



*Summary findings*

# TIMOR-LESTE SAFETY, SECURITY AND JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS SURVEY

2022



NEW ZEALAND  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE  
Aid Programme



**The Asia Foundation**  
Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities

## TIMOR-LESTE SAFETY, SECURITY, AND JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS SURVEY, 2022

**PRODUCED BY:** The Asia Foundation

**AUTHORS:** Abby McLeod, Lisa Denney

**REVIEWERS:** Bu Wilson, Megan Hirst, Heidi Arbuckle

**SAMPLE DESIGN:** Da-Eun Kim

**DATA COLLECTION:** Carmenesa Soares and the Timor-Leste Research and Advocacy Network

**DATA PROCESSING AND VISUALIZATION:** ORIMA Research

**DESIGN AND LAYOUT:** Elzemiek Zinkstok

**CONTENT EDITOR:** Rebecca Conroy

The Asia Foundation would like to thank all the respondents who volunteered their experiences for the purposes of this research. We would also like to thank Todd Wassel, Bu Wilson and Megan Hirst for their feedback on an early version of the survey findings.

The 2022 Timor-Leste Safety, Security, and Justice Perceptions Survey was funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) through the Community Security and Justice Program (*Programa Apoio Seguransa Komunidade*, PASK).

Cover photo: Women performing the traditional dance “tebe-tebe likurai” in preparation for the 20th anniversary celebration of the Restoration of Independence in Dom Boaventura, Luac, Manufahi. Photo taken by Solita Noronha Pereira.

### ABOUT THE ASIA FOUNDATION

The Asia Foundation is a non-profit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our work across the region is focused on good governance, women’s empowerment and gender equality, inclusive economic growth, environment and climate action, and regional and international relations. In Timor-Leste, the Foundation is currently focused on strengthening governance and policy, ending violence against women, developing inclusive tourism, and promoting peace and justice.

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
SAFETY AND SECURITY	3
CRIME AND DISPUTE: PERCEPTIONS, EXPERIENCE AND PATHWAYS	6
ENGAGEMENT WITH AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE PNTL	9
CONCLUSION	11



Photo by: Solita Noronha Pereira 2022

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, The Asia Foundation conducted its sixth nationwide survey to capture general public and community leader perceptions of safety, security and justice in Timor-Leste. These surveys generate empirical data that can be used by policymakers, the police, researchers, and development organizations to respond to people's experiences and perceived challenges of security and justice, with a view to strengthening the human security of people in Timor-Leste.

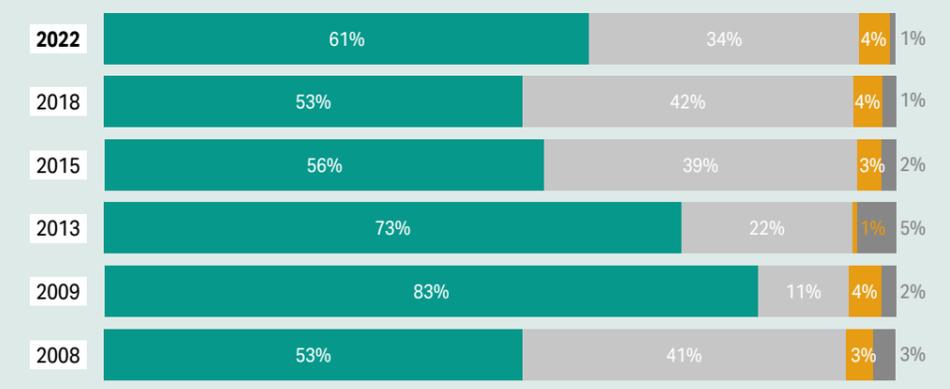
Since 2008 (when the first survey was conducted), surveys have been modified to enable the exploration of contemporary issues to best inform emerging policy and practice. This year, the survey explored the different roles community leaders play in dispute resolution and how they make decisions, as well as views on the ways in which the members of vulnerable groups interact with state and non-state law and justice actors. These new avenues of inquiry were pursued alongside a range of questions about safety, security, justice-seeking behaviors and the Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste (PNTL), which have been asked since the surveys first commenced.

The 2022 survey interviewed a random, representative sample of members of the general public and community leaders aged 17 years and over from 13 municipalities of Timor-Leste (data collection was completed before Timor-Leste made the island of Atauro its 14th municipality). The survey was implemented between November 2021 and January 2022 by 62 enumerators (43 male; 19 female) of the Timor-Leste Research and Advocacy Network (TRAIN). The survey was conducted as a part of The Asia Foundation's Community Security and Justice Program (Programa Apoio Seguransa Komunitade, PASK), which is funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT).

