

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING IN TIMOR-LESTE

RESEARCH REPORT



Emily Toome, Damian Grenfell and Kathryn Higgins

Local Perspectives on Political Decision-Making in Timor-Leste

A Short Report on the 2007 Presidential
and Parliamentary Elections
in Dili and Venilale

Emily Toome, Damian Grenfell and Kathryn Higgins



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Cover image: A woman votes in Venilale, 2007.

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Contents

List of Acronyms	4
Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	6
Elections in Timor-Leste	8
An overview of process and results	8
The 2007 Elections	9
<i>Presidential Elections: 2007</i>	10
<i>Parliamentary Elections: 2007</i>	11
The 2012 Elections	13
Methodology	15
The Research Sites	15
Research Methodology	16
Challenges to Data Collection	18
Research Findings	20
Introduction	20
Media	20
Leadership	24
Campaigning	28
Genealogy	32
Citizenship	34
Bibliography	40
Appendices	42

List of Acronyms

ASDT	<i>Associação Social Democrata Timorese</i> (Timorese Social Democratic Association)
CNE	<i>Comissão Nacional de Eleições</i> (National Electoral Commission)
CNRT	<i>Congresso Nacional de Reconstrução de Timor-Leste</i> (National Congress for the Reconstruction of Timor-Leste). From 1998 to March 2007 the acronym CNRT stood for <i>Conselho Nacional de Resistência Timorese</i> (National Council of Timorese Resistance)
ETAN	East Timor and Indonesia Action Network
F-FDTL	<i>FALINTIL-Forças de Defesa de Timor Leste</i> (Timor-Leste Defence Force)
FALINTIL	<i>Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste</i> (Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor)
FRETILIN	<i>Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente</i> (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor)
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ISF	International Stabilisation Force
KOTA	<i>Klibur Oan Timor Asuwain</i> (Association of Timorese Heroes)
PD	<i>Partidu Demokrátiku</i> (Democratic Party)
PDC	<i>Partidu Demokrata-Cristão</i> (Christian Democratic Party)
PDRT	<i>Partidu Demokratika Republika de Timor</i> (Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste Party)
PMD	<i>Partidu Milenium Demokratiku</i> (Millennium Democratic Party)
PNT	<i>Partidu Nacionalista Timorese</i> (Timorese Nationalist Party)
PPT	<i>Partidu do Povo de Timor</i> (People's Party of Timor)
PR	<i>Partidu Republikanu</i> (Republican Party – Timor-Leste)
PSD	<i>Partidu Social Democrata</i> (Social Democratic Party)
PST	<i>Partidu Socialista Timorese</i> (Timorese Socialist Party)
PUN	<i>Partidu Unidade Nacional</i> (National Unity Party)
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
STL	<i>Suara Timor-Timur</i> (Voice of Timor-Leste)
TMR	<i>Taur Matan Ruak</i> (Two Sharp Eyes)
TPS	<i>Tempat Pemungutan Suara</i> (Voting Station)
TVTL	<i>Televisaun Timor Lorosae</i> (Television East Timor)
UDT	<i>União Democrática Timorese</i> (Timorese Democratic Union Party)
UNDERTIM	<i>União Nacional Democrática de Resistência Timorese</i> (National Union of Timorese Resistance)
UNMIT	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste

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Emily Toome and Kathryn Higgins are students at RMIT University. Emily is currently completing her postgraduate degree in International Development and Kathryn an undergraduate degree in the International Studies program. Both have undertaken field work in Timor-Leste in 2011 and 2012, including on a new project that investigates political decision-making in Timor-Leste. Damian Grenfell is Director of the Globalism Research Centre at RMIT University and Manager of the Timor-Leste Research Program, and has lived and worked in Timor-Leste on a variety of occasions.

For more information please visit www.timor-leste.org.

Introduction

In 2012 East Timorese are participating in national elections for the third time, a decade on from finally achieving formal independence. In 1999 the 24-year occupation by Indonesia came to an end following a United Nations sanctioned vote which offered the options of either autonomy within Indonesia or full independence for the territory. With the resounding rejection of the option for autonomy, the subsequent withdrawal of Indonesian forces and militia resulted in wide-spread destruction and death across the territory. For the next two-and-a-half years Timor-Leste became a United Nations administered territory, and in preparation for national independence a Constituent Assembly was elected on 30 August 2001 to determine the country's constitution. This Assembly in effect became the first National Parliament, and with Presidential elections held in April 2002, the democratic character of the state took form as the new nation officially came into being on 20 May 2002. With five year terms for both the Parliament and the Presidency, new elections were held across the country over the first half of 2007. However, rather than taking place in the context of new found national liberation, these elections were undertaken in the context of intense political turmoil and violence within Timor-Leste.

It was over the 2007 election period that the material on political decision-making in this report was collected, seen as an important task given the efforts to create a new democratic political system and the contours and character of local political cultures within Timor-Leste. In the context of the socio-political crisis, it was also an important time to get some sense of local views on citizenship and the state. Working in the country over the last decade, it has been a key aim of the Timor-Leste Research Program at RMIT University to try to understand the processes of social change occurring, particularly with regards to processes of nation- and state-formation. Accordingly, the 2007 elections provided us with an opportunity to gain insight into subjective understandings of politics and citizenship in the new nation. The research was not intended as a test of citizen knowledge or way of finding out whom voters planned to support, but rather it was an attempt to begin the process of understanding how East Timorese come to make political decisions. How do East Timorese access information about politics, how do they make decisions about who to vote for, why do they want to participate in elections, and what is the connection they make between emerging political processes and their day-to-day lives?

The obvious question a reader may ask is why release this data now? When this material was collected in 2007, the project was run as a pilot study that, while limited in scope, was intended to be drawn into a short report like this. Various logistical and resource factors conspired against this possibility, and importantly it was felt that the data collected needed to be supplemented in order to strengthen the findings. With the passing of time and increasing distance from the 2007 elections, it became more difficult and implausible to return and conduct supplementary research. However, with the national elections occurring in 2012 these research themes were brought back into focus with a new study in the country. In this context it made sense to go back to the 2007 data, not just for our own sake but also to make the findings publicly available for those students and practitioners who might find some value in a short report on the ways in which voters in Timor-Leste make political decisions. In considering the scope of this report, more could have been done in terms of expanding the research questions investigated or refining of research methodologies. Here we try to be frank and open about the effectiveness and otherwise of the methods that were used. As such we do not seek to claim too much in this report, but see it as one source of information that may be drawn from alongside all kinds of other research that has been undertaken.



Life Love Belief Unity and Happiness, Dili, July 2007

In terms of structure, this report commences with an overview of the election processes and system of national governance in Timor-Leste, considering the outcomes of the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, and the current 2012 elections. In turn the report explains the research methods used and their limitations, followed by an analysis of the data collected on processes of political decision-making in Timor-Leste. Five key themes—namely Media, Leadership, Campaigning, Genealogy and Citizenship—emerged as trends within the research findings. There is of course considerable overlap between these categories as they come together to frame how and why people engage in the emerging national political structures, and these categories are unevenly felt across the country. For instance, modern processes of elections are not necessarily accompanied by modern communications infrastructure or mass media penetration, particularly not in rural areas of the country such as Venilale, one of the research sites. Moreover, political decisions are made in a whole range of scenarios, not least at the customary level, though here we limit ourselves to a narrower definition, focussing on the state as the principle point of investigation and at the moment of national elections. However, other forms of political decision-making encroach on this, as can be seen by the way customary leaders inherit their positions through genealogical connection, albeit now sometimes legitimised through processes of formal election into positions on the *konsellu suku* (village council). The accounts made by East Timorese during this research remind us that while the conduct of elections may be held up by some as a measure of the relative success or failure of democracy and state-building activities in Timor-Leste, they are but one reflection of the broader processes of decision-making occurring in a highly complex socio-political context.

Elections in Timor-Leste

An overview of process and results

Ever since the East Timorese rejected the option of 'autonomy within Indonesia' in the 1999 referendum, and in turn began the process of becoming formally independent, a great emphasis has been placed on building a democratic polity in the new nation. Given the virtually non-existent opportunities for East Timorese to participate in political decision-making across the period of Portuguese colonialism and then the Indonesian occupation, elections now serve as one of the clearest manifestations of Timor-Leste's sovereign independence. For many East Timorese, elections are also one of the most significant points of connection and engagement between themselves and the new state; a vast majority of Timor-Leste's population live outside of urban centres like Dili and therefore in their day-to-day lives often lie beyond the limited reach of state-based mechanisms and processes.¹

Since 1999, the development of Timor-Leste's system of government has come to most closely resemble a semi-presidential democratic model², incorporating both a Presidential Head of State—a largely symbolic role—and a national Parliament, where a majority of state legislation and policy is handled under the leadership of a Prime Minister. The nation's first Parliament, formed out of the Constituent Assembly voted on by East Timorese in 2001, had a total of 88 seats.³ This number was reduced to 65 seats in the 2007 elections, with each member elected through a closed list proportional representation system to serve a minimum five year term.⁴ Under this system, there is in effect one nationwide constituency where each of the parties or coalitions vying for seats in Parliament must submit a list of 65 candidates and no fewer than 25 alternates prior to the election campaign period. A three per cent threshold for a gaining a seat in Parliament is required and the number of seats won is calculated in proportion to the percentage of the total Parliamentary vote received by each party.⁵

In contrast to the Parliamentary elections, the process of electing the President is far more focussed on individual candidates. To be eligible candidates must nominate either as an independent or with the endorsement of a political party, as well as procure a petition of no fewer than 5,000 signatures in support of their candidacy, with at least 100 signatures from each of country's 13 districts. A candidate is required to receive more than 50 per cent of the total vote in order to secure the Presidency. If no single candidate is able to garner more than half the votes then a second election is declared comprising only the two candidates that gained the most votes in the first round, with whoever gains the most votes winning the Presidency.

1 A.M. Brown 'Security, Development and the Nation-Building Agenda—East Timor', *Conflict Security and Development*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2009, p.148.

2 D. Shoemith, 'Divided Leadership in a Semi-Presidential System', *Asian Survey*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2003, pp.231–252.

3 In 2001, there was an 88 seat unicameral Constituent Assembly incorporating 13 members elected from single-member constituencies and the other 75 members through a party-list proportional representation system. However, in 2006 this system was overhauled, and a new parliamentary structure was installed for the 2007 elections.

4 Election Guide, 'Timor-Leste Country Profile', last updated 14 February 2012, <<http://electionguide.org/country.php?ID=63>>, accessed 18 February 2012.

5 This method of seat allocation is as per the d'Hondt method, which bases itself upon mathematical principles of proportionality. See p. 220 in M. Leach, 'The 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Timor-Leste', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2009, pp. 219–32.

The 2007 Elections

The 2007 elections came at a time of immense social turmoil in Timor-Leste. In early 2006 a split within the East Timorese military led to widespread conflict as the security apparatus of the state collapsed. Fighting occurred between different factions of the military, between the military and police, and in turn small groups of militias armed by different political factions including Parliamentary Ministers.⁶ In the security vacuum that was created, people were forced out of homes on the basis of emerging forms of ethnic difference, houses were robbed and torched, and gang-fighting became regularised across the capital.⁷ Within the party political sphere, intense political rivalry between the then President Xanana Gusmão and the Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri resulted in the resignation of the latter. An 'International Stabilisation Force' (ISF) led by Australia attempted to regain stability and a new United Nations peace mission (United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste) was formed. Adding to the intense competition between political parties and personalities, in the run up to the 2007 elections the then President Xanana Gusmão founded a new party, the National Congress for the Reconstruction of Timor-Leste, under the controversial acronym CNRT—the same acronym that was used to identify the umbrella organisation of resistance groups and parties during the latter years of the Indonesian occupation.⁸

Despite the risk of violence, the unwillingness to postpone the scheduled elections can be seen in terms of attempts to re-legitimise the state in the wake of the crisis, usher new political actors into the Parliamentary system, and ensure that the work done to create a democratic political culture was consolidated rather than lost. In this context, the 2007 elections occurred across an extremely tense period, and indeed the outcomes of the Parliamentary elections were met with significant violence in centres including Baucau, Venilale and Viqueque.

Notwithstanding the turmoil in which they occurred, each of the Presidential and Parliamentary elections had a voter turnout in excess of 80 per cent.⁹ This high turnout was an encouraging reflection of political participation, given that voting is voluntary in Timor-Leste, is often inconvenient due to the challenges of poverty and poor infrastructure, and was in this instance taking place in an environment of acute stress, fear and insecurity. The elections did not, however, resolve the key tensions that had perpetuated the 'crisis', as this period of time is broadly referred to. Rather, the 'crisis' was seen to climax in February 2008 with the attempted assassinations of President Jose Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, the former of whom was badly injured, as well as the death of a renowned rebel Alfredo Reinado. A 'state of siege' was declared which included a curfew, and over the following two years internally displaced persons (IDPs) were repatriated, remaining rebel groups surrendered, and gang fighting in Dili was significantly reduced.

6 See for example the United Nations, *Report of the Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste*, 17 October 2006.

7 For an account of the communal violence see J. Scambary, 'Anatomy of a Conflict: The 2006–2007 Communal Violence in East Timor', *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2009, pp. 265–88.

8 Though during the independence struggle the acronym stood for the 'National Council for Timorese Resistance'; see A. McWilliam and A. Bexley, 'Performing Politics: The 2007 Parliamentary Elections in Timor-Leste', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2008, pp. 66–82.

