



TIMOR-LESTE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

MAY 12, 2018

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Introduction

On May 12, 2018, Timor-Leste held a snap parliamentary election to choose the country's fifth National Parliament.¹ The election was called in January 2018 by President Francisco "Lu Olo" Guterres in response to the protracted political impasse that followed the July 22, 2017 parliamentary election. The 2018 parliamentary elections included eight political parties and coalitions contesting 65 parliamentary seats.

With funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Republican Institute (IRI) conducted long- and short-term international election observation missions to observe Timor-Leste's parliamentary elections on May 12. Based on the mission's findings, IRI can report that the 2018 parliamentary elections were well-administered and conducted in a peaceful, open and transparent manner.

IRI's long-term observation mission included three observers who were deployed throughout Timor-Leste during the 30-day campaign period prior to Election Day. They assessed the pre-election environment by reporting on party campaign activities, voter education and Election Day preparations by the country's Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and documented any observed electoral violations. Based on observations from 158 meetings and events with election-related stakeholders, IRI's long-term observers found the pre-election environment to be competitive and heated, but simultaneously orderly and peaceful. The Comissão Nacional de Eleições (CNE) should be commended for fulfilling their mandate in an impartial and professional manner during this period.

The short-term election observation mission included 18 international observers who observed the opening, voting, closing and counting procedures on Election Day, visiting a total of 128 polling stations. Both the long- and short-term international election observation missions covered all of Timor-Leste's 13 municipalities.

Following Election Day, IRI released a preliminary statement² expressing the view that Timor-Leste's parliamentary elections were "efficiently administered and met international standards for free and fair elections." IRI observers noted a clear commitment by both EMBs, the Secretariado Técnico de Administração Eleitoral (STAE) and CNE; party agents; voters; and the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) to ensure the process was conducted efficiently and without error or incident.

IRI also noted the strong presence of party agents and domestic election observers, particularly from the Timorese civil society group Observatorio da Igreja Para Os Assuntos Sociais (OIPAS), whose presence contributed to the legitimacy and credibility of the elections process. Women also featured prominently as election officials, serving in numerous roles at polling stations throughout the country.

¹ Constituent Assembly elections were held in 2001 and elections for the National Parliament were held in 2007 and 2012.

² See Appendix B for IRI's Preliminary Statement.

It should be noted that IRI identified minor procedural and structural imperfections, which did not affect the credibility of the election results, but represent areas in need of improvement for Timor-Leste's electoral system. IRI has therefore developed a series of recommendations outlined in this report that are designed to address these inconsistencies and strengthen Timor-Leste's future electoral processes.

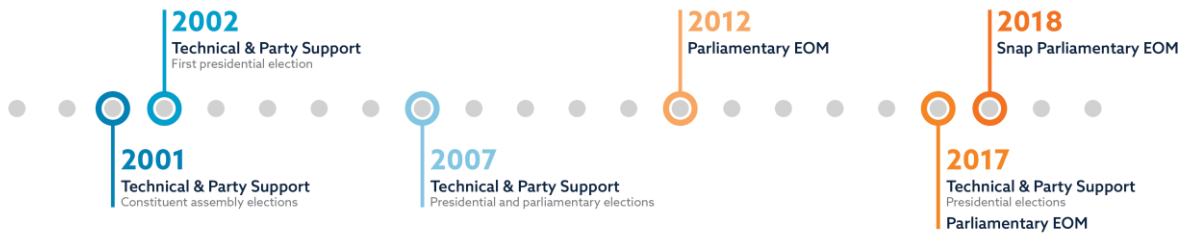
Key recommendations include:

- Ensure polling stations are easily accessible to persons with disabilities;
- Enhance communication between electoral officials and party agents during counting procedures when discrepancies arise to minimize the risk of dispute and claims of invalidity by party agents; and
- Improve the consistency of electoral officers in checking voters' fingers for pre-existing signs of ink before allowing voters to enter polling stations.

IRI in Timor-Leste

Since the restoration of Timor-Leste’s independence in 2002, IRI has become a trusted resource for Timorese civil society, members of parliament and political parties in developing and strengthening the country’s democratic institutions.