# SAFETY AND SECURITY

The 2022 community perceptions of safety and security survey reveal that hard-won improvements in safety and security have been maintained since the last survey in 2018. Given Timor-Leste's recent experiences of COVID-19 and the 2021 floods, maintaining and even improving respondents' perceptions of safety and security is impressive.

**FIGURE 1** How would you describe the security situation in your locality compared to the previous year?

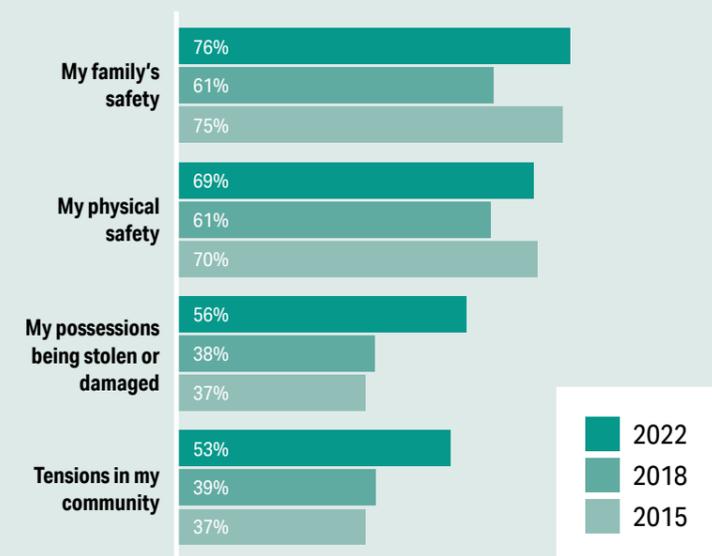


■ Security has improved      ■ Security has become worse  
■ Security has stayed the same      ■ Don't know / No answer

Nonetheless, people continue to experience crime and interpersonal disputes, most typically relating to family matters, land, and animals; respondents continue to be concerned about their safety and security and their families. Domestic violence (DV) continues to be underreported in the survey, suggesting significant work remains to elevate understanding of DV as a community security and justice issue.

“  
**Perceptions of security continue to remain stable and have improved slightly.. Yet concerns about safety and security have increased.**”

**FIGURE 2** General public: I am worried about... (% strongly agree or agree)



■ 2022  
■ 2018  
■ 2015

The 2022 survey findings were characterized more by continuity than substantial change, albeit some shifts were apparent. Although respondents continue to rely primarily on television for information about security, they increasingly rely on the internet and social media, particularly young respondents. General public respondents also reported increasing reliance upon Aldeia Chiefs for security information, consistent with the broader finding that Aldeia Chiefs are the most prominent community dispute resolution actors.

As in past surveys, respondents continue to perceive community leaders as having the greatest responsibility for security in their location, although it became apparent that they see Aldeia Chiefs as having greater responsibility than Suco Chiefs or lian-na'in. While people also continue to see a significant role for the PNTL in the maintenance of security, when asked about responsibility for the resolution of disputes and grievances, general public respondents considered the PNTL to play a lesser role with the most significant responsibility being vested in community leaders—most prominently Aldeia Chiefs. Unlike members of the general public, community leaders see the PNTL as having the greatest responsibility for security in their location.

