

Understanding Timor-Leste

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Analysing Timor-Leste Electoral Politics from a Socio-Economic Perspective

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This short essay is an attempt to identify and make preliminary observations on a division that emerged during the 2007 elections in Timor-Leste. At first glance the division seems to be geographical. In the three eastern districts Fretilin has the most supporters, while other parties are strong in the western districts. The division is often linked to a long-standing division between *firaku-kaladi*² and was further overshadowed by rivalry among political groups within the independence movement that pursued different lines of struggle against the Indonesian invasion and occupation.

The result is an imagined division between the pro-Fretilin *firaku* East and the non-Fretilin *kaladi* West. However, historically Fretilin was not been connected with *firaku* identity as such, and the west is not just *kaladi* but more diverse. During the 2007 elections, in the non-*kaladi* western districts of Bobonaro, Liquiça and Dili, where Fretilin received overwhelming support in 2001, CNRT became the first party. Our question is: why, after five years of Fretilin rule, did these western districts rebel against it? In this paper, I will suggest looking at the division between East and West from a socio-economic perspective. I hope that this approach will provide a starting point, albeit provisional, towards a more structural analysis of Timor-Leste politics.

Elections in 2007

Before attempting an analysis, let us see what became evident in the 2007 elections. There were two elections, a presidential election, which went to a second round to decide the winner and a parliamentary election.

The first round of the presidential election was held on 20 April and the results are shown in Table 1. It can be seen that voter preference divides along four distinct regional lines.

Table 1. Candidates' showings by region in 2007 presidential election (1st round)

Region	District	1st place		2nd place	
		Name	%	Name	%
Western border region	Oecusse	Lasama	29.94	Lu Olo	22.17
	Bobonaro	Lasama	38.70	Lucia Lobato	18.55
	Covalima	Lasama	32.69	Lu Olo	26.55
	Ermera	Lasama	45.51	Lu Olo	17.66
Northern coastal region	Liquiça	Ramos Horta	32.52	Xavier	17.86
	Dili	Ramos Horta	40.86	Xavier	17.48
	Manatuto	Ramos Horta	37.80	Xavier	16.88
Central southern region	Aileu	Xavier	64.89	Ramos Horta	8.78
	Ainaro	Xavier	27.33	Manuel Tilman	24.88
	Manufahi	Xavier	34.00	Lu Olo	25.69
Eastern region	Baucau	Lu Olo	62.99	Ramos Horta	26.99
	Viqueque	Lu Olo	65.53	Ramos Horta	17.26
	Lautem	Lu Olo	46.83	Ramos Horta	22.70

Source: CNE

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² *Firaku* means 'inhabitant of eastern East Timor', while *Kaladi* 'mountain dweller of western East Timor, applied especially to Mambai speakers' (Hull 2002).

The three border districts and the western highland district of Ermera favoured Fernando Lasama de Araújo. Francisco Guterres Lu Olo came in second in three of these districts, and Lucia Lobato, in Bobonaro. The three northern coastal districts show a very clear pattern of support for José Ramos Horta, with Xavier do Amaral in second place. Xavier do Amaral led in the two central highland districts and the southern district of Manufahi, but the second favoured candidate differed in all three. The eastern three districts show a very clear pattern of support for Lu Olo with Ramos Horta in second place. Generally Fretilin's Lu Olo performed well in districts far from the capital.

The second round of the presidential election held on 9 May resulted in a landslide victory for Ramos Horta, who received 69.18% of the total valid votes. While Lu Olo garnered 30.82%, the number of the votes he received in the second round, 127,342, was not much higher than the number gained in the first round, 112,666, and the increase, 14,676, probably came in large part from voters (16,534) who backed Manuel Tilman in the first round, because it was only Tilman that did not declare support for Ramos Horta before the second round. These figures seem to indicate that voters are loyal to their candidates. The result showed a clear division between the three eastern districts and the rest, although Lautem was sharply divided, Lu Olo gaining 51.19% of the vote, Ramos Horta, 48.81%.

The parliamentary election held on 30 June was contested by 14 political parties or coalitions of parties. However, only seven parties obtained seats because of the electoral threshold of 3% that applied. The leading party was Fretilin, which received 29.02% of all valid votes, followed by CNRT, 24.10%, ASDT-PSD, 15.73%, PD 11.30%, PUN 4.55%, Kota-PPT 3.20%, and Undertim 3.19%. Table 2 shows that the regional breakdown of Table 1 also applies to the results of the parliamentary election, although the pattern is slightly more nuanced.

