



PEOPLE'S PEACEMAKING PERSPECTIVES

FEBRUARY 2012

Timor-Leste

TIMOR-LESTE WILL GO TO THE POLLS IN SPRING THIS YEAR for presidential and parliamentary elections, the third national elections since the country gained independence in 2002. The elections will be a significant test for this young country, which has made notable progress in statebuilding over the past ten years; the political situation is fragile but stable. However, there are fears that the elections may ignite instability or violence based on recent history and a number of underlying weaknesses and tensions within Timor-Leste. These include capacity challenges in the security and justice sectors and limited local conflict transformation capacities, within a context of high levels of poverty, unemployment (particularly among young people), limited basic service provision, regular displacement and the potential for propagation of misinformation and rumour.

Efforts to prevent electoral violence are complicated by many Timorese having multiple affiliations and identities. Groups formed during the Indonesian occupation to oppose or support it have since morphed into other political affiliations and martial art groups (MAGs), who can play positive roles in the community but can also be involved in violence. Political divisions between key political players developed during the resistance movement (1975–1999) endure and have been instrumental in triggering and exacerbating episodes of violence over the last decade. Moreover, there is a tendency to respond with violence rather than dialogue when resolving conflict, particularly among the youth.

This Policy Brief is based on consultations with a wide range of local actors in Timor-Leste and desk research. Communities desire peace, a sentiment echoed, at least in rhetoric, by the political elite. Of prime concern is whether levels of political manipulation, as seen in recent years, will happen and whether youths, MAGs and other groups are mobilised around the elections. If this occurs, the prevention of an escalation from localised to nationwide violence will be contingent on the response of the police, the conduct of national political leaders and the capacity of established mechanisms for conflict resolution.

The European Union (EU) and its Member States have a key role to play in supporting and influencing the conduct of peaceful elections and wider democratic processes in Timor-Leste. Through sensitive political dialogue and financial instruments the EU can help promote the political maturity in democratic processes that Timorese citizens expressed as lacking. The EU can also work to engage and build the capacity of youth as agents of peace and encourage an environment conducive to the completion of peaceful elections.

KEY OUTCOMES

- **Efforts to engage political actors and other key stakeholders in a constructive role in the election process are needed** to counter the dominance of divisive rhetoric in national politics, particularly during elections.
- **Initiatives that seek to raise public awareness of the electoral system and related laws and to address misinformation and rumour are crucial.** Specific focus should be on raising awareness of the electoral process.
- **Engaging youth and members of MAGs in peaceful processes around the elections and wider democratic processes is vital** in order to prevent them being drawn into and manipulated for political violence.
- **In addition to immediate measures to prevent election violence, longer term interventions are required** to support the implementation of the rule of law and develop community level conflict prevention and response mechanisms that are locally owned and led.

The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project

The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project is a joint initiative implemented by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld and financed under the European Commission's Instrument for Stability. The project provides European Union institutions with analysis and recommendations based on the opinions and experiences of local people in a range of countries and regions affected by fragility and violent conflict.

"We need the leaders to be responsible; to have political maturity. not political arrogance."

Martial arts groups leader

Findings and Recommendations

1.

Efforts to engage political actors and other key stakeholders in a constructive and positive role in the election process are needed to counter the dominance of divisive rhetoric in national politics, particularly during elections.

"If we would like the 2012 elections to contribute to peace then the entire people, the government leaders, and the party leaders must walk hand in hand to create stability and to prevent conflict and violence at both the community and national level. I think the political leaders should unite and put the national interest ahead of personal or group interest."

Young man, Covalima district

In the context of the 2012 elections the likelihood of conflict and violence is seen by community members to be heavily dependent on the way in which the political parties contest the election during the campaign period and arrive at a political settlement after the results are announced. In order for the elections to proceed peacefully it will be necessary for political preparations to be conducted in a co-ordinated manner bringing all political actors into the process and maximising inclusivity. Political actors have a crucial role to play in setting the tone and temperament of the elections and must be committed to ensuring not only that they pass without violence, but that they provide an example of how peaceful elections can be managed.