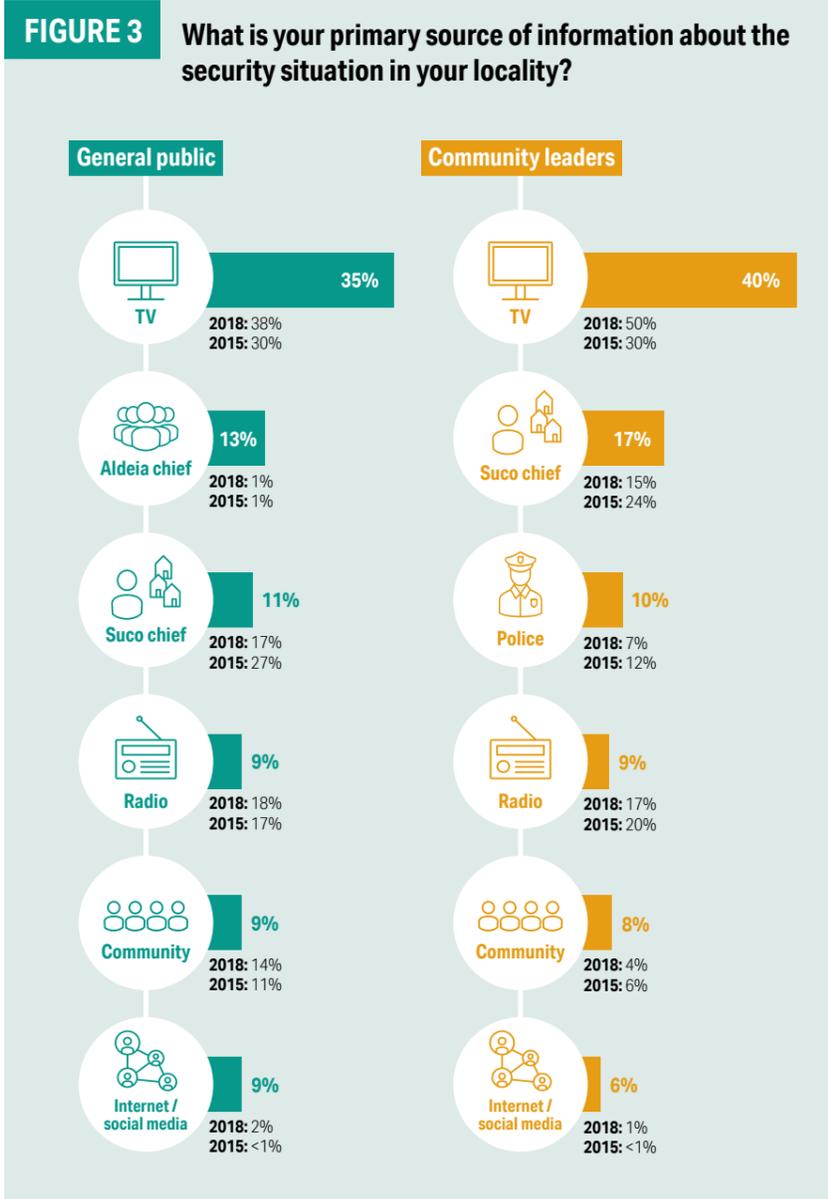


Photo by: The Asia Foundation, 2015

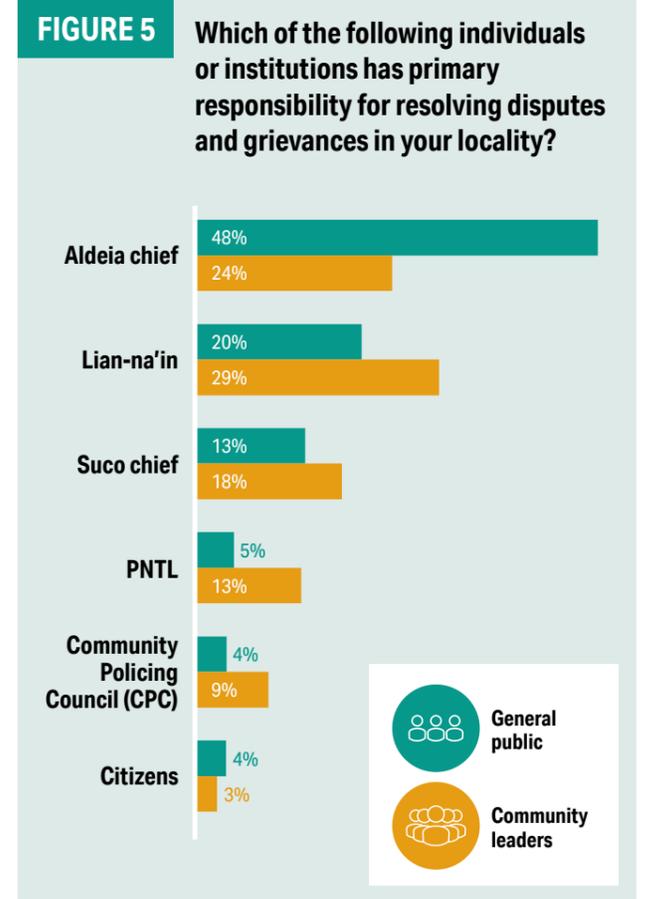
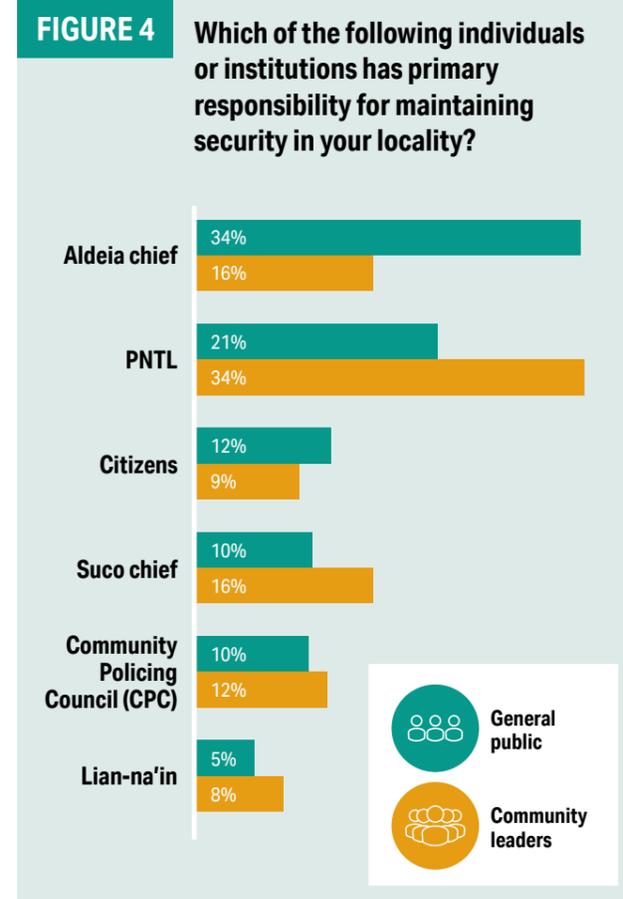