Table 2. Party preference by region in 2007 parliamentary election

Region	District	1st place		2nd place	
		Party	%	Party	%
Western border region	Oecusse	CNRT	34.68	Fretilin	27.52
	Bobonaro	CNRT	20.56	PD	19.31
	Covalima	Fretilin	28.58	PD	20.70
	Ermera	PD	21.97	PUN	19.67
Northern coastal region	Liquiça	CNRT	38.96	ASDT-PSD	19.82
	Dili	CNRT	45.23	Fretilin	22.38
	Manatuto	CNRT	33.18	Fretilin	17.57
Central southern region	Aileu	ASDT-PSD	47.30	CNRT	20.46
	Ainaro	ASDT-PSD	29.13	Kota-PPT	18.69
	Manufahi	ASDT-PSD	26.79	Fretilin	25.43
Eastern region	Baucau	Fretilin	62.44	CNRT	13.42
	Viqueque	Fretilin	59.84	CNRT	12.62
	Lautem	Fretilin	45.53	CNRT	14.61

Source: CNE

If we assume that those who voted for Ramos Horta in the first round of the presidential election voted for CNRT³, the central southern region and the eastern region results faithfully reflect the pattern seen in the first round of the presidential election, and the results in the northern coastal region also roughly correspond to that pattern, although in Dili and Manatuto, Xavier do Amaral's ASDT could not compete with Fretilin for second place. The western border region is a more complex but we can perhaps say that the votes given to Lasama in the first round of the presidential election did not automatically go to his PD but some of them went to Xanana's CNRT and Fernanda Borges' PUN.

As was the case in the presidential election, the three eastern districts came out strongly for Fretilin. Fretilin retained its leading position in Covalima, and performed fairly well in the four districts of Oecusse, Dili, Manatuto and Manufahi. As for the rest of the country, in the five western districts of

³ The assumption is reasonable because CNRT's leader, Xanana, and Ramos Horta are close political allies, and CNRT did not put up a candidate for the presidential election, Xanana therefore being the only leader of a major political party who did not run.

Bobonaro, Liquiça, Ermera, Aileu and Ainaro, Fretilin was unpopular. Fretilin received only 8.35% in Aileu, 9.97% in Ainaro, 12.00% in Liquiça, 13.90% in Ermera and 16.09% in Bobonaro. In the 2001 constitutional assembly election, Fretilin received the least number of votes in three out of these five districts; 21.25% of the vote in Aileu, 27.56% in Ainaro and 31.94% in Ermera. Therefore, the three districts of Aileu, Ainaro and Ermera can be said to be a stable stronghold for non-Fretilin parties. Table 3 shows how much Fretilin lost in each district between 2001 and 2007.

Table 3. Percentage of Fretilin votes by district in the constituent assembly election in 2001 and the parliamentary election in 2007

District	2001	2007	% difference
Oecusse	38.60	27.53	11.07
Covalima	61.42	27.58	32.89
Bobonaro	57.42	16.09	41.33
Ainaro	27.56	9.97	17.59
Aileu	21.15	8.35	12.80
Ermera	31.94	13.9	18.04
Liquica	72.44	12.00	60.44
Dili	66.05	22.39	43.66
Manatuto	47.57	17.57	29.99
Manufahi	54.56	25.43	29.13
Viqueque	74.95	59.84	15.11
Baucau	81.98	62.44	19.54
Lautem	62.78	45.53	17.25

The biggest fall in support for Fretilin occurred in Liquiça. The falls in Dili and Bobonaro are also very significant. CNRT became the first party in these three districts as well as Manatuto and Oecusse, all in the west but not typically kaladi. Here it may be appropriate to rethink what ‘the west’ is in Timor-Leste, what lies behind the dramatic sway from Fretilin to CNRT in the region.

The west with more commercialised agriculture

Our starting point is ecology. The western and central highlands, one of the four ‘major natural spaces’ in Timor-Leste, an area that covers Ermera, Aileu, southern Liquiça, northern Ainaro and northern Manufahi, is characterised by high altitude (1,000-3,000m), cool temperatures and abundant rainfall (Faculdade de Arquitectura and GERTiL 2002, 60). The western and central highlands are major coffee producing areas and contribute the most to the country’s export earnings.

Geographically, this part of the country is close to the capital Dili and shares the border with Indonesian West Timor. Ermera, Aileu, Ainaro and Bobonaro together produce more than 92% of the country’s soybeans, a commercial crop used to make tahu and tempe. This is in stark contrast with Baucau, which produces only 1% of the soybean crop and Covalima, Viqueque and Lautem, for which there are no statistics on soybean production. Bobonaro also produces almost 60% of Timor Leste’s green peas. Meanwhile, widely consumed crops such as rice, maize, cassava, sweet potatoes and beans do not show such a pattern. Baucau is a dry area suitable for peanuts and produces approximately 60% of the total volume of peanuts. (DNE 2002)

The two border districts of Oecusse and Bobonaro are known for cattle breeding, while water buffalo and sheep are raised in Baucau, Viqueque and Lautem. Cattle breeding has also spread to Ermera and Manufahi. Goats and pigs are raised everywhere. Livestock destined for the Indonesian province of West Timor is the second largest contributor to the country’s export earnings. During the Indonesian occupation cattle for beef were shipped to Surabaya and Jakarta mainly from a shipping point outside Ambeno (Pedersen and Arneberg 1999, 43).

