

Electoral violence in Timor-Leste: mapping incidents and responses

Timor-Leste has held six national elections since independence in 1999. Throughout this period the incidence and severity of electoral violence has varied considerably. For example, between May and August 2007 violence escalated during parliamentary elections in spite of a code of conduct committing political parties to nonviolence. Group clashes and widespread destruction of property were accompanied by at least two deaths and more than 100 injuries as well as the uprooting of 7,000 families. These events stand in stark contrast to presidential elections held just two months earlier, when there were no reported deaths, injuries, or population displacement.

This *Issue Brief* synthesizes current knowledge of electoral violence that took place between 1999 and 2007 and identifies practical entry points for violence prevention and reduction programming. It identifies the characteristics and dynamics of electoral violence while placing Timor-Leste's experience within a global context. It counsels against making rash or simplistic judgments about electoral violence and related prevention efforts. Indeed, a nuanced and evidence-based understanding of electoral violence in Timor-Leste is more critical than ever given the proximity of *suco* (village) elections in 2009.

Key findings include:

- Electoral violence is connected to historical and social factors such as the country's colonial past and its political institutions. The consequences of contemporary electoral violence can reproduce and intensify structural violence throughout the country.
- Electoral violence is not restricted to 'election day' but rather fluctuates before, during, and after the balloting process. Specifically, such violence occurs during elector registration, political campaigns, ballot counts, and while representation shifts in the wake of election results.

- Common patterns are associated with perpetrators of electoral violence, their motivations, and their impacts. In particular, political party leaders and their supporters are largely responsible for triggering violence, particularly during campaign events. Such violence appears to be instrumental and aimed at intimidating or swaying voters.
- Electoral violence can generate far-reaching effects extending beyond the violent victimization of individuals. For example, the 2007 parliamentary elections were accompanied by widespread property damage and displacement, despite the limited use of weapons.
- Various approaches have been shown to prevent and contain electoral violence by drawing on both public and private or civil society actors. For example, it is possible to embed violence prevention provisions into constitutional and legal frameworks; foster social cohesion; strengthen the administration, security oversight, and observation of elections; and establish mechanisms for electoral dispute resolution. The effectiveness of targeted interventions is enhanced when aligned with activities that address underlying social grievances and strengthen local prevention capacities.

Electoral violence in context

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) defines electoral violence as 'any act or threat of physical or psychological harm to a person or damage to property, directed at anyone directly involved in an electoral process (voter, candidate, party officer, election worker, election monitor, journalist, etc.), which may disrupt or attempt to disrupt any aspect of the electoral process (campaign, registration, voting, counting, etc.).'¹ The acts associated with electoral violence

include physical harm (e.g. homicide, sexual violence, torture, assault); threats (e.g. physical, verbal); intimidation; destruction of property (e.g. arson, damage from stones or sharp objects); and forced displacement.

In Timor-Leste as elsewhere, electoral violence can occur at various stages of the electoral process. This includes during voter registration, the campaign period, balloting activities (e.g. election day), the announcement of results, and the period of reallocation of representation based on election results.² An IFES-led assessment designed to monitor electoral violence in different regions of the world finds that violence most frequently occurs during campaigning, balloting activities, and the announcement of results.³ Even so, it is useful to recall that because electoral violence is often difficult to distinguish from other forms of political, social, and economic tensions, not all violence occurring during the election process is necessarily 'electoral violence'.

To separate election violence from other kinds of violence it is important to distinguish between different types of actors, motivations, and incident outcomes. Indeed, electoral violence may involve competitive relationships between or among three types of actors: political rivals (who dispute each other's claims), state actors (who defend election results to dissatisfied voters), and voters (who may claim elections were neither free nor fair). The IFES assessment finds that violence occurs most frequently between political rivals rather than between state actors and voters.⁴ The experiences of Timor-Leste are consistent with these results.

Some societies are more at risk of electoral violence than others.⁵ Specifically, elections in post-conflict environments have an increased vulnerability to violence, as well as certain *kinds* of violence—whether spontaneous or premeditated. The scope of the particular election—be it national or local—is also a

mediating factor. Likewise, the design of the electoral system or polling process and a host of other structural factors appear to influence the likelihood of violence onset. As will be discussed, uneven monitoring remains a significant hindrance to evaluating these factors. Nevertheless, all of them are relevant in the case of Timor-Leste.

Disaggregating electoral violence in Timor-Leste: 1999–2007

Since the landmark Popular Consultation in 1999, four national elections and one local election have been held in Timor-Leste.⁶ For each of these, international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and state observers have played monitoring roles. The sheer diversity and incompatibility of monitoring reports emerging from these processes prevent a meaningful comparative analysis. Nevertheless, certain similarities allow for some inferences to be made.

