

Firuze Alpaslan\*

# Political Crisis and Tourism: From the 2015–16 Security Events to Turkey’s Current Challenges

## Politische Krisen und Tourismus: Von den Sicherheitseignissen 2015–2016 zu den aktuellen Herausforderungen der Türkei

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**Abstract:** This discussion paper examines the impact of political crises on international tourism, using Turkey as a case study. As one of the world’s most visited destinations, Turkey has faced recurring political tensions, including terrorism and a failed coup in 2015–16. Recent findings by Alpaslan and Firgo (2025) show significant long-term declines on tourism demand following this period. In 2025, new unrest linked to the arrest of Istanbul’s mayor has again raised concerns. Early monthly data indicate that most of the deviations in March and April may be the result of calendar effects rather than political developments. This paper reviews results from the literature on previous security events in Turkey and discusses possible implications for current events. It highlights the need for crisis management and further research to enhance sector resilience.

**Keywords:** international tourism, terrorism, political crises, Turkey, Türkiye

**Zusammenfassung:** Dieser Diskussionsbeitrag untersucht die Folgen politischer Krisen für den internationalen Tourismus am Beispiel der Türkei. Als eines der weltweit meistbesuchten Reiseziele war das Land in den Jahren 2015/16 wiederholt mit politischen Spannungen konfrontiert, darunter terroristische Anschläge und der gescheiterte Putschversuch. Empirische Ergebnisse weisen auf deutliche langfristige Rückgänge der touristischen Nachfrage in dieser Zeit hin (Alpaslan und Firgo 2025). Anfang des Jahres 2025 hat die Festnahme des Istanbulers Bürgermeisters erneut politische Unruhen ausgelöst. Erste Monatsdaten deuten jedoch darauf hin, dass die Abweichungen im März und April eher auf Kalendereffekte

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**\*Corresponding author: Firuze Alpaslan**, Munich University of Applied Sciences, Schachenmeisterstr. 35, 80636 Munich, Germany, +49 89 12652163, E-Mail: [firuze.alpaslan0@hm.edu](mailto:firuze.alpaslan0@hm.edu). <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1828-4672>

als auf politische Entwicklungen zurückzuführen sind. Dieser Beitrag fasst zentrale Ergebnisse der Literatur zu früheren sicherheitsrelevanten Ereignissen in der Türkei zusammen und diskutiert mögliche Implikationen für die aktuelle Situation. Außerdem wird die Bedeutung eines wirksamen Krisenmanagements sowie der Bedarf an weiterführender Forschung zur Stärkung des Tourismussektors betont.

**Schlüsselwörter:** internationaler Tourismus, Terrorismus, politische Krisen, Türkei, Türkiye

## 1 Introduction and related literature

Geopolitical tensions, armed conflicts and the rise in terrorist attacks have recently intensified concerns about the resilience of international tourism. Turkey serves as an interesting case in this context, as it is one of the world's top five most visited travel destinations (UN Tourism n.d.), yet it is also a country marked by recurring political crises. In recent history, Turkey was notably impacted by terrorism and an attempted coup d'état in 2015 and 2016. Following a period of recovery from both the political upheaval and the COVID-19 pandemic, the country is once again facing political unrest. Currently, the arrest of the mayor of Istanbul, who is also the opposition's presidential candidate, resulted in widespread unrest and nationwide protests starting in March 2025. The developments in Turkey are of particular interest to the tourism sector, as they present significant challenges and lessons to be learned.

This discussion paper contributes to the discourse on the relationship between political turmoil and tourism by presenting recent findings from Alpaslan and Firgo (2025), who analyse Turkey's security crisis of 2015–16 and its impact on tourism. The paper also connects these findings with more recent developments, highlighting the ongoing relevance of political and security risks for one of the world's most visited countries. It addresses two central questions: How did the 2015–16 security crisis affect international tourism in Turkey? What implications might current political developments in 2025 have for future tourism flows?

Numerous studies show that international tourism is highly sensitive to political instability and terrorism and highlight declines in international tourist numbers following such events (e. g. Neumayer 2004; Asongu and Nwachukwu 2019; Walters et al. 2019; Akamavi et al. 2023). Furthermore, political instability appears to have a stronger deterrent effect on tourism than terrorism (Saha and Yap 2014). These findings are supported by various case studies across different countries and contexts (see e. g., Spain (Enders and Sandler 1991; Voltes-Dorta et al. 2015), Israel (Karl et al. 2017), Greece, Italy and Austria (Enders et al. 1992), among others).

Several empirical studies have examined the impact of terrorism on tourism in Turkey. Drakos and Kutan (2003) analyse the Eastern Mediterranean region (Turkey, Greece, and Israel) and find that terrorism significantly reduced tourist arrivals in all three countries between 1991 and 2000. Feridun (2011) finds significant negative short- and long-term effects of attacks between 1986 and 2006. Ulucak et al. (2020) identify terrorism as the most influential factor in explaining tourism demand in Turkey between 1998 and 2017.

## 2 Empirical findings from the 2015–16 security crisis

The years 2015 and 2016 were marked by terrorism and political instability in Turkey, including an attempted coup in 2016. The 2015–2016 national security crisis forms the basis of the case study by Alpaslan and Firgo (2025), who analyse the causal effects of this crisis on tourism industry. Using counterfactual scenarios constructed by the Synthetic Control Method<sup>1</sup>, their study reveals significant declines in key international tourism indicators.

