailand has been well-known for its prolong political risk. Indeed, the prolong political risk has been mainly due to the constant coup d'états however, the sources of risk had shifted significantly beyond coups. In fact, political turmoil, regime instability and political tension are the key types of risk that defines Thai contemporary political risk. Regime instability, obviously, is the result of constant coups and withdrawals. While political turmoil and tension represents the polarization of Thai politics. Nonetheless, political risk has caused years of high uncertainty and social instability for Thailand. That said, Thailand's economy has remained strong within

the Southeast Asia region (World Bank, 2016). Such positive performance is notable and questionable. Thus, this paper seeks to answer the **research question**: How does Thailand's economy remain resilient all this while even with its endless political crisis especially in its top industry, namely tourism? To answer, this paper looks at the key political actors, high profile political events, Thai economy and tourism industry.

### 1. THAILAND POLITICAL RISK

Coups, or regime instability, used to play a defining role in Thai political risk but have shifted significantly since Thaksin Shinawatra led Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) to its landslide victory in 2001 legislative election and 2005 re-election. Thaksin was a telecom billionaire. He also founded the TRT political party with a populist ideology (Hicken, 2006; BBC, 2011). TRT soon gained immense popularity from the "rural farmers and urban working class" due to its attractive healthcare and education policies that greatly benefited its supporters (BBC, 2012). Nonetheless, the mass support led to the winning of TRT and Thaksin became the Prime Minister of Thailand. All were good until the sales of Shin Corp share worthing up to US\$1.9 billion to a Singaporean firm (Hicken, 2006; BBC, 2011). This angered large number of Thais, who then started large street protest. Corruption rumors did not spare Thaksin and eventually led to official investigation. Thai corruption agency discovered both Thaksin and his wife guilty of making false declaration about their assets (Sinpeng, 2014). To avoid charges, Thaksin left Thailand on self-imposed exile but could not escape from the chaos as he was overthrown by a coup. Even though, Thaksin got ousted by the coup but his political influence persisted until today, leaving Thai politics polarized. Notably, it is the polarization that fueled Thailand's contemporary political turmoil. To make matters worse, polarization also led to high political tension between four political actors.

## 1.1 Thailand Political Risk: Political Tension

### 1.1.1 Thai Monarchy

#### Political Significance

For centuries, the highly respected and well-loved Thai monarchs have been at the very heart of Thais. Even though the monarchs' role, as written in the constitution, was an advisory role in Thai politics. However, in times of crisis, their role would exceed what has been stated in the constitution. That said, Thai monarch act as the pillar of stability for Thailand whenever there was an unsolved political turmoil (Ockey, 2005; Promchertchoo, 2016). This was exceptionally true for the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej. His Majesty have always been the core pillar of stability for Thailand throughout his reign and in times of political crisis, he would intervene to ensure stability. The most prominent event that demonstrated His Majesty's role in ensuring stability was the Bloody May event in 1992. This event or mass demonstration against General Suchinda Kraprayoon resulted in a force-massacre (The Guardian, 2009). To prevent further deaths and injuries, King Bhumibol broadcasted the meeting with both leaders, requested them to stop the conflict. Soon after, both parties agreed to stop the violence and have resigned from their positions (Promchertchoo, 2016). Once again, Thailand became politically stable.

#### Political Position

Indeed, the exceeding political power of Thai monarchs was important and mandatory to ensure stability. However, in terms of political position, the monarchy should remain "politically neutral" or to be unbiased towards any politician. Yet, cases have shown that this component does not apply to Thai monarchy. For instance, during an official trip outside of Bangkok, King Bhumibol implicitly showed its relationship with the military institution by wearing "his green army uniform" (Charoensin-o-larn, 2013). A more recent indicator was the signing of military-backed constitution by King Maha Vajiralongkorn. Indeed, the signing of the new military-backed constitution was an approach to restore democracy however, critics have argued that this constitution would only further strengthen the military power in Thai politics (Thepgumpanat & Tanakasempipat, 2017). Both examples have directly and indirectly informed the Thai public and the rest of the world on its political position in Thai politics. In simpler terms, the subtle actions carried out by both Kings have signal the public that the Thai monarchy have strong political ties with the military institution.

### 1.1.2 Thai Military

#### Political Significance

Royal Thai Army (RTA) role and identity in Thai politics has been very prominent throughout history. Particularly, the constant coups were a key channel for RTA to exert influence in Thai politics and gain political positions (Bunbongkarn, 2004). As seen, Thai

military has increasingly become a significant part of contemporary Thai politics. The strong connection and high influence that the Thai military had constructed with Thai politics had made them one of the key actors in politics. In addition to being influential, Thai military had also adapted to new professionalism or internal security (Stepan, 1988). The fact that, the military function of RTA focus on internal security, thus they would not completely distance itself from Thai politics. Rather, draw itself closer through constant coups.

#### Political Position

Over the course, RTA political position had changed significantly. Initially, the first coup carried out by the military in 1932 overthrew the existing absolute monarchy and replaced it with the current constitutional monarchy. Subsequent coups primary aim was for military officers to obtain senior political positions (Bunbongkarn, 2004). Military strong presence and integration into Thai politics lasted for nearly four decades. Unlike previous coup, the 1977 coups primary aim was to enforce democratisation. The civilian government lasted for nearly 12 years before the 1991 coup. This time, the reason behind the coup was the lack of legitimacy by civilian government due to several factors such as corruption (Bunbongkarn, 2004). Moving forward, the current political position that the RTA has been holding was to protect the Thai monarchy. Throughout King Bhumibol's reign, the coups "were done in the name of protecting the king – and eventually endorsed by him" (The Straits Times, 2016). Thai military stance was clear under the previous king but with the current king in position, it is unknown. More importantly, as mentioned above, King Vajiralongkorn clearly stated that he would not be like his father or take on any position like his father did (Tostevin, 2017). This also imply the future relations between the monarchy and military.