Key to enabling this is the development of local leaders' (village chiefs') capacity to engage with the electoral process and to play a lead role in the management of conflict at the local level.

"I think that the national government should build the capacity of the local leaders so that they will have the knowledge and ability to prevent conflict and violence within the community. Provide support and motivation to the local leaders to strengthen unity in the district level up to the village level."

Young man, Covalima district

Further initiatives to complement ongoing activities in this area are a priority for communities and should have a specific focus on enhancing Timor-Leste's election planning, management and implementation capability; this is particularly important given both Timor-Leste's relative inexperience in elections and its proclivity for violence triggered by large, national-level events.

"The international community need to support our government especially [in the] capacity of STAE [Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration], for the officers of STAE to know their role in the election process ... based on the experience of the last election in 2007, some of the [village] chiefs did not know about their role which was a problem. We need to strengthen them for this process and [provide] logistical support for the election."

Government Advisor on Civil Society, Dili

Various Timorese institutions would benefit from additional training, particularly the electoral bodies, STAE and the National Electoral Commission (CNE) who, despite engaging in election preparation, face some difficulties in gathering enough evidence on electoral violations to ensure accountability. The CNE in particular lacks authority in turn restricting its role:

"We have an electoral law but I think no energy, no fusion of power inside there. You just have that law but CNE have no authority because of the [weak electoral] law and political interference through law... [People] do whatever they want. They never co-operate with us."

CNE Commissioner, Dili

The 2012 elections represent a test for the institutions of the state, particularly the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL)

who are policing their first election, and civil society who are significantly involved in conflict management. This is accepted by many in the communities and by government officials themselves who recognise the need to prove to regional and international observers that Timorese political and state institutions are committed to working within the democratic processes of the new state.

"They [the international community] have to monitor the election to make sure there is no manipulation during the election."

MAG Leader, Dili

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support the Government in implementing the election codes of conduct and in broadening understanding of election-related laws, including through a high-level dialogue such as the Maubisse Forum involving all political parties and major associations/organisations that may play a role in the elections.
- Build the capacity of local leaders to support the election process in communities through targeted training on the positive role they can legitimately play, including their inclusion in the development of security planning.
- Provide additional resources to STAE and CNE in order to facilitate an extension of their training programme on electoral laws and processes from the sub-district level to the community level (*suco* and *aldeia*). Maximise opportunities for civil society collaboration in these initiatives to ensure comprehensive coverage across all districts.
- In addition to deploying a robust EU observer mission, provide long-term support to national observer missions beginning prior to the onset of electoral campaigning and finishing after the establishment of a government and an appropriate 'bedding-in' period.

2.

Initiatives that seek to raise public awareness of the electoral system and related laws and to address misinformation and rumour are crucial.

Specific focus should be on raising awareness of the electoral process.

"The majority of the population's education level is low, especially in understanding laws. They need to learn to follow the legal system. Access to information is crucial, constitutional laws – especially land and election laws – need socialisation."

Government official working in conflict prevention, Dili

Lack of access to accurate information and rumour is often an exacerbating factor in the emergence of conflict and violence in Timor-Leste today and has been cited as an important challenge throughout recent history. For conflict prevention initiatives to be successful therefore, a process of awareness-raising about relevant electoral processes, as well as the provision of civic education, are critical elements that will go a long way in assisting communities on how to respond to local challenges, such as struggles over access to resources and influence.

To minimise the risk of electoral violence, such strategies should be based on information pertaining to the relevant laws guiding the process, particularly those relevant to conducive campaigning practices and legislation determining the formation of a new government once results have been announced.

"The political party leaders, local leaders and community leaders need to remind the public of the importance of living in a democratic nation [through] dissemination and implementation of the law."