The 1999 Popular Consultation

While the Popular Consultation is distinct from subsequent elections in important ways, it offers an important point of departure for understanding electoral violence in the country. It was administered during a period of colonial occupation; its outcome was to determine whether the Timorese would be granted independence. At that time, independence was strongly opposed by the Indonesian authorities and the military forces overseeing election security, as well as by certain members of the Timorese elite. These pro-integration forces sought to ensure that the electorate would vote in favour of autonomy (and hence integration) rather than against it (and thus for independence).

In many ways, the violence accompanying the Popular Consultation was hardly surprising: it mirrored many of the dynamics of the 25-year resistance struggle. But unlike violence occurring during the resistance period, the atrocities of 1999 were highly visible to the world. More than 100 election observer groups were witness to violence before, during, and after the vote.⁷ Indeed, violence escalated during the registration period (26 July–8 August), continued through election day,⁸ and persisted well after the 4 September announcement of results—which revealed that the vast majority of voters rejected autonomy in favour of independence—and the flight and evacuation of Timorese and international observers.⁹ Findings from various monitoring reports and the Commission for Reception, Truth and

Reconciliation in East Timor (CAVR)¹⁰ document widespread threats and intimidation by Indonesian military and pro-integration militia during the voter registration and campaigning periods.¹¹

A number of monitoring reports and human rights investigations agree that three principal armed actors were responsible for triggering and sustaining the violence in 1999: district-based militias, the Indonesian military (TNI), and the mobile paramilitary police, Brimob. These groups mobilized and recruited others to commit acts of violence, perpetrated atrocities, and in the case of the police were routinely complicit in the violence. According to CAVR, violence was largely premeditated.¹²

The scale and severity of violence appears to have increased after election day. Roughly 60,000 people were displaced and extensive torture and other forms of physical harm¹³ were noted by several observer groups between the June arrival of the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) and the 30 August election; approximately 900 civilians were killed between election day and late October 1999, with 400,000 forcibly displaced by the pro-autonomy militia-led violence (including about 250,000 refugees in West Timor).¹⁴ Throughout the year, young women and girls suffered rape and sexual slavery, with sexual assault affecting both women and men.¹⁵ Property destruction was also extensive, with an estimated 80 per cent of infrastructure destroyed after the vote.

The 2001 Constituent Assembly election

Just two years after the Popular Consultation, Timorese civilians returned to the polls on 30 August 2001 to select the Constituent Assembly.¹⁶ Some 1,028 observers (including 750 nationals) monitored the election; a number of those groups had witnessed the 1999 election.¹⁷ Given the history of conflict and competition between political parties in 1975 and the traumatic violence of 1999, civilians were understandably worried.¹⁸ To allay these fears, security actors maintained a strong presence throughout the election and political parties signed a public Pact for National Unity.

Despite the efforts to enforce security, however, reports soon emerged concerning election-related intimidation and violence during the campaigning period (15 July–28 August).¹⁹ Monitors related that a group assaulted a man who had raised a question during a campaign event.²⁰ Monitors also raised red flags concerning the ‘Clean Sweep’ campaign of the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor

(FRETILIN), which was perceived by some as a form of intimidation owing to its parallels with Indonesian military slogans.²¹ Fears of violence following the release of results notwithstanding, there were no reported incidents, not even among parties dissatisfied with their percentage of seats. In fact, the end of the campaign, election day, and the post-election period were surprisingly calm.²²

It is important to recall that uneven monitoring can potentially mask certain types of violence. Specifically, a climate of fear in communities can reduce reporting rates. Likewise, despite their best intentions, monitoring groups charged with verifying fair elections may not be sensitized to account for violence and may lack the appropriate mechanisms to capture violent events. This may be especially true when violence and intimidation are the result of inter-personal actions rather than due to the influence of particular political parties. All reports of electoral violence invariably require careful interpretation.²³

The 2002 presidential election

The first presidential election was held on 14 April 2002 and was observed by 116 groups (78 Timorese), involving some 2,213 observers (1,817 Timorese), more than twice as many monitors as the August 2001 election.²⁴ As in previous elections, several groups actively monitored intimidation. Unlike the 2001 elections, however, monitoring reports did not detect any visible tensions between political parties during the 2002 election. This may be partly attributable to the cooperative nature of the campaign and the race’s focus on the presidential candidates rather than inter-party rivalries. Over the course of the election campaign, the two presidential candidates treated one another amicably and with respect. Most observer groups reported that the pre-election, election day, and post-election periods were largely incident-free.²⁵

The 2004–05 *suco* (village) elections

Between December 2004 and September 2005, *suco* elections were held. Voters in 442 *sucos* selected representatives for their respective villages and sub-villages (*aldeias*).²⁶ Voters also chose members for *suco* councils, a quasi-governmental structure established to coordinate local authorities and facilitate village-level development. Unlike previous elections, however, the polling process took place in distinct phases and lacked the systematic monitoring of international and national groups. In fact, there is comparatively little information on monitoring efforts or incidents of electoral violence.

