

1975

**1975**

East Timor declares independence from Portugal. Indonesia invades the country, occupying it for the next 24 years. Over 100,000 are killed or die from famine or disease during the occupation.

**1975**

Repressive Indonesian rule strengthens Timorese nationalism. Resistance is led by FRETILIN and its armed wing, FALINTIL, which conduct guerilla warfare against Indonesian security forces.

**1991**

The Santa Cruz massacre—Indonesian forces fire on pro-independence marchers, killing between 150 and 270. International pressure builds as Indonesia is accused of systematic human rights abuses.

**1998**

The collapse of Indonesia's Suharto regime following the Asian economic crisis give Timor's independence movement momentum.

**1999**

Pro-Indonesia militias attack civilians during a national referendum on independence. Nearly 75 percent of the population is displaced, and 200,000 flee into West Timor, but almost 80 percent vote for independence.

**1999**

As a multinational UN force arrives in Timor, the last Indonesian soldiers leave the territory.

**2002**

East Timor officially becomes the independent Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

**2006**

Regional resentments fueled by the dismissal of 600 soldiers from the Timor military trigger a violent political crisis. Over 150,000 are displaced by armed clashes between protesters, security forces, and street gangs throughout the country.

**2006**

Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri resigns, and a UN mission is dispatched to restore peace.

**2006**

Communal violence erupts in Ermera and rapidly spreads to the capital, Dili, as martial arts groups (MAGs), street gangs, and local communities battle for territory and control of illegal activities. Clashes continue at about 50 per week through 2007.

**2007**

Political rivalry between FRETILIN and the National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) causes violent clashes during the parliamentary election. Xanana Gusmão becomes prime minister and Jose Ramos-Horta becomes president.

**2008**

An assassination attempt against President Ramos-Horta and an armed attack on Prime Minister Gusmão raise fears of a coup, as old resentments continue to fuel political violence.

**2011**

Fearing gang violence during the 2012 elections, the government temporarily bans MAGs. When the ban is lifted in 2013, violence resumes, and several MAGs are permanently outlawed.

**2012**

CNRT wins a majority in the election and forms a coalition government that excludes FRETILIN, sparking clashes between angry supporters and the police.

**2012**

Parliament passes a land law, but President Ramos-Horta vetoes it. The land law remains unsigned, and land disputes remain a significant source of local conflict.

**2015**

Gusmão steps down, paving the way for a FRETILIN prime minister, and an alliance between CNRT and FRETILIN is formed.

**2017**

Francisco Guterres, backed by FRETILIN and CNRT, wins the presidential election.

2017

# Timor-Leste

## At a glance



National civil war  
**Absent**



Communal/ideological conflict  
**Decreased from medium to low**



National political conflict  
**Decreased from high to low**



Local political and electoral conflict  
**Medium**



Transnational terrorism  
**Absent**



Local resource conflict  
**Medium**



Separatism and autonomy  
**Absent**



Urban crime and violence  
**High**

*\* Rankings are based on the last 15 years and are relative to other Asian countries.*

## Overview

After a political crisis in 2006, Timor-Leste has stabilized in the postindependence period. Yet the aftermath of the 2006 crisis continues to significantly shape the political landscape and security conditions. Growing rivalry between the former resistance movement, Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN), and the National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) resulted in violent clashes between political parties during the 2007 parliamentary election. An alliance between FRETILIN and CNRT in early 2015 changed the political landscape to one with reduced political opposition ahead of the general elections in 2017. The 2006 crisis—driven by perceptions of inequality between easterners and westerners in the military, which were manipulated for political gain—also triggered widespread communal conflict. Communal conflict in Timor-Leste often takes the form of gang violence among different martial art groups (MAGs). The government made multiple attempts to reduce MAG-related violence when it escalated after 2006. A temporary ban was imposed on all MAGs for a year before the 2012 election to limit their involvement in politics and electoral violence. As MAG-related violence resurfaced with the lifting of the ban, the government permanently outlawed a few of the major MAGs that were responsible for most of the violence. The primary drivers of communal conflict are land and access to resources. Such disputes continue to cause friction and violence throughout the country due to the absence of an effective legal framework to determine ownership or usage rights. A draft land bill went back and forth between the parliament and the administration from 2003, and was finally approved in 2017. Rates of violence against women and children are very high.



#### National civil war

Timor-Leste had a difficult road to nationhood. Within days of declaring independence from Portugal, the country was occupied and forcibly incorporated into Indonesia in December 1975. Indonesia feared that Timor-Leste (then East Timor) would fall to communism or spur secessionist movements in restive regions of Indonesia. The Indonesian government forced resettlement and imposed the Indonesian language and what were considered “Indonesian values” on the Timorese. Repressive Indonesian rule strengthened Timorese nationalism. Resistance to the Indonesian occupation, led by the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente, FRETILIN), persisted for 24 years, until Indonesia left Timor in 1999. FRETILIN’s armed wing, the Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor (Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste, FALINTIL) carried out guerrilla warfare against Indonesian security forces during this period.

Many lives were lost during Timor’s struggle for independence. The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in East Timor (Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade, e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste, CAVR) estimates at least 102,800 Timorese civilians died between 1974 and 1999.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 18,600 of these were killed or forcibly disappeared, while 84,200 died of famine and disease. Over 100,000 households were displaced, most internally.<sup>2</sup> Indonesian security forces committed human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, routine and systematic torture, massacres, and sexual violence against women. Up to 4,500 Timorese children were forcibly transferred to Indonesia.<sup>3</sup> The Santa Cruz massacre (also known as the Dili massacre), in November 1991, received widespread international attention. The Indonesian military opened fire on unarmed civilians participating in a peaceful, pro-independence march to the grave of Sebastiao Gomes, a young man killed a month earlier in an attack by Indonesian security forces on the Motael church, where he and other Timorese activists had taken refuge. The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions estimated that between 150 and 270 people were killed by Indonesian security forces at Santa Cruz; the Indonesian authorities claimed there were 19 deaths.<sup>4</sup>

# 100,000+

civilians died during  
Timor’s struggle for  
independence  
1974–1999

Following the massacre, international pressure on Indonesia increased, but it took Timor another decade to gain independence. The Asian economic crisis of 1997 and the overthrow of Indonesia's Suharto regime the following year allowed Timor's independence movement to gain momentum domestically and internationally. Portugal and Indonesia held talks, mediated by the UN,<sup>5</sup> regarding Timor's status, and agreed to let the Timorese people decide for themselves in a referendum on independence (known as the 1999 Popular Consultation). In August 1999, nearly 80 percent of the population voted for independence. In the lead up to and during the referendum, pro-Indonesia militias attacked civilians across Timor, killing hundreds and destroying property.<sup>6</sup> More than 75 percent of the population was displaced. Approximately 200,000 fled to West Timor and other areas, while others were internally displaced in camps in Dili and elsewhere in the country.<sup>7</sup> In 1999, as a multinational military force mandated under Chapter 7 of the UN charter arrived, the last Indonesian soldiers left the territory. While anti-independence militias were active throughout 1999 and early 2000, the transition occurred on schedule, and in May 2002, East Timor officially became the independent Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.



### National political conflict

As a postconflict country with weak state institutions and rule of law, Timor-Leste is vulnerable to political conflict and electoral violence. The country maintained a fragile stability for the first four years of its independence, but a political crisis erupted in 2006, resulting in some loss of life, injury, displacement, and property destruction. The crisis began when nearly 600 soldiers were dismissed from the Timor-Leste Defense Force (Forças de Defesa de Timor Leste, FALINTIL–FDTL or F–FDTL) in March 2006. The dismissals were the result of a petition submitted in January 2006 to Brigadier General Taur Matan Ruak and President Xanana Gusmão about mismanagement and perceived discrimination against westerners within the defense force. Grievances fused with rivalries and other political conflicts, leading to armed clashes between protesters, the police, and defense forces. Widespread rioting, involving armed gangs, MAGs, and youth groups, occurred throughout the country. Thirty-eight were killed and 69 injured in the violence of April and May 2006. Over half of the victims were civilians. Around 150,000 people were displaced, and over 1,600 houses were destroyed.<sup>8</sup> The crisis led to the resignation of Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri and the establishment of a UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) in August 2006 to help restore peace and increase police presence.

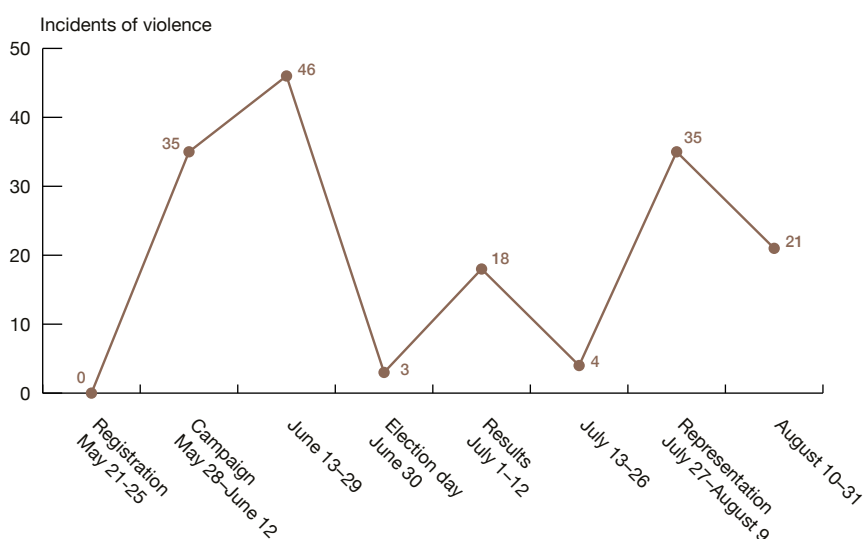
The 2006 political crisis was in part a manifestation of political disputes resulting from historical competition between and within political parties during the resistance. Tensions within FRETILIN in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly between central committee members and Xanana Gusmão, then commander in chief of FALINTIL, continued into the postconflict government. In 1987, as Gusmão resigned from the FRETILIN central committee over ideological differences, FALINTIL became the armed wing of the new National Council of Maubere Resistance, formed to represent all political parties rather than a single party. FRETILIN lost absolute control over the policies of the resistance movement. FRETILIN members have continued to play central political roles since independence, and tensions between much of the FRETILIN leadership and Gusmão have continued in the postindependence era.

Enmities among ex-soldiers also flowed from the poorly implemented demobilization of FALINTIL fighters and the creation of the F–FDTL, which absorbed some FALINTIL veterans but left others unemployed, while the new police force incorporated 370 officers who had previously worked for the Indonesian police force. Rivalries between the F–FDTL and the police escalated further as the new minister of the interior, Rogerio Lobato, created two paramilitary police units, undermining the F–FDTL. A former defense minister, Lobato ensured that those loyal to him were recruited into the police, fanning resentment among veterans against the former Indonesian police. With a significant element of the police loyal to him, Lobato played a hyperpoliticized role in the 2006 crisis.

While the 2006 crisis is often attributed solely to the breakdown of the security sector, its root causes were a complex web of political, economic, and social factors. Underlying issues included a failure to define land and property regimes to settle competing claims, latent tensions between the LOROSA'E (easterners) and LOROMONU (westerners), and lingering, unresolved tensions between citizens dating back to Portuguese times. These issues were exacerbated by the stresses of resistance and occupation, the social and economic consequences of rapid urbanization in the capital, and the subsequent competition for housing, resources, and employment. Politicians, seeking to build their own support bases, manipulated the divide between the pro-independence east and the pro-Indonesia west, in the process further reinforcing it.<sup>9</sup>

Political tensions became further entrenched after the 2006 crisis. Intensified rivalries between FRETILIN's central committee and Gusmão's political party, the National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT), led to violent clashes between political parties and their supporters during the 2007 parliamentary election. Violent incidents resulted in two deaths, 100 injuries, and 91 incidents of property destruction between May and August 2007.<sup>10</sup> Violence spiked at the end of the campaign, following the decision by President José Ramos-Horta, who won the 2007 presidential election, to authorize the Parliamentary Majority Alliance to form a new government with Gusmão as prime minister (figure 1). The 2006 crisis also led to the formation of new parties. Long-standing political rivalries, antagonisms among FALINTIL veterans, and petitioners' resentment continued to fuel violence, highlighted by the February 2008 assassination attempt on President Ramos-Horta and a separate armed attack on Prime Minister Gusmão by the rebel group led by Reinado.

While the 2012 elections were held peacefully, power remained in the same hands (the old generation), and many of the root causes of fragility persisted. CNRT won the majority with 30 seats, followed by FRETILIN with 25 seats. CNRT formed a coalition government with two other small parties, the Democratic Party (PD) and Frente-Mudanca (FM), leaving FRETILIN as a single-party opposition. Exclusion of FRETILIN from the coalition government caused clashes



**Figure 1.** Violent incidents during the 2007 parliamentary election

Source: Timor-Leste Armed Violence Assessment (TLAVA)<sup>11</sup>

between its angry supporters and police, leading to one death and four injured police officers. Dozens of cars and properties were damaged.<sup>12</sup> The political landscape changed in February 2015, however, when Gusmão, who had been prime minister since 2007, stepped down to pave the way for his successor, FRETILIN politician Rui Maria de Araújo. An alliance between CNRT and FRETILIN was formed, leaving the parliament without an effective opposition. Conflict between the parliament and President Taur Matan Ruak increased.<sup>13</sup>

Even though CNRT and FRETILIN had formed a peaceful political union, 2015 saw political violence in Baucau district when supporters of a rebel group, the Maubere Revolutionary Council (KRM), launched attacks against police. After his return to Timor from self-imposed exile in Holland in 2013, Mauk Moruk, a former FALINTIL commander and a longtime opponent of Gusmão, formed the KRM, which was made up of disaffected veterans of the independence struggle. The KRM carried out a series of attacks contesting the legitimacy of the government. Moruk was killed in a joint operation by the police and the military in August 2015. Amnesty International reported that dozens of individuals suspected of supporting Moruk were arbitrarily arrested and tortured in the government operations.<sup>14</sup>

Prior to the March 2017 presidential election, nationwide polls indicated that 66 percent of respondents were concerned about electoral violence in their districts,<sup>15</sup> despite only a few reports of violent incidents in the 2012 elections. Research from a local NGO, Belun, however, predicted that conflicts during the 2017 elections would be small.<sup>16</sup> Francisco Guterres, a former guerrilla fighter backed by both FRETILIN and CNRT, won the election, sustaining Gusmão's influence in Timorese politics. FRETILIN and CNRT also gained victory in July parliamentary election, securing 29.7 and 29.5 percent of the vote respectively. Gusmão however announced that CNRT would not join the coalition government, making it more likely that FRETILIN will form a minority government.<sup>17</sup>



### Transnational terrorism

There have been no reported activities or attacks carried out by transnational terrorist groups in Timor.

## Subnational level

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### Separatism and autonomy

Timor-Leste gained independence in May 2002, with the majority of the population voting against autonomy within Indonesia after 24 years of Indonesian occupation (see the national civil war section for more information). There has been no separatist conflict in Timor-Leste since its independence.



### Large-scale communal and ideological conflicts

Timorese society has long been divided along a number of axes. During the Indonesian occupation, society became deeply split between those involved in the resistance movement and those loyal to Indonesia. An east-west divide stretches back to at least the 1940s, when migrants from eastern and western parts of the country started competing for the control of Dili markets.<sup>18</sup> It became common for migrants to associate themselves with one or the other group. The 2006 crisis, which played a part in the political mobilization of this divide, emboldened youth gangs to partition Dili into territories, using their influence for both criminal activities and “protection” of their communities.<sup>19</sup> The general lawlessness that followed the 2006 political crisis led to widespread gang conflict among groups divided by different loyalties.

Gang-related violence was particularly heated in Dili, and continued until the end of 2007. Dili experienced 70–80 violent incidents per week during the first half of 2007, but violence dropped to an average of 54 incidents per week during the second half of 2007, and 36 in 2008.<sup>20</sup>

During the 2006 crisis, armed groups were organized by patronage and kinship networks centered around particular individuals. These people were usually heads of family networks or former resistance figures who acted as procurers or fixers, organizing youths into mobs to carry out violent activities on behalf of parties or businesses.<sup>21</sup> These groups have continued to be involved in tensions and clashes since 2006.

Each suburb of Dili is divided into neighborhoods (*aldeias*), roughly corresponding to the territories of single communities, sometimes influenced by a gang, martial art group (MAG), or political group.<sup>22</sup> What sometimes appears to be a gang or MAG clash is often a communal dispute between villages, as each community mobilizes its youths to defend its territory. This has been the pattern of violent incidents in Dili. Communal conflicts between families in rural districts sometimes spread to Dili, as one family uses a gang or MAG to attack another family over a property or land dispute. Gang violence often escalates, as members from other gangs or MAGs get involved, leading to cycles of retaliation.<sup>23</sup> For example, a communal conflict that erupted in November 2006 between an antigovernment group, Colimau 2000, and the largest MAG, Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT), rapidly spread from the western district of Ermera to neighboring districts and then into Dili, resulting in seven deaths.<sup>24</sup> The conflict between Colimau 2000 and PSHT led to the formation of an alliance among Colimau 2000, Kmanek Oan Rai Klaran (KORK), and clandestine groups such as 7-7 to fight against PSHT. PSHT's subsequent aggression for territorial dominance and control of security, protection rackets, and illegal activities prompted a wider coalition of gangs and local communities.<sup>25</sup> The conflict continued throughout 2007, particularly between PSHT and 7-7 after PSHT burned down the house of the 7-7 leader. According to UN Police figures, Timor experienced roughly 50 violent incidents per week during that time.<sup>26</sup> The two groups signed a peace agreement in August 2008.

Multiple attempts have been made to address MAG-related violence. A temporary blanket ban of all MAGs was enforced for one year before the 2012 election to limit their involvement in politics and electoral violence. Police officers were also prohibited from joining MAGs. When the ban was lifted in 2013 and violent incidents returned, the government decided to permanently outlaw the three main MAGs—Kera Sakti, KORK, and PSHT—whose members were responsible for most of the violence.

## Local level



### Local political conflict and electoral violence

There was no major lethal violence reported when Timor-Leste held three *suku* (village) elections for village chiefs, subvillage (*aldeias*) chiefs, and delegates for village council (one female and one male delegate from each subvillage) in 2004, 2009, and 2016. ActionAid Australia and Small Arms Survey's report indicated that localized tensions and more subtle forms of intimidation had probably occurred during the 2004 and 2009 *suku* elections.<sup>27</sup> Belun recorded 59 incidents of electoral violence during the 2016 local elections, including 27 incidents of physical violence and 32 incidents of verbal threats.<sup>28</sup> The primary causes of the violent incidents included dissatisfaction with the election results, suspected irregularities in the process or results, confusion about the election process, and poor organization of the election. Based on a law adopted that July, the 2016 elections were implemented by local authorities, not by the Technical Secretariat for Election Administration or the National Election Commission as were previous elections in 2004 and 2009.



### Local conflict over resources and community rights

Land and property disputes are a significant source of friction and conflict, as Timor-Leste lacks a legal basis for determining ownership of land and property beyond Portuguese freehold titles. Timor inherited a highly complex and challenging land title system, a legacy of both Portuguese colonization and Indonesian occupation. The Portuguese and Indonesian governments issued a range of ownership and usage rights that continue to form the basis of many official claims to land and property ownership. Sorting through overlapping claims has been a challenging task due to the destruction of public records and widespread illegal occupation of land and properties after the displacement that followed the 1999 referendum.

Competing land claims between individuals and between individuals and the state are common. The 2006 and 2007 violence led to more displacement, with people forcibly taking back land they felt had been stolen from them during the Indonesian occupation. The Asia Foundation's 2015 survey on community-police perceptions found that land disputes were seen as one of the principal security threats facing local communities.<sup>29</sup> Belun recorded a total of 137 incidents in 2016 related to land for farming and housing, 10.2 percent of all violent incidents that year.<sup>30</sup> The International Crisis Group notes that many land disputes are part of longstanding family or community disputes that have roots in other conflicts.<sup>31</sup> Many cases of gang and MAG violence are rooted in land issues. Due to the absence of a clear land title law, and limited access to police protection and the justice system, many families in rural areas encourage their youth to join these groups for protection in land disputes.

Despite the high stakes involved, the country has made only slow progress on land titling, further inflaming land disputes in communities. The National Directorate for Land, Property, and Cadastral Services, under the Ministry of Justice, started a land surveying program called *Ita Nia Rai* (Our Land), a precursor to land titling, and collected 55,000 claims between 2007 and 2012.<sup>32</sup> However, land surveying conducted by the Ministry of Justice's National Cadastral System, which developed from *Ita Nia Rai*, has also triggered disputes in some communities. Belun recorded 31 incidents related to surveying between 2015 and 2016.<sup>33</sup> In some communities, the surveying sparked tensions over land where there were previously no disputes, as people realized that land ownership was being reexamined. In some cases, the surveying was reportedly conducted without consulting local leaders about how communities address these issues.<sup>34</sup> Although parliament approved a land law to establish a set of criteria for land ownership, it was vetoed by President Horta in 2012. Since then, the land law has been going back and forth between parliament and the government. A package of three laws, to address land titling, territorial integrity, and expropriation, was approved by parliament and sent to the president in April 2017. The law was enacted in June 2017.



### Urban crime and violence

Timor-Leste's political and socioeconomic challenges and the legacies of its past have significantly affected urban crime and violence in Dili, the most populous city in the country, with a population of over 277,000 (2015 census). Dili frequently served as a site of violence and resistance during the Portuguese colonization, the Indonesian occupation, and the 2006–2007 unrest. Although Dili has been stable since 2007, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that it has the second-highest homicide rate in Asia in 2013, 11.3 per 100,000 people, three times higher than the national rate of 3.6 in 2010.<sup>36</sup> Between 2014 and 2016, Belun recorded over 1,000 violent incidents in Dili, 32.4 percent of the national total.<sup>37</sup> Belun's data indicates an upward trend of violence in the capital city (figure 2).

A wide range of factors make Dili vulnerable to urban crime and violence, including rapid rural-to-urban migration, a “youth bulge,” youth unemployment, the growth of gangs and MAGs,



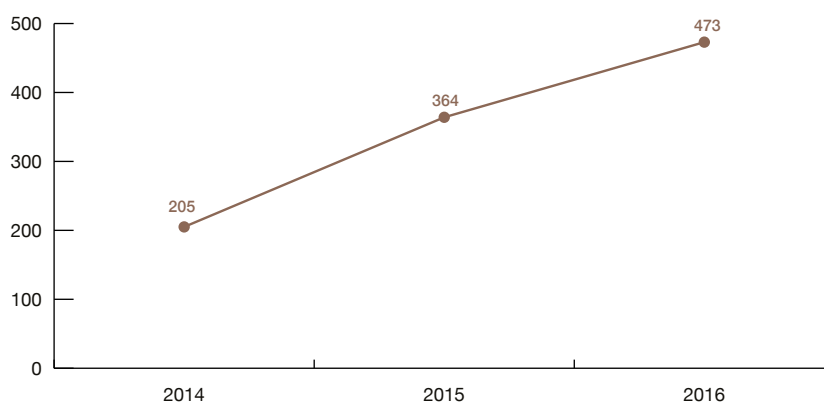
and competition for control of markets and land. The number of migrants in Dili increased from 68,887 in 2004 to 94,349 in 2010.<sup>38</sup> The majority of migrants are young people between 15 and 29<sup>39</sup> who have moved to the capital city seeking better prospects for education and employment. However, the city suffers from inadequate urban planning and a lack of jobs and resources to accommodate them. With the majority of its population under 30 years old, youth unemployment is a serious problem in Dili. The 2010 census reported an unemployment rate of 40.2 percent for urban youth 15–19 years old, compared to 22.8 percent for rural youth.<sup>40</sup>

High rates of unemployment and rural-to-urban migration, compounded by the youth bulge, generate frustration and tensions among youth. According to the 2015 Asia Foundation survey on community-police perceptions, youth issues are the highest security concern in Dili (35 percent).<sup>41</sup> The main provocateurs in MAG-related violence are males between 15 and 25 years old. Gangs and MAGs offer youth companionship, status, protection, services, and a source of income.<sup>42</sup> As some MAGs struggle with bad reputations and restrictions on their activities, organized crime groups have been increasing their recruitment of youth to carry out illegal activities such as theft, prostitution, and other violence.<sup>43</sup>



### Domestic and gender-based violence

Women and girls in Timor-Leste experience widespread gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence. Data from the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) for 2010 through 2014 show an upward trend in reports of domestic violence (figure 3). Based on the PNTL's 2014 data, more than 80 percent of reported incidents of gender-based violence are about domestic violence. According to The Asia Foundation's 2016 report on violence against women and children, 59 percent of women aged 15–49 who had ever been in a relationship had experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime.<sup>44</sup> Seventy-seven percent of female respondents who had experienced any form of physical violence by their partners experienced severe acts of violence, and 81 percent experienced physical violence many times in their lives.<sup>45</sup> The study found that the rates of physical and sexual intimate partner violence were consistently higher in urban areas, particularly in Dili, than in rural areas.<sup>46</sup>



**Figure 2.** Violent incidents in Dili (2014–2016)

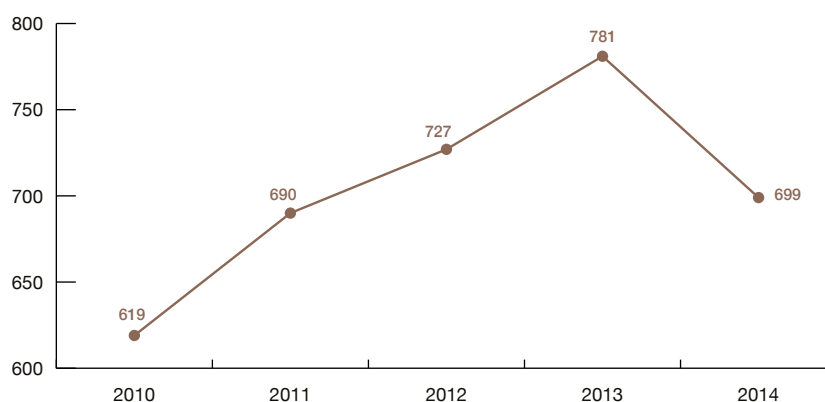
Source: Belun

Domestic violence is often regarded as a private matter in Timor-Leste, and is therefore underreported.<sup>47</sup> The 2009–10 Timor-Leste Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) found that just 24 percent of women who had experienced violence from their partner reported it to anyone.<sup>48</sup> Women most often sought help from their own family (82 percent), their in-laws (27 percent), and friends or neighbors (14 percent). Only 4 percent of women sought help from the police, and just 1 percent from social service organizations.

According to The Asia Foundation’s 2016 study, 14 percent of all women between the ages of 15 and 49 years had been raped by someone other than a husband or boyfriend (nonpartner rape) in their lifetimes, and 10 percent said this had happened in the previous 12 months. Three percent of women had been raped by more than one man at the same time (gang rape). These figures are higher than any of the 16 countries where the WHO or UN Multi-Country Study survey methodology has been used in the past. Child abuse rates are also the second highest in the Asia-Pacific after Papua New Guinea. Seventy-two percent of women and 77 percent of men had experienced at least one form of physical or sexual abuse before age 18.<sup>49</sup>

Patriarchal culture and traditional practices reinforce gender inequalities and heavily influence how women and girls are treated and regarded within the household and in the community. Many studies and surveys indicate that there is a high degree of tolerance for violence against women within intimate relationships, and both Timorese men and women often believe that some forms of physical and sexual violence are not violence, but discipline. The 2009–10 Timor-Leste DHS found that 86 percent of women believed a husband is justified in beating his wife if she burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children, or refuses to have sexual intercourse with him.<sup>50</sup>

The weak formal justice and security sectors exacerbate the problem. Amid rising concern over domestic violence in the postindependence period, the parliament passed the Law Against Domestic Violence in May 2010. However, appealing to the formal justice system in domestic violence cases is still uncommon. Victims are often referred back to their community leaders to solve the problem. Courts often treat domestic violence cases lightly, and tend to suspend a prison sentence or substitute a fine.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 3.** Incidents of domestic violence in Timor-Leste (2010–2014)

Source: PNTL<sup>52</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in East Timor (CAVR), "The Profile of Human Rights Violations in Timor-Leste, 1974–1999," part 6 in *Chega! Final Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor* (Colombo and Brussels: CAVR, 2005), 3, <https://www.etan.org/news/2006/cavr.htm>. The reporting period includes deaths from a brief civil war between supporters of FRETILIN and União Democrática Timorese (UDT) following an attempted UDT coup, which FRETILIN resisted with the help of local Portuguese military.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 3 Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation in East Timor (CAVR), "Violation of the Rights of the Child," part 7.8 in *Chega! Final Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor* (Colombo and Brussels: CAVR, 2005), 78, <https://www.etan.org/news/2006/cavr.htm>. Precise figures on the number of children forcibly transferred are unavailable. Estimates are between 2,400 and 4,500.
- 4 UN Economic and Social Council, *Report by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye, on his mission to Indonesia and East Timor from 3 to 13 July 1994* (E/CN.4/1995/61/Add.1) (New York: UN, 1994), 6–7, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G94/145/62/PDF/G9414562.pdf?OpenElement>.
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- 7 Larry Niksch, Lois McHugh, and Rhoda Margesson, *East Timor Situation Report* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2001), <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/crs/RL30975.pdf>.
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- 10 Belun and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), *Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) in Timor-Leste: Final Report* (Dili: Belun and IFES, 2007), [http://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/final\\_report\\_ever\\_17\\_oct.pdf](http://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/final_report_ever_17_oct.pdf).
- 11 Timor-Leste Armed Violence Assessment (TLAVA), *Electoral Violence in Timor-Leste: mapping, incidents and responses*, Issue Brief Number 3 (Dili: TLAVA, 2009), 4, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/K-Timor-leste-ava/SAS-Timor-Leste-AVA-IB3-ENG.pdf>.
- 12 "Timor-Leste clashes break out after prime minister forms coalition," *Guardian*, July 16, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/16/clashes-timor-leste-coalition>.
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