9 Results of the Comissão Nacional de Eleições, 'Elisaun Prezidente 2007: República Democrática de Timor-Leste: ACTA Final Apuramentu Nacional', 18 April 2007, published by ETAN, <<http://www.etan.org/etanpdf/2007/Presidential%20Round%201%20National%20Result.pdf>>, accessed 28 February 2012; Comissão Nacional de Eleições, 'Elisaun Prezidente 2007: ACTA Final Apuramentu Nacional: Segunda Volta', 14 May 2007, published by ETAN, <<http://www.etan.org/etanpdf/2007/CNEcertification2ndpres.pdf>>, accessed 28 February 2012.; and Comissão Nacional de Eleições, 'Elisaun Parlamentar 2007: ACTA Final Apartamentu Nacional', 9 July 2007, published by ETAN, <<http://www.etan.org/etanpdf/2007/Acta%2520Final%2520Nacional.pdf>>, accessed 28 February 2012. Amongst voters, there was a relatively equal split along gender lines. In the Parliamentary elections, 53 per cent of voters were male and 47 per cent female. The UNDP also noted that women were prominently represented in voter education material, see J. Chinaud, *A Gender Perspective Audit of the 2007 Parliamentary Elections of East Timor*, UNMIT, 9 August 2007, available via ETAN, <<http://www.etan.org/etanpdf/2007/GENDERAUDITParl07.pdf>>, accessed 4 March 2012.



First Round of Presidential Elections, UN Armoured Personnel Carrier, Dili, April 2007

Presidential Elections: 2007

Eight candidates nominated for the Presidential elections with the formal campaign period running from 23 March to 6 April 2007. On 9 April the first round of polling was held with over 80 per cent of the 522,933 registered voters casting their preference at one of the 705 polling stations across Timor-Leste.¹⁰

Area	18, 898 km squared
Districts	13
Subdistricts	65
Suku (villages)	442
Aldeia (hamlets)	2, 228
Population	+/- 1,111,032
Registered Voters	522,933
Voters	427,198
Valid Votes (not blank)	403,941
Valid Votes (blank)	7,723
Invalid Votes	15,534
Total Polling Stations	705
Total Participants (% of registered voters)	81.69%

Table 1.1: Election Day turnout for 2007 Presidential Election first-round ballot

(Source: East Timorese Electoral Commission)

The official provisional result for the first ballot was announced by the National Electoral Commission (CNE) on 14 April, and as no candidate received the minimum 50 per cent majority required (as displayed in Table 1.2), a second round of Presidential elections was held on 9 May 2007. East Timorese citizens were asked to choose between the two candidates who earned the most votes on the first ballot, namely Francisco ‘Lu Olo’ Guterres (the party candidate for *Frente Revolucionaria de Timor-Leste Independente*–FRETILIN) and Jose Ramos-Horta (who ran as an independent with an endorsement from CNRT).

¹⁰ It is worth noting that of the 427,198 votes cast in the 2007 Presidential election, 23,257 (or 5.4%) were counted as being blank or invalid, and therefore did not contribute to the election result (see Table 1.1).

Candidate	Number of Votes	Percentage of Total Votes
Francisco 'Lu-Olo' Guterres	112,666	27.89%
Jose Ramos-Horta	88,102	21.81%
Fernando Lasama de Araujo	77,459	19.18%
Francisco Xavier do Amaral	58,125	14.39%
Lucia Maria B.F. Lobato	35,789	8.86%
Manuel Tilman	16,534	4.09%
Avelino Maria Coelho da Silva	8,338	2.06%
Joao Viegas Carrascalao	6,928	1.72%
Total Valid Votes	403,941	100%

Table 1.2: Results of first-round ballot in 2007 Presidential Election in Timor-Leste
(Source: East Timorese Electoral Commission)

The provisional result of the second ballot was released by CNE on 11 May. Despite receiving the largest number of votes in the first ballot, Lu-Olo was clearly defeated in the second round when Ramos-Horta won 69.18 per cent of vote. Ramos-Horta, who had been Prime Minister in the period before the election, was subsequently sworn in as President and took office on 20 May 2007.

Parliamentary Elections: 2007

Campaigning for the Parliamentary elections began on 29 May 2007 with voting taking place on 30 June. Fourteen parties contested the elections, amongst them FRETILIN, led by former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri, and the newly founded CNRT, led by Xanana Gusmão. FRETILIN was seeking to defend the Parliamentary majority it held after winning 55 of the 88 available seats in 2001 Constituent Assembly elections. CNRT was looking to make electoral inroads, while the longer established PD (*Partidu Demokratiku* or Democratic Party), led by Fernando Lasama de Araujo, was attempting to better the results it received in 2001 when it gained the second highest vote after FRETILIN.

In the 2007 Parliamentary election (as displayed in Table 2.1) FRETILIN won more votes than any other party (29.02 per cent), though this result reflected a severe drop in the dominance they displayed in the 2001 Constituent Assembly elections where they secured 57.4 per cent. With FRETILIN winning 21 seats and CNRT winning 18, neither party had a sufficient majority to form government in their own right. It was therefore unclear immediately after the election how and under whose leadership the government would be formed.



Parliamentary Elections 2007, Vote counting in Dili

Name of Party/Coalition	Acronym	Total Votes	Percentage of Total Vote	Parliamentary Seats Won
<i>Frente Revolucionaria de Timor-Leste Independente</i>	FRETILIN	120,592	29.02%	21
<i>Congresso Nacional de Reconstrução de Timor-Leste</i>	CNRT	100,175	24.10%	18
<i>Associação Social Democrata Timorese / Partido Social Democrata (Alliance)</i>	ASDT-PSD	65,358	15.73%	11
<i>Partidu Demokrátiku</i>	PD	46,946	11.30%	8
<i>Partidu Unidade Nacional</i>	PUN	18,896	4.55%	3
<i>União Nacional Democrática de Resistência Timorese</i>	UNDERTIM	13,247	3.19%	2
<i>Aliança Democrática</i>	KOTA/PPT	13,294	3.20%	2
<i>Partidu Nacionalista Timorese</i>	PNT	10,057	2.42%	0
<i>Partidu Demokratika Republika de Timor</i>	PDRT	7,718	1.86%	0
<i>Partidu Republikanu</i>	PR	4,408	1.06%	0
<i>Partidu Demokrata-Cristão</i>	PDC	4,300	1.03%	0
<i>Partidu Socialista Timorese</i>	PST	3,982	0.96%	0
<i>União Democrática Timorese</i>	UDT	3,753	0.90%	0
<i>Partidu Milenium Demokratiku</i>	PMD	2,878	0.69%	0

Table 2.1: Results of the 2007 Parliamentary Election in Timor-Leste (ETAN, 2007)

The election was followed by an intense period of political jostling and negotiation, and on 6 July 2007 a coalition was formed including CNRT, ASDT-PSD and PD and was put forward as one option for forming government. There were also suggestions of a FRETILIN minority government, with FRETILIN leader Mari Alkatiri arguing that a majority in Parliament was not necessarily fundamental to forming a constitutional government.¹¹ With negotiations continuing, on 30 July the National Parliament was sworn in with the government and Prime Minister still, as yet, undecided.

On 6 August, President Jose Ramos-Horta exercised one of the few substantive powers of the President, and asked the CNRT-led coalition *Aliança Maioria Parlamentar* (Alliance with a Parliamentary Majority), under the leadership of Xanana Gusmão, to form a government. The stabilising effect of a Parliamentary majority was cited in this decision, though it has since been criticised by some as being unconstitutional, particularly by FRETILIN supporters who met the decision with outcry.¹² There were threats by FRETILIN Parliamentary members, including Alkatiri, to boycott the Parliament and violence marked the ensuing weeks in several sites around the nation, with the United Nations Police

11 Stated in an interview with Adnkronos International (AKI), ETAN, 'East Timor: A Minority Can Govern Says FRETILIN Leader', 5 July 2007, <<http://www.etan.org/et2007/july/07/05minort.htm>>, accessed 12 March 2012.

12 For an example of the FRETILIN perspective on this issue, see: S. da Silva, & J. Teixeira, 'The Unconstitutional, Irrational and Damaging Decision by President Jose Ramos-Horta: A Legal Opinion on the Formation of an Unconstitutional Government in Timor-Leste', *East Timor Law Journal*, 24 May 2012, <<http://easttimorlawjournal.wordpress.com/2012/05/24/the-unconstitutionalirrational-and-damaging-decision-by-president-jose-ramos-horta-a-legal-opinion-on-the-formation-of-an-unconstitutionalgovernment-in-timor-leste>>, accessed 2 June 2012.



Voting in Parliamentary Elections, Venilale, June 2007

confirming that at least 142 houses were burned down.¹³ On 8 August, Xanana Gusmão was sworn in as Prime Minister and the new government was formed. Though there was an initial boycott of Parliament, FRETILIN members were attending sittings of Parliament by the end of August.

The 2012 Elections

In some respects the 2012 elections appear similar to the 2007 elections. The Presidential race remained dominated by many of the same key players with the ballot paper still reading like a 'who's-who' guide to the East Timorese independence struggle: Jose Ramos-Horta, Francisco 'Lu Olo' Guterres, Fernando 'Lasama' de Araújo, and José Maria Vasconcelos, known as 'Taur Matan Ruak (TMR)'.¹⁴ Similarly, in the Parliamentary election it is anticipated that the same two major parties—FRETILIN and CNRT—will be vying for the Parliamentary majority that was denied to both of them in 2007 and, failing that aim, will seek to form a majority coalition with parties such as PD.

However, these elections already present several key points of difference. One of the most significant differences is that the Presidential elections, which took place in March and April this year, occurred in an environment where violence and social conflict were not present as they were in 2006–2007. Despite intense political rivalry, and renowned animosity between the leadership of FRETILIN and CNRT, the election period—to the second round of Presidential voting at least—has occurred in an acutely more peaceful context.¹⁵ At least on the surface, this should assist people in terms of making political decisions freer from intimidation and the threat of retaliation.

¹³ Though some aid organisations placed the estimate at as high as 600 houses, A. Barker, ABC News, 'Mobs Burn Hundreds of Houses in E Timor', *ABC News*, 10 August 2007, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2007-08-10/mobs-burn-hundreds-of-houses-in-etimor/635812>>, accessed 4 March 2012.

¹⁴ 'Taur Matan Ruak' is the *nom de guerre* of Jose Maria Vasconcelos; it means 'two sharp eyes' or 'two eyes on you'.

¹⁵ For example, the Catholic Church held 111 days of prayer meetings in the lead up to the election to help promote unity and nonviolence during the election period: F.P. Seran, 'March Held for Peaceful Election', *Union of Catholic Asian News*, 23 February 2012, <<http://www.ucanews.com/2012/02/23/church-calls-for-peaceful-election>>, accessed 28 February 2012.

In political terms, a second factor marking the 2012 elections has been the unsuccessful bid for re-election as President by the incumbent Jose Ramos-Horta, who no longer held CNRT endorsement. After the first round of voting on 17 March 2012, it was announced by CNE that Ramos-Horta received only 17.48 per cent of the total vote, placing him third behind FRETILIN candidate Francisco 'Lu Olo' Guterres (28.76 per cent) and former F-FDTL commander Taur Matan Ruak (25.71 per cent), who ran for President backed by Xanana Gusmão's CNRT party. This eliminated Ramos-Horta from the second round of voting and ended his Presidency. The outcome of the second round, held on 16 April 2012, saw Taur Matan Ruak (with 61.23 per cent of valid votes) resoundingly defeat Guterres (38.77 per cent). Hence, while the elections themselves appear to be contested by the same set of dominant political players, when Taur Matan Ruak was sworn in as President on 20 May, Ramos-Horta was absent from the state architecture for the first time since independence.

A third difference in the 2012 elections is the apparently expanding political field, with both the Presidential and Parliamentary races displaying a marked increase in the number of contenders. Even if the political scene is dominated by a set of familiar political leaders vying for control of the state, it is worth noting that there has been an increase in both the number of parties and coalitions contesting the Parliamentary elections (from 14 in 2007 up to 20 in 2012)¹⁶, and individuals contesting the Presidential elections (from 8 in 2007 to 12 in 2012).

Finally, amendments to laws could result in changes to the representative makeup of the Parliament in 2012. A recent change to Timor-Leste's Law of Elections determined that one in every three candidates submitted by each party on their closed list of parliamentary nominees must be a woman, an increased ratio compared to the previous rule of one in four.¹⁷ Timor-Leste's Parliament already has a relatively high level of female members, and this could potentially increase further where as a minimum, and based on a list of 65 nominees and 25 alternates per party, each party will this year submit at least 30 women's names for nomination to Parliament.

This report will be released prior to the Parliamentary election, scheduled for 7 July 2012, and as such it cannot be said for certain how the elections will unfold. While the public atmosphere appears calm and a general commitment to keeping the peace appears to be prevailing, it is noteworthy that it will only be in the period after the elections that the International Stabilisation Force will withdraw and the United Nations will wind down its mission (UNMIT).¹⁸ That the ISF is remaining in the country for the elections indicates that the current political environment, despite the apparent functionality, still has a fragility to it that may need to be secured by an international force.

