

# Fault Lines: Bangkok, Thailand

DEC 2017



Bangkok can be described as chaos that works. It serves as the political, cultural, and economic center of Thailand. It is said that as goes Bangkok, so goes Thailand.

The greatest potential contributor to instability in Bangkok—and Thailand as a whole—are political divisions driven by both a societal discord on what constitutes a legitimate political order and uncertainty over the relationship between the new king and the military junta. Though present throughout the country, these divisions manifest themselves on the streets of Bangkok. While political upheaval has not been uncommon during the last century in Thailand, the turmoil that began in 2001 (when Prime Minister Thaksin and his rural poor Red Shirt political power base entered the scene) brought political upheaval to an entirely new level. Since that time, the population has been caught in a tug of war between two political coalitions: the Red Shirts, riding the wave of populism (winning elections with majority support) and the Yellow Shirts (generally considered to be royalists/militarists) preferring rule by elites rather than majority representatives. This political struggle led to a 2014 coup transferring governance power to a military junta aligned with the Yellow Shirts and is indicative of the struggle facing society in determining what constitutes a legitimate political order.

Further complicating this political environment is the recent death of the revered monarch King Bhumibol (Rama IX). The death of a longstanding king and the ascension of his inexperienced son, King Maha Vajiralongkorn (Rama X), presents uncertainty and a profound challenge to the governing junta's ability to maintain stability in the government.

The following fault lines, if exploited, have the potential to contribute to instability in the Bangkok operational environment:

**Uncertain relationship between Rama X and military junta:** Rama X is an untested king who lacks the experience, revered status, and support enjoyed by his father. The military junta, while having sworn loyalty to the new king, may seek to maintain—and possibly grow—its power, potentially resulting in a loss of power of the monarchy.

**A lack of consensus on what constitutes a legitimate political order:** Thais are being forced to take sides concerning the future of political order in the country: one side seeks political order based upon popular support (Red Shirts) while the other side seeks order based upon the rule of the elites (Yellow Shirts).

***FAULT LINES** are “exploitable sources of instability in the human domain; they can be real or perceived.”*

Source: GCKN Fault Line Methodology, 2017

## FAULT LINES

(if exploited)  
Assessment of impact



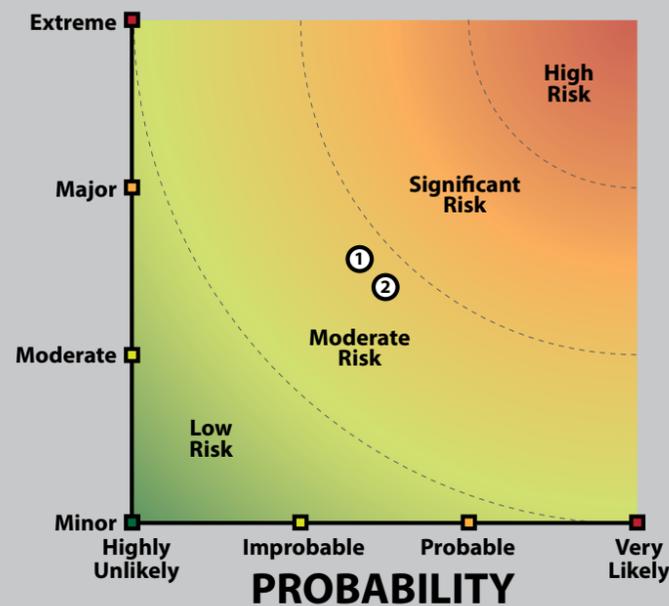
**1** Uncertain relationship: Rama X and junta

**2** No consensus on legitimate political order

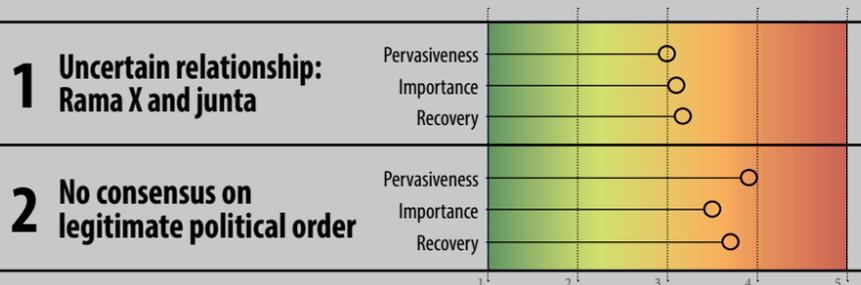
**MODERATE**  
Improbable with major consequence

