

# Timor-Leste 2016 Suku Election Survey

On August 17, 2016, the Government of Timor-Leste announced in the *Journal du Republica* the intention to proceed with the local government elections for *xefes Aldeia*, *suku* council members, and *xefe suku* on September 30, 2016. The upcoming election would follow the new election proceedings as contained within the newly promulgated Suku Law No. 9/2016. Following the announcement, various advocates, civil society groups, and members of the National Elections Commission (CNE) voiced concern over the government and communities' readiness to implement an election at such short notice.

In an effort to gain insight into the preparedness of communities and to address particular concerns from communities, The Asia Foundation conducted a telephone poll of 227 elected community leaders.



(L) Voters in Timor-Leste line up to vote  
(R) Elections officials discuss the ballot

## METHODOLOGY

Given the very short timeframe in the lead up to the planned election, coupled with the need to obtain a randomized sample, the Foundation devised a short survey questionnaire comprised of 10 questions to be implemented via telephone. Utilizing trained enumerators from Matadalan Institute, a member organization of the Timor-Leste Research and Advocacy Network (TRAIN), the Foundation managed the poll from our offices in Dili, using tablet computers. All phone calls were made under close supervision by Foundation staff for quality control purposes. Published phone numbers of *xefe suku* were randomized by Foundation staff and provided to enumerators. Only complete surveys were included in the analysis.

The survey questionnaire was designed by Asia Foundation management and members of the Pasa ba Suku local governance team. Coding, translation, and training of enumerators was conducted by Foundation survey and monitoring staff. All analysis was done by Foundation survey staff in consultation with an Innovation Specialist. The poll took place between September 5-7, 2016.

Of 442 *xefe suku*, we interviewed 227 individuals, constituting 52 percent of the total. Of those, 214 respondents (95 percent) were male and 12 respondents (5 percent) were female.<sup>1</sup> The margin of error (MoE) can be defined for any confidence level, but in this case is 95 percent. This level is the probability that a margin of error around a reported percentage includes the "true" percentage. All percentages in this report, unless stated otherwise, carry a 4.54 percent margin of error.

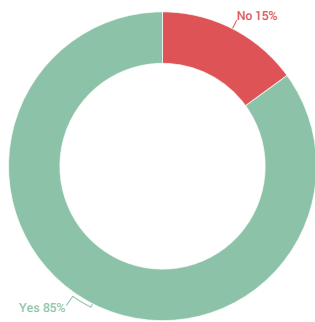
## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### AWARENESS OF THE NEW SUKU LAW

NO. 9/2016

Of the 227 respondents, 193 (85 percent) have heard of the new *suku* law as promulgated by the president in July 2016. Of those that had heard of the new *suku* law, more than half of *xefe sukus* (55 percent) obtained information from television, nearly three times as many as the next source of information, namely community leaders (18 percent), followed by radio (14 percent).

Have you heard any information about the 2016 suku elections?



Of those who indicated that they have not heard about the law, enumerators were asked to read a section of the *suku* law to respondents relating to the competencies and roles and responsibilities of the *suku* council, as defined by the law. These respondents, who indicated no previous knowledge about the law, were then asked to identify any potential concerns, in their opinion, that they foresee with the extent of the competencies contained in the legislation. Of these respondents, 44 percent listed the complicated election procedure in the law as their main concern.<sup>2</sup>

### AWARENESS OF THE UPCOMING SUKU ELECTION

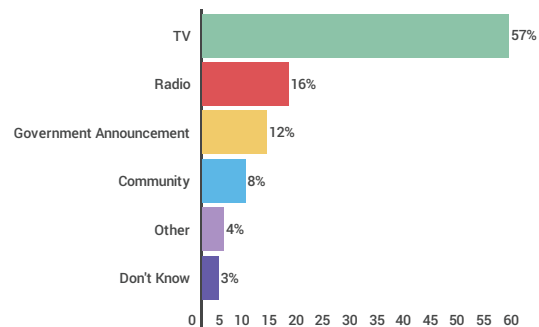
Of the respondents interviewed for this survey, it is encouraging that an overwhelming majority (85 percent) have heard about the upcoming *suku* election.

Despite earlier indication that the election may take place on September 17, it could potentially be moved to a later date altogether.<sup>3</sup> Of those who indicated that they have heard about the upcoming election, 92 percent were aware that the date was September 30, 2016.<sup>4</sup> Seven percent of respondents however indicated that they did not know the scheduled date for the upcoming election.<sup>5</sup>

Once again, the main source of information was television with 56 percent of respondents who were familiar with the

election obtaining information through this medium. The next source of information is radio (16 percent), the government (at 12 percent) and community at just 8 percent.

Where did you hear about it (election date)?

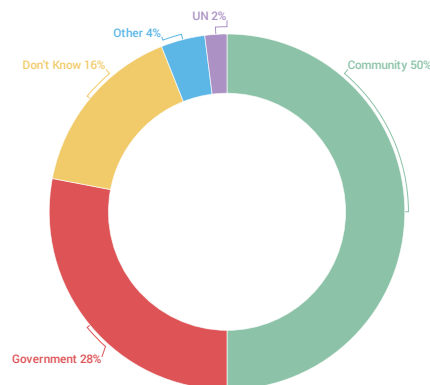


### PERCEPTIONS ON ELECTION MANAGEMENT

To gauge the familiarity with the current *suku* law, respondents were first asked about their familiarity with election management of the previous *suku* election, held in 2009. Of the 227 respondents, 86 percent responded that the government managed the election. Six percent believed the community managed the election and three percent thought the UN managed the *suku* election in 2009.