Woman in FGD, Ainaro district

Those consulted through the research highlighted the extent to which the lack of accurate information and rumour has enabled and aggravated conflict. This could be rumour around the origin of a dispute, misinformation about security in



A Timorese man casts his vote at the Second National Village Council (*sucos*) elections of 9 October 2009 while an election worker looks on. © UN PHOTO/MARTINE PERRET

an area, and lack of information about the law. It was claimed that the media have contributed to this problem. The deficit of reliable information permits an environment where multiple competing claims for power, political or otherwise, can influence and divide public opinion.

The violence that tarnished the 2007 elections had its roots in the lack of accurate information regarding the electoral process, in particular the rules guiding the formation of government – for example, in 2007, the party that won most of the popular vote did not form the government resulting in confusion over the legality of the new coalition – and points to the need for a significant prioritisation of this area in a rigorous and targeted manner. The importance of this for the 2012 elections was strongly emphasised by community members who expressed both a fear of political manipulation and a lack of understanding of electoral-related laws and the responsibilities of state institutions in relation to the elections in equal measure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support the government to increase awareness regarding the specifics of the election process, including at the community (*suco* and *aldeia*) level.
- Build the technical capacity of national media to provide accurate, balanced coverage of the election process through the delivery of media training that expands analytical and output capacity as well as conflict sensitivity principles.
- Promote and support open communication channels between political parties, media and communities, including raising awareness of the official complaints mechanism, to enable the on-going dissemination of accurate information throughout the entire election process.
- Press for the full implementation of Timorese law regarding the mandate of each security agency during elections. Support awareness raising on security agency mandates, ensuring this is fully understood by the agencies themselves, and by the political parties and the communities.

3.

Engaging youth and members of MAGs in peaceful processes around the elections and wider democratic processes is vital in order to prevent them being drawn into and manipulated for political violence.

"...broken promises [by political leaders] have heated the blood of the youth. As a result, we now see fights all the time everywhere between our own youth. We forgot to give back what we have taken away, and our youth now have to pay the price. The killings won't stop until we fulfil the promise we have made."

Male member of the Muslim minority, Baucau district

The issue of children, youths, MAGs and other semi-political groupings and affiliations, who have been used as proxies in past conflicts, was raised by all respondents in the study. Young people in Timor-Leste have been witness to episodes of significant violence in recent years which has led to trauma and reinforced the meeting of force with force. In addition, today's youth have limited livelihood opportunities which can result in apathy and lack of engagement with their community, thus making them more susceptible to political manipulation.

"Many times conflict happens because the youth ... are frustrated. Frustration is the cause of conflict so in order to minimise the risk of conflict the government has to create or generate more jobs or adequate jobs for youth so that [they] will be able to have something."

Local political co-ordinator, Covalima district

In order to overcome these challenges it is necessary to actively engage youth, MAGs and other groups within the community and encourage bodies associated with youth such as the umbrella organisation representing the MAGs, the Federation of Traditional Self-Defence Arts in Timor-Leste (FESTIL), and the National Youth Council in Timor-Leste (CNJTL) to emphasise the positive role youth can play in generating a peaceful atmosphere. This was seen as

crucial to develop a sense of community unity prior to the elections.

"The community must stand ready to participate in creating a conducive environment ahead of the forthcoming general election."

Man, Ainaro district

Respondents also linked the development of such an environment to the way in which their communities are policed, with a clear distinction between communities in which the police work with community leaders, mutually share information and are seen on a regular basis and those which do not.

"[The police] have good intentions, and also they are very close to the community in terms of attending to problems in the community because they ... don't want civil conflict to occur."

Local Journalist, Ainaro district

Where communities enjoy a reciprocal and sustained relationship with the PNTL, who in turn co-operate with local leaders, the environment was very peaceful. However, in some locations there is still a lack of confidence in working with the police, particularly on the part of the youth.

"The sort of difficulties facing the police and the community in conflict prevention include the lack of interest from community members to collaborate with the police in the investigation of all the problems that the community encountered."

PNTL Personnel, Covalima district

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide and promote job creation, training, community events and the use of youth champions to increase youth, MAGs' and other groups' sense of citizenship and identification with the forthcoming elections.
- Engage and support FESTIL and the CNJTL to use their influential roles with youth, MAGs and other groups in the dissemination of peace education, and to assist civil society and community based organisations to provide civic education more generally.
- Target 'at-risk' locations and groups, using a community policing approach prior to the start of the campaign period to build the confidence of communities, particularly the youth, in the police and their ability to prevent and deal with electoral violence through the implementation of security plans currently being developed.

4.

In addition to immediate measures to prevent election violence, longer-term interventions are required to support the implementation of the rule of law and develop community level conflict prevention and response mechanisms that are locally owned and led.

"We have a very good law that ensures that if any individual commits any crime, they should be prepared to be held accountable in the court. Now the question is about implementation because in the 2007 election there was a lot of electoral fraud and crime, but until now there has not been any sentence given by the court to the perpetrators or the political party activists who committed electoral fraud."

CNE Commissioner, Dili

Rule of law has been a contentious issue in Timor-Leste that has contributed to violence and conflict in the country. The government's informal policy of amnesty for reconciliation and stability – as evidenced by a lack of prosecution of those involved in perpetrating violence in the 2006 political crisis, 2007 electoral violence, and the 2008 assassination attempts on President Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Gusmão – and a poor socialisation of the law in the community, has led to confusion within the population regarding the law and its application. Respondents reported that when community members see perpetrators of crimes escaping justice, despite being found guilty, the potential for insecurity increases.

The symbiotic relationship between justice and security is more evident during and immediately following the election period and needs to be a central focus for all concerned. Strong and consistent rule of law during the elections is important not only for the security of the elections themselves, but also in terms of representing the necessary fundamental shift in approach to sustainable development within the country.

"As long as there's no rule of law, there's only the rule of the deal. Then the longer-term will be covered by violence. Why? Because there is already the perception that the law is written but it's attached to somebody above the law."

Civil society leader, Dili

According to the respondents, many communities develop activities that bring people together to strengthen social cohesion and increase resilience to conflict and violence. Much of this work is supported by civil society organisations and the government through building the capacity of communities to manage localised conflict. This has been crucial in reducing levels of violence. However, it is clear that there remains a significant amount to do to ensure such systems are appropriately and adequately positioned to mitigate the risk of electoral violence, and indeed, beyond the elections and throughout Timor-Leste's longer-term transition. Recent developments in the use of dialogue at the community level to resolve community conflicts have been well received by community members who have advocated for such initiatives to continue.

"We would like to ask you to help us tell our leaders to create dialogue. Dialogue between district leaders, sub-district leaders and the *aldeia* [village] leaders so that they help to calm the situation before we have the elections; because if dialogues are not held, there would be conflicts in the future in many places."

Male member of the Muslim minority, Baucau District

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support the CNE to develop a complaints follow-up mechanism to ensure timely response to violations of the electoral law and regulations, with relevant cases referred to the Prosecutor General and the courts, to strengthen confidence in the legitimacy of the electoral process
- Building on existing efforts, promote work with communities to strengthen their resilience to conflict and violence through community cohesion building activities, highlighting the negative impact of violence and promoting the elections as a new and crucial step in the peaceful development of the country
- Consider the role and use of religious institutions and traditional systems to prevent violence and foster an appreciation of reconciliation, community and unity throughout the election period and beyond.
- Resource and strengthen existing systems – such as Belun's Early Warning Early Response (EWER) project and its established Conflict Prevention and Response Networks (CPRNs), the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MSS) dialogue teams and the National Directorate for Community Conflict Prevention (NDCCP) – to continue the building of nationally owned early warning and response mechanisms.



This map is intended for illustrative purposes only. Saferworld and Conciliation Resources take no position on whether this representation is legally or politically valid.