16 There are 20 parties vying for seats, of which three are coalitions made up of smaller parties, as per Comissão Nacional de Eleições, 'Kalendaríu Kampaña Eleitoral (Kompiladu) ba Eleisaun Parlamentar 7 Jullo 2012', 4 June 2012, <<http://www.cne.tl/includes/publications/Parliament%20Election%202012.pdf>>, accessed 6 June 2012. The 2007 Parliamentary elections saw 14 parties compete, including two coalitions: ASDT-PSD, and KOTA/PPT, Comissão Nacional de Eleições, 'Result of Parliamentary Election 2007 (Second Round): 30 June 2007', <<http://www.cne.tl/index.php/main/index/en/elections/parliamentary.php>>, accessed 27 February 2012.

17 This is the result of a recent amendment to Timor-Leste's Law 6/2006 Article 12(3). For a consideration of gender quotas at the level of local rather than national elections in Timor-Leste, see D. Cummins 'The Problem of Gender Quotas: Women's Representatives on Timor-Leste's Suku Councils', *Development in Practice*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2011, pp. 85-95.

18 For example, Australian Defence Minister Stephen Smith said that a decision about the timing of Australian troop withdrawal from Timor-Leste should be left until the 2012 elections, Salna, K., 'East Timor Troop Decision After Poll: Smith', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 April 2011, <<http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/east-timor-troop-decision-after-pollsmith-20110415-1dhka.html>>, accessed 27 March 2012.



Venilale

METHODOLOGY

The Research Sites

This research was conducted across two sites: Dili, the national capital and largest urban centre in Timor-Leste; and Venilale, a sub-district of Baucau in the central highlands of the country. Dili is a small city situated on the northern coast of the country, a site established as the capital of Portuguese Timor in 1769. According to the 2010 National Census, the population of the district of Dili is 234,000, of which the vast majority live within the city of the same name. The city is still marked by the immense violence of 1999 when Dili was sacked and burnt, and the subsequent waves of destruction during riots in 2002 and again over 2006 and 2007. As a centre for migration, Dili is home to families from across all of Timor-Leste's districts, and yet it often has the sense of being a metropolitan bubble separated in significant ways both culturally and materially from the remainder of the nation. In an equivalent way, the East Timorese state and administration tends to have a far greater penetration into Dili than elsewhere in the nation.

In contrast, the sub-district of Venilale is situated in the cool central highlands of Baucau District, approximately 50 kilometres south of the district capital also named Baucau. Located on the main road between the population centres of Baucau and Viqueque, Venilale is relatively well-serviced by transport routes to both the north and south coasts. Much of the land in the Venilale region is used for agricultural production, a source of subsistence for the local population with surplus sold off at the markets in the area and in Dili. The sub-district capital—Vila Venilale—houses the main market in the area, and is well known for being a centre for education with its Catholic and state-run schools. Architecturally the town centre is marked by a large public library, church and administrative buildings. Housing in the main town area is relatively concentrated, but the density quickly dissipates as small groups of houses become dispersed across the hilly terrain. As with Dili, there was much destruction of buildings in 1999 and following the results of the 2007 elections houses of supporters of competing parties were burnt down in the area. Three Austronesian languages—Waima'a, Midiki and Cai Rui—are commonly spoken, as well as Makasae, Tetun and Indonesian.

Research Methodology

The total data collection process in Dili and Venilale ran from 3 May to 9 July 2007 in conjunction with both Presidential and Parliamentary elections. The administering of structured interviews in Dili took place in the period between the first and second rounds of the Presidential elections (3–7 May 2007), while semi-structured interviews were administered over the period of the Parliamentary elections (June 2007). Fieldwork in Venilale (both structured and semi-structured interviews) took place between the second round of Presidential elections and the national Parliamentary elections (23–29 June 2007).

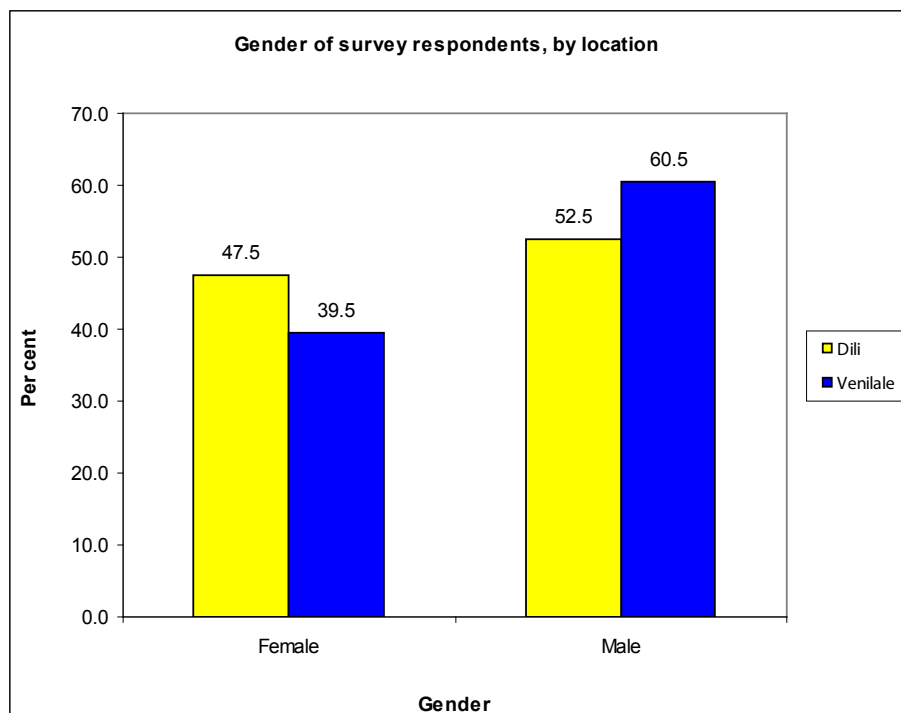
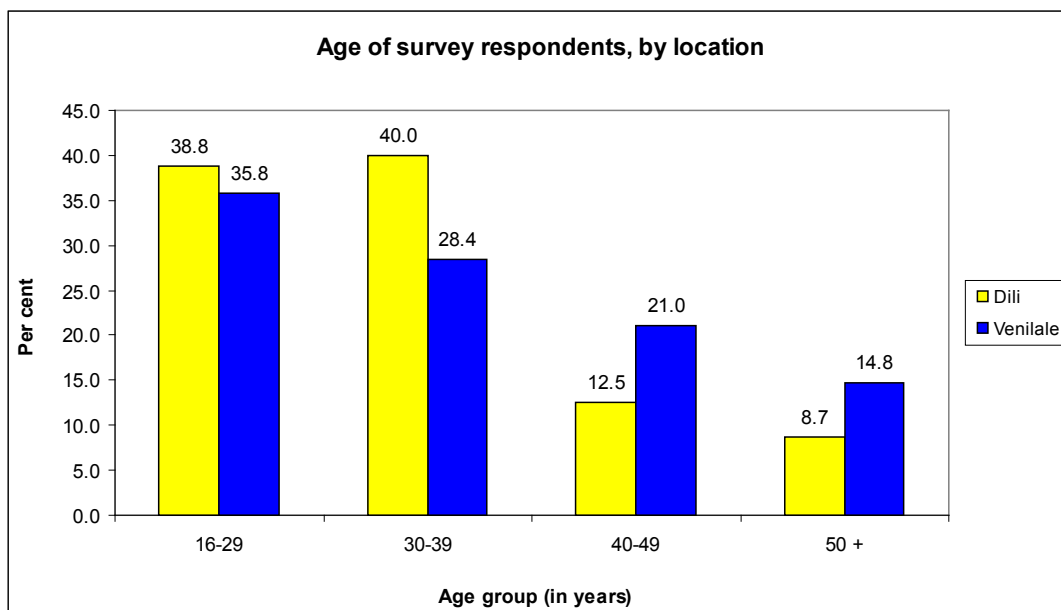
Without claiming to be representative of urban and rural dynamics across the country as a whole, or even claiming direct comparability between the two sites (as discussed below), the selection of Dili and Venilale was intended to allow the possibility of drawing some generalised comparisons between urban and rural experiences of political decision-making. The overall approach was qualitative in orientation, and there were two distinct data collection methods that were used, supplemented by observational techniques. In terms of formal methods, a total of 80 short structured interviews were completed in Dili and 81 in Venilale. These were undertaken in either Tetun or Indonesian by foreign researchers employed by RMIT University who were fluent in either one or both of the two languages. Research staff recorded each interview and took shorthand notes of their observations. Each short structured interview began with a set list of questions on demographics, followed by 22 open-ended, short-answer questions relating to the respondents' exposure to media sources, attitudes towards elections, and the process of political decision-making in the context of elections.¹⁹ Data collected in this form was classified using an open coding technique, with individual's responses grouped into categories of response based on the identification of common words and themes. Results were first entered into Microsoft Excel, with the data later analysed using SPSS statistical data analysis software.

For the sake of clearly distinguishing the structured and the semi-structured interviews, from this point on we will refer to the former as 'surveys'. Due to the timing in which they were administered, surveys carried out in Dili were focussed on the Presidential elections, whilst in Venilale focussed on the Parliamentary elections. There were variations in questions as the election processes were distinct; for instance the voting for an individual in the Presidential elections as opposed to party lists in the Parliamentary elections. In this sense, the surveys were not designed to be specifically comparable, as how people make decisions changes both over time and according to processes, experience and context. While to a degree this diminished the capacity for direct comparative analysis between the two sites, resource constraints prohibited the team from undertaking research in both sites simultaneously. Moreover, the primary objective was to begin the process of understanding how political decisions are made in Timor-Leste, hence data gathered from different sites for different elections can be seen as adding as much to the possibilities of learning as direct comparative work. It is important to point out that in terms of presenting data, in this report we often draw the material from equivalent questions together into graphical form. This is to ensure an efficient representation of the material, and to open up discussion, rather than an attempt at direction comparison (which is a point that we often remind the reader of through the report).

In addition to the use of short survey-style structured interviews, a limited number of in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in both sites (5 in Venilale and 12 in Dili). A semi-structured model of interviewing was chosen for the typical reason that it provided more latitude to both the interviewer and participant to discuss ideas as they emerged in conversation. The semi-structured interviews were still focused on the respondents' political decision-making, though given the nature of this research method often moved into comparatively framed discussions, such as past experiences of elections including those held during the Indonesian occupation.

¹⁹ Please see the appendix at the end of this report for a list of the questions asked.

Researchers undertook data collection with people in shops, markets, and in the areas near where they lived. Semi-structured interviews tended to be undertaken at people's houses where distraction was less likely. The selection of respondents was informed by the desire to be as broadly representative as possible, but of course such an attempt is always tempered in a range of ways, not least by the gender and nationality of the researcher, as well as local demographics and the nature of the data being collected. For instance, it was consistently easier to survey younger people, as they tended to traverse public space with greater frequency and were eager to participate, however concerted efforts were made to include older people in the research as well. A slightly older demographic was represented in the surveys in Venilale compared to Dili (as seen in the graph below). Across the sites there were a total of 60 respondents in the 16–29 age group, 55 in the 30–39 age group, 27 people between 40–49, and 19 people aged 50 and above. In regards to gender, 43.5 per cent of survey respondents were female, and 56.5 per cent male. There was a notable gender disparity in the semi-structured interviews, as in Dili slightly more women than men were interviewed, but in Venilale all of those interviewed were men.



The researchers in the data collection phase of this project all spent time living in Timor-Leste, and the authors of this report have each spent time in the field, including undertaking data collection in local East Timorese communities. As such it is necessary to point out that while the two key methods informing the findings of this report were structured and semi-structured interviews, observations—in both the stricter sense as well a broader engagement with East Timorese society—were very influential on how this project was shaped and in turn the analysis in this report. In an immediate sense, much information comes to bear from incidental moments that occur outside of the formal process of gathering data, for instance from the observations made walking through communities, in the small talk before and after interviews, and in the process of staying with local families and the like. More broadly however, given that those who have contributed in different ways to this report have also worked on an extensive range of other research projects and/or have lived in Timor-Leste for extended periods, questions and experiences that have arisen elsewhere will always have some kind of influence on the interpretations of what is and what is not important to ask. As such, it is fair to say that even if not directly featured in a report such as this, observation in both the immediate and broader sense gave contour and shape to the initial ideas for the project and how the collected data was treated.

Challenges to Data Collection

Working as foreigners in East Timorese communities, with limited resources, in highly diverse linguistic environments, and amidst the tensions of a newly independent society going through a period of intense social turmoil, will always provide challenges to the data collection process. While there are many issues that can be discussed in terms of how the social context impacts the collection of data, we want to concentrate here on three key points: epistemology, language, and cultural difference.

In thinking on epistemology, taken here to mean the patterns of knowledge, it is worth reflecting on how a method can shape a particular form of answer, by which we mean its structure rather than its content. For instance, while keenly interested in the content of people's answers to questions, the underpinning form that kept emerging in the way people spoke triggered a constant anxiety that 'we were being told what we want to hear'. Specifically, the language and rhetoric of 'democratic best-practice' continued to frame responses even if people seemed to otherwise be disengaged from the state and formal politics. Themes of citizenship or nationalism would readily emerge in responses, yet the person would not seem to engage in such language on other occasions. Of course there can be multiple reasons to account for this, not least a combination of not wanting to offend an outsider while also wanting to present the local community in the best possible light. However, there is another reason that appears rarely mentioned in all the survey work done on Timor-Leste, and that is that the epistemology that underpins a survey creates the conditions for a discursive response that is somewhat equal to its form. Asking questions in an abstracted form, such as those on processes or systems, will drive people towards responses framed by abstracted categories that may not be the discursive frames that are used in their everyday life.