IRI Support to Elections in Timor-Leste



As the only non-governmental organization to work directly with Timor-Leste’s political parties since 2000, IRI prepared political parties for the 2001 constituent assembly and the 2002 presidential elections. IRI provided technical assistance during every subsequent election and deployed observation missions to the 2012 and 2017 parliamentary elections.

Our work in Timor-Leste has supported civic education, bolstered political pluralism, increased political participation of women and youth and strengthened the capacity of the parliament to serve as an independent and representative legislative body.

In the lead-up to the 2018 snap parliamentary elections, IRI provided trainings to 238 party members, including 200 women and 13 youth, from four of the eight political parties through a series of Campaign Management Schools and Campaign Training Academies. IRI trainings were focused on enhancing candidates’ capacity to plan and implement more inclusive, issue-based campaigns; developing strong communications strategies and communicating consistent messaging to the public; implementing grassroots citizen engagement efforts; and strengthening women’s role in political parties. Of the 65 members of parliament elected in the 2018 parliamentary election, eight (including seven women) received training from IRI before the May 12 election, demonstrating the impact of IRI’s political party trainings in Timor-Leste.

Female Members of Parliament in 2018



Long-Term Observation Mission

On April 7, IRI deployed three accredited long-term observers (LTOs) across Timor-Leste to observe the four-week campaign period ahead of the May 12 parliamentary election. From April 7 to May 6, LTOs attended 158 meetings and events throughout all 13 of Timor-Leste's municipalities, including 51 political party campaign events; 48 meetings with CNE and STAE; 25 meetings with political party officials; 17 meetings with the National Police (PNTL); 11 meetings with civil society organizations; five meetings with other Timorese Government officials; and one meeting with an international organization.

Throughout the observation period, IRI's LTOs consistently reported a competitive and pointed, but simultaneously orderly and peaceful, campaign environment, with the electoral process mostly proceeding in accordance with the electoral calendar and relevant laws. LTOs only reported a handful of minor incidents throughout the campaigning period. The LTOs reported a high level of dedication and professionalism from CNE and STAE staff as they conducted voter education activities, observed political party events and trained polling station staff in advance of Election Day.



FRETILIN supporters join a motorcade in Dili on May 9, 2018, the final day of campaigning before the May 12 election.

Rallies often drew large crowds of boisterous supporters and – along with sub district-level dialogues and public meetings – were the primary methods of campaigning used by political parties. Parties also used grassroots campaigning (e.g. door-to-door), visual advertising, social media and television advertising to disseminate their messages to voters.

As the campaigning period progressed, rhetoric at the rallies became increasingly heated, with some challenging the credibility of the country's EMBs. Despite the pointed rhetoric, the campaign environment remained peaceful. Parties' messaging emphasized both revolutionary credentials and key public policy issues such as education, infrastructure, unemployment and the resolution of the maritime boundary dispute with Australia.

Short-Term Observation Mission

IRI deployed a short-term observation delegation of 18 accredited international observers on May 12, 2018, who monitored opening, voting, closing and counting procedures in all 13 municipalities on Election Day at 128 of 1160 polling stations. The mission was deployed as part of a United States government-led effort to support Timor-Leste's electoral process and help ensure a free, fair and peaceful electoral environment.

Electoral Procedures

Opening Procedures

Opening procedures at the observed polling stations were carried out in an organized and efficient manner, with all IRI observers reporting high levels of confidence that election laws were being followed. Observers reported that the atmosphere at the polling stations was calm and orderly, with one observer noting a lively but peaceful atmosphere. No complaints were reported at any of the observed polling stations during the opening procedures.

Irregularities in Opening Procedures

Despite the overall exemplary conduct of the opening procedures, there were a few areas where minor, isolated procedural irregularities were observed:

- At one polling station in Ainaro, ballots were not observed to be individually counted during the opening procedures at the observed polling station.
- In Oecusse, some ballot books had two extra ballots without serial numbers at one polling station. These ballots were removed and destroyed. Other ballots had preexisting marks and were marked invalid by electoral officers.
- In Cova Lima, one polling station observed was at least 10 minutes late in beginning its opening procedures.