Several reports by international agencies describe the election as successful and free of intimidation without elaborating the exact criteria for these judgments. But while visible violence may not have been monitored or reported, it is plausible that localized tensions and more subtle forms of intimidation occurred.²⁷ This can be attributed to the considerable authority wielded by leaders and political parties at the *suco* level. State and civil society actors often issue *suco* leaders with a critical role in mobilizing and sharing information with community members, including parties, which is beneficial for isolated areas. As a result, however, *suco* leaders are able to use their access to information and positions to exert control and advance their specific interests, including during elections.²⁸

The 2007 presidential election

The 2007 presidential elections should be studied in the context of the national crisis that began in late April 2006. Despite a year of relative calm, acute violence erupted during a demonstration by 592 ‘petitioners’ protesting their dismissal from (and discrimination within) the Timor-Leste Defence Force. The crisis reflected deep-seated grievances, including underlying political tensions between specific leaders and parties and weak state institutions, particularly the security and justice sectors. Key actors rapidly mobilized around regional and political identities, which intensified latent divisions within and between communities. The costs of the 2006 crisis incurred by Timorese society were considerable.²⁹ State entities, particularly the security sector, were torn apart and several ministers resigned, including the prime minister, in June 2006. Meanwhile, the establishment of an interim government was accompanied by the heavy presence and role of international police and security forces in the country.

The second presidential elections were held against a backdrop of persistent insecurity, widespread population displacement, and incidents of localized violence in Dili. More than 85 organizations (including 56 Timorese) involving more than 2,000 observers (at least 1,847 Timorese)³⁰ monitored the two rounds of elections, on 9 April and 9 May. Monitoring was not systematic, however, and many groups were not in place to observe the registration period (29 January–21 March). The elections were generally described as peaceful, despite some references to incidents of election-related intimidation, threats, and violence during the campaign period and on election day, such as the assault on a *Timor Post* journalist by political party supporters in Ermera.³¹



UN Police patrol in the street in Dili while FRETILIN supporters march during the last day of the parliamentary campaign, 27 June 2007.
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ZÉSOPOL C. CAMINHA

During the first round, the UN reported some 15 violent incidents out of a total of 128 campaign events.³² Likewise, the National Electoral Commission (CNE) received just five complaints of violence and intimidation.³³ Moreover, on election day, UN and monitoring group reports noted the general absence of violence. Even so, some voters interviewed by election monitors claimed to have witnessed acts of intimidation or threats, although the exact number of these incidents is unknown.³⁴ Monitoring groups also highlighted the involvement of martial arts groups in ‘door-to-door’ campaign activities³⁵ and the use of *livre acessu* (free access) passes at polls, both activities potentially intimidating or threatening to voters.³⁶ Such observations by monitors are important even if they are anecdotal.

Comparatively few incidents of electoral violence were reported during the second round of presidential run-offs. Remarkably, only one complaint (of intimidation) was submitted to the CNE. However, despite the limited reports of violence, monitoring groups continued to receive anecdotal reports of electoral violence.³⁷ For example, the observed threats and acts of intimidation between political party supporters included a group of youths seen shouting that they would burn the polling site if José Ramos-Horta did not win. In another case, monitors reported that an individual widely known to have committed acts of violence in 2006 intimidated election staff and observers at a polling site.³⁸ Both election rounds witnessed individuals and groups affiliated to political parties in actual or perceived incidents of electoral violence.

The 2007 parliamentary election

The 30 June 2007 parliamentary election registered a comparatively high incidence of violence. Elections were monitored by at least 77 groups (25 Timorese), which involved 2,750 observers (2,349 Timorese).³⁹ Despite numerous incidents reported before and after election day, monitoring groups declared the overall process ‘free and fair’. Similar to the 2001 election, some 14 political parties and coalitions signed a voluntary Code of Conduct and Political Party Accord committing to nonviolence. The election process and voter registration began on 21 May, with the campaign held from 28 May to 27 June. For the first time, the demographic and geographic features of electoral violence were specifically monitored through the Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) Project, composed of a national network of 35 civil society monitors (15 women and 20 men) who identified and verified 162 incidents of electoral violence.⁴⁰

Overall, the election period resulted in two deaths, nearly 100 injuries, the displacement of at least 7,000 families, and 62 reported incidents of destruction of personal property, including houses and vehicles.⁴¹ Victims were identified as political party supporters in 55 per cent of incidents and party leaders in 15 incidents, involving 10 political parties or coalitions. Violence was spread over a wide geographic area, with the highest number of incidents reported in Baucau (see Figure 1). More than half the incidents (92) occurred in public spaces such as the street or markets, with 45 incidents taking place in private homes and only five at electoral offices or voting centres. The majority of incidents (97) took place between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Figure 1
Number of violent incidents by district, 2007 parliamentary election