In comparison, the semi-structured interviews provided more detailed responses (as they tend to anywhere) giving concrete examples of lived experiences, and at times contradicting the information gathered in the surveys, a moment that tends to result in acute learning for the researchers. In Timor-Leste semi-structured interviews felt less alien in that they were an oral exchange that allowed for narrative discussion. However, any claim that this provides a distinctly better pattern of data can only be made in terms of extent. An interview is still a particular form of exchange where being interviewed still means speaking on a subject matter with an outsider and in a way a person might not normally.

The purpose of this discussion here is that these points only undermine data if they are ignored rather than incorporated into the learning process. There are alternatives of course, one of which is to treat the collected data as an unadulterated reflection of a person's



Marketplace, Venilale, 2007

thoughts and beliefs. Such an approach is unsustainable, ignoring as it does the ways in which research respondents possess power to project themselves in the ways they best see fit. Another alternative is to not do the research at all, invoking claims of relativism; however this negates the potential for research to shed light on unexamined themes, to challenge taken for granted assumptions, to build relationships and understanding between groups, or to advocate for transformative change. Hence despite the epistemological challenges of conducting this research project, the authors feel that if a consideration of the process of data-collection is threaded together along with the results and folded into the learning, then there is an opportunity for an advancement in knowledge.

While the research was conducted in two of the most common languages in Timor-Leste, namely Bahasa Indonesia and Tetun, the nation's linguistic complexity²⁰ meant that researchers came across people who spoke neither and thus could not be captured in the research. Though this was a more notable problem in Venilale than in Dili, in both sites there were problems with regards to the ongoing consolidation of Tetun as a national language and differences in terms of the standard of Indonesian spoken. On the latter for instance, while most people aged around 18 and upward at the time of the research had some knowledge of Indonesian, levels of comprehension and fluency varied greatly. Those who had completed most of their primary and/or secondary schooling in Indonesian were the strongest (roughly those aged between 20–45) whilst older people and women who would have missed this schooling tended to lack confidence expressing themselves in Indonesian, even if they had full or partial listening comprehension.

A significant issue regarding language use in the data-collection related to the way in which English words did not necessarily translate as intended. This was most noticeable in the translation of the term 'influence' in the question 'When you made your decision, were you influenced at all by your family?'. While hardly a pejorative question in English, the use of the Indonesian word *pengaruh* meant that the question was interpreted as meaning that there was some level of 'force' being applied by family members. Given that people are

²⁰ See J. Hajek, 'Language planning and the sociolinguistic environment in East Timor: Colonial practice and changing language ecologies', *Current Issues in Language Planning*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2000, pp. 400–414; K. Taylor-Leech, 'The language situation in Timor-Leste', *Current Issues in Language Planning*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2009, pp. 1–68.

unlikely to speak to outsiders in a negative way about their family, and in combination with the history of political coercion in Timor-Leste, it is not surprising that the question resulted in a uniformly negative response (as *pengaruh* was used in both the Indonesian and Tetun surveys). As such, with a significant gap between the intent and the interpretation of the question its value to this survey was changed, a point discussed in the report proper in the section on Genealogy.

As a final point of discussion here was the impact of the researcher on the process of data-collection. Even by 2007 the act of a person coming from outside of a community to ask questions of a political nature was often viewed with suspicion, especially in rural areas such as Venilale. As such, a huge amount of time was needed for casual talking and introductions, to in effect 'break the ice', both before and after each interview. This was necessary in order to help people trust the researchers and to clarify the nature of the research project itself. The difficulty of being an outsider, and speaking on politics, was further compounded depending on the sex of the researcher. Male researchers discussing political issues in a heavily patriarchal society present challenges in obtaining a gender-balanced sample, not only in terms of quantity, but quality. For instance, it is not appropriate for a man to be talking to women in their homes without a man of the house present. However, when a man was present, at times women would defer to them when formulating their answers. In the reverse, even when women could be found outside the home, many were extremely embarrassed to be approached by a foreign man seeking answers to questions, and would avoid or politely refuse the interview. Of course this is why it is important to have research teams comprised of different sexes, such as we did on this project, and as with each of the problems discussed here, necessitates a team of researchers who are highly reflexive in terms of their own engagement and who are able to adapt the process of data-collection while not compromising the data in and of itself.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

In the following analysis, we have delineated five major trends in the data collected that help understand the reasons underpinning the political choices people make during elections, and as an extension of that, their views on the electoral system itself. The five categories—namely Media, Leadership, Campaigning, Genealogy and Citizenship—should be treated as intersecting, where each may in varying degrees come to inform any one person's decision on if, how and why to engage in the electoral process. While the categories here may not be surprising to people involved in implementing democratic processes, it is notable that even a preliminary investigation such as this begins to show how modern and national processes get drawn back into customary and local political understandings of the world.

Media

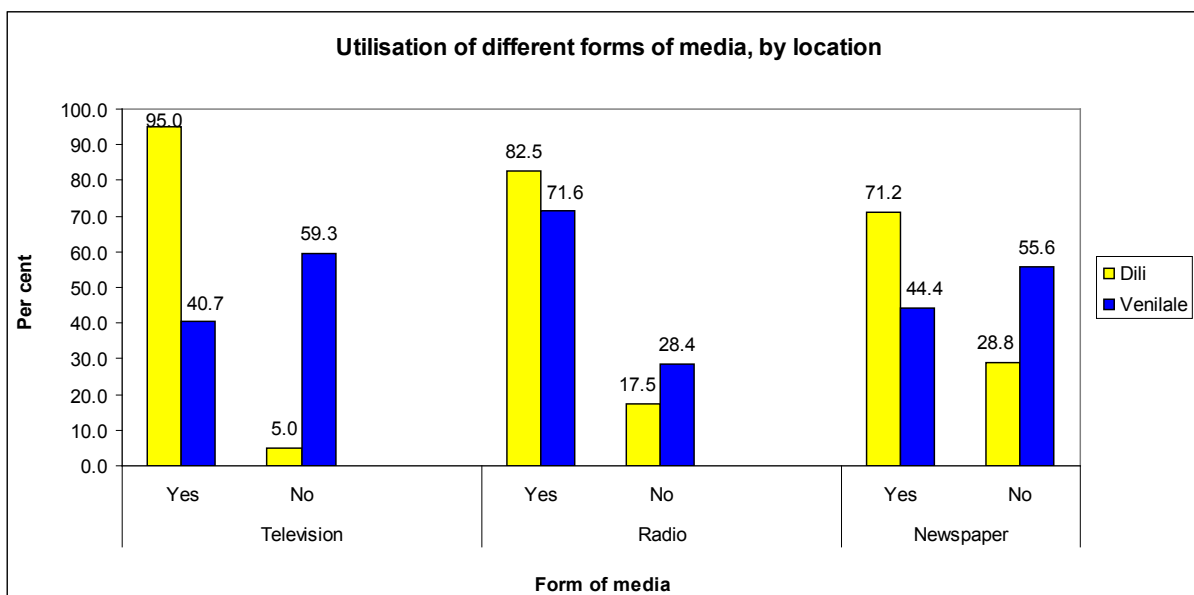
As is quickly apparent in Timor-Leste, the development of post-conflict communications and media infrastructure has remained limited. In the capital Dili, the ready availability of signal from the national television broadcaster (TVTL) and the presence of a variety of newspapers and radio stations means that access to mass media tends to be far greater than in the vast majority of rural populations. In contrast, in rural areas, including Venilale, radio is the most accessible and utilised form of media.²¹ Coupled with limited levels of literacy

²¹ A report released in May 2007, based on research carried out late in 2006 confirmed the overall dominance of radio as a source of information in Timor-Leste, particularly in rural areas, see E. Soares and G. Mytton, *Timor-Leste National Media Survey Final Report*, Fondation Hirondelle, May 2007, <http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADL058.pdf>, accessed 3 June 2012. A follow up study on media communications in Timor-Leste carried out in 2010 found that while radio still had the most dominant (and still increasing) reach, television had significantly increased in its coverage, spreading into the districts. Increases in newspaper, mobile phone and internet coverage since 2006 were likewise observed, however regional variation was noted with coverage substantially greater in Dili than other areas. United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste, *Timor-Leste Communication and Media Survey*, UNMIT Communication and Public Information Office, 2011, <http://unmit.unmissions.org/Portals/UNMIT/Media_Survey_Report_CPIO_FINAL_ENG.pdf>, accessed 3 June 2012.

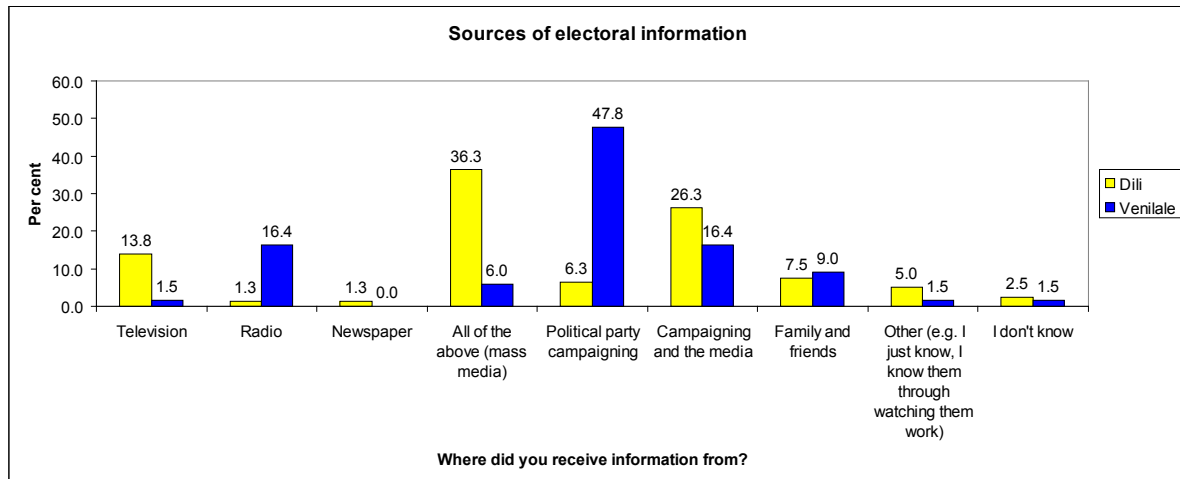
across the country, again more pronounced in rural areas, we see in the following analysis a distinctly different level of media integration in Dili than we do Venilale. As a consequence, through two sets of questions in the survey—one on media access and one on sources of electoral information—we see an impact on the kinds of political information people draw from, which may affect their political decision-making.

In terms of access and utilisation of mass media, survey responses in Dili showed that nearly 95.0 per cent watched television while in Venilale the number was 40.7 per cent. Furthermore, for those in Venilale who did watch television, it was far less common for them to watch television in their own homes (42.4 per cent) than it was in Dili (93.4 per cent). Instead, Venilale respondents watched television at the homes of neighbours (18.2 per cent) or with other friends and family (39.4 per cent), suggesting fewer televisions within the community as a whole. As is commonly noted of rural areas in Timor-Leste, radio is a popular form of mass media and in Venilale 71.6 per cent of survey respondents said that they listened regularly. This however was still less than in Dili where the percentage of those who listened to the radio was 82.5 per cent. In regards to where and how often people listened to the radio, very similar percentages of listeners in both Dili and Venilale said that they did so daily, either at home or when with neighbours or friends.

With regard to newspaper readership, the distinctions between Venilale and the capital were pronounced. While 71.2 per cent of survey respondents in Dili said that they read newspapers, only 44.4 per cent of people in Venilale did the same. Diverging literacy rates account for this gap to an extent, as 86.3 per cent of respondents said that they could read and write in Dili compared to 65.4 per cent in Venilale, but scarcer access to newspapers in rural areas (a question of distribution as well as relative cost) would also be a factor. That survey respondents in Venilale were far more likely to gain access to a newspaper by borrowing it (80.6 per cent) than buying it themselves (8.3 per cent) supports this contention. In contrast similar percentages of people in Dili bought the paper themselves (31.6 per cent) as borrowed it from someone else (35.1 per cent). People in Dili were not only more likely to read the newspaper, they did so more frequently. Almost a quarter (24.6 per cent) of those who read the paper said they did so every day, compared to just 5.6 per cent of people in Venilale. The remainder—75.4 per cent in Dili and 94.4 per cent in Venilale—replied that they read the newspaper sometimes.



The level of penetration of the media does not out of necessity mean that it influences people's political decision-making, as that depends on a whole range of additional factors such as the content of the media as well as whether it is trusted or not. That said, in the case of the survey findings here, mass media appeared to play a significantly greater role in informing voter intention in the nation's capital than it did in Venilale, or, was at least afforded greater importance as a source of information by the people living there. As indicated in the graph below, mass media—of one or multiple forms—was cited as the primary source of election information in Dili for a total of 52.7 per cent of respondents as opposed to a total of 23.9 per cent in Venilale.