On average, Turkey received 23.4 million fewer international tourist arrivals per year between 2015 and 2019 compared to the counterfactual benchmark scenario without such a crisis, representing a 36.4 % decline. The number of international overnight stays decreased by an average of 70.4 million, corresponding to a 41.4 % reduction. In terms of tourism-related expenditures, the losses amounted to 7.7 billion USD per year, representing a 17.8 % decline compared to the counterfactual. The highest declines occurred immediately after the major terrorist attacks and the failed coup in 2016. While a phase of stabilisation and recovery can be observed from 2018 onwards, actual tourism figures were still lower in 2019 than in the counterfactual scenario, highlighting the long-term impact of political and security crisis on international tourism in Turkey (Alpaslan and Firgo 2025). While the 2015–16 crisis had demonstrably long-term effects, the question arises whether the political tensions in 2025 may follow a similar pattern or whether the Turkish tourism sector has become more resilient.

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<sup>1</sup> See Abadie (2021) for further methodological details.

### 3 Current developments in Turkey's tourism industry

Following a period of recovery after 2016, new domestic unrest and demonstrations have occurred since March 2025. As of July 2025, the German Federal Foreign Office has not issued a travel warning for Turkey, except for the areas bordering Iraq and Syria. However, advisories are in place concerning protests, arrests, and possible entry denials (Federal Foreign Office 2025). These events since March 2025 have inevitably attracted considerable international media attention. Given this context, it is important to assess how current events might affect tourism, particularly since Turkey is expecting further growth in total tourist arrivals in 2025 (SBB 2024, 177), following a record year in 2024.

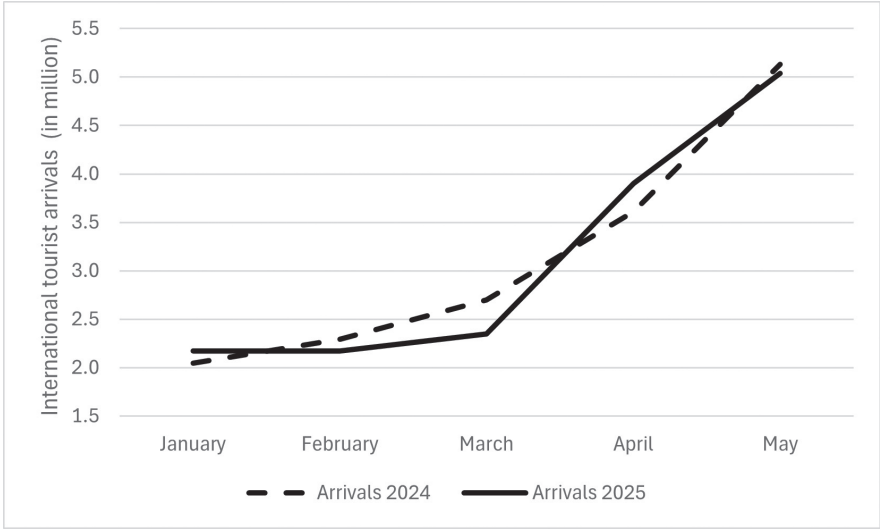
Figure 1 compares monthly international tourist arrivals between January and May 2024 with the corresponding months in 2025. The data shows a decline in February (−5.3 %), suggesting a less dynamic tourism demand compared to 2024. March (−13.1 %) illustrates a substantial drop compared to the previous year. However, the rebound in April (+8.0 %) together with the only modest decline in May (−1.8 %), suggests that most of the deviations in March and April may be the result of calendar effects<sup>2</sup> rather than to political developments.

### 4 Discussion and conclusion

Unlike the situation in 2016, Turkey in 2025 is not experiencing an attempted coup d'état or a wave of large-scale terrorist attacks. Instead, the current challenges arise from a broader context of domestic unrest. However, declines in international tourism demand for early 2025 may be related to calendar effects rather than political unrest. The developments during the summer peak season will provide better insights into tourism demand in 2025, and whether Turkey will reach its tourism targets with 63.7 million arrivals for 2025. While existing studies suggest that political instability and terrorism typically reduce international tourism demand, these are not the only relevant factors. Macroeconomic conditions such as inflation and (real) exchange rates also play a significant role and currently represent a major challenge for Turkey. Additionally, natural disasters such as the Istanbul earthquake in April 2025 and the widespread forest fires during the summer months throughout the country may further influence tourists' perceptions of risk and uncertainty.

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<sup>2</sup> Especially the drop in March is partly driven by calendar effect related to Easter holidays (March 2024 vs. April 2025).



**Figure 1:** Monthly international tourist arrivals  
Source: KTB 2025; Own illustration.

In conclusion, the current situation raises important questions that need to be further analysed to strengthen the resilience of Turkey’s tourism sector in the face of future crises: Key areas for future research include: What lessons were learned from the 2015–16 crisis? How have these learnings been applied – or not – in the current context? And what can policymakers and stakeholders still learn from past events? There is a particular need for qualitative studies and detailed analyses of crisis management strategies. Moreover, empirical research using monthly-level data can offer valuable insights into the short-term impacts of the recent events. More research is essential for a destinations’ ability to enhance the sector’s resilience to future crises.

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## Author information

**Firuze Alpaslan**

Munich University of Applied Sciences  
Schachenmeierstr. 35, 80636 Munich, Germany  
Phone: +49 89 12652163  
Email: [firuze.alpaslan0@hm.edu](mailto:firuze.alpaslan0@hm.edu)  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1828-4672>

Firuze Alpaslan is a research and teaching associate at the Department of Tourism at Munich University of Applied Sciences. Her research interests include tourism and political conflict, tourism policy, and tourism in Turkey. She holds a Master's degree in Tourism Management from Munich University of Applied Sciences and a Bachelor's degree from International University of Applied Sciences in Munich.