### 1.1.3 Red Shirts, Thaksin Family, United Front Against Dictatorship

#### Political Significance

The rise of Red Shirts was formed by a group of Pro-Thaksin supporters in the early 2000s. Formally known as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), the Red Shirts had become one the Thailand key political actors in contemporary Thai politics. The emergence of Red Shirts has been politically significant in two ways. One, the rise of Red Shirts saw the great polarization within Thai society and politics ('Red vs Yellow in Thailand', 2010). Particularly, the polarization was a result of the differences in political stance, either Pro- or Against-Thaksin. In details, the members of Red Shirts are primarily compromised by rural workers outside of Bangkok, urban working class, left-wing activists, students and business people (McCargo, 2009b). Two, Red Shirts active presence signified Thaksin's persisting political influence. Indeed, Thaksin had been ousted by the RTA in a coup and banned from politics. Yet, his

strong influence in Thai politics have not yet died down. In fact, Red Shirts and Yingluck Shinawatra both act as a channel for Thaksin to continue exerting influence in Thai politics (Hewison, 2010).

### **Political Position**

As mentioned, the Red Shirts are core Thaksin supporters. Despite that Thaksin has been on self-imposed exile and his political party got dissolved and banned, the Red Shirts continued to show strong supports for Thaksin. When Yingluck Shinawatra led her political party (Pheu Thai Party) in the 2011 election, the Red Shirts showed huge support for her. As a result, Yingluck and her party won a landslide victory and became the first women prime minister of Thailand (Nishizaki, 2014). The Red Shirts' political position had always aligned with Thaksin and his associates. Conversely, the Red Shirts have always been against the Thai military governance. They perceived the military elites' control in Thai politics as a threat towards democracy (BBC, 2012).

#### **1.1.4 Yellow Shirts, People's Alliance for Democracy**

##### **Political Significance**

Yellow Shirts, formally known as People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), is another key political actor in contemporary Thai politics. Yellow Shirts members mainly comprise of royalist from urban middle class, conservative elites and members of state enterprise labour unions ('Red vs Yellow in Thailand', 2010). The emergence of Yellow Shirts were triggered by the selling of Thailand telecom shares to Singaporean firm (Hicken, 2006). Since the incident, the rise of Yellow Shirts have been predominantly significant in Thai politics in two ways. One, the emergence of Yellow Shirts represented the other political actor (in addition to Red Shirts) that constitutes towards current polarized Thai society and politics. Two, their strong political presence represents Thai monarchy's role and strong influence in politics as well as its significance in the hearts of Thais.

##### **Political Position**

Unlike the Red Shirts, the Yellow Shirts strongly opposes Thaksin, Yingluck and their corresponding government. Instead, these Yellow Shirts see themselves in accordance with the Thai monarchy. Specifically, the yellow-coloured shirts wore by supporters was Thai king's colour (McCargo, 2009a). The supportive attitude came from Thai monarchy everlasting symbolic identity for Thailand. More importantly, their attitude towards Thai monarchy was filled with honour and respect. Base on this attitude, the Yellow Shirts often accuse the Red Shirts of "inadequate loyalty to the monarchy" (BBC, 2012).

#### **1.2 Thailand Political Risk: Political Turmoil in Action**

Since Thaksin Shinawatra became the Prime Minister of Thailand, events of street demonstrations, clashes and coups became more striking. These events were

consequences of political turmoil as it causes social instability but more importantly, it has detrimental impact on Thai economy. There are a few notable political turmoil events. One, the infamous event was the ASEAN Summit Pattaya. In April 2009, ASEAN 14<sup>th</sup> Summit was held at Pattaya. Basically, the Red Shirts protested and invaded Royal Cliff hotel where the summit was being held. This resulted in the suspension of the summit and the emergency evacuation of ASEAN leaders by helicopters or boats (Montesano, 2009; Tarrant, 2009). This event severely damaged Thailand's reputation and triggered a series of violent riots in Bangkok (Prasirtsuk, 2010). Two, the shutdown of Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport due to the Yellow Shirts occupying and blocking the entrance of the airport which left passengers stranded in the airport (Ockey, 2009). Three, 2006 and 2014 coup d'états.

## **2. THAILAND'S PERSISTING ECONOMY**

The average GDP growth rate worldwide was at 3 percent in 2016. Despite a global economy slowdown, ASEAN remained resilient with a growth rate of 4.4 percent. This was a result of stable private consumption. (Deloitte Thailand, 2017). Thailand, the second-largest economy in Southeast Asia, is also facing similar global slowdown challenge with its prolong political turmoil. To counter these challenges, Bank of Thailand's governor Veerathai Santipraphob pointed out that Thailand should increase its international reserves and government spending (Bank of Thailand, 2017).