Voting Procedures

IRI observed voting procedures in 114 polling stations and found the execution of voting procedures to be in line with electoral laws, with the exception of a few minor irregularities. The environment around all polling stations was calm, with many observers reporting a lively, festive atmosphere. Voting lines were longest in the morning and tapered off around midday. At 51 percent of observed polling stations, observers reported that at least 11 voters were in line waiting to vote when the observer arrived.

According to interviews with polling station presidents and secretaries, all polling stations received the necessary voting materials from STAE for Election Day and pre-election training from STAE.

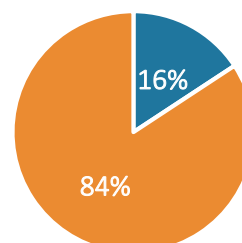
Irregularities in Voting Procedures

Despite the overall exemplary conduct of voting procedures, there were several areas where systematic irregularities were observed:

- Eighty-four percent of the polling stations observed were not readily accessible to persons with disabilities due to the absence of wheelchair-accessible amenities such as ramps or lifts.
- Electoral officers at 17 percent of polling stations observed were not observed checking voters' fingers for signs of indelible ink. While this represents a 72 percent decrease in similar instances observed in the 2017 election, the use of indelible ink is the only protection against double voting in Timor-Leste. Therefore, electoral officers should enforce this procedure to ensure this oversight does not allow voters to cast multiple ballots.
- In two instances in Bobonaro and Aileu, electoral officers pre-stamped a large number of ballots before voters entered the polling station. Although the likely intention was to increase the speed of the voting process, pre-stamping ballots increases the likelihood that the ballots will smudge if they are placed on top of one another, thereby invalidating the ballots.

Polling Station Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

(observed and reported)



■ Accessible ■ Inaccessible



A voter in Bobonaro displays his inked finger, a sign that he cast his ballot in the May 12 Election.

Closing and Counting Procedures

IRI observers reported that closing procedures were performed in a systematic manner, with polling station presidents and electoral officers following election laws diligently. Counting procedures took anywhere from two to five hours across the 13 municipalities, given the manual nature of vote counting. It should be noted that counting procedures during the 2018 parliamentary election took significantly less time than what was observed by IRI observers during the 2017 parliamentary election, indicating an increase in efficiency among electoral officials from the previous year. This improvement underscores the importance of retaining polling staff from prior years to enhance the proficiency of the electoral process in future elections.

Irregularities in Closing and Counting Procedures

Despite the general adherence to election laws by polling station officials, IRI observed minor procedural imperfections across the observed polling stations. For example:

- In two instances in Viqueque and Manatuto, the counting process was delayed over minor discrepancies without appropriate communication to observing party agents. Poor communication during a substantial delay can result in confusion that can increase the likelihood of complaints and accusations of invalidity from party agents.
- In an isolated incident in Bobonaro, a polling station became increasingly crowded during the final tabulation, with community members playing music and dancing. The increase in activity around the polling station as the final tabulation ended hurried electoral officials and led to less stringent management and control of election materials. In this case, an observer witnessed a boy taking a bottle of indelible ink.
- In two instances observed in Bobonaro and Oecusse, observers noted that the polling station secretaries did not put the unused, cancelled and abandoned ballots in the appropriately marked envelopes.

Electoral Actors

IRI observers commended the professionalism of CNE, STAE, party agents and domestic observers on Election Day for their dedication to advancing Timor-Leste's democratic processes.

Polling Staff



A STAE electoral official instructs voter to dip his finger in indelible ink after voting in Manatuto.

The performance of polling station electoral officers demonstrated the clear competency of Timor-Leste's EMBs to manage national elections without significant international support. The experience gained during the 2017 parliamentary election and the additional training received by election officials prior to the 2018 election increased the efficiency, accuracy and overall credibility of electoral processes on Election Day. CNE and STAE should be commended for their proficiency in conducting a sound and credible electoral process.

Polling officials were on-task, well-trained and complied with Election Day laws and procedures with few minor irregularities. Full attendance of electoral officers was observed in all but one of the observed polling stations. In that case, electoral officers were observed having lunch outside of the polling station.

"I was impressed by the professionalism, firmness and efficiency of the [polling station] president, who managed her team very effectively."

- IRI Observer in Ainaro, Timor-Leste

As with the 2017 parliamentary election, the 2018 parliamentary election saw a similarly high level of gender inclusivity among electoral officers. Observers reported 53 percent of observed polling stations were led by female presidents. Observers also reported that 30 percent of observed polling stations had between five and eight female electoral officers.