Photo by: Solita Noronha Pereira, 2022

“People perceive their immediate community leaders as having the greatest responsibility for security in their location.”

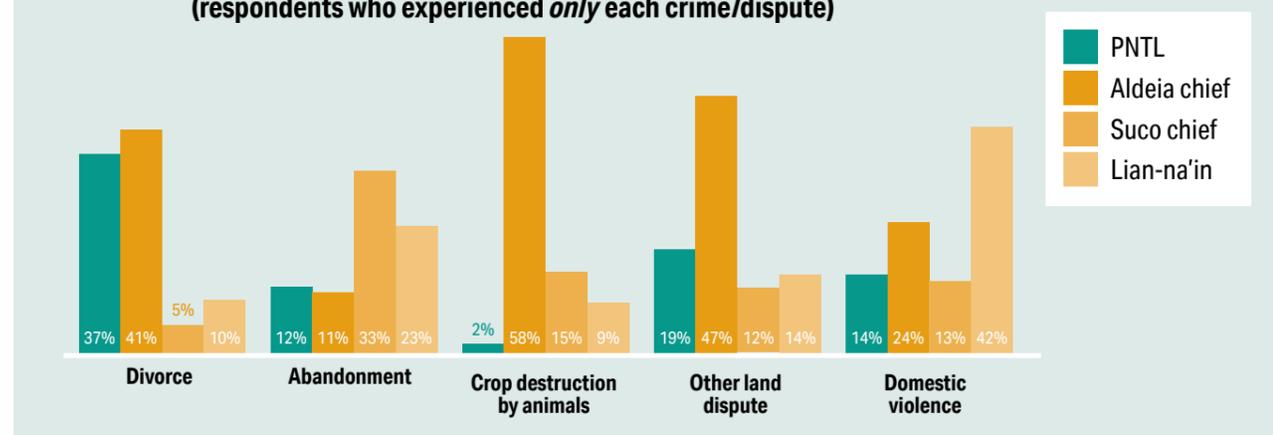
# CRIME AND DISPUTE: PERCEPTIONS, EXPERIENCE, PATHWAYS

Half of all general public respondents had experienced at least one crime or dispute in the previous year. This figure was likely much higher than in previous years due to the inclusion of a broader range of crime/dispute response options. Divorce and abandonment<sup>1</sup> were the most common crime/disputes experienced, followed by crop destruction by animals and land disputes.

The inclusion of a broader range of crimes/disputes resulted in greater consistency (than in previous years) between what respondents *think they would do* if affected by a hypothetical crime/dispute and what respondents *did do* when affected by actual crimes/disputes. In 2022, respondents who had actual experiences of crimes/disputes predominantly first reported to community leaders, consistent with what they thought they would do if they experienced a hypothetical crime/dispute.