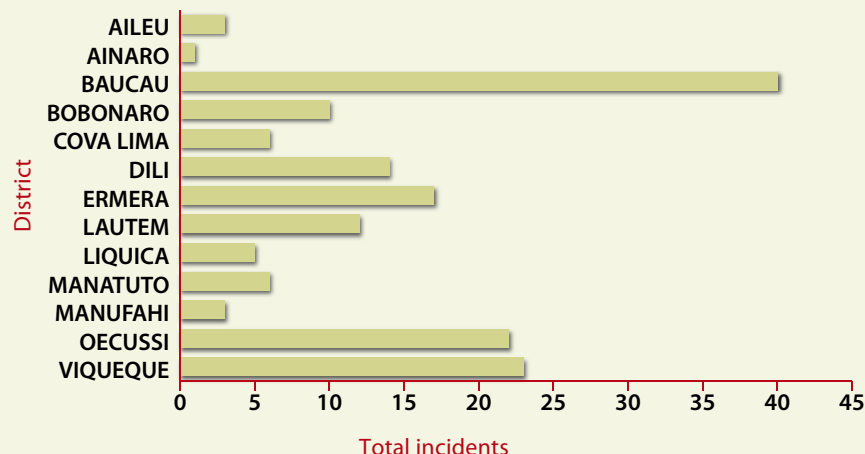


Figure 2
Number of election violence incidents by period, 2007 parliamentary election

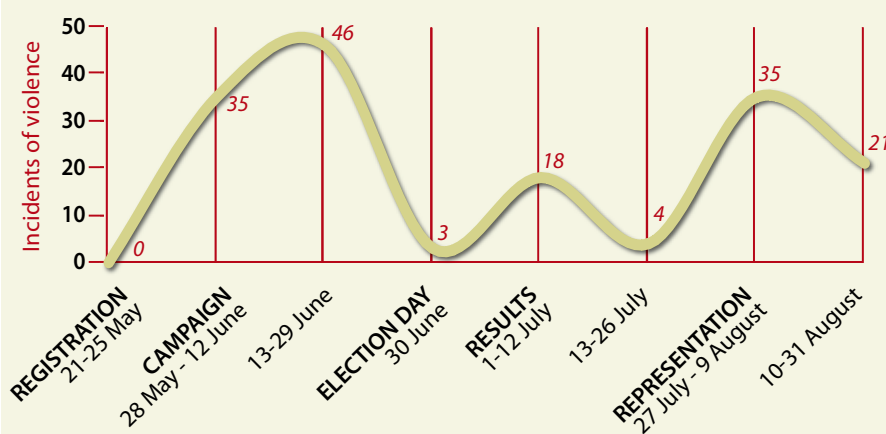
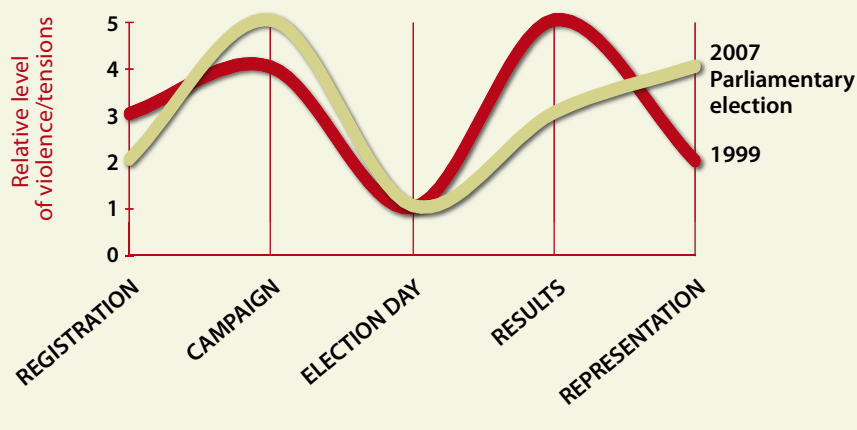


Figure 3
Patterns of election violence in Timor-Leste, 1999 and 2007



Note: For the two elections, each of the five election phases is ranked on a scale from 1 to 5 based on the level of violence in that phase relative to other phases, with 5 being the phase of highest violence levels and 1 being the lowest. Each ranking is used only once for the particular election to highlight relative violence patterns.

Though often hidden from the media headlines, property damage was the most common form of violence. It was documented in 56 per cent of reported incidents (91), followed by physical harm (60). Weapons, used in 50 per cent of reported incidents (81), included rocks or stones, fists or hands (54), and firearms (4). Groups, defined as collectives of more than one person, were perceived as perpetrators of most incidents (111), reported as male in 89 incidents, female in 1 incident, and both female and male in 18 incidents. Political party supporters were identified as perpetrators in 67 per cent of reported incidents, representing 8 of the 14 parties or coalitions. It is worth emphasizing that electoral violence spiked at the end of the campaign period and following the president's decision authorizing the Parliamentary Majority Alliance to form the government (see Figure 2). Ten incidents, the highest number reported on a single day, occurred on the final campaign day.⁴² While other monitoring groups note some aspects of the violence, such as the role of party supporters, only EVER verified incidents and had the mandate to monitor electoral violence across the election phases.⁴³

Comparing electoral violence in Timor-Leste to global trends

Although each election is unique, it is possible to make observations about the five election phases described above. Given the availability of data on electoral violence from 1999 and 2007, a 'violence trajectory' can be developed for Timor-Leste by ranking the relative levels of violence across the five election phases (see Figure 3). Of course, the particular nature of the election and local conflict dynamics should also be considered when comparing electoral violence across countries or even elections within a particular country over time.