According to interviews with polling station presidents, all presidents and electoral staff received training prior to Election Day from STAE, with most reporting that electoral officers received at least two days of training. The pre-election training increased electoral agents' capacity to implement election procedures efficiently and effectively.

Party Agents

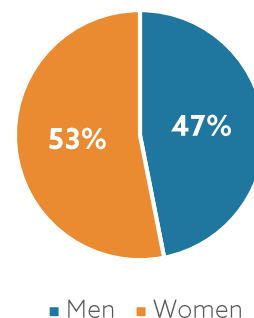
The presence of party agents at polling stations greatly contributed to the transparency, legitimacy and credibility of the election. While the number of party agents varied by party, all eight political parties deployed party agents to observe polling stations on Election Day. IRI observers noted the presence of party agents at all but two of the 128 polling stations observed. Party agents displayed proper accreditation, with most wearing shirts of matching their party colors. They demonstrated respect toward members of different parties throughout all Election Day procedures and IRI observers reported no incidents between party agents or between party agents and electoral officials.

Domestic and International Observers

Domestic and international election observers played an instrumental role in contributing to the transparency and legitimacy of the electoral process. For the 2018 parliamentary elections, Timor-Leste's EMBs accredited 2,947 domestic observers and 250 international observers. The accreditation process was well-managed by STAE, who provided all observers with the appropriate accreditation identification for Election Day in a timely and transparent fashion. IRI's international observers were afforded the rights and freedoms outlined in Government Decree No. 17/2017, including the right to access all polling stations; monitor the voting process; interview electoral officials, party agents and voters; and observe the vote tabulation processes.

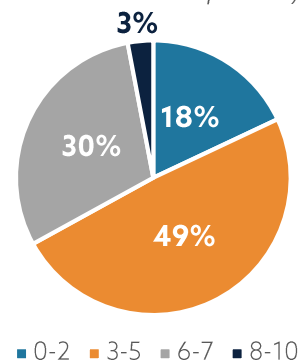
Leadership at Polling Stations

(observed and reported)



Number of Female Electoral Officers

(observed and reported)



Recommendations for Electoral Processes and Election Day Procedures

- **Ensure each polling station is easily accessible to persons with disabilities:** At 83 percent of polling stations observed, undeveloped walkways, hills and stairs without the presence of ramps made polling stations inaccessible to persons with disabilities (PWD). While inadequate infrastructure remains a nationwide issue, efforts should be made to choose polling stations that are accessible or outfit polling stations with ramps to accommodate PWD.
- **Enhance communication between electoral officials and party agents during counting procedures:** In multiple instances, electoral officials failed to communicate adequately with party agents during long periods of delay when discrepancies arose during the counting procedures. While the discrepancies in question turned out to be minor, the delays caused party agents to become confused and frustrated. Had the discrepancy been more significant, the situation could have escalated quickly.

To minimize the risk for disputes and claims of invalidity by party agents, the training curriculum should incorporate training on clear and transparent communication between electoral officials and party agents and domestic and international observers when issues or discrepancies arise. This will minimize the risk of disputes and claims of invalidity of party agents. The training curriculum should also incorporate unexpected scenarios such as disputes with party agents and errors in reconciling ballot counts.

- **Enforce the consistent checking of voters' fingers for indelible ink prior to voting:** Currently, the only protection against double-voting in Timor-Leste is the application of indelible ink on a voter's finger after voting. In multiple instances, controlling officers failed to check consistently for signs of indelible ink on voters' fingers prior to voting. The training curriculum for electoral officers should emphasize the consistent examination of voters' fingers for signs of ink before entering a polling station to avoid double voting.