### **2.1 GDP growth in Thailand**

Thailand's key GDP components are automotive industry, banking & finance industry, electronics industry, real estate, wholesale & retail, as well as tourism industry. Take Thai automotive industry and electronics industry as examples, both industries are underperforming in the short-run and long-run. As of 2015, electronics industry has been underperforming with a negative growth. This was a result of global economic slowdown and shifting production base (Economic Impact Thailand, 2017). For tourism industry, the number of foreign tourists improved by 23 percent in 2015. Tourism revenue reached THB 1.45 trillion, up by 23 percent increase from 2014. It is predicted that the number of foreign tourists in 2016 will reach 33 million, breaking previous record. Likewise, foreign visitors will bring about THB 1.64 trillion receipts to Thailand. Tourists from Asian regions such as China, Japan, South Korea and Malaysia will be the main force of tourism in Thailand. Take China visitors as an example, the total number of visitors have increased exponentially over the past 18 years. Up to 2015, total Chinese visitors accounted to 26.5 percent of total arrivals (Yong, Song, Artispong, Khor, & DBS Singapore Research Team, 2016).

## 2.2 Trade and Inward FDI in Thailand

Thailand's trade has been witnessing a general uptrend growth from 2005 to 2013, excluding the period of global financial crisis. As for the other key industries mentioned,

export volume has slowdown since 2013, which is affected by the global economic stagnation. Inward FDI have also been fluctuating over the years with 2015 total FDI amount equivalent to 2006 (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Trade and FDI in Thailand (US\$ in billions)**

Indicator	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Trade <sup>1</sup>	110.9	129.7	153.8	177.7	152.4	193.3	222.5	229.1	228.5	227.5	214.3
Inward FDI <sup>2</sup>	8.22	8.92	8.63	8.56	6.41	14.75	2.47	12.90	15.94	4.98	9.00

Source: World Bank

## 2.3 Policy Incentives in Thailand

To maintain a positive economic growth, the current government has implemented several policies. One, SME tax amnesty which is designed to encourage more small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) to re-enter the tax system which reduces tax evasion. Two, FDI tax incentives which aim to attract more private investment by investing in the ten-new special economic zone<sup>3</sup>. Other policies include Reform of State-owned enterprises, Specialized financial institutions (SFIs) supervision and tax for lands and buildings can be found at Thailand Economic Monitor (Department of Foreign Trade, 2016).

includes Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Railay (Lonely Planet, 2017). Regional wise, Thailand had the best performance, greatly exceeded its neighbours such as Cambodia and Singapore (The World Bank, 2016).

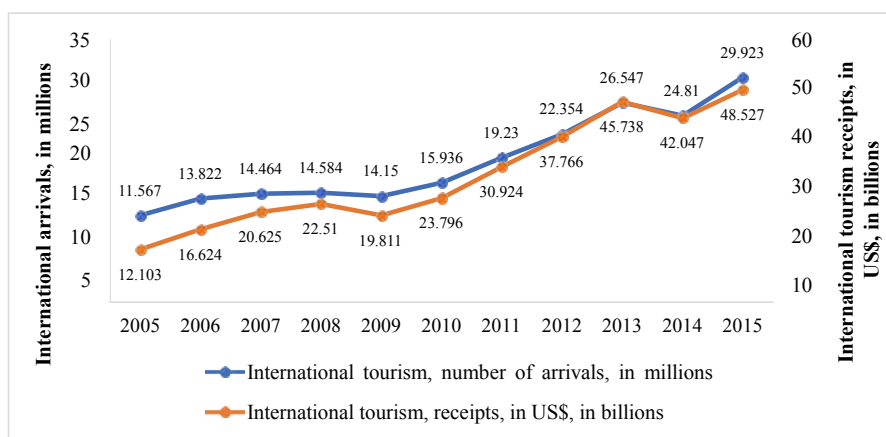
## 3.2 Overview of Thailand's Travel & Tourism Industry Performance

In 1998, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) came up with the idea of "The Amazing Thailand Campaign" as a recovery solution from 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. A 7.53 percent growth in 1998 and a further 10 percent increase in tourist arrivals in 1999 have been shown after the announcement of "The Amazing Thailand". In 2012, TAT continued to promote the country under the "Amazing Thailand Always Amazes You" campaign slogans. Following by the year of 2015, the "2015 Discover Thainess" campaign was launched by TAT, showing the hospitality of the Thai people, and making Thailand a unique tourist destination with cultural treasures. The year of 2015 is a remarkable year with a total number of 29.9 million international visitors and US\$44.55 billion international tourism receipts. We can see in Figure 1 that Thailand's tourism industry gets benefits from the rising number of visitors, accounted for US\$48.5 billion revenue in 2015 (TAT, 2015).

## 3. THAILAND SERVICES INDUSTRY: TOURISM

### 3.1 Background

Thai tourism industry have seen remarkable performance over the years as a leader within the sector. Globally, Thailand has top many travel lists and is one of top countries visited. In 2017, Phuket, Thailand got ranked 10 out of 25 top destinations in the world by tripadvisor (TripAdvisor, 2017). Other notable destination also



**Figure 1**  
**Total Number of Arrivals and Total Tourist Receipts (in billions)**

Source: World Bank

<sup>1</sup> Measured by Merchandise exports (current US\$ bn)

<sup>2</sup> Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BoP, current US\$ bn)

<sup>3</sup> Located in Tak Province, Sa Kaeo Province, Mukdahan Province, Songklha Province, Trat Province, Nongkhai, Province, Chiang Rai Province, Nakhon Phanom Province, Kanchanaburi Province, Narathiwat Province.