The timing of electoral violence between 1999 and 2007 can also be compared to global patterns of violence during campaign, balloting, and counting phases, for which available research indicates specific risks of violence, although there is no global dataset of electoral violence.⁴⁴ Despite limited data, a comparison of global patterns with monitoring reports from Timorese elections reveals that the campaign period and the counting phase are generally characterized by higher levels of reported violence; in contrast, election day usually experiences low levels of reported violence. In the future, standardization and broader violence tracking, with explicit violence monitoring by observers throughout

the election process, may improve our understanding of election violence patterns. Such improvements would allow for more detailed analysis of the nature of electoral violence in Timor-Leste around factors such as violence levels, geography, methods of violence, gender, and age; ideally, the results would serve to inform enhanced violence prevention and mitigation measures.

It is useful to examine trends in electoral violence for a number of reasons. Information on patterns of electoral violence may clarify the link between forms of general violence and those during election processes, both of which hinder post-conflict efforts to restore stability and promote reconstruction. More immediately, however, predicting violence can facilitate planning for violence prevention and mitigation activities. For example, preparing and responding to an escalation in violence during the campaign and results phases may be more effective than the frequent emphasis on security measures around election day alone. Although the campaign period and election day were covered in the UN's phased security plan with risk assessments and increased police presence during the 2007 presidential elections, the strategy did not address potential violence around the election results. It may also be possible to establish more systematic community violence monitoring mechanisms and to develop local security plans to prevent and reduce the risk of triggering events, especially by working with civil society organizations and making use of their structures.

Identifying patterns of electoral violence

Inherent limitations in data quality and availability notwithstanding, it is possible to make some general observations about electoral violence in Timor-Leste. This section considers the general timing and types of violence, the actors involved, their motivations, and the likely effects. Anticipating and preparing for these factors can inform appropriate prevention and response policies and activities.

Timing. Across all elections, the campaigning period is closely linked with progressive increases in election-related violence. This includes heightened tension between various actors, especially political rivals. What is more, the end of a given campaign registers an even higher potential for the escalation of violence (as in 1999 and 2007). Election day, however, has been relatively calm in all elections. This may reflect the intensified security presence and planning around voting and vested

political party interest in election outcomes. Likewise, the announcement of results is typically—but not always—calm, as is the reallocation of political representation based on election results.

Types of violence. Common types of electoral violence have been reported since 1999. These include killings, physical assault, intimidation, threats, arson, and destruction of property. The use of arson to destroy private and public property in 1999 and again after the 2007 parliamentary election reflects the volatility of electoral violence in post-conflict states, where entrenched conflict dynamics can simmer and flare up. On the other hand, systematic physical violence such as sexual violence, torture, and strategic displacement⁴⁵ were generally limited to 1999, and group clashes and assaults were more common during 2007.

Perpetrators. Political party supporters, and to some extent their leaders, were frequently identified as the primary instigators of electoral violence, with the exception of 1999. Party supporters targeted their political rivals rather than the state or party leaders, especially during campaign events. Although there are no known reports of political leaders condoning or encouraging violence among their supporters, verbal attacks and inflammatory language used by political leaders against rival candidates are influential on supporters.⁴⁶ The role of security actors and informal groups affecting security—such as martial arts groups and 'gangs'⁴⁷—is also less documented, although they are equally relevant actors.

Impact and motivations. While death, injury, displacement, and property damage are the most obvious effects of electoral violence, the most widespread impact arguably relates to increased fear and heightened perceptions of insecurity among civilians. But if targeted violence was intended to deter voters or sway their position, it appears to have had only a limited effect. Voter turnout has remained exceptionally high (from 98 per cent in 1999 to 81 per cent in 2007). Owing to the limited incident verification mechanisms, however, it is difficult to know to what extent intimidation is connected to political decisions and party strategies.⁴⁸ Without deeper examination, it is similarly difficult to assess the extent to which disputes between political rivals before and after campaign events are directed by political leaders.⁴⁹

It is important to note that there is also a significant relationship between electoral violence and non-political conflicts and interpersonal grievances as identified by the UN Civilian Police in 2001⁵⁰ and EVER

monitors in 2007. Although these linkages are not always apparent, there are mutually reinforcing effects of structural conflict dynamics and electoral violence that create a cyclical and negative impact on relationships between actors. For instance, the 2006 crisis involved individual grievances harboured since 1999, if not earlier, and it is likely that tensions formed or exacerbated in 2006 contributed to perceived or actual incidents of violence in 2007. In a post-conflict state such as Timor-Leste, electoral violence has a greater capacity to destabilize communities and resurface if the root causes of tensions are not addressed.