In contrast, in Venilale political party campaigning was clearly the dominant source of electoral information for respondents (47.8 per cent in Venilale as opposed to just 6.3 per cent in Dili). This was further confirmed through the semi-structured interviews, with one interviewee in Venilale bringing together the impact of the lack of alternative information with low levels of literacy, saying that:

... there are difficulties ... the information is insufficient. From the newspaper, radio, cars, there's nothing. You can't have a direct relationship, you can't read. If you know how to read then it's easy. There'd be no need for campaigns.²²

Given the lower levels of media penetration, and from that we assume lower levels of access to political commentary and general election information, there was instead some emphasis given in interviews to learning within the community, at an embodied face-to-face level rather than via abstracted media:

Here within the community with things like this we sit together and talk together, give each other ideas about which ones have good policies. Here we have to follow the *lia-na'in* (literally "keeper of the words", customary authority and mediator) who are the elders, they say that we have to be very careful about who we vote for because if we vote for the wrong people then we could fall down. When we go to vote it's up to each person who they choose but you need to be very careful. This is good because they give ideas to people so that they choose a good party to serve. And the *lia-na'in* said "I am not forcing you to choose a particular party, you have the freedom to choose".²³

It is noteworthy that while mass media was clearly an important source of information in the capital, at times the semi-structured interviews revealed some distrust towards the print press. One interviewee in Dili criticised a particular paper's negative coverage of the

²² Interview with VN3, male school principal, Venilale, 18 July 2007.

²³ Interview with VN5, male *xefe aldeia*, Venilale, 18 July 2007. Research since carried out by UNMIT found that community leaders were cited by survey respondents as the most common and most trusted source of information for *suku* level elections held in 2009. Approximately half as many people reported receiving information from the national radio broadcaster, and slightly less again from television sources. UNMIT, *Timor-Leste Communication and Media Survey*, p. 29.



Parliamentary election, children putting up party posters, Dili, June 2007

government, stating ‘... I just read STL and I wasn’t happy. Because STL is not Suara Timor-Timur (Voice of Timor-Leste) [the paper’s old name], but Suara Tambah-Tambah (Voice of Embellishing-Embellishing)’.²⁴ Another expressed distrust for print press in general but interestingly indicated a greater trust for forms of media where he could see the face or hear the voice of those making the commentary:

Newspapers, I read. But I don’t trust journalists too much. Someone says, “A”, then they say “B”. We can’t know for sure what they have said. That’s why I tend to trust TV, then radio also, where we hear the people speaking directly. But with newspapers it’s someone else who conveys it.²⁵

The importance of visual connection in confirming a voter’s intentions was described in a different way by one interviewee who spoke of the effect that living in Dili had on her ability to influence others in rural areas, even more so if accompanied by a visual image of some description:

Because they say, “You go to Dili and see listen with your eyes and ears”. If you say “Oh, this party is like this” they believe you immediately. Even more so if you bring back paper or a picture of the person.²⁶

As indicated by the interviewee above, geographical location and the nature of social change associated with urbanisation appear to shape voter intentions. While in Dili residents are readily exposed to a variety of political parties, education opportunities, mass media and other sources of electoral information, outside of the capital this may be more limited. Hence, an interviewee in Dili speculated that in rural districts the physical presence or absence of particular parties was a strong determinant of voting intention:

²⁴ Interview with D8, male student, Dili, 12 July 2007.

²⁵ Interview with D3, self-employed male, Dili, 9 July 2007.

²⁶ Interview with D4, single female, Dili, 9 July 2007. In a similar manner another interviewee discussed campaigning for her political party in her home district and the utilisation of photos: ‘We brought flags, but there were some communities who asked us to come back “Can you come back with photos [of Lasama]? So that we can see directly who our leader is?’ Interview with D7, female student. Dili, 11 July 2007.

... people don't access information from another party, because they tend to only be in their village. They only get information about party "A", so he has to choose party "A". Because they have no information from "C", "B" and the others.... and because they don't get information about other parties, they think "I'm not allowed to choose a party that I don't know".²⁷

In summary then, we can point to access to media as being a potential influence on how people make political decisions, and as one may have expected, from the information here at least it appears that media is far more influential in Dili than in Venilale. Where people do not have as great access to mass media, we instead see a greater impact of other forms of information distribution, such as campaigning (to be discussed in detail below). It is worth noting that even when people do have access, the influence of media can still be conditioned by doubt over the material and information presented, and we also see that information from media sources can then be exchanged in an embodied sense, as people share that information with others face-to-face.

Leadership

In response to questions that asked people to specify how they made their decision to vote, the answers were coded into five main categories of response; a) 'based on their capacity'; b) 'based on their policies and campaign'; c) 'based on their capacity, experience and because they are well known'; d) 'based on history and their involvement in the resistance' and e) 'other'. The third option (c) recognised a common form of response in Dili where people grouped sets of reasons together rather than distinguishing them as per the other categories (i.e. a, or b, or d). In a direct sense there is limited value in drawing these results from Dili and Venilale together, in that the former was voting for a President and the latter for the Parliament, and thus one may assume differences in the motivations for voting for an individual as opposed to a party. This in mind however, it would be fair to assume that the personality of party leaders remains very important in Parliamentary elections and party affiliation or endorsement has been important for Presidential candidates, hence it is still worth drawing the two together to discuss the findings.

In Dili when voting for an individual President, the decision of who to vote for was strongly oriented by a) 'their capacity' – which received 53.8 per cent of responses, and c) the combination of 'capacity', 'experience' and being 'well known' – which received 25.0 per cent. In comparison, when voting in Parliamentary elections both categories a) and c) received zero responses in Venilale. In contrast then, in Venilale the importance of policies was triple that of the Presidential campaign (34.3 per cent compared to 11.3 per cent in Dili) and the party's involvement in the resistance against Indonesian occupation was also rated highly, by 25.7 per cent of respondents (as opposed to no respondents in Dili). In thinking on leadership then, the absolute absence of capacity as a reason for deciding how to vote in the Parliamentary elections suggests, from this data at least, that capacity is a value that is applied very much to the individual rather than to an organisation, and when consideration is of an individual, then capacity is considered very important. For parties however, at least in Venilale, the importance of the capacity of the leadership falls away and instead the organisational features and histories of the parties come to the fore.

²⁷ Interview with D2, male NGO worker, Dili, 9 July 2007.



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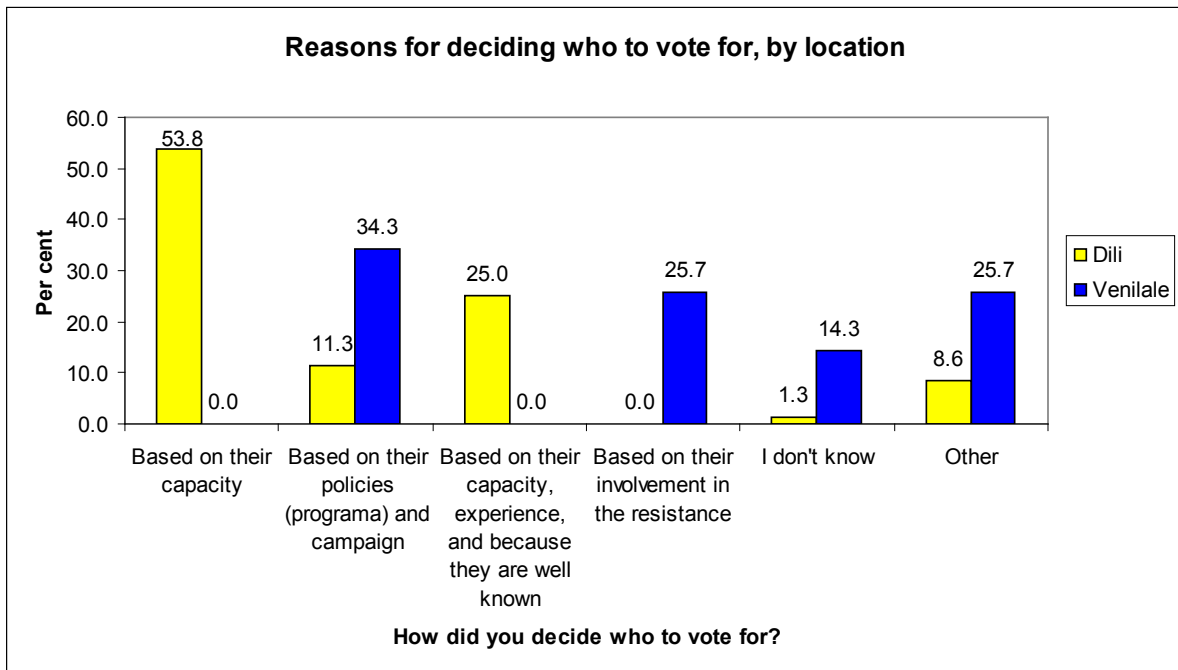


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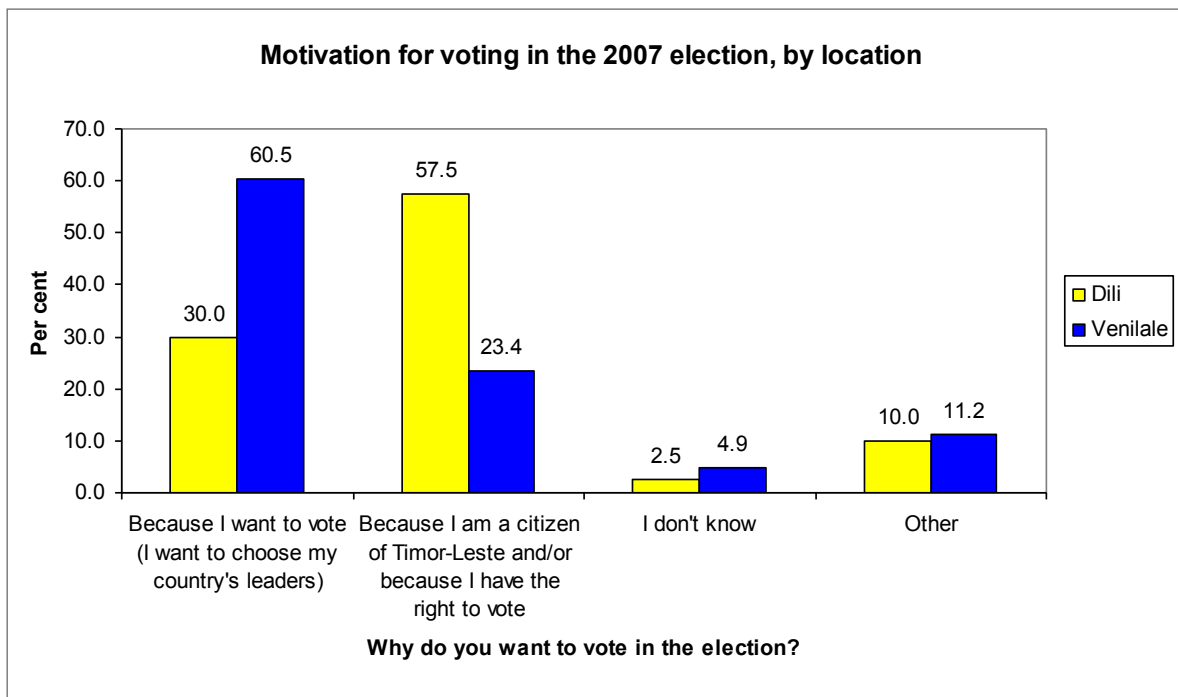
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Voter Education Poster, Parliamentary Election 2007, Movement of ballot papers



A second set of questions asked in Dili and Venilale sought to understand why people actually wanted to vote in the 2007 elections (remembering that voting in Timor-Leste is non-compulsory). As per the following graph, the desire to choose their country's leaders was one key motivation. In Dili 30.0 per cent of survey respondents indicated that they wanted to choose their leaders, and leadership factors—in particular the personality and reputation of political leaders—were also mentioned by a number of interviewees in the capital as being influential on their voting intentions. This included changing patterns of voting, as one respondent explained that dissatisfaction with the leader they had supported between 2002 and 2007 resulted in a change of vote: '... Yeah, the party I like, but the person I don't, so I voted for a different one'.²⁸



²⁸ Interview with D4, single female, Dili, 9 July 2007. Similar findings were observed by McWilliam and Bexley, who state that disapproval of Mari Alkatiri's leadership, especially during the 2006 crisis, led to estrangement from FRETILIN, particularly in western districts where historical association with the party was not as strong. A. McWilliam and A. Bexley, 'Performing Politics', p. 75.



The inking of fingers in an effort to avoid multiple voting in elections, Dili, April 2007

In the lead up to the Parliamentary elections, in Venilale a very high 60.5 per cent of survey respondents indicated that it was the process of selecting leadership that was crucial to their decision to vote. This is interesting given that for Parliamentary elections in Timor-Leste the vote is cast for the party-list as a whole, not for individual leaders. However, this may firstly be indicative of the dominance of personality within parties, as in a sense the core leadership still very much frames perceptions of the party as a whole, and secondly that the term 'leaders' here refers to a party as a group that voters would prefer to lead the country rather than another.

In discussing leaders for the country, it was Xanana Gusmão in particular who interviewees frequently mentioned to possess desirable leadership qualities, reportedly esteemed for his role during the resistance, connections to the international community, and his ability to 'hear the voices of the people'.²⁹ This is not surprising given that he is amongst the most well-known political figures in Timor-Leste, was the head of the resistance during the Indonesian occupation and was Timor-Leste's first President (winning with 87.0 per cent of the 2001 vote for President). With his party CNRT founded only in March of 2007, it is certainly conceivable that the personal attributes and reputation of Gusmão were key factors contributing to the success of CNRT in the July Parliamentary Elections.³⁰ Indeed two interviewees who stated that they supported CNRT admitted that they did not know any other members of the party aside from Gusmão, and this was likely reinforced by the prominence with which Gusmão featured on CNRT campaigning materials.³¹

²⁹ Interview with D4, single female, Dili, 9 July 2007.