Pond fishery is also concentrated in the western districts. Oecusse, Bobonaro, Aileu and Ermera account for more than 94% of the total area of fish ponds in Timor-Leste. Sea fishing for subsistence or local market consumption is practiced widely but pond fishery is a commercial enterprise. Pond fishery is particularly widespread in the two border districts of Oecusse and Bobonaro followed by Aileu. (DNE 2002).

Overall, agriculture in the western part of the country is more commercialised and connected to the outside world as a result of the deeper capitalist penetration that occurred under Portuguese colonialism and Indonesian occupation. The sudden surge of commercialism that came with the UN administration further empowered the Dili-centred economy, with adjacent areas enjoying trickle down effects. On the other hand, agriculture in the eastern region remains more traditional, providing staple and basic crops for domestic consumption.

Fretilin's original anti-colonialist policy aimed to reduce monoculture through crop diversification and land reform. Naturally, the slogan worried coffee and other estate owners concentrated in the west and Fretilin's experimental commune-like agricultural unit was located in Bucoli, the birthplace of Fretilin's charismatic ideologue Vicente Sahe near Baucau in the east. But that was the situation in 1975. The post-independence Fretilin government adopted few policies that evoked its revolutionary past nor did it revive once-produced estate crops such as copra, vanilla, cocoa and cloves. Had it done so, it may have improved the economic situation in the western region.

Smoother channels for cross-border trade with Indonesia are absolutely essential for the development of cattle breeding. The Fretilin administration failed to solve this problem and it is said that many transactions of cattle were undertaken illegally.

The CNRT's programme,⁴ released before the election, asserts that 'agriculture has to become more industrialized' and that 'agriculture, fishing and cattle farming are a priority for national development.' It says that 'CNRT calls for cattle farming to be supported and stimulated in order to guarantee the development of small and medium meat industries, milk, butter and cheese production to cater for both internal consumption and for markets outside our nation.' By saying so, CNRT was addressing frustration in the western districts over the lack of will on the part of the government to accelerate commercialisation of agriculture.

Dili as the centre for a market-oriented economy

Dili is the centre of economic activities and the hub for external trade. But its prosperity depends on government spending and expatriates' consumption because there are no meaningful domestic manufactures or industries. Therefore, as the UN presence diminishes, Dili's economy suffers stagnation or even setback. From 2004 to 2006 the total value of the merchandise imports continued to decrease. Imports from Indonesia decreased from \$60,201,000 in 2004 to \$47,769,000 in 2005 and to \$37,733,000 in 2006. Similarly, imports from Australia decreased from \$20,051,000 in 2004 to \$14,796,000 in 2005, and to \$10,951,000 in 2006. This was despite the fact that during the same period imports from Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, China and Portugal showed upward trend. (DNE 2004-2008)

The trend seems to indicate that the Fretilin government tried to diversify trade counterparts beyond Indonesia and Australia, or to put it in more blatantly; it tried to reduce the country's dependency on the two immediate neighbours. The idea is understandable although the result was a slump.

The Fretilin government did not show much enthusiasm for foreign investment. While some investors were given privileged access, many foreign businesses complained about the lack of rule of law and legal certainty, or even harassment and corruption. The motivation behind the reluctance was not all clear. However, liberalising foreign investment would have meant an influx of Indonesian and Australian businesses. Moreover, no incentives for developing tourism were given and no visionary industrial policies were conceived. There was no serious attempt to deal with the question of border trade and as a result smuggling became rampant.

CNRT, as well as PD, criticised the Fretilin government for failing to create friendly environment for foreign investment. The criticism resonated with the investors' perception quoted in the World Bank's report in 2006 that they regard the Timor-Leste's business regulatory environment as 'more hostile than welcoming to private investment' (World Bank 2006, 1). The CNRT's pledge to implement radical reform 'to make East Timor a viable investment for foreign firms' certainly appealed to those who aspired more links with Indonesia and Australia.

⁴ See the CNRT's website: <http://cnrt-timor.org/vision/index.php>.

Conclusion

The intention of this paper is not to explain details of the election results. As King suggested in his analysis of the result of the constituent assembly election, ethnic identification, ideological and social background and generational factors were all important. He also writes that 'there is a high degree of patrimonial, local clan, or ethnic loyalty,' as 'the parties are still quite rudimentary' and the 'social basis of party support is still quite diffuse' (King 2003, 757-8).

But the attempt here is to place the question of the west in Timor-Leste in a more contemporary context. While factors related to identity undoubtedly played a part, the struggle for prosperity and power became more acute during the post-independence economic downturn.

The lack of will on Fretilin's part to push a liberal development agenda was a source of frustration for the already established economic interests, especially in the capital and its surrounding areas. Xanana in his inauguration speech as the Prime Minister referred to the CNRT's liberal economic policies outlined in its programme. To realize the goals, resumption of lost links with the outside world, especially neighbouring Indonesia is vital. Xanana's persistent call for 'reconciliation' may be better understood in this context.

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