**MODERATE**  
Probable with moderate consequence

CONSEQUENCE



### Pervasiveness, Importance, & Recovery



### Implications:

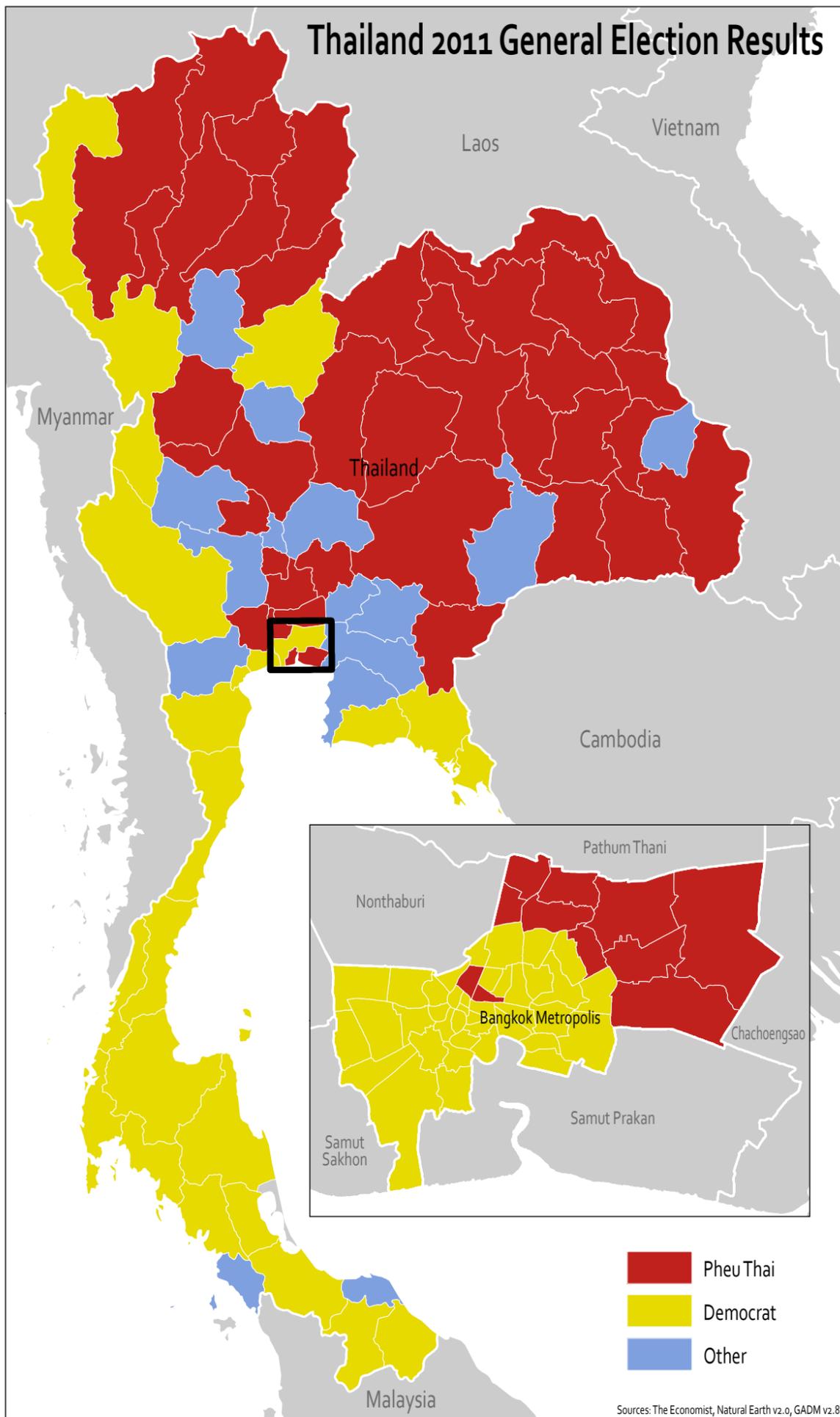
Bangkok will face continued political uncertainty until the relationship between the new king and the junta is determined. Should the junta exploit this situation and continue to delay elections and the promised return of democracy, the divisions that exist in society over the future of political order will be exacerbated. Exploitation of this environment could lead to a fundamental upheaval in Thai society and result in increased violence across the Bangkok region which has the potential to destabilize the Thai government.