Based on the report published by World Economic Forum (WEF), the world's top three of the ten most popular tourism cities in 2015 were Hong Kong, Bangkok and London. Bangkok won the silver medal, ranked only second to Hong Kong (WEF, 2016). Furthermore,

according to Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Biannual Reports, Thailand has occupied the advanced level in the world. Despite that, Thailand ranked fairly low in the category of Safety & Security (Table 2) (World Economic Forum, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015).

**Table 2**

Year	Country	T&T Competitiveness Index <sup>3</sup>		Country	Safety & Security <sup>4</sup>	
		Score	Rank		Score	Rank
2009	Switzerland	5.68	1/133	Finland	6.75	1/133
	Thailand	4.45	39/133	Thailand	3.94	118/133
2011	Switzerland	5.70	1/139	Finland	6.50	1/139
	Thailand	4.40	41/139	Thailand	4.39	94/139
2013	Switzerland	5.66	1/140	Finland	6.49	1/140
	Thailand	4.47	43/140	Thailand	4.37	87/140
2015	Spain	5.31	1/141	Finland	6.70	1/141
	Thailand	4.30	35/141	Thailand	3.75	132/141

Score is on a scale of 1-7 (best)

Source: World Economic Forum (WEF)

### 3.3 Key Event That Affected Tourism Industry in Thailand

2008 November - December Yellow Shirts Protest at Bangkok Airports

Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International Airport was forced to shut down temporary after the Yellow shirt protestors occupied the area in November 2008. Suvarnabhumi Airport saw thousands of Yellow Shirt protestors holding a sit-in demonstration as "the final push" to bring down the Pro-Thaksin government because they ultimately thought the government was a "proxy for

Mr. Thaksin" (BBC, 2012; Fuller, 2008). The airport was in a complete chaos as the protestors smashed doors and other properties. The complete paralyzation left millions of tourists stranded or diverted to other airports such as Phuket, Chiang Mai or Singapore (MacKinnon, 2008; Ockey, 2009). Based on Thai Department of Tourism data, the number of international arrivals dropped by 2.52 percent in 2008 and a further decline of 4.32 percent in 2009 (Table 3) (Department of Tourism, 2009). To be specific, the impact on tourism was immediate, more than forty thousand tourists chose not to land in Bangkok in December.

**Table 3**  
**Arrivals to Bangkok at Suvarnabhumi International Airport in 2007-09**

Month/ Year	2007	2008	2009
January - March	--	3,099,662	2,453,748
April - June	--	2,523,457	1,980,770
July - September	--	2,401,647	2,310,526
October - December	--	2,083,922	2,927,434
October	--	749,976	862,263
November	--	687,625	959,093
December	--	646,321	1,106,078
TOTAL	10,370,486	10,108,688	9,672,478
Y-o-Y Changes (%)	---	-2.52	-4.32

Source: Thai Department of Tourism

Looking at the international tourists by nationality, the top ten international markets in 2007 were Malaysia, Japan, Korea etc. Seven out of ten had a negative growth

in term of visitors after the event. Moreover, more than 23 percent of Koreans decided not to travel to Bangkok within a short time (Table 4) (Department of Tourism, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) measures "the set of factors and policies that enable the sustainable development of the Travel & Tourism (T&T) sector, which in turn, contributes to the development and competitiveness of a country." It comprises four subindexes, namely, Enabling Environment, T&T Policy and Enabling Conditions, Infrastructure and Natural and Cultural Resources

<sup>5</sup> Safety and security is a critical factor determining the competitiveness of a country's T&T industry. Including the costliness of common crime and violence as well as terrorism, and the extent to which police services can be relied upon to provide protection from crime.

**Table 4**  
**International Tourist Arrivals to Thailand By Nationality in 2007-08**

Rank	Country	2007		2008		%Δ
		Number	%Share	Number	%Share	
1	Malaysia	1,540,080	10.65	1,805,332	12.38	2008/2007 17.22
2	Japan	1,277,638	8.83	1,153,868	7.91	-9.69
3	Korea	1,083,652	7.49	826,523	5.67	-23.73
4	China	907,117	6.27	826,660	5.67	-8.87
5	U.K.	859,010	5.94	826,523	5.67	-3.78
6	U.S.A.	681,972	4.71	669,097	4.59	-1.89
7	Australia	658,148	4.55	694,473	4.76	5.52
8	Singapore	604,603	4.18	570,047	3.91	-5.72
9	Germany	544,495	3.76	542,726	3.72	-0.32
10	India	536,356	3.71	536,964	3.68	0.11

Source: Thai Department of Tourism

Meanwhile, the number of international passengers<sup>6</sup> arrived at both Chiang Mai and Phuket International Airports have increased from November to December in 2008 (Table 5) (Airports of Thailand, 2017).

**Table 5**  
**International Passengers at Chiang Mai & Phket Airport in 2008**

MTH/YEAR	Chiang Mai Airport	Phuket Airport
	2008	2008
January - March	47,726	422,002
April - June	35,100	239,270
July - September	31,541	222,236
October - December	51,800	341,215
October	13,284	80,010
November	18,666	113,326
December	19,850	147,879
TOTAL	166,167	1,224,723

Source: Air Transport Information Division, AOT

Therefore, the demonstration that happened in Bangkok seemed to have minimum impact on Thai tourism industry. Other popular tourism cities such as Chiang Mai and Phuket performed well, offsetting the negative growth in Bangkok. Overall, the number

travelers increased from 1.08 million to 1.16 million between November to December (Table 6). Meanwhile, the international tourism receipts raised by 9.4 percent, accounting to about US\$ 22.5 billion (Table 7).