Volatile and opaque: the context for the 2012 elections?

In August 2011 a police officer (PNTL) was killed in the sub-district of Zumalai, Covalima district, in the south-west of the country. The incident triggered a proliferation of violence, culminating in the burning of houses in the village (Aldeia) of Galitas and the displacement of a large number of civilians. The victim had a wide range of connections and affiliations: as well as being a PNTL officer, he was a veteran of the Armed Forces for the National Liberation of Timor-Leste (FALINTIL), a member of a national martial arts group (MAG) and related to a prominent leader of a former clandestine group, which had played a significant role during the 2006 crisis.

Given this complex background, determining the motive for the attack and an appropriate response in the midst of the violence was difficult; political motivation, a confrontation between MAGs and community conflict were all possible causes. Only once the source of the conflict became clear could the police take action to contain the violence and dialogue and mediation teams under the Ministry of Social Solidarity were able to mobilise with traditional conflict resolution ceremonies taking place. In this case, it was discovered that members of the victim's MAG had attacked the homes of members of a rival MAG associated with the perpetrators of the murder.

This case serves as a timely reminder of the speed at which conflict can escalate in Timor-Leste and the devastating effect it can have, especially when driven by multiple identities and poor or inaccurate information. It also points to the current systems in place for dealing with conflict, highlighting the positive role they play but also the challenges they face; challenges that will be multiplied during the election period.

References and Acknowledgements

The findings in this Policy Brief were drawn from a wider report entitled *Assessing the risk of violence in Timor-Leste's 2012 elections* conducted by Saferworld under the People's Peacemaking Perspectives project. For full details of the project and the report on which this brief is based, please visit: www.saferworld.org.uk/PPP

For further information contact Rosy Cave, Head of Asia Programme, Saferworld rcave@saferworld.org.uk



This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this are the sole responsibility of Saferworld and Conciliation Resources and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

Saferworld
The Grayston Centre, 28 Charles Square
London N1 6HT, UK

Phone: +44 (0)20 7324 4646
Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647
Email: general@saferworld.org.uk
Web: www.saferworld.org.uk

Registered charity no. 1043843
A company limited by guarantee no. 3015948

Conciliation Resources
173 Upper Street
London N1 1RG, UK

Phone: +44 (0)20 7359 7728
Fax: +44 (0)20 7359 4081
Email: cr@c-r.org
Web: www.c-r.org

Registered charity no. 1055436

Methodology

This Policy Brief and accompanying report are based on consultations conducted with community members and key informants in Dili, Baucau, Covalima, Ermera and Ainaro districts and interviews with civil society actors, local and national government officials and the international community in Dili in October and November 2011. The study used a combination of research techniques including desk research, focus group discussion and key informant interviews in five districts to gather community perspectives on the risks of electoral violence. Saferworld's research partner was Timorese non-governmental organisation Belun, a prominent national NGO specialising in conflict prevention.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) with an array of community members (based on gender, age and employment) were conducted in a range of locations across the country to ensure regional differences were captured. Research was conducted in Dili and Baucau, Ainaro, Ermera and Covalima districts. FGDs were conducted in three formats; women only, men only and mixed. In total 11 FGDs were conducted, two in Dili district, three in Ainaro district, two in Covalima district and four in Baucau district. The number of FGDs conducted in each area differed due to the willingness of the community to engage with the research. FGDs were supplemented with up to ten key informant interviews (KIIs) with individuals well placed in the community to provide deeper insight in each of the three rural districts. Such individuals included local police, teachers, journalists, village chiefs, local administrators, church leaders, local political party leaders and representatives of community based organisations, among others. In Dili, 25 KIIs were conducted with national level civil society, national government agencies, political parties and representatives of the international community, including donors, the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste, the UN Country Team, the EU and international non-governmental organisations.

The cover picture shows Timorese in traditional dress taking part in a ceremony for the International Day of Peace, celebrated annually on 21 September.

© UN PHOTO/MARTINE PERRET