**A Fault Line Analysis is our methodology for identifying unstable and exploitable conditions within an OE.**



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## Thailand Timeline 2006-2014

- 2006**  
SEP Prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra ousted in a bloodless coup. More than a year of military rule follows
- 2007**  
DEC Thaksin allies, The People Power Party, wins elections and forms coalition government
- 2008**  
SEP State of emergency after violent clashes between pro- and anti-government "Yellow Shirt" groups
- SEP-DEC PM Samak Sundaravej stripped of powers by Constitutional Court, Thaksin's brother-in-law Somchai Wongsawat takes his place
- OCT Exiled Thaksin sentenced in absentia to 2 years in jail for corruption
- NOV-DEC Yellow Shirts blockade Bangkok's airports. State of emergency for two weeks
- DEC Somchai's party dissolved by Constitutional Court. Abhisit Vejjajiva becomes premier in army-backed coalition
- 2009**  
"Red Shirt" Thaksin loyalists stage major protests, state of emergency in Bangkok in April
- 2010**  
MAR-MAY Red Shirts stage mass rallies, street clashes between protesters and troops leave more than 90 dead, protests end in military crackdown
- 2011**  
JUL Thaksin allies sweep to power in elections on wave of Red Shirt support. Parliament in August elects Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra
- 2012**  
NOV Clashes erupt at first major street protests against Yingluck's government
- DEC Authorities announce Abhisit Vejjajiva to face murder charges linked to 2010 crackdown. 24 Red Shirt leaders go on trial for charges linked to 2010 protests
- 2013**  
OCT Thousands of demonstrators join daily rallies in Bangkok to protest an amnesty bill that opponents fear would allow Thaksin to return
- NOV 1 Lower house passes political amnesty bill, triggering protests, upper house later rejects it
- NOV 24 Up to 180,000 people join opposition protests in Bangkok
- NOV 25-27 Opposition protesters besiege ministries in a bid to topple the government
- NOV 28 Yingluck survives parliamentary no-confidence vote
- NOV 29-DEC 3 Protests escalate, five killed and over 200 injured
- 2014**  
FEB 2 Polls open for snap elections called by Yingluck in December. Opposition demonstrators block voting at 10,000 polling stations
- MAY 7 Constitutional Court dismisses Yingluck and nine ministers from office for abuse of power. Cabinet appoints new caretaker premier Niwatthamrong Boonsongpaisan
- MAY 22 Coup led by Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha dissolves caretaker government
- AUG 24 New National Assembly of Thailand unanimously elects Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha as prime minister



**United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship**  
 Formed in 2006 to protest against a coup that removed Thaksin Shinawatra as PM  
 Mainly made up of rural workers along with left-wing activists and students  
 Launched 2009 protests after Abhisit Vejjajiva installed as PM  
 Supported Thaksin's sister, Yingluck, in 2011 elections, which she won  
 Began fresh protests after Constitutional Court removed Yingluck from power



**People's Alliance for Democracy**  
 Protested against Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006, accusing him of being against the monarchy  
 Made up of royalists, nationalists, and "Bangkok elites"  
 Reformed in 2008, arguing new government was a proxy for Thaksin  
 Initially supported Abhisit Vejjajiva's government  
 Later turned against it over border dispute with Cambodia  
 Launched protests in 2013 against Yingluck Shinawatra over proposed amnesty bill

Source: ABC News

The representation of the red shirt/yellow shirt divide is simplified on this graphic in order to give a general idea of the political situation in Thailand.

Source: Agence France-Presse