Appendix A: Official Election Results

Votes obtained by each contesting party or party coalitions:

Contesting Parties/Party Coalitions	# of Votes Obtained	% of Votes
Majority Alliance for Progress (AMP)	309,663	49.6%
Revolutionary Front for an Independent Timor-Leste (FRETILIN)	213,324	34.2%
Democratic Party (PD)	50,370	8.1%
Front for Democratic Development (FDD)	34,301	5.5%
National Development Movement (MDN)	4,494	0.7%
Hope of the Fatherland Party (PEP)	5,060	0.8%
Republican Party (PR)	4,125	0.7%
Social Democratic Movement (MSD)	3,188	0.5%

Total parliamentary seats won by political parties / party coalitions that obtained at least 4 percent of the total valid votes:

Parties/Party Coalitions	Total Parliamentary Seats
AMP	34
FRETILIN	23
PD	5
FDD	3

Appendix B: IRI Preliminary Statement on 2018 Early Parliamentary Elections

Dili, Timor-Leste – In a preliminary statement released today, the International Republican Institute (IRI) found that Timor-Leste’s May 12 parliamentary elections were “efficiently administered and met international standards for free and fair elections.”

The citizens of Timor-Leste went to the polls to vote for the second time in less than a year after President Francisco “Lú-Olo” Guterres called a snap election when he was unable to form a government and pass a budget in the national legislature.

Delegation co-chairs Randy Scheunemann and Bruce Edwards said, “The Election Day atmosphere was peaceful yet energized, with only minor incidents reported during the campaign period which did not affect the election.”

Short and Long-Term Observation Missions

IRI deployed a short-term observation delegation of 18 accredited observers on May 12, 2018 who monitored voting procedures in all 13 municipalities on Election Day at 112 polling stations. The mission was deployed as part of a United States government-led effort to support Timor-Leste’s electoral process and help ensure a free, fair and peaceful electoral environment.

IRI also deployed a long-term observation mission of three accredited observers to observe the electoral process leading up to Election Day. Between April 10 and May 5, IRI’s long-term observers attended 158 events and meetings with election-related stakeholders in all 13 municipalities, which were documented in weekly public reports issued by IRI.

IRI Commends Election Management Bodies

IRI observers noted that the staff of the two election management bodies, CNE (Comissão Nacional das Eleições) and STAE (Secretariado Técnico de Administração Eleitoral) were professional and dedicated throughout the official campaign period as well as on Election Day. Building on their experience managing the 2017 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, STAE and CNE remained efficient and impartial by following set procedures. IRI observers noted that polling stations were orderly and voting was peaceful and generally well organized despite minor procedural irregularities.

IRI Short-Term Observers

- Randy Scheunemann – Delegation Co-Chair and IRI Board Member
- Bruce Edwards – Delegation Co-Chair and International Secretary, Liberal Party of Australia
- Curtis Chin – Senior Fellow for Asia, Milken Institute; Former United States Ambassador to the Asian Development Bank

- Blanche Fawell – Attorney-at-Law, Fawell and Associates; Retired Circuit Court Judge, State of Illinois
- Ian Hanke – Chief Executive Officer, PM&C Group
- Sue Ingram – Honorary Senior Policy Fellow, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, Australian National University
- Joerg Meier – Key Expert, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Social Cultural Community (ASCC), Enhanced EU-ASEAN Regional Dialogue Instrument (E-READI)
- Robyn Nolan – Former President of the Federal Women’s Committee, Liberal Party of Australia
- Bill Phillips – Principal, Windrow Phillips Company

IRI Staff

- Derek Luyten – Director, Asia Division
- Dimitar Stojkov – Resident Program Director, Timor-Leste
- Morgan Fincher – Program Officer, Timor-Leste
- Jessica Keegan – Resident Program Director, Mongolia
- Parker Novak – Program Officer, Indonesia and Timor-Leste
- Karlito Nunes – Program Manager, Timor-Leste

IRI Long-Term Observers

- Edward Bagnall – Long-Term Observer, Eastern Municipalities
- Ken Palmer – Long-Term Observer, Western Municipalities
- Natasha Rothchild – Long-Term Observer, Central Municipalities

IRI in Timor-Leste

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As the only non-governmental organization to work directly with Timor-Leste’s political parties since 2000, IRI prepared political parties for the 2001 constituent assembly and the 2002 presidential elections. Since then, IRI has provided technical assistance during every subsequent election and deployed an observation mission to the 2012 and 2017 parliamentary elections. With a nuanced understanding of the on-the-ground, in-country realities, our work has supported civic education, bolstered political pluralism, increased political participation of women and youth and strengthened the capacity of the parliament to serve as an independent and representative legislative body.



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