Triggers. Catalysts for sudden outbreaks of violence exist in all election phases, although there are fewer trigger events during the registration period. The campaign period, however, appears to feature more triggers, including political rallies and activities towards the end of the campaign. Voting generally proceeds without much violence, although dissatisfaction at polling sites has catalyzed a few incidents of violence.⁵¹ Whereas the declaration of results was calm across most elections, the announcement is nevertheless a potential catalyst for violence when there is keen interest by particular actors in the results and where the outcome is not clear before the ballot, as in 1999. Similarly, the power redistribution and changes in political representation only triggered violence in 2007, when the election results alone did not determine the shift in power and representation.⁵² The complacency of security bodies (as in 1999) or limited response preparedness and capacity of security structures (as in 2007) are also factors that facilitate electoral violence and highlight the young nation's vulnerability to violence.

Interventions to address electoral violence

State, civil society, and international actors have adopted a variety of measures to prevent electoral violence in Timor-Leste since 1999. State and civil society actors are primarily responsible for these efforts, with international actors offering financing and technical support. These interventions can be subdivided into six distinct categories: constitutional and legal frameworks, fostering social cohesion, election administration, election security, election observation, and electoral dispute resolution.⁵³ Table 1 summarizes the range of selected initiatives undertaken in Timor-Leste.

Table 1 Selection of electoral violence prevention measures

| Category | Efforts to prevent and mitigate electoral violence (1999–2007) |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Constitutional and legal frameworks | <p>April 1999: Agreement by TNI, Falintil (then FRETILIN's military wing), and pro-integration leaders to cease violence, disarm, and give weapons to Indonesian police.</p> <p>July 2001: Political party registration and signing of the Pact for National Unity committing to nonviolence.</p> <p>2007: Creation of codes of conduct for political parties, observers, media; parties sign code of conduct and Political Party Accord to condemn violence.</p> |
| Fostering social cohesion | <p>1999–2001: Increase in civic education efforts involving civil society organizations and broadening of timeframes to cover pre- and post-election periods.</p> <p>1999: Church-organized procession in Dili before polling to pray for peace and reconciliation; Bishop Belo initiative in Suai mediates between conflicting parties.</p> <p>August 2001: Meeting between Ramos-Horta, village leaders, and civilians in Boramatan (Viqueque) to promote peaceful elections.</p> <p>April 2002: Presidential candidates vote together, affirming their agreement to conduct a respectful campaign.</p> <p>June 2007: At one campaign event, the Partidu Republikanu president tells the audience not to commit acts of violence.</p> |
| Election administration | <p>August 1999: Mixing of ballots and tabulation at UNAMET headquarters in Dili to prevent retaliatory violence.</p> <p>August 2001: Secured transportation of ballot boxes to district centres for tabulation.</p> <p>December 2004–September 2005: <i>Suco</i> elections conducted in phases with cooperation between the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration, national police (PNTL), and local authorities.</p> <p>June 2007: Tabulation and reporting of results shift to the district level to reduce potential for politically motivated community violence.</p> |
| Election security | <p>1999–2007: Pre-polling silence days (no campaign activities immediately preceding election day).</p> <p>1999: UNAMET Civilian Police (CIVPOL) placed at each polling station.</p> <p>2001: Oecusse monitoring groups; the Independent Electoral Commission, peacekeeping force, and CIVPOL of the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET); and party representatives and local leaders meet weekly to discuss and address electoral abuses, with meeting notes publicized locally.</p> <p>2002: PNTL coordinates with UN police (UNPol) and CIVPOL to provide security at polling stations.</p> <p>April 2007: UNPol provides security for all presidential candidates given violence and security concerns.</p> <p>June 2007: PNTL–UNPol coordinate security plans developed for high-risk areas.</p> |
| Election observation | <p>July 1999: Long-term and short-term observers present from registration until one month after election day.</p> <p>2001: Participation of national groups and networks in election monitoring.</p> <p>2007: Formation of Coalition for Monitoring the General Elections (KOME) for national election observers.</p> <p>May 2007: EVER violence monitoring, reporting, and support for conflict prevention initiatives with civil society actors.</p> |
| Electoral dispute resolution | <p>September 1999: Public hearings held on alleged electoral violations by an independent UN Electoral Commission.</p> <p>July 2001: Media Mediation Panel established for complaints on fairness of UNTAET media coverage of the election.</p> <p>April 2007: Enactment of procedural legislation on complaints and release of complaints filed at CNE (by category).</p> |

Electoral violence prevention in Timor-Leste faces many challenges. Lingering political disagreements have delayed the articulation of a legal framework to regulate electoral processes and efforts to bolster social cohesion. Symbolic public displays of cooperation by political elites are often contradicted by inflammatory and provocative statements from party leaders. Institutionally, the CNE and other electoral dispute mechanisms formalized

in April 2007 remain relatively new and untested. Ensuring clarity over the legal framework and institutional roles governing electoral processes is critical. This could be facilitated through longer-term and more targeted civic education and information campaigns, allowing sufficient time for this information to spread and increase public awareness prior to the start of elections and through the announcements of results.⁵⁴