³⁰ Additionally, as noted in the introductory section on the 2007 Elections, the acronym CNRT had previously represented the proindependence umbrella organisation *Conselho Nacional de Resistência Timorense*. An interviewee expressed indignation that in forming the party CNRT Gusmão capitalised on 'Not just the name [CNRT]! The flag also is the same, the FALINTIL flag. He shouldn't use that, but he did'. Interview with VN1, prominent male community member, Venilale, 29 June 2007.

³¹ Commenting on a CNRT banner displayed in Dili in the lead up to the 2007 elections, McWilliam and Bexley note that 'Xanana featured in two complementary images. On one side he is dressed in military fatigues, the charismatic leader of the armed resistance and champion of independence. On the other side he is portrayed in a suit and tie, the image of the statesman and competent leader guiding the development of the nation'. A. McWilliam and A. Bexley, 'Performing Politics', p. 69.

Reflecting again on the potency of imagery, an interviewee in Dili felt that by being such a well-known individual, the distribution of votes in the Parliamentary elections would have been different if photos of party leaders (in particular Gusmão's) were permitted on ballot papers instead of the images of the party flag:

People didn't care about CNRT. That's why I say if you use a photo [on the Parliamentary ballot paper], CNRT would win outright. Because his [Gusmão's] photo would be known by lots of people. Meanwhile the flag alone, not that many people know. The other parties, who supported the bill to ban the use of photos, were really smart. Because if you can use photos, leaders who are not that well known will lose.³²

This sentiment regarding the eminence of Gusmão was also reflected by others in Venilale. Even after accounting for the fact that these interviewees may have been CNRT supporters (this is not discernible from their transcripts), it is still of importance to note the connection between leadership, support for a party, and the role of an image in a society where media penetration remains relatively low and illiteracy rates high.

Campaigning

As per the first graph of the previous section, when asked how they decided who to vote for, only 11.3 per cent of people in Dili responded in accordance with b) 'the policies and campaign of the candidates'. This may at least in part be accounted for by the fact that people were surveyed in the lead up to the final round of the Presidential elections, and thus the focus of decision-making was to a greater extent concentrated on an individual's abilities, experiences and so forth. By comparison, when people were questioned on how they decided who to vote for in the 2007 Parliamentary elections, 34.3 per cent of survey respondents in Venilale said that they based their decision on the party's policies (*programa*) and campaign. Again, that this is a far higher percentage than in Dili may to some extent be accounted for by the fact that people were voting for parties rather than individuals as this may put greater emphasis on the political platform of the organisation as a whole.

Differing forms of elections aside, the higher importance given to campaigning in informing the political decision-making of voters in Venilale is notable when considered in relation to the lower levels of mass media access compared to Dili. It is plausible that while respondents may have had exposure to the programs of parties who directly campaigned in their districts, in the relative absence of mass media to provide information on other parties, these campaigning efforts may actually have a more significant impact on people's choices. This has particular implications when some parties are more able to garner resources for campaigning across different districts. In this context, the uncertainty expressed by some interviewees about the content and quality of new parties' programs may conceivably be a reflection of lack of exposure to the campaigns of those parties.³³ Alternatively it may also be that the some political parties seek to draw support through other mechanisms, such as through leadership, rather than their policies.

In terms of campaigning, it is important to point out that parties that had already been well established as organisations involved in the resistance had a distinct advantage in that they were already known. These parties in effect already had a constituency and reputation and unlike new parties did not have to expend resources on introducing the party into communities for the first time. For instance, the interviews across both sites indicated that for many FRETILIN's success in the 2001/2 elections was overwhelmingly due to its historical association with the struggle against Indonesian occupation (and as such the party

³² Interview with D3, self-employed male, Dili, 9 July 2007.

³³ For instance, one interviewee in Venilale commented '...yeah, all of them [the new parties] are good, but there are some who don't have a program. Because CNRT has a program, FRETILIN also has a program, but the others, their program isn't clear'. Interview with VN3, male school principal, Venilale, 18 July 2007.



Campaigning at the Fretlin Rally, Dili, April 2007

was labelled by some as the '*partai historia*' or historical party).³⁴ A sense of unified support for FRETILIN was reported to have been driven in part by the fact that under Indonesian occupation 'You could belong to whatever party, but if you showed a bit of resistance or anything, [you were] FRETILIN'.³⁵ The compulsion to vote for FRETILIN was also reported to arise from a lack of knowledge of alternatives '...to be frank, at that time we only knew one party [FRETILIN]. Because in the beginning that party since [gesturing 'ages'], yeah they were already there'.³⁶ While nationally this dynamic may have been shifting by 2007, in sites such as Venilale, which had a strong historical association with FRETILIN, it is likely to have been an enduring influence. Indeed in Venilale the second most frequent reason for deciding who to vote for in the Parliamentary elections was based on history in terms of the party's involvement in the resistance.³⁷ Interestingly, this reason was not given by any survey respondents in Dili.

³⁴ Interview with VN2, male development worker, Venilale, 18 July 2007. Indeed as Hohe explains, during their 2002 campaign FRETILIN themselves capitalised upon this historical association and customary fears of ancestral sanctions, '[going] as far as demanding that "people should not vote for themselves but for the ones that fell in the struggle"'. T. Hohe, 'Totem Polls: Indigenous Concepts and 'Free and Fair' Elections in East Timor', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2002, pp. 69–88. However as Smith notes, FRETILIN's success in the 2001 Constituent Assembly elections was perhaps not as high as the party's leaders had expected. A.L. Smith, 'East Timor: Elections in the World's Newest Nation', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2004, p. 151.

³⁵ Interview with D1, male farmer, Dili, 6 July 2007.

³⁶ Interview with D10, female NGO worker, Dili, 11 July 2007. Associated with the perceived dominance of FRETILIN in the early days of independence there was a tendency for interviewees to believe that only a few parties competed in the 2001 elections, when in fact 16 parties had competed. A.L. Smith, 'East Timor', p. 150. The dispersed presence of the FRETILIN party across the territory in 2001 (see T. Hohe, 'Totem Polls', p. 71), in combination with limited channels of information about the electoral process and party platforms, East Timorese citizens may not have had access to information about all the political parties.

³⁷ This was reflected in the outcomes of both the 2007 elections and the recent 2012 Presidential elections, whereby when broken down by district, support for FRETILIN in Baucau district was the second highest in the nation (after another historical FRETILIN stronghold, Viqueque). As McWilliam and Bexley note, the results of the 2007 Parliamentary election 'reflected a long-standing perception that the party's principal support base remains in the east where armed resistance continued throughout the Indonesian occupation and where the FRETILIN name retains a deep legitimacy among rural constituencies. For the many who endured the long years of the resistance struggle, FRETILIN stands as a symbol of their shared suffering and eventual victory. In their minds, to vote against FRETILIN would be an act of disloyalty no matter how unsatisfactory or delayed the wider restoration of social services and economic benefits'. A. McWilliam and A. Bexley, 'Performing Politics', pp. 75–6.

The dispersal of information via campaigning is sometimes constrained by barriers that outsiders may face to enter communities to campaign for their political party. As a number of interviewees discussed, the community might distrust outsiders, the *xefe suku* (village chief) may act as a gatekeeper only permitting certain parties to enter, or outsiders may be directly threatened if campaigning in areas where alternative parties are dominant. According to one man in Venilale:

Timorese people have heads of stone. Not like people in advanced countries right. In advanced countries, I've seen in films, you want to campaign, cars go by, trains go by, everything, nobody's bothered. Timorese are not like that. Someone campaigns there, people will burn and throw stones. Pick up one [rock] and throw it. That's why we have to be very careful about granting permission to people to enter a territory to campaign.³⁸

One key campaign tool in Timor-Leste is the mass rally, and as discussed here by McWilliam and Bexley, while providing an opportunity for the oral presentation of party principles and platforms this form of event does confirm the importance of the 'leader' in terms their personality and political background:

A common strategy for the campaign managers was to hold a series of rallies and public meetings across the country mirroring practices in neighbouring Indonesia. Typically this involved rounding up supporters and a number of trucks and private vehicles, festooned with banners and flags, to make a noisy entrance into target towns or villages. Here a series of speeches would be presented to the party faithful and onlookers urging their support and outlining plans for reform or program implementation. Subsequently, many serious conversations would be held about political prospects, platforms and strategies during refreshments and post-rally discussions. Written material and pamphlets outlining the various party policy platforms tended to be scarce and most people contented themselves with the slogans and anodyne political speeches. Indeed for the most part, party campaigns in the lead up to polling day relied heavily on the politics of personality and a focus on the leading figures among the 14 official parties. Campaign symbolism promoted heroic images of the respective leaders, their contributions to the national struggle for independence and their capacity to reclaim the much sought after *Unidade Nacional* (National Unity).³⁹

While voters may gain access to the policies and ideas that parties are advocating through campaign rallies, these events also work as a form of spectacle. Several interviewees in Dili believed for instance that the attraction of campaigning events arose more from the show of the event than a desire to obtain electoral information: 'I think, with campaigns at fields like that, lots of people attend, but most people just want to join in the excitement'.⁴⁰ This was further confirmed by the following interviewee, who contested that attendance at parties' campaigns and overall party allegiance was not necessarily driven by ideological affinity but rather by the hope of gaining an immediate tangible benefit:

Yeah, only the hope of getting something, let alone the people who are illiterate, they will be very happy with their goods, they're not interested in the improvement of the country. No, if, in the campaign, they get lots of t-shirts or food, they will follow that [party].⁴¹

38 Interview with VN2, male development worker, Venilale, 18 July 2007.

39 A. McWilliam and A. Bexley, 'Performing Politics', pp. 68-9.

40 Interview with D2, male NGO worker, Dili, 9 July 2007.

41 Interview with VN4, male head of household, Venilale, 18 July 2007.



CNRT Campaign Banner, Dili, 2007

Other interviewees noted handouts of rice, money, cigarettes or clothing, direct payments being made to individuals to attend party campaign rallies, or how certain members of the community might mysteriously come into money around election time. Indeed, when the term ‘influence’ was used in the research, a number of respondents immediately associated this with either bribes or threats. Nevertheless, that threats are made or bribes are promised does not necessitate that voters comply, as was explained by a number of interviewees such as this one:

I don't think that just because someone is given rice, or money, he will follow. At the moment he will just accept it, but the next day when he votes, you won't be there to see right? It's his right at the time he votes to not vote for you.⁴²

Finally, in regards to campaigning it is worth briefly mentioning that several interviewees in Dili made reference to the language of ‘progress’ in CNRT campaign materials. In particular, the imagery on CNRT campaign banners—utilising pictures of satellites, sky-rise buildings and fighter jets—led one interviewee to suggest that the party was trying to appeal to those who ‘are very thirsty for modernisation’.⁴³ However it was acknowledged that ‘logically speaking...it's over the top’⁴⁴, with another interviewee explaining that such imagery was simply a way of garnering votes: ‘...it's just to manipulate the thinking or desires of people... It's impossible that we will have planes as sophisticated as that in 10 years, but it's just to play on the people's ignorance’.⁴⁵ It is worth noting that, according to an interviewee in Venilale and the work of the field team, this kind of modern imagery was absent in the CNRT promotional materials seen in the district.⁴⁶

⁴² Interview with D3, self-employed male, Dili, 9 July 2007.

⁴³ Interview with D3, self-employed male, Dili, 9 July 2007.

⁴⁴ Interview with D2, male NGO worker, Dili, 9 July 2007.

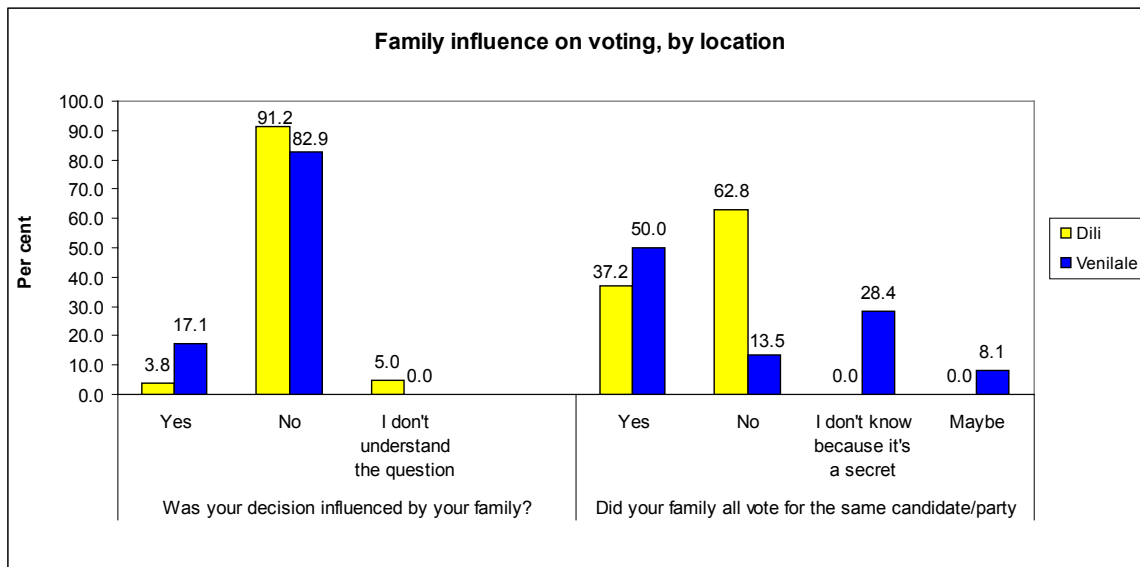
⁴⁵ Interview with D3, self-employed male, Dili, 9 July 2007.