**Table 6**  
**International Tourism Arrivals (in millions), in 2007-09**

Month/ Year	2007	2008	2009
January - March	3.82	4.33	3.65
April - June	3.12	3.55	2.96
July - September	3.46	3.38	3.28
October	1.17	1.09	1.21
November	1.37	1.08	1.36
December	1.52	1.16	1.69
TOTAL	14	15	14

Source: Thai Department of Tourism

<sup>6</sup> International passengers include tourist arrivals, businessmen and others.

**Table 7**  
**Total Receipts<sup>7</sup> From International Tourism (in bn)**

Year	2007	2008	%Δ
Receipts (US\$ bn)	20.625	22.51	9.14

Source: Word Bank

**2010 March – May Anti-Government Demonstrations in Bangkok by Red Shirts**

Pro-Thaksin supporters gathered on the streets of central Bangkok for months, demanding former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to resign. The protest left parts of central commercial Bangkok paralyzed (BBC, 2016). Even worse, the demonstration ended with a bloody clash between tens of thousands of protestors and the RTA, leaving 91 dead and thousands injured (Connors, 2011). Apparently, the demonstration had adversely affected the tourism

industry in Bangkok. Since March 2010, the number of foreign traveler has gone down by almost 30 percent in April and a further fall by another 31 percent in May. If we compare the number of visitors with the same month last year, namely April and May, visitors were reduced. Surprisingly, Thailand tourism industry has experienced a sharp rebound after the consecutive recessions. By the end of the year of 2010, the tourism industry had been fully restored and reached the highest in the number of visitors (Table 8).

**Table 8**  
**Arrivals to Bangkok at Suvarnabhumi International Airport in 2009-11**

MTH/YEAR	2009	2010	2011
January	841,340	1,113,597	1,186,214
February	780,848	1,069,674	1,146,205
March	831,560	951,105	1,096,912
April	731,505	675,578	1,003,957
May	606,533	464,124	889,434
June	642,732	586,535	964,365
July - September	2,310,526	2,464,140	3,223,028
October	862,263	863,556	917,231
November	959,093	1,007,322	729,965
December	1,106,078	1,156,415	1,100,910
TOTAL	9,672,478	10,352,046	12,258,221

Source: Thai Department of Tourism

As we are looking at the Accommodation Establishments data, the social unrest happened in the third quarter of the year of 2010, the number of guest was

significant less than its in 2009, accounted for a negative 14.88 percent growth (Table 9).

**Table 9**  
**Accommodation Establishments Information in Bangkok in 2009-10**

Bangkok	Guest Arrivals at Accommodation <sup>8</sup>		
Month/ Year	2009	2010	Δ(%)
January - March	3,273,272	3,535,412	8.01
April - June	2,782,297	2,368,176	-14.88
July - September	2,526,762	2,288,703	-9.42
October - December	3,803,085	2,538,880	-33.24
Total	12,385,416	10,731,171	-13.36

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand

To further examine the scope of the demonstration to Thailand's tourism industry, besides looking at Bangkok (in the Central of Thailand), a few more popular tourism sites are studied, including Chiang Mai (in Northern Thailand), Pattaya (in Eastern Thailand) and Phuket (in Southern Thailand). In general, arrivals in both Chiang Mai and Pattaya were dropped in the third quarter, especially in Pattaya, in which is closer

to Bangkok, experienced a roughly 15 percent decrease in the third quarter (Table 10). In addition, other than bombing incidents in Bangkok, there were also bombing accidents in Chiang Mai during the same period (OSAC, 2012). As for Pattaya, due to political tension, the government imposed a curfew which severely impact the night activities of residents (Pattaya Today, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> International tourism receipts are expenditures by international inbound visitors including payments to national carriers for international transport. Also include any other prepayment made for goods or services received in the destination country.

<sup>8</sup> Guest arrivals includes both Thai guests and international guests

**Table 10  
Accommodation Information in Chiang Mai & Pattaya in 2009-10**

Destination Month/ Year	Guest Arrivals at Accommodation in Chiang Mai			Guest Arrivals at Accommodation in Pattaya		
	2009	2010	Δ(%)	2009	2010	Δ(%)
January - March	682,905	658,120	-3.63	766,356	1,231,372	60.68
April - June	495,919	476,229	-3.97	853,095	728,455	-14.61
July - September	449,778	865,602	92.45	854,936	877,063	2.59
October - December	765,787	770,191	0.58	1,019,119	1,170,734	14.88
Total	2,394,389	2,770,142	15.69	3,493,506	4,007,624	14.72

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand

With the development of economy and prosperity of the tourism in Thailand, Phuket has experienced a remarkable growth even after the demonstration in 2010. In the third quarter of 2010, the number of guest arrivals at accommodation in Phuket has increased by almost 14

percent. Likewise, the number of international passengers arrived at Phuket International Airport, has grown by roughly 49 percent in the third quarter in 2010 compared its in 2009 (Table 11).

**Table 11  
Accommodation Information & International Arrivals in Phuket in 2009-10**

Phuket Month/ Year	Guest Arrivals at Accommodation			International passengers at Phuket International Airport		
	2009	2010	Δ(%)	2009	2010	Δ(%)
January - March	624,267	743,965	19.17	344,205	515,476	49.76
April - June	669,533	760,321	13.56	208,373	310,329	48.93
July - September	1,427,469	1,349,080	-5.49	238,901	349,549	46.32
October - December	723,855	702,446	-2.96	332,297	377,180	13.51
Total	3,445,124	3,555,812	3.21	1,123,776	1,552,534	38.15

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Sports; Air Transport Information Division, AOT

To sum up, the total international arrivals improved by 12.62 percent in 2010, whereas the total receipts from

international tourism has reached to US\$ 23.8 billion, which increased by 20.12 percent compared to 2009 (Table 12).

**Table 12  
Total Arrivals & Total Receipts From International Tourism**

Year	2009	2010	%Δ
International arrivals (in millions)	14.15	15.936	12.62
Receipts (US\$ bn)	19.811	23.796	20.12

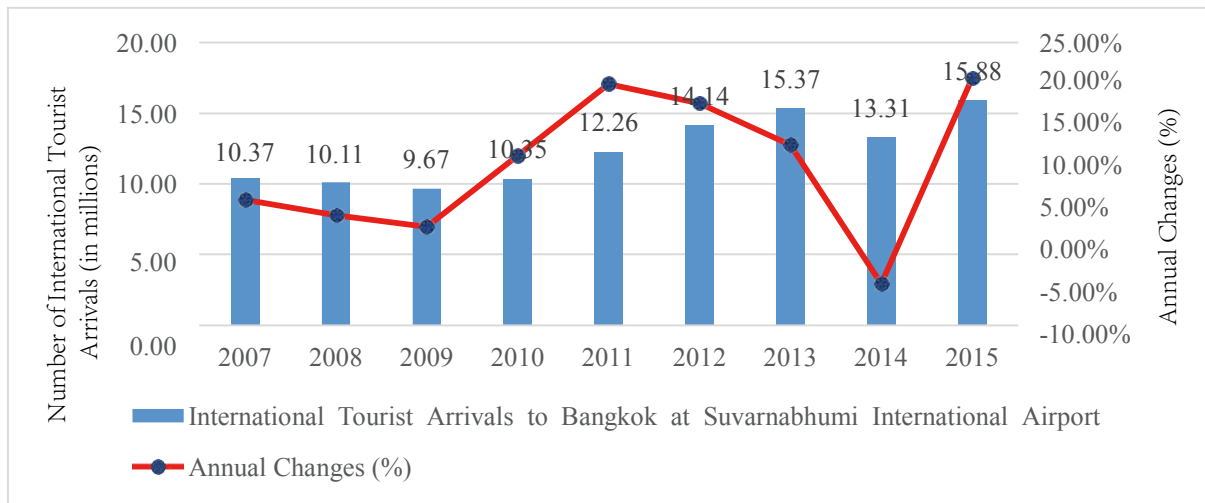
Source: Word Bank

**2014 Protest to Military Coup**

May 2014 military coup ousted former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. The fact that she was Thaksin's sister, the public especially the Yellow Shirts, saw her as Thaksin's puppet ('Profile: Yingluck Shinawatra', 2015). Furthermore, there was also the issue of corruption. These two factors and other as well resulted in another Yellow Shirt protest aimed to bring down Yingluck and her government. Tens of thousands occupied and blocked road junctions and government ministries in Bangkok, demanding Yingluck to step down. The protest soon turned violent and escalated into another coup. The military coup undoubtedly brought sufferings to Thailand and wreaked unprecedented havoc on Bangkok's tourism

industry. Visitors arriving at Bangkok international airport has fallen to about the level of three years ago. The international tourists arrived at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport dropped by over 13 percent in 2014 (Figure 2). Obviously, this catastrophe did not stop in Bangkok simply, but adversely affected the entire tourism industry in Thailand. The total tourism receipts from international travelers reduced from US\$45.7 billion in 2013 to US\$42 billion in 2014. This was the most serious decline since 2009 (Table 13). Again, the incident happened in May 2014, an immediate decline was occurred after that in June, but recovered in July, indicating a strong resilience of Thai tourism industry (Table 14).





**Figure 2**  
**Arrivals to Bangkok at Suvarnabhumi International Airport**  
 Source: Thai Department of Tourism

**Table 13**  
**International Tourism Receipts in US\$ Billions in 2007-15**

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Receipts (bn)	20.625	22.51	19.811	23.796	30.924	37.766	45.738	42.047
Δ(%)	--	9.14	-11.99	20.12	29.95	22.13	21.11	-8.07

Source: World Bank

**Table 14**  
**International Tourism Arrivals (in millions) in 2013-15**

Month/ Year	2013	2014	2015
January - March	7.01	6.38	7.83
April	2.06	1.93	2.41
May	1.94	1.67	2.3
June	2.06	1.49	2.27
July	2.15	1.9	2.66
August	2.36	2.08	2.61
September	2.0	1.87	2.04
October - December	6.97	7.49	7.77
TOTAL	27	25	30

Source: World Bank

### 2015 Bangkok Bombing

On 17 August 2015, Bangkok witnessed the bombing at Erawan shrine, a popular tourist attraction in the central of Bangkok. Indeed, this is not the first bombing incident that took place in the capital of Thailand. A year prior to Erawan shrine bombing, a similar bombing incident took place just across the street of Erawan shrine at Ratchaprasong Skywalk (Aljazeera, 2014). The unexpected event did not only affected tourists that were already in Bangkok but prospective ones as well. In summary, when there is emergency incident in Bangkok, the response is immediate, but the impact period is short. Putting military coup in 2014 and Bangkok bombing 2015 together, the results as shown in Table 15. For the coup event happened in May 2014, the number of international tourism arrivals dropped immediately at

both Suvarnabhumi Airport and Don Mueang Airport, which located in Bangkok. The number at the former airport decreased by 12 percent within merely one month after the military coup. Surprisingly, it took another one more month for Thai tourism market to gain the tourists' confidence back. In July, the number of visitors has rebounded to the original level in May before the coup d'état, or even slightly higher than the original level. Similarly, Don Mueang International Airport experienced a 14.8 percent reduction in its airline passenger volume. Likewise, after the bomb attack in August, the Suvarnabhumi Airport lost 343,000 international travelers a month later, which accounted for about 25 percent loss of traffic. Again, it took about a month for tourism industry to recover.

**Table 15**  
**Arrivals to Bangkok Through Airport in 2014-15**

Bangkok	International Tourist Arrivals at Suvarnabhumi Airport			International Tourist Arrivals at Don Mueang International Airport		
	MTH/YEAR	2014	2015	%Δ	2014	2015
January - March	3,433,307	4,315,441	25.69	463,553	785,354	69.42
April	1,014,283	1,287,871	26.97	169,508	278,953	64.57
May	863,054	1,214,782	40.75	163,595	276,962	69.30
June	757,879	1,205,263	59.03	139,387	277,461	99.06
July	991,760	1,442,923	45.49	182,133	324,285	78.05
August	1,139,742	1,359,224	19.26	202,963	323,423	59.35
September	978,394	1,016,065	3.85	203,854	260,115	27.60
October	1,195,744	1,139,729	-4.68	233,312	278,115	19.20
November	1,355,658	1,362,749	0.52	246,632	317,949	28.92
December	1,578,481	1,539,881	-2.45	269,125	361,777	34.43
TOTAL	13,308,302	15,883,928	19.35	2,274,062	3,484,394	53.22

Source: Thai Department of Tourism

After the incident, total tourist arrival drop to 2.04 million (23.31 percent) in the following month. Despite the fall, Thai tourism picked up quickly in October with a steady growth of 23,000 arrivals. By the end of 2015, total

tourist arrival reached its year-high of 2.99 million (Table 16) and tourism receipts improved by 15.41 percent compared to 2014 (Table 17).

**Table 16**  
**International Tourism Arrivals (in millions) in 2014-15**

MTH/YEAR	2014	2015	%Δ
January - March	6.38	7.83	22.73
April - June	5.09	6.98	37.13
July	1.9	2.66	40.00
August	2.08	2.61	25.48
September	1.87	2.04	9.09
October	2.21	2.23	0.90
November	2.43	2.55	4.94
December	2.85	2.99	4.91
TOTAL	25	30	20.00

Source: World Bank

**Table 17**  
**International Tourism Receipts in US\$ Billions in 2014-15**

Year	2014	2015	%Δ
Receipts (bn)	42.047	48.527	15.41

Source: World Bank

To sum up, during the military coup in September 2014, there were only 24.8 million visitors in total, a decreased by 4.3 percent from the previous year. Nevertheless, 2015 showed strong resilience due to TAT's "2015 Discover Thainess" campaign.

### 3.4 Sources of Resilience

Thailand tourism industry was not completely immune to the prolong political turmoil. As showed, tourism industry did saw immediate consequences following the month of political events. Despite that, Thai tourism often see a quick recovery with even better performance in the coming 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> month of post-event. Such results have made Thai tourism industry famous for its extraordinary

resilience to political turmoil shocks. Following of this section identifies three key sources that constructed Thai tourism strong resilience.

#### Budget Spending

Political turmoil events have repeatedly led to a drop in tourism confidence. To counter this problem, the Thai government have adjusted its budget to restore confidence and boost Thai tourism. In 2009, the Thai government allocated THB1 billion to boost its tourism sector (UOB, 2009). Likewise, 2010 Red Shirts months of demonstration adversely damage tourism confidence. To resolve this issue, the Thai government gave tourism industry THB9,521.4 million to restore confidence "by organizing public relations activities to enhance Thailand's

image and marketing events” (Bureau of Budget, 2011). As political conditions worsen and tourism becomes more dominant for Thai economy, TAT found all means to boost tourism. For instance, Songkran Festival had been a very popular event among young Thais because it is fun, entertaining and symbolic (TAT, 2017). The popularity of Songkran Festival had reached worldwide to a point where it attracts many foreigners to Thailand. In 2014, TAT Governor Thawatchai Arunyikwide widely advertised the festival and stated that “... the kingdom welcomed tourists who came to join the Thai people in one of our most joyous annual celebrations” (TAT, 2014). On top of making an official announcement, the TAT also spent THB 20 million on tourism during Songkran Festival 2014 period. The effort and contribution proved great success as it generated an estimation of THB 4 million (The Nation, 2014; TAT, 2014).

### **Competitive Advantage**

Other than budget spending to boost tourism, the rich culture heritage, beaches and medical tourism are also key sources that fueled Thailand’s competitiveness. The uniqueness of these heritage did not only grab the attention of international tourists but organisations as well. For example, the ancient City of Ayutthaya became one of UNESCO World Heritage location (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2017). In 2008, a record of 3 million tourist visited Ayutthaya and amongst them, 786,158 were foreign tourists (Ongkhluaip, 2012). In addition to culture heritage, sunny beaches along the southern coast and temples are another factor that fueled Thailand’s competitiveness. That said, the aggregate number of tourists in both categories reached nearly 30 million in 2015 (Temphairrojana, 2016).

The last and fastest growing – with an annual growth rate of 16 percent – source of competitiveness is Thailand’s medical tourism. Unlike the above two, medical tourism lures tourist with its cheaper medical treatments and hotel room. Rapid growth of aging population in developed countries have correspondingly increase the demand for medical treatments. Yet, instead of receiving treatments at home, many people chose medical tourism due to the lofty healthcare cost back home. Seeing this opportunity, TAT has worked towards medical tourism since 2004 (Eden, 2012). Thai government efforts did paid-off as Thailand saw an increasing number of medical tourists. More importantly, with the affordable hotel rates and medical treatments, Bangkok has been ranked the most popular destination for medical tourism in the world. That said, in the year 2011, Thailand had an estimated 500,000 medical tourists which contributed to 0.4 percent of Thai GDP (Eden, 2012).

### **Mitigation Effect**

The Thai government have tried to mitigate the adverse effects by diversifying it into two main areas. One was

to promote other tourist destination. The shutdown of Suvarnabhumi Airport resulted a large decline in the number of tourists entering Bangkok. Despite a fall, the overall tourism industry witness an overall increase. This was an outcome of the variety of popular tourist destinations such as Chiang Mai, Phuket and Pattaya. In addition to these well-known destinations, the Thai government also promoted Southern locations such as Krabi and Koh Phangan as alternatives (Ministry of Finance, Royal Thai Government, & The World Bank, 2012).

The second area was the boosting of domestic consumption through campaigns and tax incentives. In 2009, the Thai government introduced a special campaign called “Travel for your Nation” to encourage Thais “to see more of their country”. This campaign was a great success as it boosted the domestic air passengers by 7 percent in 2010 (Ministry of Finance et al., 2012; AOT, 2017). Indeed, the campaign did improve domestic number of trips but was assisted with tax incentives. Particularly, May 2010 experienced a riot in Bangkok which led to a fall in total airport passengers in June. The negative impact was resolved by Thai government introduction to tax incentives for “companies hosting domestic or international trade shows and training seminars”. In addition, the government also announced a “personal taxable income deductions [scheme] for Thai residents on domestic tourism-related spending” (Haddad, Nasr, Ghida, & Ibrahim, 2015). This method was very effective as there was a significant increase in total passengers rebound with a higher number prior to pre-event with 372,751 (AOT, 2017). Furthermore, internal tourism consumption also increased in the consequent years. Specifically, according to World Travel and Tourism Council report, consumption was THB1281.8 billion in 2010 and rose by 15 percent in the following year (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015). The astonishing comeback was so unexpected that even the TAT Governor Suraphon Svetasreni calls it “one of the most remarkable turnarounds in the history of Thai tourism” (Royal Thai Embassy, 2012).

### **3.5 Thai Tourism Outlook**

Based on AOT’s Traffic Report 2015, the number of passengers has increased by 21.3 percent since 2004. Passenger volume has reached to 100 million served by AOT’s six airports<sup>9</sup>. And the future goal for AOT is the expansion of the six airports’ scale to increase both aircraft movements and passengers, besides to develop Don Mueang international airport into the world’s largest low-cost carrier airports.

According to Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2017 Thailand report, Thai tourism industry contributed

<sup>9</sup> Suvarnabhumi, Don Mueang, Chiang Mai, Hat Yai, Phuket and Mae Fah Luang Chiang Rai

directly<sup>10</sup> 9.2 percent (THB 1292.5 billion) to its GDP. It is expected to increase to 9.3 percent (THB 1412.2 billion) and 14.3 percent (THB 2708 billion) in 2017 and 2027 respectively. The tourism sector has created about 2.3 million jobs in 2016 or 6.1 percent of total employment. This figure is expected to rise to 6.3 percent and 10.5 percent in 2017 and 2027 respectively. In 2016, Thailand gained THB 1891 billion from visitor exports<sup>11</sup>. This is expected to grow by 10.3 percent this year. By the end of 2017, Thailand is expected to have over 67 million international tourist arrivals, earning THB 4210.2 billion, which accounted for about 30 percent of total exports. In conclusion, Thailand's tourism industry still has great potential and is in a state of rapid development. Indeed, political and social instability do have impact on tourism in the short-run. Yet, in the long-run, political turmoil has minimum impact on Thai tourism's development and expansion.

## CONCLUSION

Thai tourism industry's remarkable resilience towards the prolonged political turmoil had gained wide attention. Throughout, this paper has shown that Thai tourism industry has been growing at a steady pace and it is very resilient towards political turmoil. Looking forward to the upcoming election. The planned general election date that was initially postponed from 2016 to 2017 has been further pushed to 2018. Even with the continuous defer in date, in general, the election would pose little impact on Thai tourism. In other words, Thai tourism would not be affected regardless of election results. As shown throughout the paper, tourists tend to have short-memory which fuels the quick rebound in tourism. Furthermore, tourists care more about safety, cheap travel packages, culture and historic architecture. Therefore, tourism industry would not be affected by macro-effects such as the upcoming general election.

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<sup>10</sup> GDP generated by industries that deal directly with tourists, including hotels, travel agents, airlines and other passenger transport services, as well as the activities of restaurant and leisure industries that deal directly with tourists.

<sup>11</sup> Visitor exports is the spending within a country by international tourists for leisure and business travel, including spending on transport.

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