Capacities do exist for electoral violence mitigation. For example, increased emphasis among security actors to anticipate and monitor electoral violence has facilitated rapid response and intervention. To be most effective in the Timor-Leste context, however, the timeframe for implementing security strategies needs to be extended to cover all electoral phases—from the registration process through the announcement of results and redistribution of power. Administrative measures such as coordinated campaign processes and mixed ballot tabulations have also helped to reduce community vulnerability to retaliatory electoral violence and could be usefully developed further. Meanwhile, the increased observation and presence of community-based monitors during the various election phases (together with public reporting) may have successfully deterred political rivals from engaging in violent acts during campaign rallies or other election events.

The raising of awareness about issues at public meetings and forums—including the EVER-supported peace initiatives—can strengthen dialogue and reinforce local capacities. These efforts may be complemented by *suco* councils or other local leaders through actions promoting peace and nonviolence, including customary agreements committing signatories to nonviolence or ceremonies to reduce tensions and emphasize community unity. Media efforts are also critical to diffuse tensions; they may offer a constructive outlet for exchanging opinions and voicing concerns. To ensure the effectiveness of efforts to prevent and mitigate violence, it is critical to engage women and men equally in all these activities.

Ultimately, the most effective way of reducing and preventing electoral violence will require long-term efforts combining state and non-state resources to address individual and community-level grievances and to diminish the incentives for actors to perpetrate acts of violence. These efforts may be most successful when they invite collaboration between actors and strengthen local conflict prevention capacities. They will also need to recognize and disrupt the intricate linkages between electoral violence and broader underlying conflict dynamics. The upcoming *suco* elections, scheduled for mid- to late-2009, are an opportunity to apply the lessons learned from past elections with consideration of the trends identified in this analysis. The period ahead of the election will be critical in ensuring a peaceful election processes and political outcome.

Notes

This *Issue Brief* is based on research by Sunita Vyavaharkar, who has worked through Columbia University's Center for International Conflict Resolution to support conflict-sensitive development efforts with Timorese civil society organizations since 2002 and directly with BELUN, a Timorese NGO, since its establishment in 2004.

- 1 IFES's definition of election violence is articulated in its Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) Project. See <<http://ever.r.ifes.org/about-terms.html>>.
- 2 Fischer (2002, p. 9).
- 3 The EVER programme was developed by IFES to monitor and report on election violence with the goal of preventing and reducing violence. For more information on the initiative in Timor-Leste, see BELUN and IFES (2007).
- 4 EVER (n.d.a.).
- 5 Dunne (2006).
- 6 This section is based on monitoring reports, media releases, and other related documents available electronically. The findings may not reflect all types of incidents.
- 7 For an example of violence monitoring methodology, see Carter Center (2000, p. 25).
- 8 See ANFREL (2000, p. 67).
- 9 See ANFREL (2000, p. 33).
- 10 The CAVR database of human rights violations covers 1975–99, although it does not separate the 1999 violence data into different periods. For 1999, the records reveal that an estimated 2,634 people were killed and that 12,634 non-fatal violations (21 per cent of total non-fatal violations documented since 1975) were committed (CAVR, 2005, pp. 3, 23).
- 11 See ANFREL (2000, p. 37); Carter Center (2000, p. 9).
- 12 For more on evidence of premeditated violence in 1999, see Robinson (2005).
- 13 CAVR recorded 4,324 acts of torture and ill-treatment and 2,779 acts of arbitrary detention throughout 1999 (mostly affecting men).
- 14 See Martin (2001, p. 57), cited in Robinson (2005, pp. 45, 46–47).
- 15 At least 182 such cases were identified in 1999, including rape, attempted rape, and sexual assault, although many more incidents probably went unrecorded. See Robinson (2005, p. 41).
- 16 The elections determined the composition of the 88-person body (23 women) mandated to draft and adopt the constitution for Timor-Leste. For background on the elections, see Carter Center (2004).
- 17 See EUEOM (2001, p. 29).
- 18 See NDI (2001, p. vi).
- 19 See EUEOM (2001, p. 60).
- 20 See Osaka East Timor Association (2001).
- 21 Televised coverage of the accusation subsequently prompted FRETILIN's leadership to explain the party's intention to make a 'clean' departure from Timor's violent history. For a description of *Operasi Pembersihan* (Operation 'Clean Sweep'), see Robinson (2005, p. 72). See also EUEOM (2001, p. 24); Independent Media Mediation Panel (2001, p. 4); Carter Center (2004, p. 15); and Kang and Phasuk (2002, p. 33).
- 22 Reports reviewed include Carter Center (2004); Domestic Electoral Monitoring Organization (2001); EUEOM (2001); van Binsbergen (2001); IFET (2001); Oxfam International (2001); Osaka East Timor Association (2001); and UNTAET (2001a; 2001b).
- 23 See Kang and Phasuk (2002, p. 31).
- 24 See EUEOM (2002, p. 9).
- 25 Reports reviewed include Kang and Phasuk (2002); Carter Center (2002); EUEOM (2002);

IFET (2002); Independent Election Observer Groups of East Timor (2002); and NDI (2002).