⁴⁶ Interview with VN2, male development worker, Venilale, 18 July 2007.

Genealogy

In planning for this study, it had been assumed that one of the key ways in which people would decide their vote would to a large degree be determined by how their families, especially their parents, voted. Coming from an Australian perspective, where for instance it is very common for children to vote the same as their parents, there seemed little reason for this to be any different in Timor-Leste. In fact, drawing from anecdotal experience and other research, the assumption was that it may in fact be much higher in Timor-Leste, not least as it is not uncommon to hear of communities voting much the same way, motivated for instance by the political affiliation of local leadership.

Despite this assumption however, there was a resoundingly negative response when people were asked 'When you chose a candidate/vote for a party, were/are you influenced at all by your family?'. Based on the survey data, in Dili 91.3 per cent of people and 82.9 per cent of people in Venilale said that their vote was not influenced by their family. Just 3.8 per cent of people in Dili said they were influenced by their family, and while that figure was higher in Venilale, at 17.1 per cent, it still constituted a clear minority of the responses. However, as discussed above in the section on methodology, there was a clear issue with the Indonesian translation of influence (*pengaruh*). Rather than being neutral, the term was interpreted negatively to mean a kind of 'undue influence'. In terms of this question then, the value to this research was reduced in that we were not so interested in terms of whether people felt *coerced* by their families but rather if a commitment to a political choice came via a sense of genealogical connection. Nonetheless, as will be explained here and in the section below on citizenship, through this misinterpretation and strong negation of undue family influence we were still able to gain insight into the role of genealogy and conceptions of individual democratic rights.



To begin with, that the overwhelming majority of respondents said that they were not influenced by their family did not necessarily mean that they voted differently to other family members. The question 'Did your family all vote for the same candidate / party?' provided an interesting counterpoint, with 37.2 per cent of people in Dili and 50.0 per cent of people in Venilale saying that all of their family voted for the same candidate or party. From the sample of voters in this study at least, the responses indicate that there is greater divergence in family voting patterns among residents in Dili than in Venilale; in Dili 62.8 per cent of people indicated their family did not all vote for the same party or candidate, whereas in Venilale, only 13.5 per cent said the same. In Venilale an additional 28.4 per cent of people gave answers within the category of response, 'I don't know because it's a secret', and another 8.1 per cent said 'maybe', and in both cases it is plausible that there could have been substantial confluence in terms of family voting patterns.

It is therefore interesting that while on the one hand people indicated that their family did not influence them negatively, on the other we see relatively high levels of similarity regarding voting within families. This takes us to perhaps one other significant reason as to why a question regarding influence was met with a high level of rejection, namely that influence may occur over time and in effect through a broader association of hierarchy and authority within a family. As is perhaps a common way for people to come to know things, influence does not come through a sharply delineated moment of instruction (in this instance, being told who to vote for). Rather, political choices come wrapped around whole sets of social interactions and over longer periods of time, and hence the familial support for the same party may seem so naturalised through history and allegiance that it would hardly feel like influence. Thus on this question at least, we are still pressed to see that genealogy is not of consequence to the voting decisions of many people, though clearly the use of survey questions in this form and delivered in this context meant that the study needed to be further refined and supplemented with other methods. What we can say from this data though is that from those who participated in the surveys, there was a relatively high incidence of voting similarity with family members (which may in fact be higher with more investigation) and when asked if this is because of a negative influence within families, then resoundingly (especially in Dili) the answer is no.

The semi-structured interviews provided important additional information on the question of genealogy. For those interviewees who acknowledged the influence of familial relations on how they chose to vote, parental or ancestral influence was frequently a factor. In terms of the latter, some people interviewed made the point that their decision to vote was based in honouring deceased relatives who had died fighting during the resistance to Indonesian occupation.⁴⁷ As an example of this, in recounting his family's suffering during the Indonesian invasion and occupation, one interviewee in Venilale explained that there could only be one choice for him stating that '... whatever happens, I'll still be FRETILIN'.⁴⁸

In contrast to ancestral pressures, some interviewees suggested that influence can also flow from children to parents, particularly when the children are based in Dili and are seen to be exposed to higher levels of education and political information. Discussing how people influence the voting intention of others within their origin *suku*, an interviewee who had migrated to Dili explained, 'They, the voters [in the rural *suku*], usually immediately believe it [information about politics] if it's from someone who they trust, for example, they think, "My child knows more than me, so I have to trust her"'.⁴⁹ However, the same interviewee indicated that this is not always the case and that discretion was still required: '... if you want to talk about politics, usually you have to go to the garden, or to collect wood, and just speak there, "I like this party", like that'.⁵⁰

In both research sites interviewees indicated that divergence within family's voting intentions was quite common, to some extent at least helping to understand the 62.8 per cent in Dili that said their families did not vote the same way. In Dili an interviewee explained 'We are one family but we don't all have the same party. There are a few'.⁵¹ Some interviewees were comfortable with the difference of political opinion within their family, explaining that 'people have their own differences. And we can't force [each other]. We just discuss, but after the discussion, that's it, finished. Leave it'.⁵² However, and coming back to the point above regarding ancestry, others indicated that supporting a different party to that

47 Indeed Hohe has commented on the way that in its 2001 campaign FRETILIN in particular sought to associate itself with resistance heroes, noting 'This hero cult is easily linked to the structure of an ancestral cult. Ancestors that have died during a war activity are usually perceived as the most powerful and dangerous. To pay them respect and honour is to ensure support of their powers for the survival of society'. T. Hohe, 'Totem Polls', p. 75.

48 Interview with VN4, male head of household, Venilale, 18 July 2007.

49 Interview with D4, single female, Dili, 9 July 2007.

50 *ibid.*

51 Interview with D10, female NGO worker, Dili, 11 July 2007.

52 Interview with VN1, prominent male community member, Venilale, 29 June 2007.

which their family members support is a point of tension: '...our parents get angry with us because we don't follow their party, because my uncle died for FRETILIN in '75. That's why we are told by them that we have to follow them at home'.⁵³

A number of interviewees suggested that the influence of family in shaping voter intention was likely to be stronger for women than for men, and that this was likely to be linked to education levels. One interviewee in Dili explained that he and his wife support different political parties, but that his acceptance of this difference would perhaps be atypical, saying that 'I think most people don't think like this because some of the men say "you have to follow me...because we're married you have to follow me, this is East Timorese custom"'.⁵⁴ The patriarchal structures were most clearly demonstrated by one interviewee who discussed the difference between how she could speak freely in Dili compared to her home *suku* in a rural area:

...in the mountains, women are scared of men. Men don't talk, if you speak like that they just straight away hit you. So women are scared. Sometimes we [women] answer their questions and they kick us out of the room, to the kitchen. "Women don't know anything, go and cook. We need coffee so we can talk politics". It's as if at a restaurant, we're just there to serve the men.⁵⁵

In sum then we see that genealogy impacts patterns of political decision-making in Timor-Leste, albeit in intersection with various other influences that shape how people come to vote the way they do. While the survey questions provided some insight into understanding whether families voted either the same or differently, the semi-structured interviews served to reveal important dimensions to this, not least the demand of recognising the importance of the ancestral domain and also the ways in which information flows from urban to rural areas.

Citizenship

Rather than examining how a decision to vote for a candidate or party is made, the final section in this report focuses on the decision made by people to engage in the state-political system itself. This is an important consideration in Timor-Leste in that voting is non-compulsory (unlike for instance Australia), and that people can certainly face a range of logistical problems in even registering prior to voting. As will be discussed in this section, we found that the idea of citizenship—taken here as a person's connection with and sense of duty to the national political architecture—was a key motivation in engaging with the political system. While the discourse of citizenship was strong, there however remained some significant points of ambiguity in people's views on the political system.

Through the surveys, interviews, and observations made by researchers during fieldwork, a discourse of citizenship framed the way many people responded to questions of political decision-making. As discussed in the section on methodology at the start of this report, at the time of undertaking the field research there was a concern that people were speaking in a particular way, in effect to tell us 'foreigners' what they thought we wanted to know. This of course is of issue in many forms of community engagement where the projection of that community to the world is reflected in the answers its members give (and often enough not wanting to be negative). There are other things to fold into consideration as well, for instance the role of rhetoric in the process of nation-formation (and the subjective sense of connection this can create), and the way in which the form of particular methods may influence the categories of discourse by respondents.

That all said, the discourse was dominant enough that it needs to be treated as being one of the key factors in how political decisions are made during electoral processes. Indeed, in Dili a rights and citizenship discourse was evident in 57.5 per cent of surveys.

⁵³ Interview with D6, female teacher, Dili, 10 July 2007.

⁵⁴ Interview with D9, male NGO worker, Dili, 11 July 2007.

⁵⁵ Interview with D4, single female, Dili, 9 July 2007.



Voting in Venilale, Parliamentary Elections 2007

Approximately half as many survey respondents (23.4 per cent in total) in Venilale replied in a similar way. Across both sites the kinds of phrases here that kept being repeated were '*hakarak hili*' (I want to choose), '*diretu*' (rights), '*Timor oan*' (I am Timorese) and '*sidadaun*' (citizenship). If we take the figures on leadership discussed above (60.5 per cent of respondents in Venilale and 30.5 per cent in Dili) as having a citizenship dimension to them—as an indication of people's desire to participate in shaping the national leadership—then citizenship appears clearly as the major stated point of motivation for engaging in the electoral process, further validated in practice by the relatively high rates of voter participation.

The discourse of citizenship was discussed by various interviewees in terms of acting as a buttress against the attempts by local leaders to enforce voting for certain parties. One interviewee in Dili discussed how a *xefe suku* in her origin village encourages, or even orders, residents to vote in a particular way, to which she responds by saying '... it's the right of every citizen, up to them if they want to follow'.⁵⁶ Similarly, two interviewees in Venilale invoked a discourse of democratic rights to explain why, unlike some other families they knew of in their district, they believed that family members should not instruct each other how to vote. One explained: '... we don't want to teach our children [which party they should vote for], it's up to each of them to choose, if we teach them then that's wrong. We can't force anyone because that's against their human rights'.⁵⁷ The other clarified that the reason that support for political parties may differ within families is 'Because it's democracy. There's nobody who says "Ah, you have to choose this", nobody who forces. "I've entered this party, [now] you guys also have to". No. Now it's democracy. That's why you will determine your own fate'.⁵⁸

This emphasis on citizenship can be understood to a significant degree by the broader political context in Timor-Leste. Participants explained that in the immediate period of independence there had been great hope that citizens of Timor-Leste would be granted the opportunities for political freedom and improved living conditions that they had been denied under Portuguese colonisation and Indonesian occupation. Cognisant of the tokenism of elections held under Indonesian occupation, respondents valued highly the opportunity to vote in national elections in independent Timor-Leste, framing their accounts in the language of rights: 'And at the time of the first election, we wanted to determine our country, our country's future, that's why I wanted to cast my vote, because I have that right'.⁵⁹ Hence exercising one's right to vote served as both a way to have a say in the governance of Timor-Leste as well as being an opportunity to express nationalist sentiment, a theme that continued to surface in the interviews undertaken in 2007:

For me, the leaders we have now are not good enough, so I hope there is a change, and for that change, we have to elect someone else. There is always change. If the leader is not good, we have to take part in elections, maybe there is someone else who has good thinking, even if it's not good, we have to accept it. But my hope is that there is always change. That's all. Not for me, but for this country. Indonesia for 24 years smashed us every day, now we're independent but still [the same fate]. Who wants that? Nobody could want that continuously. There has to be positive change.⁶⁰

While some interviewees recounted long-held affiliation with certain political parties, other interviewees seemed less convinced of the merit of particular candidates or parties. Nonetheless, even these more disenchanted citizens saw value enough in the electoral process to participate in the act of voting, as demonstrated by the following:

[T]omorrow, I will make my decision at the last minute. That's because... all these parties have almost the same programs, there is not much difference. They promise things about housing, electricity, roads, they all talk about the same things but none of them talk about people's everyday lives in the *suku* or *aldeia*. They just talk about the electricity and roads, veterans and FALINTIL. So tomorrow when I go to the voting centre then I will decide who I vote for.⁶¹

56 Interview with D10, female NGO worker, Dili, 11 July 2007.

57 Interview with VN5, male *xefe aldeia*, Venilale, 18 July 2007.

58 Interview with VN3, male school principal, Venilale, 18 July 2007.

59 Interview with D10, female NGO worker, Dili, 11 July 2007.

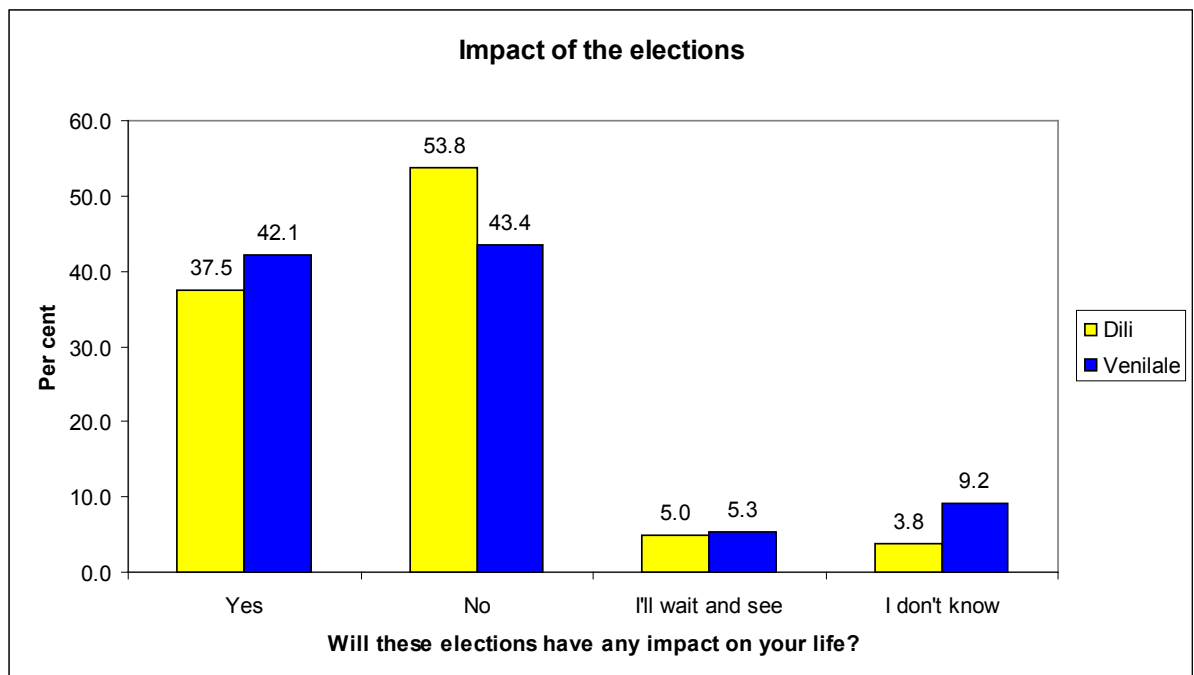
60 Interview with D3, self-employed male, Dili, 9 July 2007.