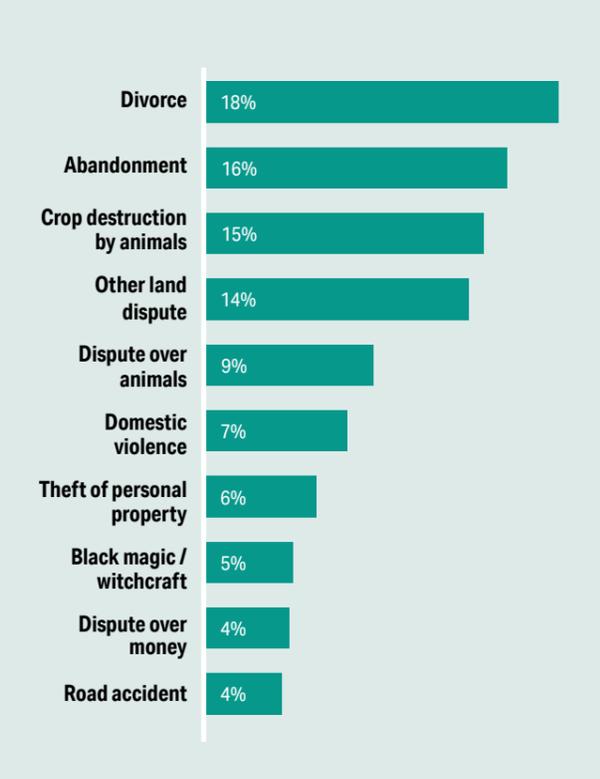
Most respondents who experience crimes or disputes do not retaliate, but only just over half seek assistance. Overwhelmingly, general public respondents see community leaders as the most appropriate initial avenue for reporting a crime/dispute. However, they take different matters to different types of leaders, and the degree to which they perceive a role for the PNTL varies according to the nature of the issue at hand. Of those who experienced a crime/dispute and sought assistance, 43% first reported to an Aldeia Chief, followed by the PNTL (19%), a lian-na'in (10%) or Suco Chief (8%). Those who seek assistance typically have their issue resolved by the first person they report to and feel that they were fairly treated.

**FIGURE 7** Who is the first person or organization you reported to? (respondents who experienced *only* each crime/dispute)



<sup>1</sup> Abandonment in the Timor-Leste context often refers to men leaving their wife/partner and/or children without material support. It includes paternity cases where a pregnant woman is seeking material support from someone who promised to marry her; as well as in sexual assault cases resulting in pregnancy where the perpetrator refuses to pay maintenance.

**FIGURE 6** Have you or a member of your family experienced any of the following in the last year?



Community leaders report good relationships with the PNTL and see them as the most appropriate initial mechanism to report crimes and disputes. Proximity plays the most decisive role in determining from whom people seek assistance.

Land disputes were the matters most commonly referred to others by community leaders and amongst the matters they reported finding most difficult to deal with. Community leader respondents also reported finding it difficult to deal with physical attacks resulting in death and domestic violence (which they do not believe they should deal with) and which they rightly perceive as police matters. Given that members of the general public continue first to take domestic violence to community leaders to resolve, ongoing public education about how to address domestic violence is essential. It is a positive finding that people believe that all people are treated equally by police and community leaders, although this appears to be less the case for members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) community.

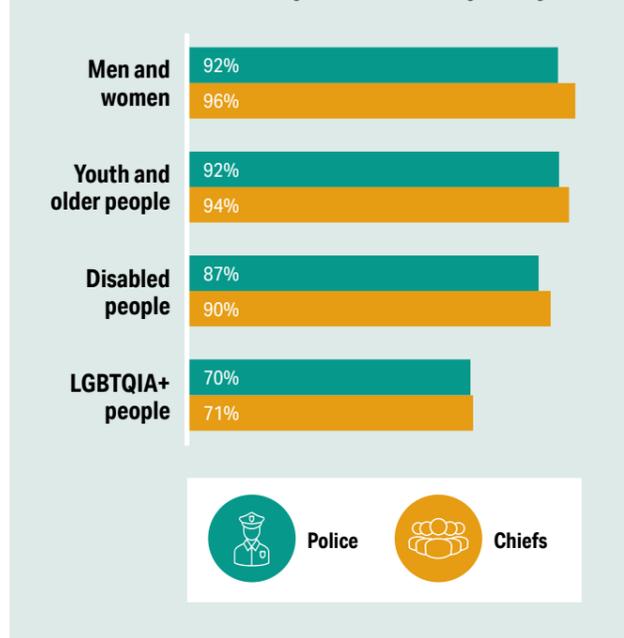
Community leader respondents rely heavily upon their knowledge of community traditions and customs, rather than Timorese law, to resolve crimes/disputes brought to them, typically using mediation, which assumes a range of forms. Despite the prominent role of community leaders in dispute resolution, however, addressing crimes and disputes is a collaborative endeavor (consistent with respondents' understanding of community policing) involving partnerships with both state and non-state actors, most importantly police but also increasingly with non-government and religious organizations, as well as veterans and martial arts groups.