Of those who indicated that the government was responsible for managing the previous *suku* election, 67 percent identified STAE and 25 percent identified CNE as being the responsible government body.<sup>6</sup>

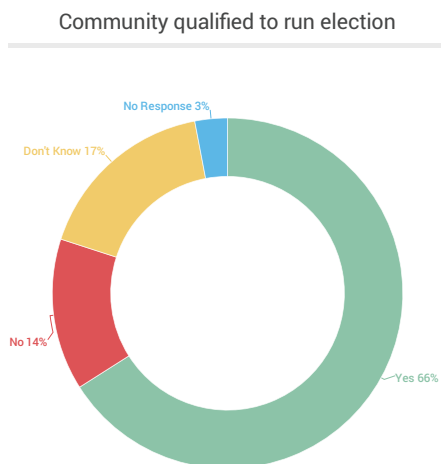
Do you know who will manage the suku election in 2016?



Turning toward the upcoming 2016 *suku* elections, respondents were then asked whether they knew who were responsible for managing the elections in September. Of the respondents aware of the upcoming elections only 50 percent were able to correctly identify that the community

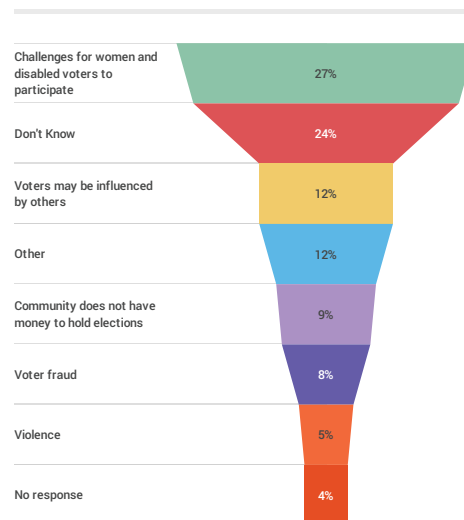
was responsible for managing the election.<sup>7</sup> Half of all of these respondents either did not know (16 percent) who was responsible for managing the upcoming election, or thought that the government (28 percent), or the UN (2 percent), or another institution (4 percent) was responsible.<sup>8</sup>

At this stage in the survey, respondents were reminded of the government circular outlining that communities would be responsible for managing all aspects of the elections including printing of ballots, processing of applications by candidates, voting, run-off elections and other aspects. Based on this fact, respondents were asked whether they believed there were people in their own community capable of implementing the election. Over two-thirds of respondents (66 percent) indicated that they did feel their community had people capable of managing all aspects of the election. A further 17 percent did not know, and nearly 14 percent of respondents felt that there were not members of their community qualified to implement the elections in September.



Finally, in light of informing respondents that the communities would be responsible for managing the elections, the survey tried to gauge any particular concerns or fears that community leaders may have regarding the upcoming elections. Options included accessibility, voter fraud, violence, lack of resources to implement the elections at the community level, and the notion that some people may decide on behalf of others. More than one in four respondents (27 percent) replied with concerns for women and people with disabilities to be able to freely vote. Nearly 12 percent of voters are concerned that voters may be influenced by others. Only 8 percent were concerned with voter fraud, and less than 5 percent listed concerns of violence as their main concern with the upcoming elections.

Community Concerns with upcoming elections



## CONCLUSION

This quick survey of *suku* chiefs was conducted to provide policymakers, election officials, community leaders, and elections advocates with feedback from community leaders tasked with assisting in the upcoming local elections. While it is encouraging to see what percentage of respondents (85 percent) were in fact aware of the upcoming elections, indicating that the government and election bodies are getting the information out, there is concern that only 50 percent of those polled were aware of the fact that the communities themselves would be responsible for managing the elections. Nearly one-third of respondents were under the impression that the government would manage the elections, and over 15 percent indicated that they did not know.

Notably a high percentage of respondents thought that their community did have qualified individuals capable of implementing the elections. Of the specific concerns listed, accessibility far outranked any other concern and should be a consideration for advocates of women and people with mobility issues (elderly, disabled) to ensure that all citizens have access to casting their vote on September 30. Notably, less than 10 percent of respondents were concerned with major voter fraud, and even less than 5 percent listed violence as a fear that they hold.

<sup>1</sup> Note other estimates range between 9-11 female xefe suku in total. The scope of this survey was not able to determine why the discrepancy exists.

<sup>2</sup> Since this question was only asked of respondents who identified that they had not previously heard about the law (n = 34), the small sample size herein, indicate that this figure should be seen as indicative and not statistically reliable within the margin of error of the survey.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of print there were initial announcements that the government may be postponing the suku election to October 2016. Due to this development, the survey was unable to take the new date into account

<sup>4</sup> Sample size n = 194; MoE = 5.28%

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Sample size n = 196; MoE = 5.23%

<sup>7</sup> Sample size n = 194; MoE = 5.28%

<sup>8</sup> Sample size n = 194; MoE = 5.28%

<sup>9</sup> Sample size n = 194; MoE = 5.28%



## The Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit 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 addresses five overarching goals—strengthen governance, empower women, expand economic opportunity, increase environmental resilience, and promote regional cooperation.

Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals. In 2015, we provided more than \$95 million in direct program support and distributed textbooks and other educational materials valued at over \$10 million.

Funding for this survey was made available through the generous support of the UK Department of International Development (DFID) through our Pasa ba Suku local governance program.

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