61 Interview with VN5, male *xefe aldeia*, Venilale, 18 July 2007.

This sense of still wanting to engage in the political system as a principle was a theme that was in evidence in a number of interviews, for instance where on reflecting how he came to a decision of who to vote for, one interviewee explained that ‘... for me what is most important is that I participated in the election’.⁶²

This desire for participation, framed largely around questions of citizenship, did not mean however that voters saw the state as unambiguously positive. Rather, people’s responses did on the one hand suggest that the emerging political system remained ambiguous in terms of its reach into daily lives (at least via elections), and yet paradoxically on the other the democratic system could also be seen as a source of division and instability. These points are explored briefly here in turn, however they—and the relationship between them—would require much more research in order to reach a proper understanding.

In terms of the first point—the impact of elections on people’s lives—survey findings revealed a sense of disconnect in the relevance of the 2007 national elections on voters’ lives. Just 37.5 per cent of people in Dili and 42.1 per cent of people in Venilale thought that the election in discussion would have an impact of any kind on their own lives. Slightly more respondents—53.8 per cent in Dili and 43.4 per cent in Venilale—thought that the elections would not have an impact, while a small percentage in each site—5.0 per cent in Dili and 5.3 per cent in Venilale—said they would ‘wait and see’, while the remaining 3.8 per cent of people in Dili and 9.2 per cent of people in Venilale said they did not know.⁶³



One of the striking points about this figure is that the elections were being held during a time of political upheaval in Timor-Leste which was to a significant extent informed by competition between different parties, and in turn the elections were treated as an important opportunity to restore the legitimacy of the state. One possible way of understanding this sense of disconnect is that political life in Timor-Leste remains very much grounded in the local. Hence while it was seen as important to engage in the elections in terms of an emerging principle of citizenship, it was recognised that the lack of infrastructure

62 Interview with D12, female secondary student, Dili, 9 July 2007.

63 Amongst those respondents who believed that the elections would impact on their lives, almost twice as many in Venilale than in Dili believed that the election would impact them positively (75.0 per cent compared to 36.7 per cent). In Dili 43.3 per cent of respondents believed that the elections would impact them negatively, and another 13.3 per cent thought there would be both positive and negative impacts. A small number—6.4 per cent—stated that they did not know whether the nature of the impact would be positive or negative. In contrast, in Venilale just 12.5 per cent of respondents believed that the elections would impact them negatively, 8.3 per cent thought there would be both positive and negative impacts, and 4.2 per cent did not know.



'Peace for the Election', Civic education poster calling for peace and stability, Dili, June 2007

meant that for many there were few ways in which the national political apparatus could conceivably effect day-to-day life. This was reflected in the following comments made by one interviewee who stated that interaction between *suku* leaders and communities, in rural areas at least, meant that *suku* level elections were more meaningful than national elections, as this man explained:

Yes because these elections are the ones the community like because they can see the candidates with their own eyes and see how they work with their own eyes. It's not the same as now like the Parliamentary elections, we only hear the peoples voices but we can't actually see how they work and what they do. How can we know what they do? So it's not the same, the national ones we don't see them but the *xefe suku* the population can vote for directly and they know how he works. This is a big impact.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Interview with VN5, male *xefe aldeia*, Venilale, 18 July 2007.

While questions on the impact of national elections did appear to be taken in terms of whether they would make a material difference to people's lives, in a different way (and in a sense paradoxically) the political system was seen as divisive and to some extent the source of instability. As discussed above in 'Campaigning', while in the 2001 elections there was a perception that FRETILIN was dominant in a field of only a few political parties, by 2007 there was a broader knowledge of different parties and through that a sense of increased competition. As one interviewee put it '... in 2001, all 13 districts had one objective: FRETILIN. In 2001 it was calmer, nobody was hitting each other, but in 2007 there were lots of disturbances. We ran to Metanaro'.⁶⁵ While for one interviewee, the increase in party competition was a positive indicator of the nation's developing democracy, 'now there are lots [of parties], so there's been a bit of progress'⁶⁶, others indicated that the competitiveness was a threat to national unity and development.⁶⁷ For instance, justifying his ongoing support for FRETILIN, which he saw as the nation's unifying historical party, one interviewee reported 'For me it's like this, to change a country or develop a country it has to be through unity, only then can you develop a country. But after they divide, what happens? Probably destruction, and killing is what happens'.⁶⁸

A sense that elections and party competition could cause division rather than national unity was similarly reflected in a discourse of 'winners' and 'losers'. One interviewee in Dili, commenting on people's fear of being stoned if they were to join in party campaigning activities, explained '... yes, they are also scared. It's as if one party loses and the other wins, so there is also this kind of contradiction present. The contradiction is always there'.⁶⁹ There was also a reported sense that elections bring the risk that the 'wrong' party will be brought to power, and that this bears responsibility back on voters:

... before there were only a few parties whereas now there are lots and they each come with their own program so people have to decide which one is the best. If we choose the wrong one then we have to put up with the consequences and in the future we will continue to suffer.⁷⁰

Another interviewee suggested that these consequences often fell on the general population, rather than the elected representatives themselves, asserting that 'It's the people who become the targets, not them. They have wings to fly, but pity the little people'.⁷¹

65 Interview with D6, female teacher, Dili, 10 July 2007.

66 Interview with D6, female teacher, Dili, 10 July 2007.

67 T. Hohe, 'Totem Polls', discusses the way in which electoral competition may seem adversarial to East Timorese due to the fact that local customary beliefs and processes of governance place high value on unity, balance, saving face, and more consensual-based (though one could argue, not universally participatory) modes of decision-making.

68 Interview with D8, male student, Dili, 12 July 2007.

69 Interview with D11, female student, Dili, 5 July 2007. Indeed, the announcement of the 2007 Parliamentary election results and appointment of Gusmão as Prime Minister was met with protests and violence, particularly in the Eastern districts but also in Dili. See A. McWilliam and A. Bexley, 'Performing Politics', p. 78.

70 Interview with VN5, male *xefe aldeia*, Venilale, 18 July 2007.

71 Interview with D8, male student, Dili, 12 July 2007.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Structured Interview Questions - Dili

Community Attitudes to the 2007 Democratic Elections in Timor-Leste

Structured Interviews – Dili

PERSONAL DETAILS

1. Where were you born?
2. Where do you live now?
3. How old are you?
4. Male or female?
5. Do you know how to read and write?
6. What do you do?

...Work

...At home

...Study

MEDIA UTILISATION

7. Do you watch television?
8. If you watch television, where do you watch it?
9. How often do you watch television?
10. Do you listen to the radio?
11. If you listen to the radio, where do you listen to it?
12. How often do you listen to the radio?
13. Do you read the newspaper?
14. If you read newspapers, where do you get them from?
15. How often do you read the newspaper?

... Never

...Sometimes

...Everyday

... Never

...Sometimes

...Everyday

... Never

...Sometimes

...Everyday

2007 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

16. Why did you want to vote in the first round Presidential election?
17. How did you make the decision about which candidate to choose?
18. When you chose a candidate, were you influenced at all by your family?
19. Did your family all vote for the same candidate?
20. Where did you get information about the Presidential candidates from?
21. Did you feel that you received enough information about the candidates?
22. If no, what sort of information would you have liked to have received?
23. Have you ever seen a candidate face-to-face (with your own eyes)?
24. If yes, please tell me about it.
25. Are you going to vote in the second round of Presidential elections?
26. If the candidate you choose loses, can you still trust the winner?
27. Can a woman be President?
28. In general, what is the President's work?
29. Do you think these Presidential elections will influence your life?
30. If you think the election will have an influence on your life, do you think it will be positive or negative?
31. Do you think the Presidential elections can resolve the crisis in Timor-Leste?

Appendix 2: Structured Interview Questions – Venilale

Community Attitudes to the 2007 Democratic Elections in Timor-Leste

Structured Interviews – Venilale

PERSONAL DETAILS

1. Where were you born?
 2. Where do you live now?
 3. How old are you?
 4. Male or female?
 5. Do you know how to read and write?
 6. What do you do?

....Work	...At home	...Study
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MEDIA UTILISATION

7. Do you watch television?
 8. If you watch television, where do you watch it?
 9. How often do you watch television?

... Never	...Sometimes	...Everyday
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 10. Do you listen to the radio?
 11. If you listen to the radio, where do you listen to it?
 12. How often do you listen to the radio?

... Never	...Sometimes	...Everyday
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 13. Do you read the newspaper?
 14. If you read newspapers, where do you get them from?
 15. How often do you read the newspaper?

... Never	...Sometimes	...Everyday
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2007 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

16. Do you intend to vote in the Parliamentary election?
17. Why/ why not?
18. Without telling me which party, can you tell me if you have decided which party you will vote for?
19. When did you decide which party to vote for?
20. Why do you want to vote for the party that you have selected?
21. Is your vote influenced by your family or not?
22. Do you think your family will vote the same way as you?
23. If the party you vote for loses, can you still trust the winner to govern well?
24. Have you obtained any information about the political parties?
25. From where did you obtain information about the political parties?
26. Did this information help you to decide your vote?
27. Do you feel that the information that you obtained was sufficient or not?
28. If you felt that the information was insufficient, what kind of extra information would you have liked?
29. Have you ever seen with your own eyes the leader of a political party?
30. If yes, can you tell me a little bit about that?

31. In your opinion, is the work of members of Parliament suitable for women?
32. Generally speaking, in your opinion, what is the role of the members of Parliament?
33. Until now, do you think the elections have had an impact on your community?
34. If yes, have they impacted on your community positively or negatively?
35. Do you think this Parliamentary election will have an impact on your life?
36. Will they impact you positively or negatively?
37. Do you think it is better that Timor-Leste has many political parties or just one?
38. Do you think these elections can help to resolve the current crisis in Timor-Leste or not?

Appendix 3: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Community Attitudes to the 2007 Democratic Elections in Timor-Leste

Semi-structured Interviews

GENERAL

Can you tell me where you are originally from? (i.e. where born/grew up, or district of ancestral heritage)

Where are you living now? (suku within either Dili or Venilale)

(If interviewee has moved from origin district, follow up with 'when did you move here and why?')

What are you doing now? (e.g. farmer; salaried work; studying; unemployed etc.)

ELECTIONS

Can you tell me about the first time that you voted?

Why did you vote then? What was the context? How did you feel?

Did you vote the same way in 2001 and 2007? If 'yes' why? If not, why not?

INFORMATION, FAMILIES, TRUST, INFLUENCE

How did you learn/know about the different parties and candidates in the elections?

Did anybody come to your area with information about the elections? (including STAE, CNE, NGOs, political parties).

Whose views do you most trust/respect about political matters?

If you talk about politics, who is it usually with?

Who talks about politics in your community?

Do you think the role of families is important in Timorese politics? If so, can you explain how?

Do you think that in most Timorese families, all the members tend to vote the same way?

If so, why do you think this is so?

Lots of people have told me their vote is not influenced by their families, but when I ask them whether their families voted the same way, they almost always say "yes!" How would you explain this? Can you help me to understand?

BEYOND THE FAMILY: ALDEIA, SUKU, SUB-DISTRICTS AND DISTRICTS

Did you vote in the xefe suku elections in 2005?

Which elections are more important for you: xefe suku or the national Parliamentary and Presidential elections?

Do people listen to the xefe suku's views on political parties?

Do people listen to the xefe aldeia's views on political parties? Are they often the same?

Why do you think different parties received more or less votes in specific districts?

In the Presidential elections, votes were counted at the polling station, but for the Parliamentary elections, they counted them at the district level. Why do you think the location of the counting was changed?

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