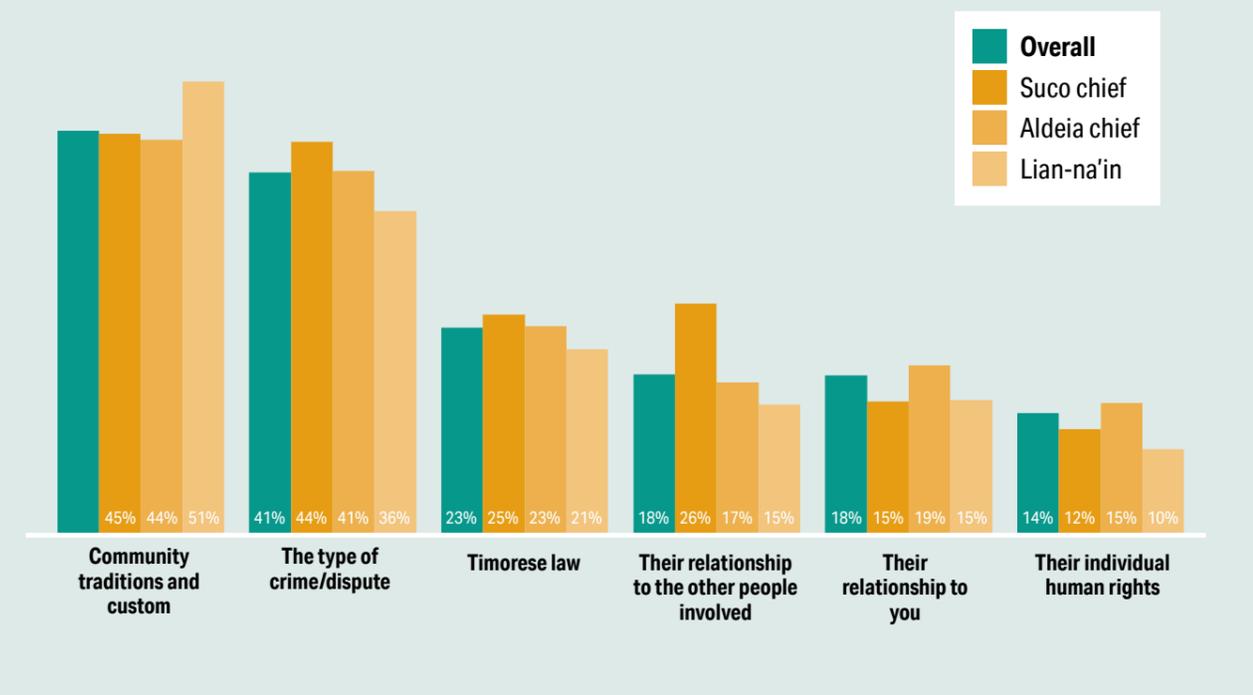
**FIGURE 8** Why did you take your complaint to [the first person sought assistance from] first?



**FIGURE 9** Are the following types of people treated the same by Police and Chiefs in your community? (% yes)



**FIGURE 10** When a member of the community comes to you about a crime or dispute, do you consider any of the following when deciding what type of help to provide them? (Community Leaders)



“

*There is significant regional variation in assistance seeking pathways, highlighting the highly localized nature of crime/dispute and its resolution.*