- 26 Each *sucu* is composed of a varying number of *aldeias*; cumulatively, there are 2,228 *aldeias*.
- 27 See RDTL (2005); UNSC (2005a; 2005b); USAID Timor-Leste (2005); World Bank Group (2006, p. 14).
- 28 The Carter Center noted concern by some parties that intimidation would occur 'below the radar' of police and UN authorities (Carter Center, 2004, p. 34).
- 29 At least 37 people were reportedly violently killed and some 150,000 people displaced. Dili also experienced widespread property damage. See SOMET (2007c, p. 4).
- 30 See UNDP (2007a).
- 31 See EUEOM (2007, p. 30).
- 32 See UNMIT (2007a).
- 33 Complaint data is cited in EUEOM (2007, p. 56).
- 34 See SOMET (2007a, p. 5).
- 35 See EUEOM (2007, p. 24) and UNMIT (2007b, p. 13).
- 36 See SOMET (2007b, p. 6).
- 37 For a list of reports from the various monitoring bodies (including NDI, ANFREL, and SOMET), see ETAN (2007) and ETAN Resources on Past Timor Elections (n.d.a).
- 38 See SOMET (2007b, p. 9).
- 39 See UNDP (2007b).
- 40 For more information on the initiative in Timor-Leste, see BELUN and IFES (2007).
- 41 See BELUN and IFES (2007, p. 8).
- 42 Though the registration period is included in the analysis presented here, no data is available for this period since the EVER initiative only began monitoring on 28 May, three days after the close of the registration period.
- 43 Other reports that cite electoral violence include: Carter Center (2007), EUEOM (2007), ICG (2007), SOMET (2007c), and UN Independent Electoral Certification Team (2007).
- 44 See Fischer (2002) and Sisk (2007).
- 45 Unlike in 1999, the internal displacement of families in August 2007 targeted a specific community in Viqueque and is therefore not considered widespread.
- 46 For example, after public accusations between presidential candidates in 2007, CNE requested that candidates 'refrain from personal insults' (NDI, 2007c, p. 2).
- 47 For a detailed analysis of the role of gangs in Timor-Leste, see TLAVA *Issue Brief 2*.
- 48 For more on this point, see Carter Center (2004, p. 34).
- 49 The temporal distribution of some pre- and post-balloting violence may reflect the intention of actors to influence results as opposed to disrupting the election process.
- 50 See EUEOM (2001, p. 24).
- 51 Examples of violence in the 2007 parliamentary election are found in SOMET (2007c, p. 14).
- 52 These triggers suggest that individual actors and groups may employ violence when events affect their personal or political interests and when they are able to act without fear of punishment. Perceived violation of rights in polling incidents and perceptions of injustice are particularly relevant given the country's history.
- 53 The analytical framework presented and applied in this section is based on Sisk (2007, p. 17).
- 54 For example, see the Judicial System Monitoring Programme's report on CNE's Electoral Dispute Mechanism in Maia, Leffler, and Marriott (2007).

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- Number 1, October 2008
Dealing with the kilat: an historical overview of small arms availability and arms control in Timor-Leste
- Number 2, April 2009
Groups, gangs, and armed violence in Timor-Leste

TLAVA project summary

The Timor-Leste Armed Violence Assessment (TLAVA) is an independent research project overseen by Austcare and the Small Arms Survey. Designed in consultation with public and non-governmental partners, the project seeks to identify and disseminate concrete entry points to prevent and reduce real and perceived armed violence in Timor-Leste. The project functions as a Dili-based repository of international and domestic data on violence trends. From 2008 to 2010, the TLAVA is to serve as a clearing house for information and analysis with specific focus on:

- the risk factors, impacts, and socioeconomic costs of armed violence in relation to population health—particularly women, children and male youth, and internally displaced people;
- the dynamics of armed violence associated with 'high-risk' groups such as gangs, specific communities in affected districts, petitioners, veterans, state institutions, and potential triggers such as elections; and
- the availability and misuse of arms (e.g. bladed, homemade, or 'craft' manufactured) as a factor contributing to armed violence and routine insecurity.

The project's objective is to provide valid evidence-based policy options to reduce armed violence for the Timorese government, civil society, and their partners. The project draws on a combination of methods—from public health surveillance to focus group and interview-based research—to identify appropriate priorities and practical strategies. Findings are released in Tetum, Bahasa, Portuguese, and English. TLAVA Issue Briefs provide timely reports on important aspects of armed violence in Timor-Leste, including the availability and distribution of small arms and craft weapons and election-related violence.



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Editorial support: Emile LeBrun and Robert Muggah

Contact

For more information, visit www.timor-leste-violence.org or contact info@timor-leste-violence.org