Photo by: The Asia Foundation Nabilan Program, 2015

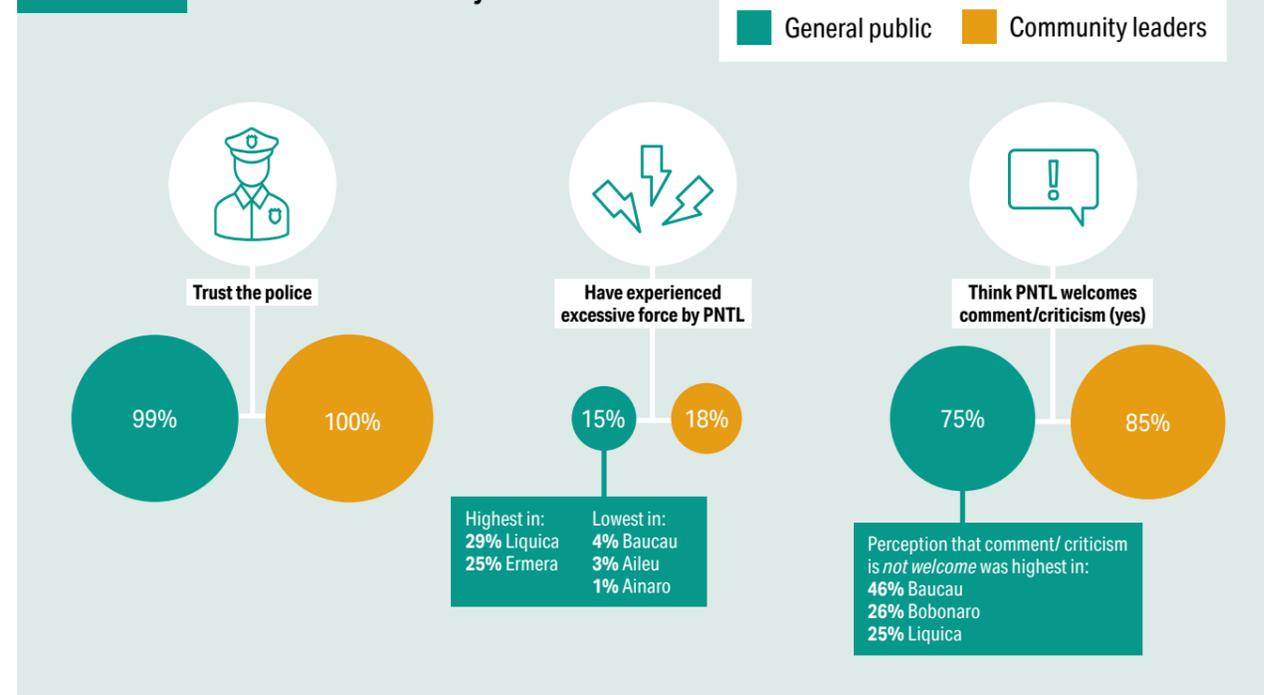
## ENGAGEMENT WITH AND PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE

“

*Contact with police was higher than in 2018, accompanied by more positive perceptions of police across multiple measures.*

As in previous years, survey respondents reported remarkably high levels of trust in police and continued to perceive their performance as improving, despite 15% reporting excessive use of force by police.

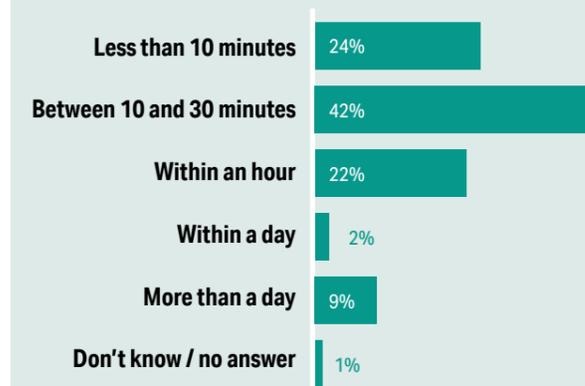
**FIGURE 11** Trust and Use of Force by Police



The *Ofisial Polisia Suku* or Village Policing Service (OPS) plays an important role in connecting people with the broader PNTL and community-PNTL engagement has increased since the last survey. Most people can access a police station in under an hour, and of those who have made direct contact with police, most received a response in under 30 minutes. These are positive findings, yet there is significant regional variation, with respondents in some areas of the country receiving substantially slower police responses and taking substantially longer to access a police station, in some cases more than a day.

Members of the public feel that police *presence* in their communities “is about right”, an improvement on previous years, although a significant number of community leaders feel that it is “too little”. Most members of the public and community leaders feel that police *involvement* “is about right”. The high demand for increased numbers of women in the PNTL continues.

**FIGURE 12** How long did the PNTL take respond to your request?



“

People see a need for increased numbers of women in policing.

FIGURE 13 Role of Police in Dispute Resolution

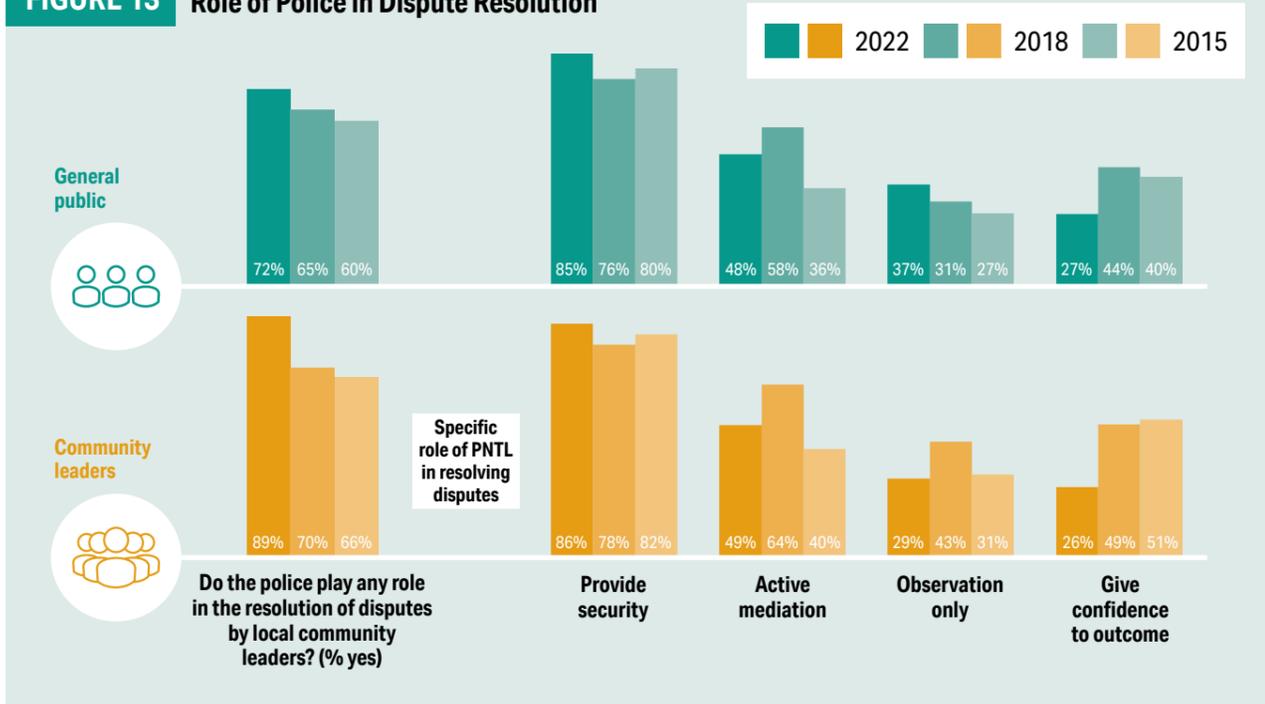


FIGURE 14

What does the term community policing mean to you? (Top 5 themes)



Police work closely with community leaders to address crimes and disputes, and they play a range of roles including providing security and assisting with mediation. The roles police play when supporting community leaders varies greatly across the country.

Awareness of the concept of community policing continues to grow in Timor-Leste. However, fewer respondents reported having an active Community Policing Council in their community in 2022, possibly due to more limited operations in light of COVID-19 restrictions.

What stands out most prominently in the 2022 data is the widespread regional variation. Although minimal variations on the basis of demographics such as gender and age are apparent, the degree to which variation exists between municipalities suggests that where people live has a significant impact on their experiences of safety, security, and justice. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize about people’s experiences at the national level because doing so masks great diversity in lived experience. Further work could draw out these sub-national variations and experiences to inform policymaking and programming.

CONCLUSION

The 2022 Safety, Security and Justice Perceptions Survey reveals notable improvements in many aspects of people’s experiences of safety, security, and policing in Timor-Leste. It also provides a more granular understanding of the various ways people seek to resolve disputes and crimes and the processes by which community leaders conduct resolution. While the overall picture painted by the data is generally positive, the experience of vulnerable groups deserves particular attention to ensure that improvements in safety, security, and justice benefit everyone and that some are not left behind.

Notably, the most significant variations within the data occur by municipality rather than by age, sex, or ability. This suggests that experiences of safety, security, and justice are highly localized. Headline statistics at the national level can thus mask important sub-national variation. In recognition of this variation, policymaking and programming require much more fine-grained tailoring of initiatives to the sub-national context.

Looking to the future, it is clear that community leaders remain at the heart of communities in Timor-Leste and play important primary roles in providing security and dispute resolution functions. Supporting these leaders, monitoring their performance, and ensuring they are responsive to the communities they serve will be key to improving the safety, security, and justice of all Timorese. In addition, the PNTL is clearly emerging as a more trusted service that is viewed as broadly acting in the service of community security. Continuing to support healthy and robust police-community relationships that are inclusive and respectful of the rights of all will ensure that this positive journey continues.

“

The experience of vulnerable groups needs particular attention to ensure that improvements in safety, security and justice benefit everyone.



Photo by the National Police of Timor-Leste



**NEW ZEALAND**  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE  
Aid Programme



**The Asia Foundation**  
Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities