



Development  
Progress

**Case Study Report**  
*Security*



**AFTER THE  
BUFFALOES  
CLASH**  
Moving from  
political violence  
to personal  
security in  
Timor-Leste

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Cover image: For some in Timor-Leste, martial arts is a recreational sport, while for others martial arts practices have stronger ties of group identity which can lead to rivalries and violence.

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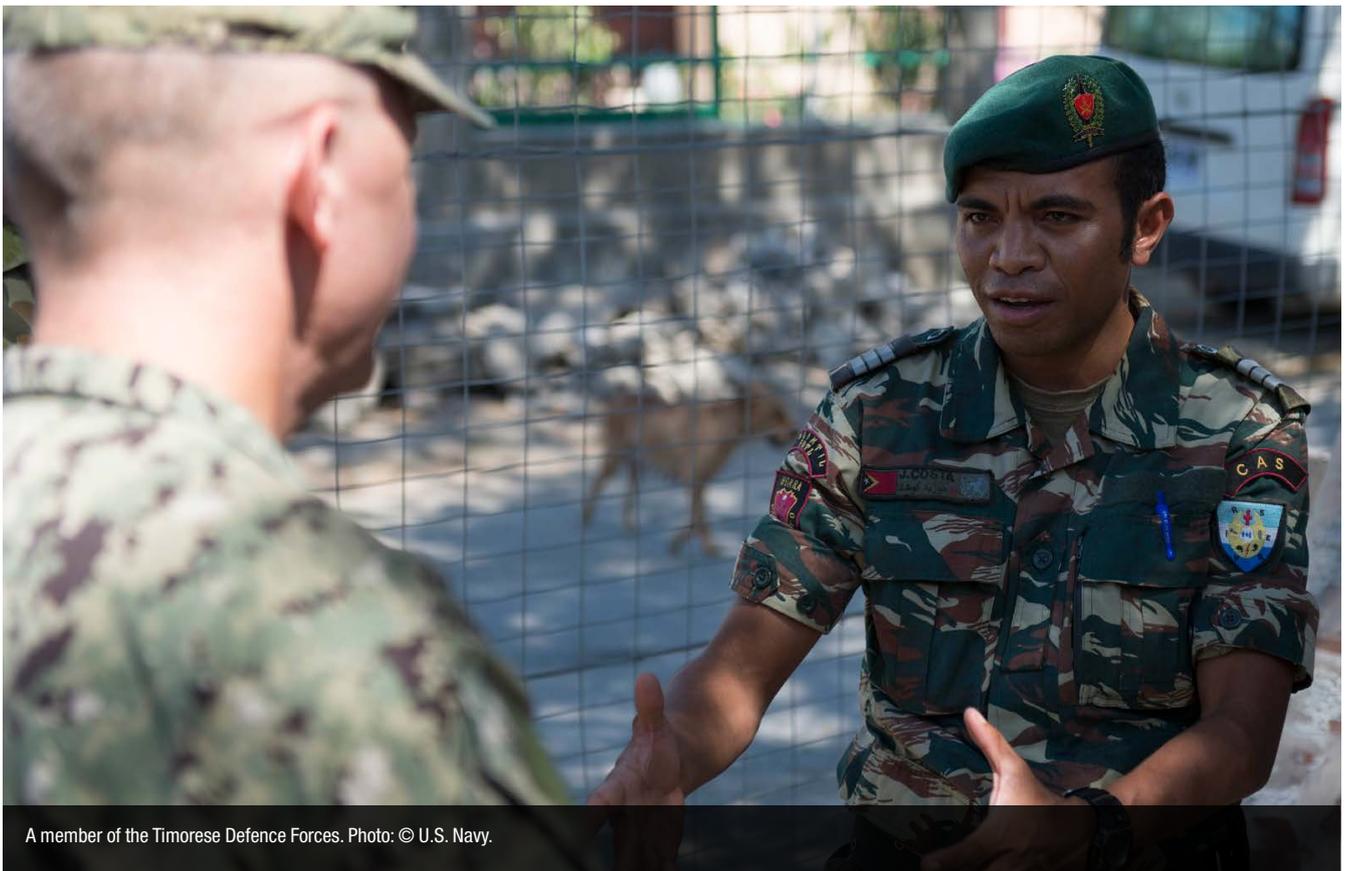
# Abbreviations

<b>AMP</b>	Parliamentary Majority Alliance	<b>KRM</b>	Maubere Revolutionary Council
<b>CAVR</b>	Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation	<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>CNRT</b>	Conselho Nacional de Reconstrução de Timor	<b>ODA</b>	official development assistance
<b>CPD-</b>	Popular Committee for Defence of the Democratic	<b>PDHJ</b>	Human Rights and Justice Provedoria
<b>RDTL</b>	Republic of Timor-Leste	<b>PNTL</b>	Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste
<b>EWER</b>	Early Warning, Early Response	<b>POLRI</b>	Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia
<b>FALINTIL</b>	Forças Armadas de Libertacao Nacional de Timor-Leste (Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor)	<b>SGBV</b>	sexual and gender-based violence
<b>F-FDTL</b>	FALINTIL-Forças Armadas de Defesa de Timor-Leste	<b>SSR</b>	security sector reform
<b>FRETILIN</b>	Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor)	<b>UNAMET</b>	United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>GNI</b>	gross national income	<b>UNMISSET</b>	United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person	<b>UNMIT</b>	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste
<b>INTERFET</b>	International Force for East Timor	<b>UNOTIL</b>	United Nations Office in Timor-Leste
<b>ISF</b>	International Stabilisation Force	<b>UNPOL</b>	United Nations Police
		<b>UNTAET</b>	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor

# Abstract

Timor-Leste is often held up as a post-conflict success story. However, this was also the case before the political-military crisis and elections-related violence in 2006-2007 brought this story crashing back down to reality. This paper examines the progress made in personal security since that time. It finds there have been notable reductions in various forms of violence in Timor-Leste, particularly political violence. The reasons for this include a mix of peacekeeping interventions which eventually transitioned into nationally owned decision-making, a relatively stable political settlement, the government's attempts to 'buy the peace' with oil and gas reserves, effective state responses to threats to stability, ongoing development of a national police force and a range of responses by local actors to insecurity. However, a number of tensions and trends threaten to undermine the gains made to date. Various

forms of violence persist: notably sexual and gender-based violence, and violence linked to the security sector, land, urban growth and youth groups. Crucially, many of the factors that have brought stability to Timor-Leste may not be sowing the seeds of sustainable peace. For example, questions remain over how Timor-Leste can transition away from the highly enigmatic but centralised political domination of Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, whether it can move away from a 'buying the peace' approach, and how problems in the security sector can be resolved. Finally, while security has undoubtedly improved, this may be negated by socioeconomic inequalities and questions around how the gains made to date may be sustained. Timor-Leste's experience, then, is a chequered story of security progress. While much has been achieved, there is still a long way to go.



A member of the Timorese Defence Forces. Photo: © U.S. Navy.

**‘When two buffaloes clash, it’s the ground beneath them that gets trampled’ (Former Timorese MP)**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Why explore security in Timor-Leste?

In this paper, we present an analysis of the progress made in security by Timor-Leste since 2008. We focus on improvements in personal security, understood as *personal safety from physical threat and fear of physical threat*.<sup>1</sup> Personal security is an essential part of well-being and development. With security, people are more able to invest in their futures, and it can also make it easier for governments and other groups to deliver public services and for people to engage in livelihood activities. International efforts to put security issues on the development agenda have resulted in increased donor funding and commitment to peacekeeping efforts, as well as for conflict prevention strategies, including security and justice sector reform in post-conflict states. However, what security is, who it is for and who should provide it remain contested questions, and even where there is progress on these issues in fragile and conflict-affected states, it is often fraught with challenges relating to equity and sustainability (Valters et al., 2014). Timor-Leste is a significant case study, not least because of its position as one of the leading members of the g7+, a voluntary association of 20 countries that self-identify as being affected by conflict and that aim to share experiences, learn from one another and reform international engagement in fragile contexts.

While our main focus is on how far Timor-Leste has come since 2008, we necessarily also use a wider lens, taking into account Timor-Leste's occupation from 1975 to 1999, the UN administration between 1999 and 2002, as well as key events since independence in 2002. Our analysis highlights notable improvements, particularly since 2008, such as an absence of civil conflict, improved institutional resilience, a decline in many forms of violence, and perceptions of improved safety and security amongst the population. These are important changes in a country where, as our headline quote suggests, people have suffered greatly as a result of political contestation and violence. But there are also some important caveats. Violence and insecurity persist in various ways, including through sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), security sector violence and violence linked to land, urban growth and youth groups. Furthermore, the sustainability of Timor-Leste's

security progress remains tentative, based on a fragile political settlement, finite oil and gas reserves, and state security institutions that remain weak in many ways (ICG, 2013; IPAC, 2014).

This case study is guided by three key questions:

- What progress has Timor-Leste achieved in personal security?
- What factors are driving these changes?
- What challenges remain for improving personal security?

As we shall demonstrate, the improvements in personal security experienced by many Timorese are the product of several interrelated factors. They are underpinned by international support through peacekeeping interventions, but are predominantly the result of national factors, including a relatively stable political settlement, a 'buying of the peace', an effective approach to security threats by the state, local responses to violence and, to some extent, the reforms of the national police.<sup>2</sup> These factors are not necessarily valorised in this report; in fact, while they have achieved a cessation in political violence and a period of national stability, we hold concerns that some of these drivers promote a short-term approach that is unlikely yield deep-rooted and long-term peace.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, however, Timor-Leste's story of progress presents some important lessons for national policy-makers and international donors.

## 1.2 Politics, violence and socioeconomic development: from colonisation to today

Timor-Leste's progress has been achieved following centuries of colonisation and decades of occupation. Exploring some of the political, social and economic effects of these periods is crucial to understanding how far the country has come, but also the ongoing challenges it faces. Equally, analysing its recent process of state formation, including the police and army, can help explain the structural tensions which underpin ongoing violence in the country.

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1 This takes its inspiration from human security and focuses on the experiences and perceptions of citizens. However, this is narrower than a fuller definition of human security, which would incorporate health, education, or political voice (Valters et al., 2014). This is not to deny the importance of the broad range of threats that people can face, or to downplay the clear links personal security has with other dimensions of well-being. However, for our purposes, a narrower definition of security is necessary in order to trace progress in a complex setting.

2 Increasingly, the phrase security sector development (SSD) is used rather than security sector reform (SSR) or security and justice reform (SJR) as it is seen to emphasise a more proactive and locally driven change process and a move away from donor-led reforms.

3 Lothe and Peake (2010) argue that two distinct approaches to stabilisation can be observed in Timor-Leste: 'The first is a "security-first" approach, where development activities are complementary and serve to support security sector assistance, while the second emphasises traditional development activities and institution-building as the foundation for a stable country.'

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### 1.2.1 Colonisation to independence

Timor-Leste sits in the south-eastern region of the Indonesian archipelago, comprising the eastern half of the island of Timor along with the enclave of Oecusse in Indonesian West Timor (see map on page 10). The territory was proclaimed a Portuguese colony in 1702. Subsequent rebellions were violently put down by the colonisers and, with the exception of three years of occupation by the Japanese during World War Two, the Portuguese remained in control until 1975. In the lead-up to Portuguese withdrawal, fierce competition between the two main Timorese parties – the Revolutionary Front for Liberation of East Timor (FRETILIN) and the more conservative, pro-Portugal *Uniao Democratic Timorese* – escalated into civil war. The military wing of FRETILIN, *Forças Armadas de Libertacao Nacional de Timor-Leste* (FALINTIL), emerged during this time and would later form the basis of Timor-Leste's national army after independence. After a short-lived independence of only nine days, Indonesia invaded in December 1975, with the support of Western allies (principally the US and Australia), beginning an occupation that lasted until 1999.

During Indonesian occupation, the Timorese were subjected to wide-scale violence. The Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation (CAVR) estimated that there were between 102,800 and 183,000 conflict-related deaths, with authorities also responsible for mass displacement, arbitrary detention and torture (CAVR, 2005). While East Timorese groups became united in their fight against occupation, personal grudges and ideological divides existed between them, many of which continue to resonate in the political settlement today (see Section 3.2). Throughout occupation the economy was overwhelmingly controlled by the Indonesian armed forces or Indonesian businesses, although there was a small Timorese private sector based in Dili. As Nixon argues, while in this period perhaps a surprising amount of resources were invested in Timor-Leste, 'few meaningful economic and social development outcomes were realized' (Nixon, 2008: 151).

Throughout the Indonesian occupation, the Timorese waged a resistance movement on three fronts: diplomatic, armed and clandestine.<sup>4</sup> The tide began to turn because of a number of factors, including the sheer perseverance of the Timorese resistance movement, a shift in international public opinion following a massacre in Santa Cruz in 1991, and the fall of President Suharto in Indonesia after economic collapse and advances in democratisation in 1998. Despite the Indonesian forces' draconian use of security measures to intimidate voters, the elections saw a 98% voter turnout, with 78.5% voting in favour of independence, rejecting an arrangement of autonomy within Indonesia. The withdrawal

of the Indonesian forces and associated militias in 1999 in the aftermath of the independence vote led to the death of around 1,400 Timorese (among a population of less than 1 million). It is estimated that 300,000 people fled to the hills and forests near their homes, and 250–280,000 people were deported to West Timor. Around 70% of Timor-Leste's infrastructure was destroyed, while positions in the civil service, small industry and service sectors were left vacant by fleeing Indonesians (CAVR, 2005: 122).

In September 1999, at the height of this violence, the United Nations Security Council authorised the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET), headed by Australia, to restore peace and security (S/RES/1264). In effect, from 1999, Timor-Leste experienced 'state-building through UN statehood' (Chopra, 2002: 981). Under UN Security Council Resolution 1272, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) replaced all pre-existing authorities in Timor-Leste, becoming the formal government of the country in every respect (Chopra, 2002: 984).<sup>5</sup> The country finally declared its independence on 20 May 2002 (known as the 'restoration of independence', in light of the nine days of independence in 1975). Figures from the resistance movement took power: Mari Alkatiri formed a FRETILIN-led government as Prime Minister, and Xanana Gusmão was elected President. From 2001 the CAVR led a process of truth-seeking for the period 1974-1999 and community reconciliation for less serious crimes, and prepared a report entitled '*Chega!*' on its findings and recommendations. This process is widely credited with enabling peaceful coexistence between community members formerly associated with the political factions that supported or opposed the independence movement.

The Timorese Defence Force (F-FDTL) was formed in 2001 during the UN's transitional administration from a selection of former FALINTIL members. The newly formed force was a fraction of the size of FALINTIL, leaving many ex-combatants with serious grievances about the fairness of the criteria for F-FDTL selection. In addition to these concerns, those veterans who did not otherwise gain employment through the civil service faced the same meagre living conditions and minimal state services faced by the population living in rural areas. The slowness of decisions relating to the payment of veterans' pensions compounded their feelings of disenfranchisement. The *Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste* (PNTL), also formed under UNTAET, was by contrast formed largely from former police officers of the Indonesian administration. This strategy was designed in the interests of expediting the formation of a professional police force, as *Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia* (POLRI) officers already had professional

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4 The three fronts of Timor's resistance (diplomatic, armed and clandestine) worked to gain international acknowledgement of Timor-Leste's independence and secure the opportunity for a referendum.

5 As Chopra (2002: 984) discusses, 'both legislative and executive powers were vested in a single individual, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Transitional Administrator, Sergio Vieira de Mello'.

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policing backgrounds. Though these officers were vetted by the Timorese leadership, this led to the creation of a police force that faced serious challenges to its legitimacy. Such political and institutional issues overlapped with broader societal sentiments of discrimination over access to political influence, resources (including land and economic opportunities) and services, both in rural areas and in the newly expanded population of the capital, Dili.

### 1.2.2 Independence to 2007

From the restoration of independence in 2002 until 2006, Timor-Leste appeared to be stabilising, experiencing relatively low levels of civil unrest. There were a number of protests in 2002 and 2004 involving students, veterans and gang members, in part linked to discontent based on a rejection of the UN presence and the legitimacy of the new state's institutions. However, the absence of highly observable outbreaks of violence led Timor-Leste to be upheld by many as a 'success story' (Berger, 2006: 6). The peacekeeping force UNMISSET left the country in May 2005, succeeded by a new political mission, the United Nations Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL) (May 2005 to August 2006), which supported 'the development of critical State institutions and the police and provided training in observance of democratic governance and human rights'. The plan was to withdraw this broader civilian component from the country, after four UN missions, in 2006.<sup>6</sup>

However, in 2006, a political-military crisis unfolded. A group of soldiers who became known as the 'petitioners' wrote a petition to the Prime Minister and President calling for an investigation into discriminatory policies against those from the west of Timor-Leste within the military. As Carapic and Jütersonke (2012: 13) note, this not only led to the 'fragmentation of the military and police forces, but also pitted Dili neighbourhoods (and their youth groups) against each other'. The ensuing violence was the greatest faced since independence. According to United Nations Police (UNPOL) statistics covering a four-month period, the political-military crisis resulted in 38 homicides, including eight unarmed PNTL officers shot by F-FDTL and large-scale destruction of infrastructure (Prictor, 2012; UNMIT, 2008; OHCHR, 2006). The widespread violence left over 150,000 people displaced, with many living in IDP camps for around two years. Prime Minister Alkatiri resigned and violence carried through into elections the following year.<sup>7</sup> The election period alone led to nearly 100 injuries, the displacement of 7,000 families and the destruction of property (Vyavaharkar, 2009: 1-2). Overall, there are

estimated to have been up to 200 deaths as a result of civil unrest and gang violence between the start of the crisis and the beginning of 2008 (Streicher, 2011; Carapic and Jütersonke, 2012).

The causes of the crisis are multiple, complex and contested. Since political competition has historically been decided through violence, many Timorese view the events of April and May 2006 as a continuum starting from the decolonisation process, encompassing the violence and factionalism of the Indonesian occupation and the violent aftermath of the 1999 referendum (OHCHR, 2006: 16). The institutional tensions within and between the army and police prior to the 2006 crisis were evident, with almost 70% of disciplinary cases within the F-FDTL since their inception concerning confrontations with PNTL personnel (Simonsen, 2009: 585). The distinction between the country's westerners (in Tetum, 'lorosae', generally understood as those from Dili and to its west) and its easterners (in Tetum, 'loromonu', generally understood as those from east of Dili) was clearly part of the violence, with many of those displaced from their homes in Dili ostensibly thought to have originally come from the east.<sup>8</sup> However, the east-west division is a simplification of a more complex issue, since there are other sensitive divisions along the lines of language, land and notions of national and communal identity that interacted with the east-west tensions within the security institutions to produce the 2006 crisis (see OHCHR, 2006; Carapic and Jütersonke, 2012; Simonsen, 2009). Finally, some argue that harsher living conditions played a role in swelling the conditions for the crisis: Engel and Vieira (2011) criticise the international community for introducing a sudden and unassisted transition to a market-driven model that eliminated state services on which rural populations had depended for their livelihoods.

Recent history suggests that Timor-Leste's state and its institutions – and the safety and security of its people – will be fragile. The experience of an often-violent occupation, the struggle for independence and the volatility of the early years of statehood have made security a clear priority. Clearly, Timor-Leste has witnessed considerable improvements in security since 1999. But the crisis made clear that the euphoria surrounding the withdrawal of UN peacekeeping troops in May 2005 had in fact papered over a range of political, social and economic problems. The structural underpinnings of violence to date – discussed above and in Section 4 – are crucial in putting all gains from 1999 to the present day in context.

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6 UNOTIL was scheduled to end its mandate in May 2006 and the UN Security Council had already received the Secretary-General's recommendations for the post-UNOTIL period. However, crisis in 2006 led to the establishment of a new mission. See [www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unmisset/background.html](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unmisset/background.html).

7 There were particularly high numbers of incidents in the eastern districts of Baucau and Viqueque, the heartlands of FRETILIN support, as well as in Ermera district, in the west, which was important as the largest population base outside of Dili, the centre of the Mambae language group (rival to the FRETILIN-orientated Makassae) and the base of the Petitioners.

8 The origin of these terms has a complex political history that this paper cannot explore in depth; see Carapic and Jütersonke (2012).

### Box 1: Data on personal security in Timor-Leste

To examine violence since 1999 we reviewed the literature and available data, including earlier perception surveys, electoral monitoring data and crime data as available through international datasets (TLAVA, 2010; The Asia Foundation, 2004; Grenfell and Winch, 2014). Survey and perception data on security in Timor-Leste are relatively plentiful from 2009 and include Belun’s Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) data, the Asia Foundation’s Perceptions Surveys, Small Arms Surveys, national human rights monitoring mechanisms, and police crime statistics. Most were established in 2008-2009, enabling relatively detailed trend analysis from this date. All evidence from data analysis and literature reviews were triangulated with findings from qualitative interviews to give the most accurate picture possible. The EWER programme uses a volunteer monitoring network to gather information on incidents of violence and situational change. The forms of violence recorded depend upon what is happening in the local context at the time. The Asia Foundation has conducted a large number of public opinion polls and perceptions surveys, which have the advantage of interviewing a large, diverse and randomly selected sample of the population (2002, 2008, 2014).

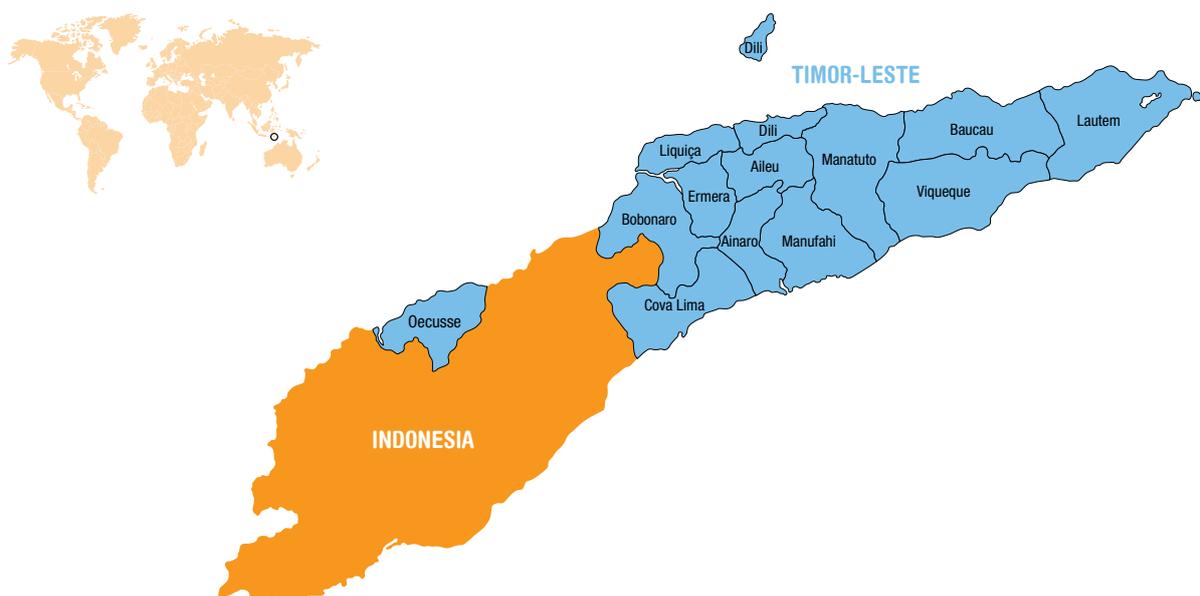
### 1.3 About this case study report

The research team was composed of three international researchers, including one British Timor-Leste-based researcher fluent in Tetun and one local Timorese researcher. Initial research comprised a substantial review of primary and secondary data and literature. Between May and July 2014, the team conducted 75 semi-structured key informant interviews and focus group discussions. In Dili, interviewees included independent experts and academics specialising in security in Timor-Leste, representatives of donors active in the sector, local and international NGOs, and police and Government of Timor-Leste representatives. Interviews were also conducted with government and donor representatives involved in financing for the security sector. Research in the districts took place in Ermera and Baucau, where interviewees included local government employees, police

commanders, martial arts groups (see Box 2, page 16) and community and civil society representatives. One limitation of this study is that we were unable to conduct interviews with the army. Baucau was chosen largely as it was the site of the recent mobilisation of veterans groups, while Ermera was the heartland of the group whose petition sparked the 2006 political crisis.

The report is organised into five sections. The following section analyses the progress achieved to date, with a specific focus on achievements since 2008, the year the country appears to have turned a corner. Section 3 analyses the main factors that have enabled Timor-Leste’s progress in these areas. Section 4 explores a range of political, social and economic challenges that remain. Finally, Section 5 sets out policy lessons that can be drawn from this case study.

Map 1: Map of Timor-Leste



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# 2. What progress has been achieved?

**‘The 2006 crisis was like a big hit to remind everyone that they had to work towards peace’ (Local NGO leader)**

Timor-Leste’s referendum in 1999 and independence in 2002 were major achievements that would reduce the threat of political violence that the Timorese experienced during occupation. Three years of UN stewardship laid the foundations for improved security, establishing a Timorese police service and armed forces and a Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR), which sought to promote reconciliation and build social cohesion for crimes committed between 1974 and 1999. In this paper, however, we focus on improvements in personal security since 2008. These occurred in the aftermath of violence associated with the 2006 crisis that reminded everyone of the fragility of Timor’s hard-fought gains.

From 2008 to 2014 considerable improvements are observable in people’s perceptions of their own safety and security. In this section we focus first on the national security picture – the aggregate indicators of experiences and perceptions of violence – which supports the general narrative that the security situation in Timor-Leste has markedly improved. Then we zoom in on two specific forms of violence that have previously been a major cause of insecurity: political violence and violence associated with martial arts groups (these are major informal security actors in Timor-Leste – also see Box 2, page 16). It should be noted here that there are various forms of violence which persist and may well be increasing, including land, youth and urban violence, SGBV and security sector violence; these are analysed in Section 4.

## 2.1 Since 2008: less violence and improving perceptions of security

The available crime statistics and national data on violent incidents show that instances of most kinds of violence have declined since 2008, with homicide rates remaining consistently low (Belun EWER data 2009-2014; PNTL Crime Statistics; TLAVA, 2010; The Asia Foundation, 2008, 2014). Belun Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) data show that violent incidents have decreased from an average of three incidents per month per sub-district in early 2009 to between one and two per month in early 2014 (Figure

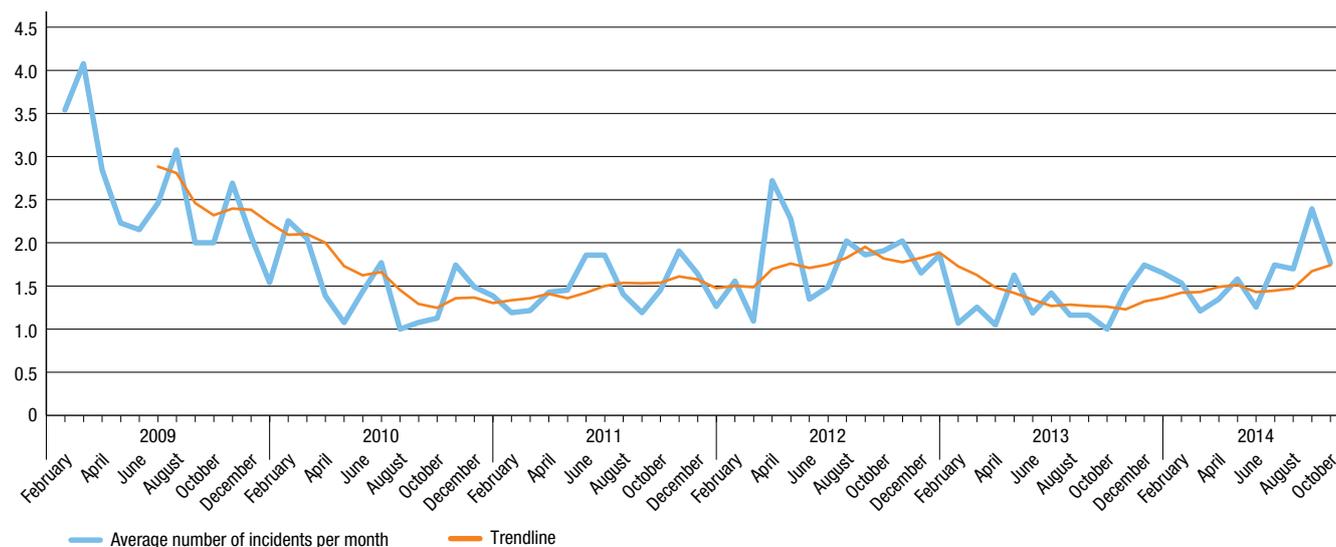
1, overleaf). Under the EWER system, ‘violent incidents’ are classified as any form of violence, from a verbal threat to physical assault or property damage. This includes incidents not reported as crimes to the police. The overall declining trend in the total number of violent incidents has levelled off to some degree, with the exception of a spike in incidents during the 2012 Parliamentary electoral campaign (ICG, 2012; Belun EWER data).

Police reporting data are often not the most reliable indicator for levels of crime and violence: an increase in official crime rates, while seemingly indicating a rise in criminal activity, may actually represent higher reporting rates on the basis of improved police–community relations, while a decrease in reporting may imply a deterioration in relations (Valters et al., 2014: 3). In the case of Timor-Leste, available police data show that the total numbers of reported criminal incidents have been decreasing since 2009 (Figure 2, overleaf). Conversations with various donors suggests that this indicates a reduction in the reporting of cases since the departure in 2012 of UNPOL, which played a mentorship role with PNTL. Data from the Asia Foundation’s Community-Police Perceptions Surveys appear to strengthen the argument that significant numbers of incidents are going unreported as the number of survey respondents reporting that they or their family were a victim of one or more crimes in the past year stayed steady across the 2008 (23%) and 2013 surveys (22%). This could indicate that people are experiencing similar rates of crime as in 2008 but are reporting it less often to the police. The ‘snapshot’ nature of the Asia Foundation surveys makes it difficult to understand what has occurred in the intervening years.

While a decrease in the reporting of cases brought to the police since the UN departure in 2012 may account for some of the decline, the overall declining trend in PNTL crime rates since 2009 correlates to a large extent with the declining number of incidents recorded through Belun’s EWER system. Members of the PNTL, at both national and district levels, argue that the data decline represents an actual decline in criminal activity.

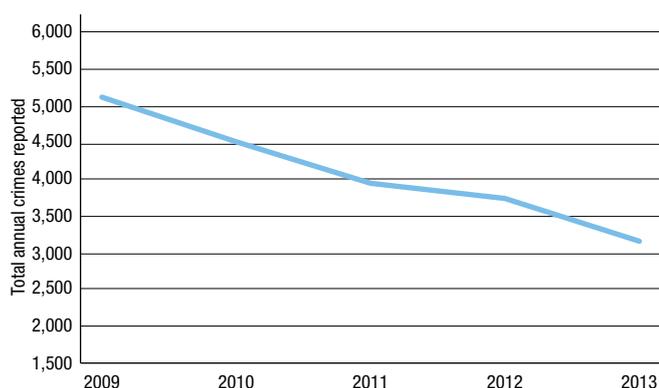
Data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime demonstrate that Timor-Leste has a medium level of homicides when viewed globally: the 124th highest homicide rate of the 218 countries surveyed in 2010 (UNODC, 2013). While the homicide rate spiked at 62 cases in 2007, during the political-military crisis, it fell to an average of 35 homicides a year between 2008 and 2010,

**Figure 1: Average number of incidents per sub-district, February 2009 to October 2014**



Source: Belun, 2014d.

**Figure 2: PNTL crime statistics – total annual crimes reported**



Source: Authors' own, PNTL crime statistics.

lower than the pre-crisis average of 39 between 2004 and 2006. This reflects a relatively low rate of homicides for a conflict-affected setting, both in comparison with other members of the g7+ group of states and with others in the South-East Asian region, such as Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand and the Solomon Islands.<sup>9</sup> Comparing it to more peaceful countries in the region, the homicide rate of 3.6 per 100,000 population is high compared to its neighbour, Indonesia (0.6 per 100,000), but only slightly higher than other Pacific island states, such as Vanuatu (2.9) and the Cook Islands (3.1).

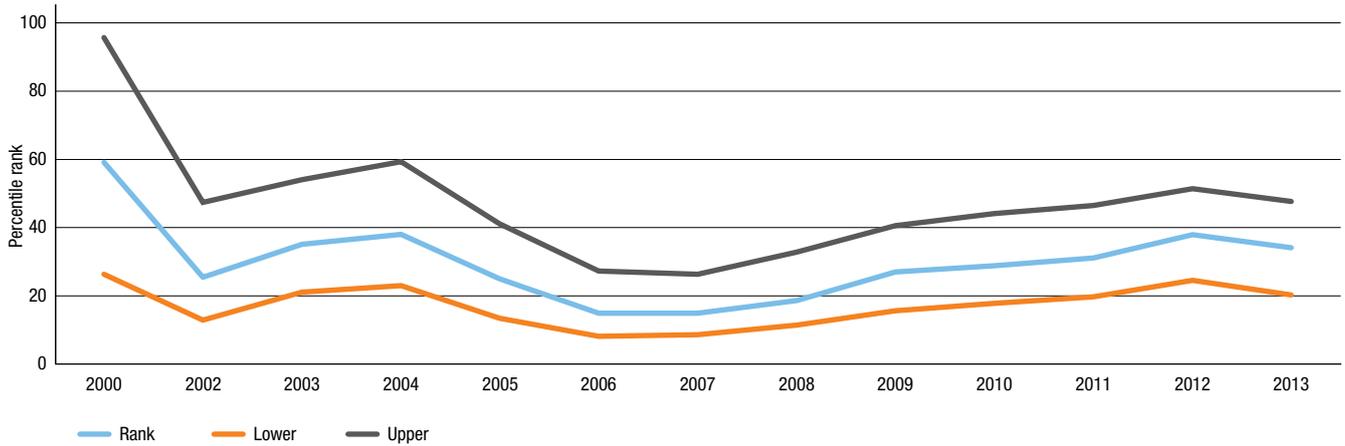
International indicators appear to support the hypothesis that relative to the events it has suffered, Timor-Leste's security progress has been strong. Timor-Leste was ranked 69th out of 162 countries in the 2014 Global Peace Index, a slight drop from its 2013 position of 51, but still a high ranking for a fragile state.<sup>10</sup> The World Governance Indicators (WGI) on political stability and absence of violence also support this thesis (Figure 3). According to the WGI, Timor-Leste is benefiting from stronger levels of political stability and less violence than the majority of its fellow members of the g7+ group of fragile states, with only the Solomon Islands and Sierra Leone nudging ahead, and Timor-Leste's rates are even comparable with its larger and stronger neighbour Indonesia.

These broad-brush statistics on violence generally align with available perception survey data, which show there have been positive changes in Timorese perceptions of the overall security situation. First, the Asia Foundation's Community-Police Perceptions Survey undertaken in 2008 demonstrated a marked improvement in people's perceptions of security. In a survey of 1,040 citizens across the country, over half of respondents felt their security had improved from the previous year. There were particular improvements in Dili, where 78% of people believed that security had improved compared with the previous year (The Asia Foundation, 2008: 15). This is important but perhaps unsurprising: Dili is where the vast majority of the violence associated with the 2006 political military crisis occurred.

<sup>9</sup> In comparison with the 18 other members of the g7+ group of states, Timor-Leste had a relatively low rate of homicides, with 3.6 per 100,000 people in 2010, higher only than Liberia and Sierra Leone. Other fragile and conflict-affected states in South-East Asia and the Pacific have higher rates: Papua New Guinea (10.4); the Philippines (8.8); Thailand (5); and the Solomon Islands (4.3).

<sup>10</sup> The Global Peace Index uses a range of international datasets to measure militarisation, society and security, and domestic and international conflict. For more information see [www.visionofhumanity.org](http://www.visionofhumanity.org).

**Figure 3: Aggregate indicator: political stability and absence of violence**



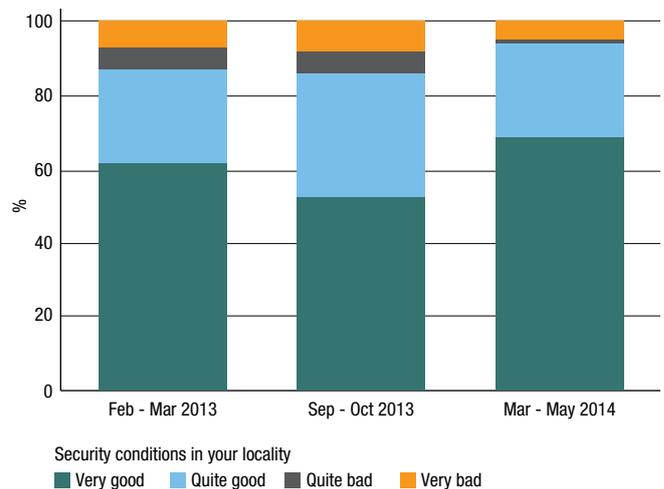
Source: World Bank data (accessed 2014). World Governance Indicators: Timor-Leste, 1996-2013.

Equally, public opinion polls conducted by the Asia Foundation between 2013 and 2014 show that perceptions of local security conditions have consistently been predominantly very good (see Figure 4).

Another way to measure security progress is to try and understand to what extent security remains a preoccupation for the state and its citizens. Both the government and the Timorese population appear to see ‘security’ as less of a priority focus than they did in 2008, suggesting security poses less of a day-to-day concern than other issues. In 2008-2009 the government ranked ‘security’ as its number one national priority, but in each subsequent year it was repeatedly demoted (interview with government official).<sup>11</sup> This is publicly marked by the government slogan ‘Goodbye Conflict, Welcome Development’. To a large extent this aligns with citizens’ development priorities. A 2014 Public Opinion Poll by the Asia Foundation showed that citizens ranked security conditions more favourably than the conditions with respect to other development needs in their localities, with a majority of respondents ranking security conditions as ‘very good’ (68%) or ‘quite good’ (25%) in their areas (The Asia Foundation and Belun, 2014).<sup>12</sup> Data from a 2011 security perceptions survey in five *sucos*<sup>13</sup> of Dili concurred, with 86% of respondents saying they felt secure in the communities in which they lived (Grenfell and Winch, 2014: 9).

There is much to celebrate: security no longer seems to be a main issue of concern (as shown in Figure 5, overleaf). As one police officer in Dili stated: ‘People are less worried about security and more worried about infrastructure

**Figure 4: Data from three consecutive public opinion polls 2013-2014**



Source: The Asia Foundation and Belun (2014).

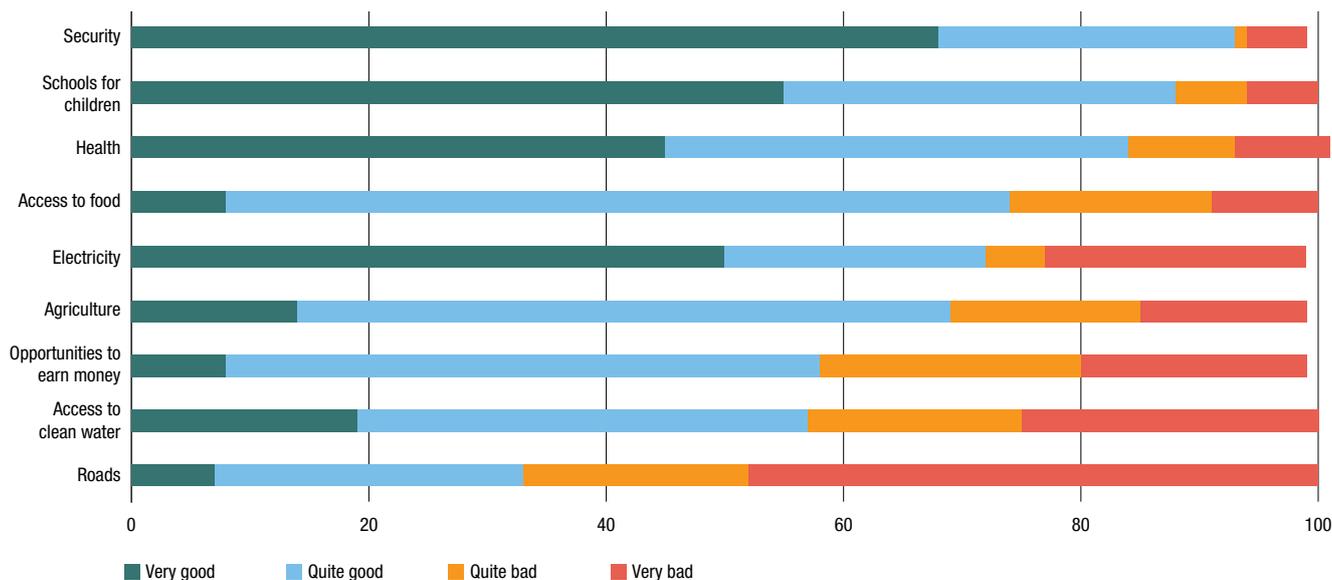
– that’s a sign of progress’. But even if insecurity is no longer inhibiting people’s daily lives, powerful ongoing socioeconomic concerns still remain (also see Section 4). As the village chief (*Xefe Suco*) of one former IDP community in Dili stated: ‘Everyone has returned, it’s calm and peaceful and nothing bad has happened up until now ... [but] The benefits, state benefits, they are mostly for the elite people ... we are small people, what kind of things have we got? We are bored of hearing about these benefits’.

11 This is not to suggest the government does not take security threats seriously, as demonstrated by its response to the Mauk Moruk group KRM and to CPD-RDTL in 2013 and 2014.

12 This marks even more of an improvement from the September 2013 survey in which 85% of respondents ranked security in their local area to be either ‘very good’ (52%) or ‘quite good’ (33%) (The Asia Foundation and Belun, 2013).

13 A *suco* (village) is the administrative division below a sub-district in Timor-Leste. It represents a village or group of sub-villages known as *aldeias*. There are 13 districts, 65 sub-districts, 442 *sucos* and 2,336 *aldeias* in the country.

**Figure 5: Survey on local conditions**

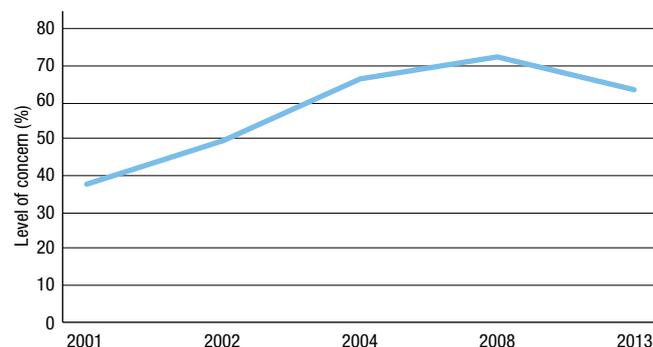


Source: *The Asia Foundation and Belun (2014)*.

Furthermore, while there is a general recognition that security has improved, many Timorese do not feel safe. Between 2001 and 2013 the Asia Foundation periodically collected data asking respondents how concerned they were about safety in their locality. Responses of either ‘somewhat concerned’ or ‘very concerned’ rose steadily from 38% to 73% between 2001 and 2008 (Figure 6). The first decline over the collection period was observed in 2013, dropping to 64%.

It should be noted that 64% of people having concerns about local safety indicates there is a serious perception of insecurity. This differs starkly to the data from Grenfell and Winch’s survey, which asked a more positively framed question. In addition, the proportion of those who cited being ‘very concerned’ about their safety has actually increased over the past five years, from 49% in 2008 to 54% in 2013, with a particularly marked increase seen among community leaders, from 49% to 66% (The Asia Foundation, 2014). These findings put some of the improvements Timor-Leste has witnessed into perspective. The differences between these findings may well point to subtle differences in the questions: it is certainly possible to be seriously concerned about safety in your area without feeling that security has declined or that, relatively speaking, security conditions are good. Wassel (2014c) provides one hypothesis: that citizens fear that small security incidents can spiral out of control to larger group violence and that state structures are not yet capable of responding quickly to such escalation. Equally, it may reflect concerns about ongoing forms of violence, which we address in Section 4.

**Figure 6: How concerned are you about your safety in your locality?**



Source: *The Asia Foundation (2014)*.

## 2.2 Reductions in political violence and martial arts related violence

Political violence and martial arts violence stand out as two forms of violence that significantly affect the personal security of the Timorese. They are particularly important because of their potential to spark wider forms of violence. As we explored in Section 1.2, the underlying causes of the crisis of 2006 went beyond national political and military aspects; diverse actors engaged in violence as the crisis created space for local score-settling, intra- and intergroup or gang violence, looting and more. Resolving national-level issues has some effect on other forms of interpersonal violence, but the reverse can also be true: ongoing interpersonal violence and tensions at the local level (which we outline in Section 4.1) can create the conditions for future political violence.

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## 2.2.1 Political violence

Since the election-related violence in 2007, incidents of wide-scale political violence appear to have reduced in Timor-Leste. Below, we outline a number of incidents which had the potential to spark wider violence: these include the purported assassination attempts against then President José Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, the returns process for IDPs, continued intercommunity tensions in the aftermath of the 2006 crisis, and the elections of 2012. The fact they did not spark widespread violence is important: while the structural causes of violence in Timor-Leste are far from resolved (see Section 4), Timor-Leste appears increasingly resilient to wide-scale violence and unrest (see Section 3).

On 11 February 2008, a former member of the resistance, Alfredo Reinado,<sup>14</sup> unexpectedly arrived at President Ramos-Horta's<sup>15</sup> residence. The events that followed are unclear, but the President was shot and rushed to hospital and Alfredo Reinado was shot dead, apparently by a Timorese soldier (ICG, 2009a: 2; Dunn, 2008). According to Dunn, 'almost certainly it was a botched attempt by the rebel leader, Reinado, to corner the President and seek assurances that the proposed surrender conditions, culminating in his pardon, would in fact be carried out'. Approximately one hour later, Gastão Salsinha (Reinado's second-in-command) allegedly staged an unsuccessful ambush on Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão's convoy (ICG, 2009a: 2). Aside from the death of Reinado and some of his men, the purported assassination attempts against the President and Prime Minister were dealt with relatively peacefully. The government created a joint command structure, controversially bringing together the military and police for internal security (see Sections 3 and 4 for more detail). This tempered response and the fact that events did not escalate suggests some degree of resilience.

Another major issue which could have escalated into violence was the returns process for IDPs between 2008 and 2009. In 2008, the government, with NGO partners, gave financial incentives to IDPs to return to their villages. The National Recovery Strategy to reintegrate the IDPs into their original communities appears to have been one of the successes of the new Timorese state. Upon their return, community dialogues led by local NGOs took place. In one area in Dili, Vila Verde, these dialogues outlined how many felt their security situation had markedly improved, although they continued to be wary of violence, and mistrust between different groups remained (Belun, 2008). During a focus group with former IDPs from this same area in June 2014, they stated that few

of the previous tensions were of concern, although they thought other communities might still be experiencing problems. As one former IDP in Dili told us, 'When we first returned it was really scary: if something happens, who is going to provide security? Slowly everything is getting better, up until now ... It's safe to walk the street night and day in this *Suco*'.

Ermera was the district outside Dili most significantly affected by the 2006 crisis, both in terms of the international and national police and military operations to capture members of the petitioners' movement, as well as the displacement related to the crisis. In Ermera, most interviewees told us of the dramatic improvements they perceived in their personal security since 2006. Freedom of movement at all hours without the risk of assault or rocks being thrown at vehicles was frequently cited. Most also explained that relationships between easterners and westerners had improved significantly since the resettlement of the IDPs. For example, one member of a local NGO outlined how 'the aunties from Baucau can now come and sell their *bua* [betel nut] in the market every week and don't experience any threats or problems'.

Crucially, the limited violence around the 2012 elections was significantly less than during previous election times. The UN, which treated the 2012 elections as a litmus test, assessed that the state institutions were strong enough for it to withdraw by the end of the year. Even in Baucau, like other areas dominated by FRETILIN, the losing party in the 2007 and 2012 elections, violence was less severe than in 2007, when Baucau had experienced double the number of incidents of electoral violence than any other district.<sup>16</sup> During the 2012 election campaign period Baucau experienced far fewer incidents, aside from some violent protests with burning tyres placed in the road to block traffic (Belun, 2012).

## 2.2.2 Martial arts violence

Since independence, rivalries between various martial arts and ritual arts groups have sporadically created insecurity. Members of martial arts groups have been involved in many high-profile incidents and the links between various political actors and martial arts groups exacerbated the rapid escalation of violence during the crisis of 2006-2007 (Belun, 2014a). While disenfranchised youths make up the majority of the membership, there is still high demographic variation in the composition of the groups, with members in the police force and the army, and among the political and economic elite.

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14 Reinado led a group of armed police and soldiers that broke from chain of command in April 2006.

15 Ramos-Horta spent the occupation campaigning abroad for Timorese independence. He served as Foreign Minister in the first government, interim Prime Minister in 2006-2007 following Alkatiri's resignation, and as President from 2007 to 2012. He ran again for the Presidency in 2012 but came third, with 17% of the vote.

16 Baucau is home district of a large number of veterans. Among them are the Gama brothers, L7 and Mauk Moruk, as well as their nephew L4, each of whom was a key figure in the resistance but has challenged the legitimacy of the state post-independence.

## Box 2: Groups, gangs and armed violence in Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste features a diverse array of security groups, ranging from martial arts and ritual arts groups and social movements to small street-corner gangs and youth groups. Many of these groups developed during the militarisation of Timorese society under the Indonesian occupation to oppose occupation or are legacies of the Indonesian army's attempts to impose social control. The term 'martial arts groups' refers to a plethora of groups with varying affiliations to political actors, veterans and other informal security groups. Some of these groups actively practise martial arts techniques, many stemming from Indonesian practices (*pencak silat*), while others practise more ritualistic techniques and often claim to have magical powers. There are also a number of sports clubs practising formal Asian martial arts techniques, but these are not associated with security incidents in the way that the groups rooted in the resistance era are. For further information on group typology and affiliations, see Scambury (2009).

Armed gangs, paramilitaries and martial arts groups have been a constant feature of the post-independence period, but their potential to have a major impact on security received little attention until the 2006 crisis when they unleashed violence in the capital and in rural areas. Given the huge membership of some groups, as well as the multiple and overlapping affiliations Timorese have to them, violence can spread quickly. Members of three groups in particular – Kera Sakti, KORKA and PSHT – are well known for their involvement in continued rivalries and incidents of violence. Martial arts violence, in particular, often spreads among Timorese students and workers to Indonesia and other countries, and can then ripple back and forth between those countries and Dili. The triggers of group violence are diverse and include pre-existing conflicts and revenge killings among ethnic groups that extend back decades, property disputes, systemic unemployment, political grievances, turf rivalries, predatory crime and self-defence (Scambury, 2009).

Since 2008, however, martial arts group violence generally appears to have declined. Despite some important incidents, martial arts-related violence has not led to wider-scale violence since the 2006 crisis. This view is supported by the Asia Foundation's perception survey of 2013: a majority of the general public said martial arts groups are not active (81% in 2013, compared with 55% in 2008), and only 8% said they are either somewhat or very active (compared with 38% in 2008). Community leaders also perceive less activity among martial arts groups: 84% said they are not active (50% in 2008), and 14% said they are either somewhat or very active (48% in 2008). The incidents that have occurred have been dealt with in a number of ways, ranging from dialogue processes initiated by the state, the banning of certain groups, and a strong response from state security services (see Section 3.5).

Martial arts-related violence remains a concern, though, because it has not disappeared and it has the potential to escalate quickly. There have been some serious incidents since 2008, including the burning of around 100 homes

in Zumalai sub-district of Covalima in August 2010. As Scambury (2013: 197) notes, 'while such levels of conflict could in no way be compared with the intensity of 2006 and 2007, this renewed violence serves to demonstrate the troubling persistence of informal-security-group conflict in Timor-Leste today'. Several of our interviewees described how violence can spread: discussing one incident in 2012, a veteran in Ermera stated, 'The situation between the groups in Dili was also tense but it moved to Ermera [and] often those who get killed were not involved in the original incident'. Despite these concerns, security in Timor-Leste has not been undermined in a large-scale way by martial arts-related violence since the crisis.

## 2.3 Socioeconomic improvements

Timor-Leste's progress in security has evolved alongside some important socioeconomic developments. Between 2000 and 2013, Timor-Leste's human development score increased 33%, or 2.2% every year on average – a better performance than Cambodia or Laos, two countries in the region that had a similar score to Timor-Leste in 2000.<sup>17</sup> This performance has been driven by a jump in life expectancy at birth, rising from 59 years in 2000 to 67 in 2014, and a leap in income per capita, from \$2,000 in 2000 to \$9,600 in 2013 (constant 2011 US dollars, purchasing power parity).

Timor-Leste's health scores with regard to immunisation, access to sanitation facilities and clean water, life expectancy for both sexes, and maternal and child mortality improved steadily between 2001 and 2013 (World Bank and UNDP data). The Timorese government states that the Millennium Development Goals concerning child and under-five mortality rates have been achieved. Gains appeared to have been made in education. The government claims that, 'in 2011, 91% of school-aged children were enrolled in basic education, which is a significant improvement from the rate of 67% in 2006', while illiteracy was eradicated in the districts of

17 An approach based on life expectancy, access to education and income per capita.

Ataúro, Oecussi, Manatuto, Manufahi, Lautém, Aileu and Viqueque. The UNDP Education Index, which reflects both literacy and enrolment, shows an improvement between 2004 and 2010, and then a lack of either progress or regress between 2010 and 2014 (UNDP data). However, UNDP discounts access to education by 47% based on unequal access.

Notwithstanding these indicators of progress, many socioeconomic problems remain. In fact, an increase in poverty levels from 1999 to 2006 has been cited as one of the drivers of the 2006 crisis. Likewise, based on available data, though sparse, the prevalence of malnutrition appears to have got worse between 2002 and 2009. World Bank data show that the average Timorese gets no more calories in 2013 than they did in 2000. NGO La'o Hamutuk argues

that 'about 1,200 Timorese children under five years old die from preventable conditions every year, 20 times the number of people who die from physical violence' (La'o Hamutuk, 2014a). Furthermore, inequality is a major concern. Factoring inequalities in life expectancy, access to education and income per capita leads the UNDP to discount the score by as much as 30% and place Timor-Leste among the bottom 10 countries in the 'medium human development' category (UNDP data). It should also be noted that there is considerable controversy over exactly how human development (in particular poverty and inequality) is measured in Timor-Leste (La'o Hamutuk, 2013a). We discuss these important challenges, among others, in more detail in Section 4.

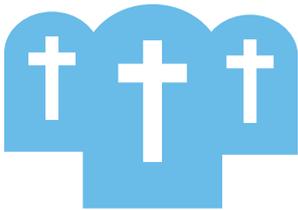


UN Police officers are pictured as they prepare for deployments to districts of Timor-Leste, alongside the national police force (PNTL), ahead of presidential elections. Photo: © UN Photo / Martine Perret.

# TIMOR-LESTE: FROM POLITICAL VIOLENCE TO PERSONAL SECURITY



**DURING INDONESIAN OCCUPATION, THE TIMORESE WERE SUBJECTED TO WIDE SCALE VIOLENCE**

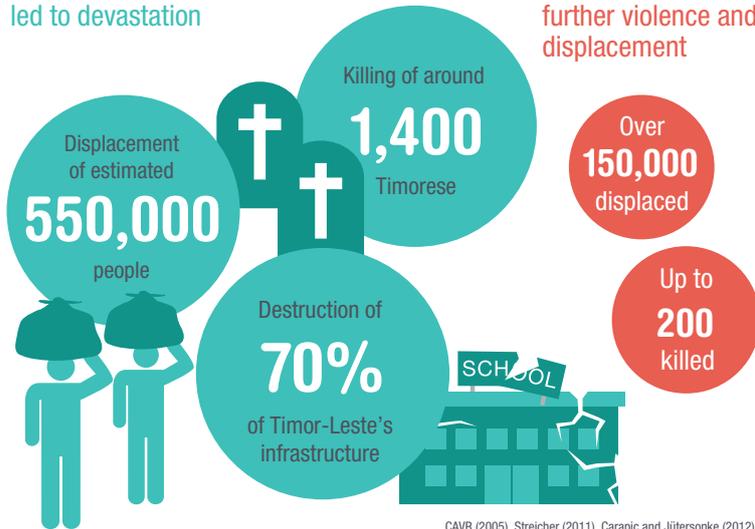


with at least  
**102,800**  
conflict-related deaths

Source: CAVR (2005)

The withdrawal of the Indonesian forces and militias in 1999 led to devastation

The 2006 political-military crisis led to further violence and displacement



## THE PROGRESS MADE ON SECURITY

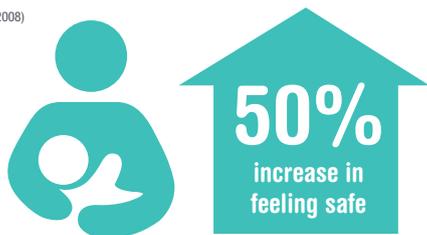
Between 2009 and 2014, violent incidents in Timor Leste halved from a monthly average of 3 to 1.5 per sub-district

Source: Belun EWER (2009-2014); PNTL Crime Statistics; Small Arms Survey (2010); TAF (2008 & 2014)



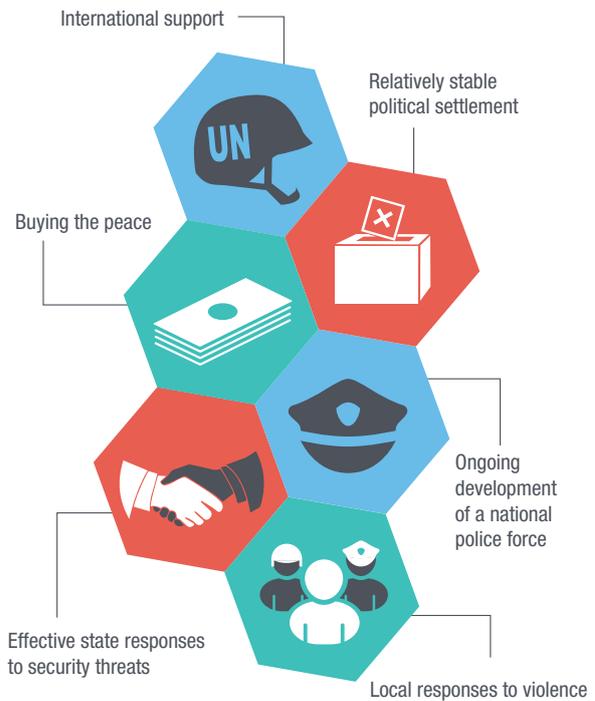
Perceptions of security have also improved, with over half of respondents in a 2008 nationwide survey feeling that their security had improved from the previous year

Source: TAF (2008)



## HOW PROGRESS HAS HAPPENED

Six key factors have played a central role in driving progress in Timor-Leste



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# 3. What are the factors driving change?

We focus here predominantly on the drivers of change that have influenced Timor-Leste since 2008. These are:

- peacekeeping interventions
- a relatively stable political settlement
- buying the peace
- the ongoing development of a national police force
- effective state responses to security threats
- local responses to violence.

These various drivers were drawn from the available literature as well as our interviews across the country. Recent literature has given prominence to the role of Timor-Leste's political leaders, their attempt to 'buy the peace', and the progress and challenges associated with the security sector (ICG, 2013; IPAC, 2014). These were also the dominant narratives emerging from our interviews with government officials, security sector experts and civil society actors in Dili. However, our interviews in Baucau and Ermera – particularly those with civil society – demonstrated the role of local actors in responding to violence at that level, as well as the potential for national political dynamics to have major knock-on effects across the country.

**'The missions in Timor-Leste were less than perfect, but they did contribute to the revival of a devastated country' (Pushkina and Maier, 2012: 331)**

The aim in presenting these drivers is not to validate them as *good* approaches or to show that they are supporting the necessarily *correct* trajectory, but to explain how they have played a role in improving personal security to date. As will be highlighted in Section 4, these drivers present their own challenges, and in some cases may well be short-term answers to long-term problems. Finally, these

**'Politicians are realising it is better to work together. It is a better way: for them to come together, share their knowledge, the capabilities that they have, experience that they have... this is better than dividing the country which would bring more conflict' (Religious leader, Baucau)**

factors do not necessarily all point in the same direction: different forms of violence will decline for different reasons. Our framework here seeks to draw out a general picture of why various forms of violence have declined, but it is plausible that martial arts violence, for example, will decline for reasons that differ to those for other forms of crime-related violence. Equally, an emphasis on developing local traditional responses to violence may run counter to developing police capacity in certain contexts. That does not necessarily mean that one factor driving change annuls another, but that the relationship between the drivers is complex. In what follows, we aim to draw out some of these relationships, while explaining what has driven security progress in Timor-Leste.

## 3.1 International support

The commitment of international actors since 1999 has been an important part of Timor-Leste's progress in security, giving Timor-Leste legitimacy as a state and backing it with peacekeeping forces and vast financial resources. The international peacekeeping presence, to differing degrees, helped restore basic security after the referendum and the 2006 crisis. Following this initial support, security progress has been driven largely by domestic factors.

### 3.1.1 Peacekeeping interventions and international support

Timor-Leste has since been the subject of five UN missions and two international peacekeeping interventions (see Box 3, overleaf). The deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in the aftermath of Timor's referendum led to the deployment of INTERFET, the United Nations-mandated multinational force (S/RES/1264), in September 1999. Although the figures varied throughout the deployment, 22 contributing nations were represented in INTERFET with total force strength of approximately 12,600 (Kelly et al., 2001). The first peacekeeping intervention in Timor is generally perceived to have been successful, particularly since this force managed to push Indonesian militias

### Box 3: UN missions and peacekeeping interventions in Timor-Leste

**UNAMET, United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor, June 1999 to October 1999:** Established to conduct the 1999 Popular Consultation, allowing self-determination by the people of East Timor. The Security Council endorsed the **International Force in East Timor (INTERFET)** to restore law and order when violence broke out following the Popular Consultation.

**UNTAET, United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor, October 1999 to May 2002:** Its mandate included all legislative, executive and judicial authority for administering the country. Command of military operations transferred from INTERFET to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in February 2000.

**UNMISSET, United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor, May 2002 to May 2005:** Established to support the newly independent nation. Timor-Leste assumed full responsibility for policing and external security on 20 May 2004.

**UNOTIL, United Nations Office in Timor-Leste, May 2005 to August 2006:** A political mission to support the continued development of national institutions and the police force, as well as to promote democracy and human rights. After violence broke out in June 2006, Australia led an **International Stabilisation Force (ISF)**, to restore law and order at the request of the Government of Timor-Leste.

**UNMIT, United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste, August 2006 to December 2012:** The mission had a far-reaching mandate to help address the consequences and causes of the 2006 conflict.

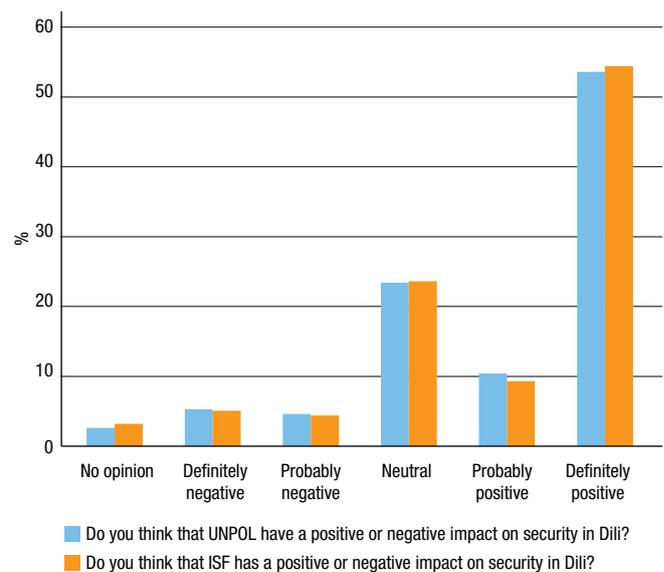
back to West Timor. During its first month of operations INTERFET engaged militias on four occasions and the Indonesian military once, while also policing the border with Indonesia. The rapid deployment of multinational military forces in 1999, according to Wassel (2014b, ii), was essential in stabilising the situation and preventing further displacement.

To some extent, the same is true in 2006, when violence associated with the political-military crisis escalated. The Australian-led ISF helped bring stability and prevent further displacement. Broadly speaking, this notion is backed up by a perception survey conducted in Dili in 2011. This showed that, overall, people felt positively about both the ISF and UNPOL, which was deployed in response to the crisis (Grenfell and Winch, 2014). Respondents generally acknowledged the importance of international actors due to the need for capacity development of the national army and police (Figure 7).

A significant majority of Dili respondents had positive perceptions of UNPOL and ISF. Grenfell and Winch (2014: 25) hypothesise that the negative views reported by roughly 10% may well relate to these forces' inability to stem violence for a long period of time or foreign police forces' particular styles of policing.

Perhaps the most important role played by the international community was symbolic. The international community, albeit belatedly, helped grant Timor the legitimacy it needed to be an independent state. One prominent Timorese professor argued 'the whole UN intervention until withdrawal was a process of legitimisation [of us] as a state and as a people ... The UN presence has made East Timor a country and that is something to be proud of'. The symbolism assumes particular significance because of the ultimately mixed evidence on the UN and other internationals' record in Timor-Leste. For example, UNTAET (1999-2002) is

Figure 7: Perceptions of the role of UNPOL and ISF



Source: Grenfell and Winch (2014).

credited for having 'set up the shell of a state, upon which the Timorese are continuing to build administrative and governance systems', but it is criticised for not having acknowledged the leaders and other assets that East Timor had at restoration of independence and for having taken the country for 'a blank slate' (Pires and Francino, 2007). However, it is important to note that for all their limitations, these missions and interventions were a critical part of the legitimisation of Timor-Leste, which was crucial in the decade following independence and helped to enforce a basic level of security. There is also the important counterfactual question of whether Timor-Leste would have been

better off alone. For all the key mistakes made, few of our interviewees argued this would have been the case.

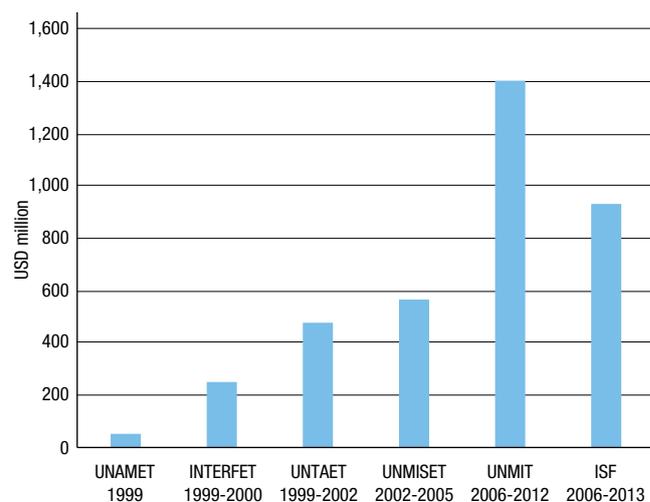
### 3.1.2 Financing for peace and security: large and stable

International peacekeeping has been supported by massive and relatively stable amounts of security and financial cooperation from international actors. The international community supported peace operations with funding amounting to over \$3.2 billion between 1999 and 2012 (Figure 8).

Development partners disbursed \$4.2 billion in official development assistance (ODA) from 1999 to 2012, making Timor-Leste the seventh most aid-dependent country in the world (ODA to GDP, 2000-2010 average – see OECD, 2013). Timor-Leste continues to receive more aid per capita than countries such as Afghanistan, Liberia and Haiti, at \$241 in 2011 (OECD, 2014). Australia, Portugal and the US are the largest donors. Forty per cent of total ODA went to conflict, peace and security (including peacekeeping) and to public sector reform, followed by 17% for education (OECD DAC statistics). Pushkina and Maier (2012: 334) find that ‘the availability of funding from both within the UN and with respect to external donors has been favourable in the case of Timor-Leste, especially when compared with other peacekeeping missions in civil wars’. The NGO La’o Hamutuk, however, has criticised the assistance for mainly supporting foreign interventions, with little going directly into the Timorese economy (La’o Hamutuk, 2009).

ODA decreased from its 2000 peak (Figure 9), falling from 80% to 16% of the Timorese budget between 2002 and 2012. While this is partly linked to a relative decline in donor interest, it is more to do with Timor-Leste’s oil and gas revenues coming on stream from 2005, leading to

**Figure 8: Peacekeeping operations 1999-2013 (US dollars, millions)**

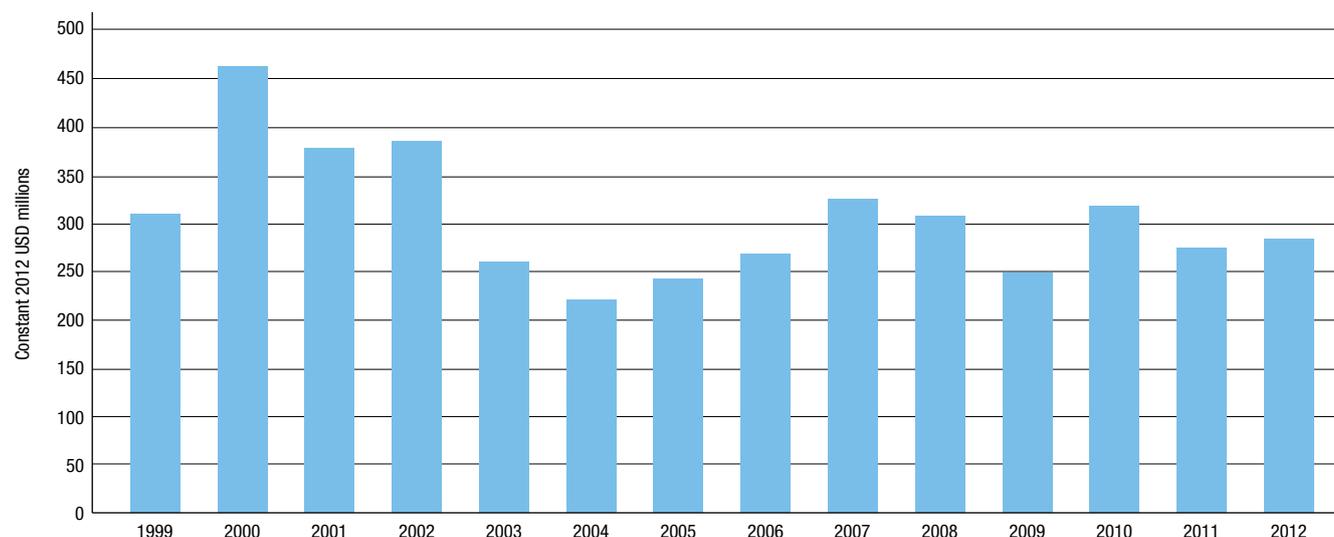


Source: OECD-DAC online data (2014).

fast-growing government revenues, GDP growth exceeding 8% since 2007, and a growing state budget (see Figure 10, overleaf). In fact, while ODA levels decreased by \$23 million between 2008 and 2012, oil revenues alone increased by \$1.2 billion over the same span. A range of government and donor interviewees suggested this gave the Timorese state growing confidence and freedom to be selective in choosing sources of finance, setting the agenda and managing its own affairs.

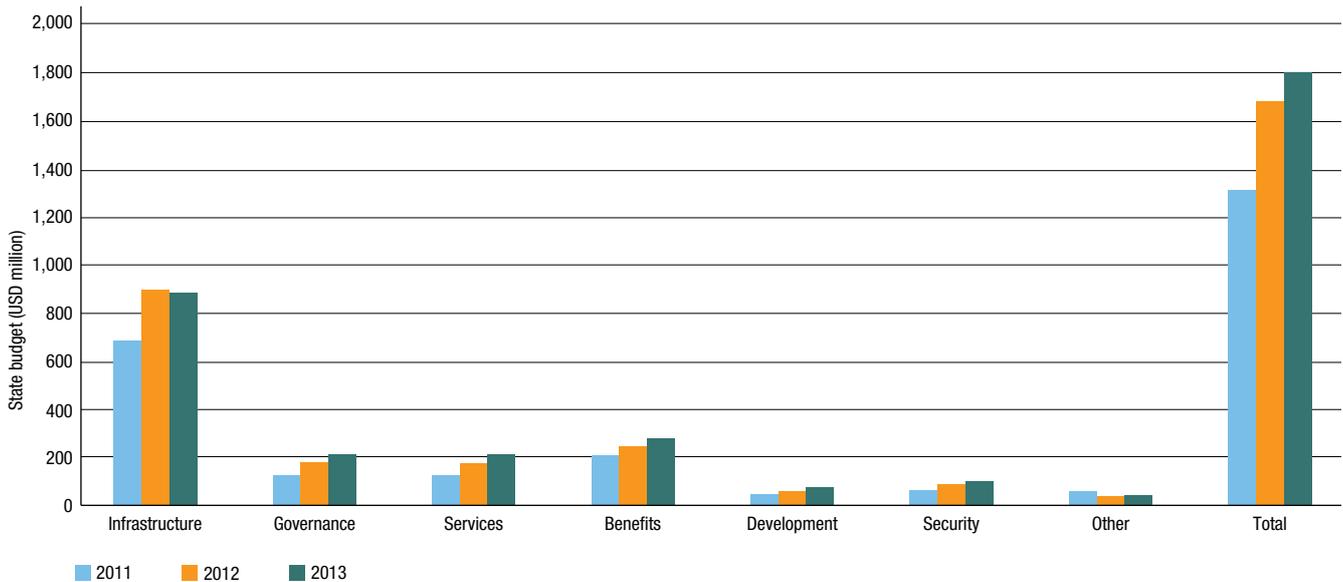
Any valorisation of the international community’s role needs to be understood in the context of a long history of failing to recognise Timorese sovereignty. Timorese hold

**Figure 9: Total ODA, all donor reports to the DAC (constant 2012 US dollars, millions)**



Source: OECD-DAC online data (2014).

**Figure 10: State budget 2011-2013 (US dollars, millions)**



Source: Compiled by La'o Hamutuk, based on Ministry of Finance data.

legitimate grievances about the past. Both Australia and the US were well placed to influence the course of events during East Timor's occupation, but tended to favour their relationship with Indonesia. Timorese NGO La'o Hamutuk referred to a 'historical amnesia' in a letter to the UN Secretary-General in early 2010, arguing that, 'In a sense, UN responsibility for Timor-Leste since 1999 grows out of failures from 1975-1999; renewed attention since 2006 is an attempt to redress mistakes made in 1999-2005' (cited in Svoboda and Davey, 2013: 11).

During our interviews, in particular with those linked to the government or donor agencies, a clear narrative emerged that much of the security progress made in Timor-Leste has been due to a shift in decision-making away from donors and towards the Timorese state. This shift is evidenced in part by a major shift in development financing. Equally, a number of nationally owned (rather than donor-driven) processes and decisions – some controversial – have been critical in reducing experiences and perceptions of different forms of violence. These include decisions linked to IDP returns, the joint operations of the PNTL and F-FDTL, the declaration of a state of emergency in 2008, buying the peace through veterans' pensions and giving contracts to potential spoilers, and the government's approach towards reconciliation in response to crimes committed during the occupation and the crisis of 2006.

### 3.2 Relatively stable political settlement: the role of Xanana

Political contestation in Timor-Leste has often unleashed politically motivated violence that has escalated other latent forms of violence. This is true of the resistance period, the 2006 crisis and the 2007 elections (see Section

1.2). The election of Xanana Gusmão and his *Conselho Nacional de Reconstrução de Timor* (CNRT) coalition in 2007 signalled a shift in how politics was conducted in Timor-Leste, with increased deference to Xanana's leadership and a growing elite consensus on policy goals. This is based predominantly on Xanana's consolidation of his own power and willingness to spend oil and gas resources, which have helped control tensions within and between the police and military and incentivised politicians to limit contestation. It has also depended on FRETILIN and its leaders committing to the role of peaceful democratic opposition. This relatively stable political settlement appears to have driven the reduction of political violence since 2008.

#### 3.2.1 The history of Timor-Leste's elite bargain

Recent research by the Crisis States Research Centre (Putzel and Di John, 2012: iii) makes clear 'the central role played by elite bargains embedded in wider political settlements in determining trajectories of violence and change in developing countries'. Understanding the nature and trajectory of the elite bargain that has been struck in Timor-Leste is crucial to understanding how political stability has been achieved. Timorese politics is characterised by a strong focus on personality rather than ideology: participation in the resistance remains the primary way in which politicians assert their legitimacy (ICG, 2013). This is embodied by current Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão. Our interviews with a range of actors demonstrated a strong narrative in which he is accorded an almost mythical power: many believe the stability of the country depends upon his hand guiding the people and politics of the state. While Xanana has always been a key character in Timor's story, he has not always

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had this degree of power and has at times been a divisive figure. An exploration of his role within the resistance and after independence helps to explain how he has come to play such a central stabilising role today.

Xanana's popularity, political orientation and power is inextricably linked to his personal history in the resistance. Sarah Niner has contributed various writings on Xanana that help explain his appeal in Timor-Leste: she argues that during the Indonesian occupation, Xanana was transformed from 'a young apolitical outsider into a hardened guerrilla commander and keen political strategist who ultimately became the central unifying figure of East Timorese nationalism' (Niner, 2005: 40).<sup>18</sup> She also highlights how 'charismatic leaderships often emerge in times of crisis, operating in the absence of formal rules, shaped by their transitory and deeply personal natures, and Xanana's leadership fits into this mould' (2005: 40). Xanana believed the independence movement could succeed only through his independent leadership, rising above internal factions and brokering compromises between them. His attempts to lead and guide the resistance led to some splits in the resistance movement.<sup>19</sup> This personal form of leadership has had its critics, but it has to a large extent managed to depoliticise and unify the resistance movement (2005: 40). Xanana's approach is not only about his background and powerbase, but also his ability to compromise and negotiate with former enemies (Niner, 2004: 346).

Xanana was elected President of independent Timor-Leste in 2002. The President's powers are largely ceremonial, yet the highly symbolic presidential role can be used to influence government and veto laws. Xanana played a major role in Timor-Leste, taking the path of reconciliation post-independence; for example, through public forgiveness of the Indonesians. The crisis of 2006, however, displayed both the positive and negative sides of Xanana's authority. His inflammatory speech on eastern and western identities in 2006 is widely regarded as one of the most potent proximate triggers of the crisis (ICG, 2006; OHCHR, 2006). But, despite coming under strong political attack from FRETILIN between 2006 and 2007, Xanana maintained his authority. In the midst of the crisis he called for Prime Minister Alkatiri to resign, and even though the FRETILIN leader secured the confidence of his own party, the Prime Minister resigned on 26 June 2006, stating 'I declare I am ready to resign my position as prime minister of the government ... so as to avoid the resignation of His Excellency the President of the Republic Xanana Gusmão'.

### 3.2.2 From 2007 to 2012: Xanana consolidates his power, manages the security forces and stability emerges

Xanana's power was consolidated through his election as Prime Minister in 2007, in which he narrowly managed to secure a coalition. The CNRT-led coalition's right to form a government was contested by FRETILIN, which claimed that since it had won the most seats, the coalition's move may have been unconstitutional. Violence escalated in Dili and the eastern districts after the announcement of the Parliamentary Majority Alliance (AMP) coalition, which was dominated by Xanana and CNRT. As Simonsen notes, 'stating that it did not endorse the violence, FRETILIN declared the new government unconstitutional, and its leader Mari Alkatiri encouraged a 'campaign of disobedience' across the country' (Simonsen, 2009: 582). As highlighted in Section 2, violence in the lead-up to and in the aftermath of the 2007 election was high, concentrated in the heartlands of FRETILIN support.

Eventually, however, FRETILIN committed to the role of democratic and peaceful opposition. In a paper published before the 2012 elections, the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2012: 12) argued that despite 'a failure to enact many of the deeper reforms prescribed after the 2006 crisis, Timor-Leste's government has done much to stabilise the volatility that characterised the period immediately before and after its entry into office'. It also noted that as the 'main opposition party FRETILIN has also played a role in helping attain this stability' (ICG, 2012). This is partly due to Xanana's authority, but also a broader national narrative that moving away from violent political contestation is required in order to grow the roots of peace.

A limited emphasis on policies and ideology meant that the coalition was less likely to fracture over policy issues. The coalition parties consistently voted together in parliament on major issues (ICG, 2009a: 8). This has in part been secured by the petroleum fund. As Prime Minister, Xanana leads a government with control of substantial oil and gas revenues, which has been invested in keeping powerful elites from too much contestation, which we explore in Section 3.3.

Further, Xanana has kept a firm hand on the direction of the security services. Our interviewees often expressed the view that Xanana deliberately selects ministers without the political power base to challenge his authority over both the F-FDTL and PNTL. He also made for himself the role of Minister for Defence and Security, which sits above other security and defence ministers – ostensibly

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18 Rees (2004: 6) provides a succinct history of Xanana's rise to power: 'Xanana Gusmão was a junior FALINTIL commander and member of FRETILIN Central Committee at the time of Indonesia's invasion in 1975. He rose to command FALINTIL in 1981 and by 1987 had recreated FALINTIL from being tied to a single party to that of all nationalist parties. In 1992 he was captured by Indonesian security forces and was subsequently incarcerated as a political prisoner in the custody of the Indonesian government. In 1999 he was President of CNRT and Commander in Chief of FALINTIL. In April 2002 he was overwhelmingly elected President of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste.'

19 For example, during 1984-1985 a conflict emerged between Xanana and a number of other key resistance figures, including Mauk Moruk, who was forced into exile. He returned to Timor-Leste in 2012 and established a revolutionary council calling for a new government, which resulted in his arrest. But these recent actions have created a national dialogue on historical resistance events (see Niner, 2013).

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in order to bring the police and military closer together. The fact that Xanana remains Minister for Defence and Security to this day – despite his apparent attempts to nominate others<sup>20</sup> – demonstrates a remarkable reliance on one figure. The absence of institutional breakdown implies this may be a partly successful strategy: through his authoritative position as former leader of the resistance and the embodiment of the independence struggle, he has been able to exercise control over these fledgling and fragile institutions (Kocak, 2014). As one donor advisor put it: ‘Lots comes down to the personalities involved – it’s not like we have strengthened institutions or have great oversight’. A Timorese security analyst argued:

*It is a very, very peaceful situation now. But behind the peace are hidden many, many things that can lead to collapse ... There is a legacy of problems from 1975 to 1999 and also those from the recent years. There are a lot of cases where Xanana is keeping issues like this [clasps hands together].*

There are, of course, many figures beyond Xanana who command loyalty within the army (and to some extent the police) and appear to be invested in ongoing peace. These include Taur Matan Ruak, who has been President since 2012. Ruak’s legitimacy in this role is grounded in his service with the FALINTIL guerrilla army, which he commanded after March 1998. He was Chief of the army from 2001 to 2011. Viewed by many as an effective bridge between those older veterans who fought in the resistance and the younger clandestine movement members, he continues to exert authority. One prominent Timorese researcher argued that the presence of Xanana and Taur Matan Ruak is crucial to the current relative calm between security forces, stating ‘The east-west divide could only flare up if Xanana and Taur Matan Ruak are not in power’. While this may be true, it should be noted that Taur Matan Ruak was Chief of the army in the lead-up to and during the petitioner protests and the subsequent 2006 crisis. His inability to curb the regional divide in 2006 was reduced to some extent when he reached out to ‘westerners’ during and after his successful presidential election campaign in 2012.

### **3.2.3 From 2012 to 2014: an elite political consensus**

The 2012 elections were markedly more peaceful than those in 2007, demonstrating greater political stability. There were still ongoing violent incidents: for example,

rocks were thrown at at least 90 vehicles in the aftermath of the 2012 elections (Belun, 2012). However, such incidents appear to have been relatively contained, and after televised statements from the FRETILIN leadership calling on their supporters to return to calm, the election results were eventually largely accepted. High-level negotiations with Xanana appear to have led to openness for a consensual-style of governance.

Since 2012, the FRETILIN opposition has appeared significantly invested in the status quo, which has been important for national stability, at least in the short term. This current model of consensus is a conscious construct with its origins in the inconclusive ‘Maubisse’ dialogues in 2010-2011 led by the church, which aimed to consider the future of politics, power sharing and preparation for handover to a new generation of leaders (ICG, 2013: 15). Yet it also reflects what one former-FRETILIN MP argued could be called a ‘mature approach’ to resolving differences. The same MP argued that FRETILIN has actually been able to be more influential since 2012 under the consensus-style politics than it was under the previous government, where FRETILIN recommendations were often written-off as opposition and overruled by the majority coalition. Equally, there is an understanding that under the current model everyone will benefit. The ICG (2013: 15) argues ‘CNRT is widely identified as the ‘big tent’ party, happy to distribute benefits to a wide range of actors, including former political enemies’.<sup>21</sup> This creates considerable incentives to maintain the status quo.

A relatively new feature of Timor-Leste’s post-independence political settlement is the non-combative relationship between Xanana and Mari Bim Amude Alkatiri. Although Alkatiri was one of the founding members of FRETILIN in 1970, he spent the occupation in political exile, returning only in 1999 ahead of the vote for independence. He became Prime Minister of the FRETILIN government from May 2002, before the crisis led to his resignation in June 2006. Re-elected to parliament in 2007, he continues to lead FRETILIN. As described above, his relationship with Xanana was once combative, particularly in the aftermath of the 2007 election, but they appear to have come to a mutual accommodation in which they can manage their respective interests and consolidate their respective legacies (ICG, 2013).

Considerable divides remain between those in power and the *Maubere*, the ordinary Timorese (Kingsbury, 2009). But that is not to say Xanana’s approach to managing elite conflict has not improved security for the wider

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20 Maria (Mikato) Domingas Alves was nominated by Xanana for the position of Minister for Defence and Security in August 2012. This proposal was rejected by Major General Lere Anan Timor and Taur Matan Ruak, leading to protests by women’s groups against their rejection of a woman in this role and the continuation of Xanana as Minister. Given that Xanana seemingly did not negotiate this proposed candidacy with the key stakeholders in advance of the public announcement, it is unclear how serious he was in backing Mikato as candidate for this role or whether he anticipated that her candidacy would be rebuffed, warranting his continuation in the role.

21 Xanana has also generally kept potential destabilising influences close to him. For example, he offered Cristiano Da Costa of UNDERTIM (a party formed of dissident groups CPD-RDTL and Sagrada Familia members) the position of Vice Minister of Economy and Development in the AMP and later Ambassador to New Zealand.

population. While there are concerns with the current model of governance (explored further in Section 4), the elite political consensus is an important aspect of security progress. Xanana, as the embodiment of the nation and the ultimate controller of its security services and resource wealth, has vested in his own leadership significant power to keep major political and social problems from bubbling over into conflict.

### 3.3 'Buying the peace'

Oil and gas revenues have come on stream since 2005. These revenues are subject to strict parliamentary oversight. The government has used these revenues to help support peace: partly through the government budget to provide state services, but also to 'buy the peace' through cash transfers and contracts to potential spoilers. This has been an important part of improvements in personal security, as it appears to have created political stability, at least in the short term.

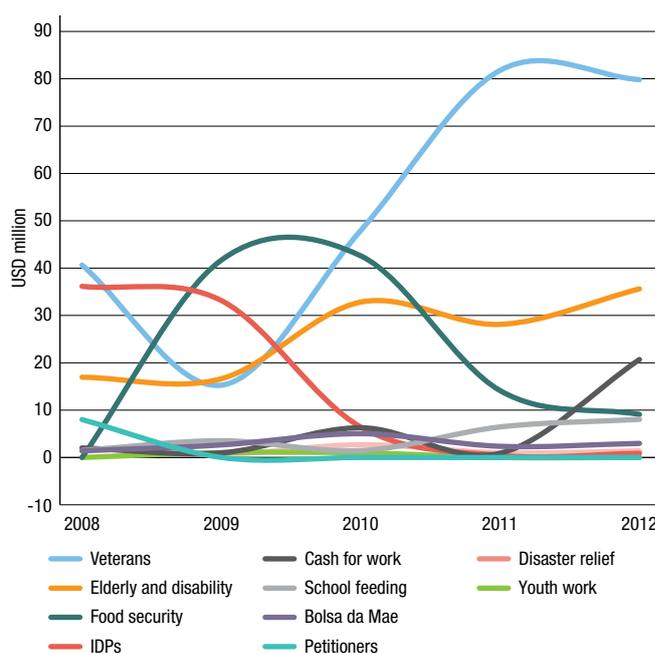
#### 3.3.1 Oil and gas revenues coming on stream

All oil revenues are channelled through the Petroleum Fund, which currently has assets of over \$16 billion (approximately ten times Timor-Leste's GDP). The Petroleum Fund is compliant with international standards, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the Santiago Principles (standards on the governance of sovereign wealth funds). The Petroleum Fund is subject to firm parliamentary oversight, as per the Petroleum Fund Act of 2005. Withdrawals are limited by law to 3% of estimated oil wealth. Excess withdrawals are allowed with permission from Parliament. In line with government policy to frontload oil revenues due to the high current needs, excess withdrawals have been or are planned for every year between 2009 and 2016. One major donor representative argued that thanks to this relatively strong governance framework and an active civil society, 'Timor-Leste has avoided becoming a failed state'. Importantly, these funds have allowed Timor-Leste to 'buy the peace', in a variety of ways. As one government advisor stated, 'The cost of the solution has to be cheaper than its alternative, which is conflict'.

#### 3.3.2 Payments to veterans and vulnerable groups

One way in which Timor-Leste has bought the peace is through numerous cash transfer programmes, predominantly to veterans, but to other vulnerable groups too (Figure 11). Many stakeholders argued

Figure 11: Cash transfer programmes (US dollars, millions)



Source: Authors' calculations, based on World Bank, 2013.

**'Veterans shouldn't have an empty plate; they should feel that there is some outcome of independence' (Veteran, Baucau)**

that compensating veterans was key to ensuring the stability of the country since they had the capability, and sometimes the public support, to challenge the state. As the head of one donor organisation argued, 'The biggest driver of security was the payments to veterans after 2006'.

Timor-Leste has a large cash transfer programme compared with similar countries in the region and to other resource-rich fragile states. Its social assistance budget represents 17% of the state budget on average (2008-2012), and in the 2014 budget it was more than the budgets for health, education or any other sector apart from infrastructure (Ministry of Finance, 2014). Spending for social programmes is around 15% of non-oil GDP, among the highest in the world. This is not only much more than the average of 1% of GDP spent on social assistance by countries in the South-East Asia and Pacific region, most of which are not in a post-conflict phase

**'From the security perspective, it's stable because of the leaders. They've got a good pension and good money. I don't mean only the leaders who are at the top – whether they are gang leaders, martial arts groups' leaders or others – this is "buying the peace". They are calm' (Timorese security sector expert)**

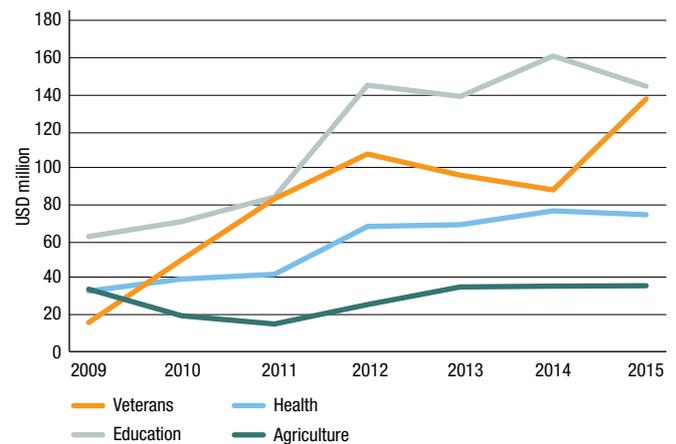
(Umapathi et al., 2013), but also vastly more than the fraction of a per cent spent in post-conflict societies, even resource-rich ones (see for example Holmes and Jackson, 2008, on Sierra Leone).

While the social assistance budget includes funding for IDPs, school feeding programmes, elderly and disability cash payments, and more, much of it goes to veterans. Timor-Leste spends 40% of the total social assistance budget on payments to veterans. The process of recognising veterans began in 2002, but the law mentioned in the Constitution was only approved in 2006, with separate commissions to register different categories of veterans: those who had served as original members of the armed front (1975-1979), those who later served with the armed front, members of the clandestine front and the diplomatic front. This law was revised in 2009 and 2011, expanding the number of eligible veterans and opening a new window in which 125,000 veterans registered (ICG, 2013) in addition to the 65,000 registered over 2003-2005. This estimated total of 190,000 veterans registered represents roughly 15% of the overall population of Timor-Leste, which stands at close to 1.2 million people (ICG, 2011).

Payments started in 2008, reaching 2,000 beneficiaries initially and 64,000 by 2012 (Barma et al., 2014: 265). Payments are high – between \$2,760, three times the non-oil GDP per capita, and \$9,000 per year – with ‘prominent figures’ receiving higher benefits (ICG, 2011). This totals over \$265 million between 2008 and 2012, or an average 4.8% of the government budget annually (2008-2012). Projections of spending according to the current policies mean that benefits will be paid to veterans and their heirs until 2122,<sup>22</sup> representing spending of between \$2.8 billion and \$7 billion (La’o Hamutuk, 2013b). Benefits are complex, including: (1) a one-time payment for those who served between four and seven years with exclusive dedication to the resistance; (2) a lifetime pension to the heirs of those who died in combat; (3) a lifetime pension to those who served between eight and 14 years with exclusive dedication and to those who were rendered handicapped or unable to work due to service in the resistance, irrespective of time served; (4) a lifetime pension to those who served between 15 and 24 years with exclusive dedication to the resistance.

The pressure to symbolically and financially reward veterans grew strong in the aftermath of the 2006 crisis, when the government used a mix of coercive measures and financial incentives to make petitioners return to civilian life. Many of the petitioners – all of whom were in the F-FDTL – joined a government invitation to dialogue. In June 2008, the government offered financial compensation of \$8 million, at \$8,000 per person, to those who chose to demobilise and return to civilian life (about 90% of them). This was a distinct one-off payment considered by many as

**Figure 12: Spending on veteran payments (US dollars, millions)**



Source: Data compiled by La’o Hamutuk from State Budget documents, November 2014.

compensation for being fired from the army. The amount represented, at the time, 70 times the monthly minimum civil service wage (ICG, 2013: 3). But the process clearly put pressure on the government to reward veterans further in order to avoid any threat to the peace. As such, the number of veterans actually receiving payments escalated rapidly between 2008 and 2012 (see Figure 12).

Another cash transfer was a one-off payment to IDPs after the 2006 crisis (see Section 2), representing a financial incentive for the IDPs to return and rebuild their homes. The 2007 National Recovery Strategy established five pillars and processes to facilitate returns, namely support to transitional shelter and housing, social protection, security and stability, socio-economic development, and trust building. The National Recovery Strategy was praised for being a ‘remarkably efficient and effective way of ending a displacement crisis in what, so far at least, appears to be a durable manner’ (Van der Auweraert, 2012: 17). Many see this as one example of Timor-Leste doing things their own way, independent of the international community’s advice and predictions. As one advisor to the Ministry of Finance stated, ‘No one internationally believed that giving each IDP \$4,000 would work, but it did. This totalled \$20m but IDP camps closed inside of two years’. Our interviews as well as independent analyses (Lopes, 2009; Van der Auweraert, 2012) suggest that many of these IDPs now face severe economic difficulties, in part because of the destruction of the assets they relied on for livelihood activities. However, the scheme worked to provide IDPs with security and the ability to rebuild their homes, at least in the short term (IDMC, 2009).

22 Only one heir receives this, but it is currently not clear how this one heir is determined: some negotiation seems to be allowed. See RDTL (2008).

### 3.3.3 Contracting of state-funded projects

Another way the government has been able to buy veterans into the peace is by ensuring they receive government contracts – including at the district and sub-district levels, where funds could be directed at political power bases through the \$31 million Decentralised Development Programme. The procurement processes surrounding state-funded projects favour veterans. For example, reports indicate that in August 2010 contracts for rice procurement were granted to 68 veterans, with profits on such contracts generally ranging from 20% to 25% of the total value of the contract (Kammen, 2011). Another case concerns *suco*-level electricity distribution: bidding companies were labelled as veteran-owned or not, and contracts were overwhelmingly awarded to veterans, including at least two convicted for their role in the 2006 or 2008 crises (ICG, 2011). This approach is relatively unique, since most post-conflict countries have not had the dramatic expansion of domestic revenues and associated economic growth that Timor-Leste has.

This bias in favour of veterans in state-funded public works is made easier by:

- The sheer complexity of the procurement framework: Cummins and Gusmão (2010) record ten separate pieces of legislation that govern public procurement in Timor-Leste, the earliest of which was passed into decree law in 2005 and has been subject to amendment more than five times.
- The extent of public spending on infrastructure (40% of the proposed 2014 budget).
- The practice of breaking contracts into small projects and sole-sourcing them: of the 30 contracts awarded in 2013, 27 were single-sourced (including 10 over \$1 million), and 26 were ‘restricted’, (i.e. no public notification that the tender was being conducted) (La’o Hamutuk, 2013c).

This has created a growing patronage system. Veterans represent a large portion of the recipients, especially those with links to the political elite, but patronage also extends to other potential spoilers, such as gang leaders.<sup>23</sup> When asked about the contracting of state projects, one influential NGO leader said:

*It’s single source: the state procurement office gives out the project to whoever is able to implement that initiative. But ability is not based on experience or knowledge but a patron–client relationship, and patronage and politics dominates. The state is the only resource for projects and the only wealth resource in the country. Outside of the state you don’t have any other sources. There is a small elite that has a very good*

*connection within the system and there are many [of those] benefitting from the patron–client relationship. (Civil society representative in Dili)*

This system has become particularly entrenched as the government ramped up spending in 2007, multiplying the opportunities for making money among the elite. One well-known veteran and gang leader argued that:

*The police, F-FDTL and veterans are getting contracts for three reasons: one, if they are well-known people or have the right connections; two, if people respect them; and three, if people are afraid of them. Those are the three reasons people can lobby to get contracts. (Businessman and gang leader)*

The allocation of contracts to influential elites is widely considered as a necessary evil: a variety of stakeholders interviewed generally defended the ‘combatants to contractors’ approach, arguing it was essential to short-term stabilisation, even if it meant higher costs and lower quality infrastructure. As one former FRETILIN MP argued, it is ‘better to have people benefit from contracts, even [if they are] not awarded transparently, than fomenting coups’. This has a strong logic to it, so long as potential spoilers do not develop a sense of entitlement that cannot be withdrawn later without major conflict. A development partner representative argued:

*[the] Government is better than internationals at allocating money for stability. Internationals would have spent more on education and health, but Timor-Leste gave priority to stability, and their choice was probably the right one.*

Buying the peace through cash transfers and contracts has been a domestically driven process, which has certainly been effective in the short term by limiting the incentives for powerful actors to challenge the current peace. However, as we discuss in Section 4, such an approach also has the potential to embed a sense of entitlement among these actors and deepen inequalities that could lead to conflict in the future.

## 3.4 Ongoing development of a national police force

The PNTL is a young institution which is not fully established across Timor-Leste, particularly in rural areas. For most types of crime, such as land disputes, citizen preferences appear to be shifting away from reporting them to the police: there was a reduction from 20% to

<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that allocating contracts to powerful actors goes beyond national actors or those who may otherwise destabilise the county. La’o Hamutuk, an NGO based in Timor-Leste, argues that the firm Chinese Nuclear Industry Construction Company No. 22 has been the recipient of many contracts from the state, with little transparency about how these were awarded, even after apparently repeatedly failing to complete contracts to reasonable standards. Contracts such as these shows how there may be other incentives at play when offering state contracts, such as improving relations with powerful nation states or their companies (La’o Hamutuk, 2013d).

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15% between 2008 and 2013 in favour of alternative dispute resolution channels (The Asia Foundation, 2008; 2014: 60). The police themselves also now actively offer the option of alternative channels to disputants in civil cases and frequently facilitate the process of bringing civil cases to local authorities to attempt mediation. There is, however, a very significant increase (from 19% in 2008 to 50% in 2013) in the portion of the general public who would seek the assistance of the PNTL as their first response in cases of domestic violence (The Asia Foundation, 2008; 2014).<sup>24</sup>

The Timorese police have taken full responsibility for the security of the country from UNPOL, in parallel with the withdrawal of UNMIT in 2012, which in the words of one Minister ‘left Timor-Leste well and truly free for the first time since independence’.<sup>25</sup> Many efforts have been made to seal the cracks in institutional integrity that played a part in the 2006 crisis. While many problems remain, here we outline some promising institutional reforms and emerging policing practices that appear to be gaining some traction inside the police force and among citizens.

### 3.4.1 Institutional reforms: improving professionalism and accountability

A number of important reforms have taken place within the PNTL which have been important in stabilising what remains, at times, an undisciplined force. Following the crisis of 2006-2007 the government introduced reforms with considerable international technical assistance. While the new processes and procedures have not been applied consistently, public perceptions of the police do appear to be improving (Wassel, 2014a: 9). In the Asia Foundation’s perceptions survey in 2013, 89% of those that sought PNTL assistance reported being treated with full respect and professionalism, an increase from 51% in 2008 (Wassel, 2014a: 22). There are also some countervailing findings which point in the opposite direction, as highlighted in Section 4.

Civil society observers and government representatives alike acknowledge that the introduction of the police ranking, salary and promotions regime has brought a degree of meritocracy to a force whose hierarchy had been dominated by historical reputations and relationships. The Secretary of State for Security said the new career

regime has helped to resolve the factionalism caused by bringing together different groups in the formation of the PNTL: he admitted: ‘There was a lot of friction. This is why the career regime was so important. It’s not who you were in the past that matters. The past belongs to the past.’ The ICG corroborated the importance of the new career regime, affirming that ‘the most notable step towards professionalisation of the police in 2010 was the implementation of a new rank structure by the government’ (ICG, 2010: 4). The promotions scheme is far from perfect and often does not take into account disciplinary history or involvement in minor or serious crimes or past job performance (Fundasaun Mahein, 2010).

Donors and security sector specialists highlight how the training of justice actors and support to case management systems, as well as the establishment of a disciplinary management council, have brought some improvements in efficiency and accountability within the PNTL. The Australian bilateral Timor-Leste Police Development Program, in particular, appears to have made significant headway in improving quality controls around investigations, incident and case management and human resources systems. In 2011, many allegations of corruption remain unpunished, with the number of pending disciplinary cases equivalent to 40% of the police officers, with limited sanctions being taken by the institution (Peake, 2013). But there is some evidence that, more recently, disciplinary procedures are having some effect, with the recent suspension of 11 police for collecting pay without showing up to work, as well as the provisional sentencing of the Head of Investigations on drugs-related charges.

Accountability remains a sensitive issue in Timor-Leste, given the wide-scale ‘pardons’ offered by former President Ramos-Horta to PNTL and F-FDNL members involved in the 2006 violence (CIGI, 2011). Furthermore, a vetting process that was initiated by the UN after the 2006 crisis has widely been seen as ineffective; time could perhaps have been better spent on reinforcing disciplinary procedures (ICG, 2010: 5). Overall, corruption is not as systematic and targeted as in many other developing countries and it is not seen as being as severe as it was under POLRI. Minor corruption at district level is unsurprising given low salaries and poor resourcing, with

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**‘Both the PNTL and the government are more mature than they were in previous times. They are more able to know what’s working and not working, compared to both 2012 and 2006. The maturity shift came in the PNTL after the UN left’ (Donor representative)**

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24 This huge shift appears to reflect the success of efforts by government agencies and civil society, with both national and international funding given to socialise the change in status of the Domestic Violence Law from a semi-public to a public crime in 2009.

25 Speech by Agio Pereira, Minister of State and of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Timor-Leste: ‘The challenges of nation-state building’ at Timor Update 2013, Australian National University, 28 November 2013.

many district-level officers paying for their own fuel and telephone credit and using their private motorbikes.

### 3.4.2 Local responses and community policing

Despite some community reluctance to engage with the police service, there is some data to indicate that police action at the local level has contributed to improved perceptions of security. Perception surveys by The Asia Foundation between 2008 and 2013 indicate a trend of increasing confidence in the PNTL and the PNTL's growing willingness to engage in community policing. In the 2013 survey, 94% of general public respondents and 92% of community leaders believed that the relationship between the PNTL and members of their community was good. This is a huge improvement from 2008, when only 48% of general public respondents and 78% of community leaders felt the same way (The Asia Foundation, 2014). These apparent improvements are relative, of course, and must be viewed in the light of a general sense of continuing impunity for the use of excessive force and corruption. In one focus group in Dili with those who had been displaced during the 2006 crisis, we asked whether they trusted the police. One veteran responded 'yes, we do, somehow', indicating both the improvements and their fragility.

These changes align with a growing focus on community policing in Timor-Leste. This policing approach is important, not least because of its emphasis on preventive rather than reactionary policing and the potential for developing more nuanced understandings of communities and their needs (Denney and Jenkins, 2013). A number of papers have analysed the development of community policing in Timor-Leste (Belo and Koenig, 2011; Wassel, 2014a; Djurdjevic-Lukic, 2014). Belo and Koenig argued that 'Community policing is an approach that, while publicly championed by international actors and senior Timorese leaders alike, has made limited inroads in the observable practice of the PNTL' (Belo and Koenig, 2011: 28). We argue, however, that the introduction of community policing has created some pockets of improved police responses to insecurity and may be an important vehicle for change in the future.

Community policing is defined in the 2009 Organic Law on security as the 'philosophy' of the PNTL, yet what this means or requires remains unclear. In the absence of a strong institutional structure for promoting community policing, its success depends heavily on the personality and interest of district commanders. Our interviews with District Commanders in Ermera and Baucau indicated widely varying responses to issues of insecurity in their district; while the former frequently championed the community policing approach, the other was more focused on a reactive response. Informal discussions with NGOs in Timor-Leste revealed some islands of good community policing led by District Commanders attracted to the model of community policing following trips abroad. Because District Commanders are regularly rotated, however, there is not necessarily the consistent leadership needed to allow

community policing cultures to fully take root. In one district, for example, the former District Commander, a community policing champion, was promoted to national headquarters and replaced by a Commander who follows a more POLRI-influenced reactive policing style. While the former-Commander is now able to promote the rhetoric of community policing at the national level, some of the initiatives and structures he built in the district have been dismantled.

The introduction of the first 'locally-led' strategic plan for the PNTL (2014-2018) represents the first agreed set of principles for Timorese community policing. It is unclear what effect this will have, although community policing principles are deeply embedded in the document. A process of rolling out '*suco* police officers' (having a police officer present in every *suco*) holds some promise as an opportunity for the police to build good relations and trust with citizens. PNTL officers at the district level report a strong appreciation of the need to be more present in the *sucos* and are enthusiastic about the government's plan. Yet many PNTL officers refer to the new *suco* police officers as 'Bimpolda', the term used for village police officers under POLRI. This indicates that many members of PNTL think of 'community policing' in terms of the Indonesian model of community policing, which was less about improving trust than it was about increased local presence, as well as intelligence gathering. Making clear the exact role of *suco* police officers as this is rolled out will be essential to ensuring it benefits citizens.

Equally, the lack of adequate budgeting for the expansion of community policing in the 2015 budget raises doubts as to whether PNTL is committed to community policing principles, or whether the community policing language was used in the plan merely to attract donor funding. A test of PNTL commitment will be whether it re-allocates more of its own resources to supporting community policing activities in the coming years. While community policing has clearly not fully taken hold, and it is difficult to know the effects of government and donor efforts to introduce it to date, there have been some important steps taken which appear to have led to improved perceptions of the police and, in the long run, with the right political commitment and police buy-in, may contribute to improved citizen security.

### 3.5 Effective state responses to security threats

Successive government responses to contain security incidents since 2006 have involved a combination of highly securitised responses though military and police 'joint responses', legal instruments to ban certain groups, political negotiation, weapons collections, dialogue and reconciliation, as well as the provision of financial incentives. Most of these approaches have led to direct improvements in security conditions, at least in the short term.

### 3.5.1 Violence in 2006-2008

Between May 2006 and February 2008 Dili was the scene of regular political, communal and gang violence. In 2008, a mix of financial incentives, weapons collections (TLAVA, 2010), negotiation, dialogue and coercive pressure through joint military-police operations brought the stand-off between the government and the petitioners to an end.

Frustrated with the inability of the Australian-led ISF to stop the violence, in December 2007 the Secretary of State for Security, Francisco da Costa Guterres, authorised the PNTL to reactivate the Dili Task Force, a rapid response unit mandated 'to address street level violence using force if necessary' (CIGI, 2009). As CIGI (2009: 4) highlights:

*Within two weeks street violence had dropped dramatically. UNMIT and other international actors strongly criticized the action, alleging that the unit was responsible for various human rights abuses, [however] the population of Dili deemed the initiative a success. Within a month, nighttime vehicle and pedestrian traffic returned to the streets.*

While the shooting of President Ramos-Horta in February 2008 had the potential to lead the country back into violence, some observers claim it in fact strengthened the government. A two-month countrywide curfew (with two additional months in Dili and Ermera) followed the shooting. During this period the Joint Command launched *Operasaun Halibur* (or Operation 'Gather Up'), which, by the end of April 2008, had led to the surrender of several armed groups with dozens of members. Most of our interviewees credit this move with a decline in violence at the time: as one advisor from the US embassy put it: 'The joint task force was the only thing that brought it [the crisis] under control'. However, these joint operations also set the tone for an ongoing aggressive security approach from the state and 'bolstered the army's ambitions to serve an internal security role' (ICG, 2009a: 5). The Joint Command had stated objectives 'to use psychological methods rather than force to pressure those involved in the 11 February attacks to turn themselves in' without bullets being fired (ICG, 2009b: 10). Nonetheless, the Timorese Ombudsman (Provedor) and the UN Human Rights Unit noted a rise in reports of illegal arrests and ill-treatment by police and soldiers during the operation (OHCHR, 2008).

According to many government sources, the joint operations have been essential to ongoing stability:

*The perception was [in 2006 and 2008]: 'what are the UN doing here?' Security is in their hands, the*

*police and defence forces are behind them, and yet at the same time things blew up ... That's why the Prime Minister, against all odds, decided to use the joint operation towards Salsinha and those in the mountains. In the end not a single bullet was fired because of the process of reconciliation. (Government representative)*

CIGI (2009: 4) argues that one of the lasting achievements of the Joint Command was the normalisation of relations between the police and the army: 'not only did clashes between the groups, common prior to 2006, cease, but they actually began to work together in a constructive manner.' International Crisis Group (2013: 3) echoes this sentiment, arguing that while the joint operations:

*blurred the lines of responsibility for internal security, the new command also sent a reassuring message of national unity and is credited with contributing to an esprit de corps among the security forces that helped paper over earlier tensions.*

This has been further bolstered through the single line of leadership to Xanana Gusmão in the joint role of Minister for Defence and Security, thus preventing the potential for competition between leadership of the two institutions, and providing assurances of improved security, at least in the short term.

One later response to the violence of 2006-2008 is the 'gift of reconciliation' offered by then President José Ramos-Horta in 2010. As detailed by CIGI (2011), this refers to the commutation of sentences of 26 soldiers and national police convicted of direct involvement in two serious incidents related to the 2006 crisis and attacks in 2008. The explicit aim of what he called 'pardons' was to promote 'national stability'. This is a controversial topic in Timor-Leste: as CIGI (2011) argues, it is likely that 'the long-term threat to establishing the rule of law and stability outweighs the short-term benefits of political reconciliation without justice'.

### 3.5.2 Martial arts groups

The state has responded to gangs in a variety of ways, from security force-led crackdowns, to brokering 'peace processes', to banning some or all groups at different periods in time (Scambury, 2009). In response to the martial arts violence in December 2010, the government employed a range of strategies. Following efforts to make arrests, the government deployed dialogue teams from the Ministry of Social Solidarity that had previously been used to reconcile IDP returnees and their communities (Saferworld, 2012; East Timor Law and Justice Bulletin,

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2011). While these did not resolve some of the root causes of the conflict, and tensions continued to simmer,<sup>26</sup> the dialogues prevented further large-scale violence in Zumalai.

However, prior to the 2012 elections, the government imposed a blanket ban on martial arts group activity for the whole year and threatened that any violent incidents occurring during the elections would result in perpetrators being shot on sight (East Timor Law and Justice Bulletin, 2012; TVTL News, 2012). In addition, members of the police were banned from being members of martial arts groups (CIJTL, 2012). After the lifting of the ban on martial arts groups, a number of incidents took place, including violence that erupted while the body of a murdered martial arts group member was being brought back from Indonesia in 2013, which threatened to spark reprisal attacks between groups in Timor-Leste as well as threats from the Indonesian government to terminate the visas of Timorese students in Indonesia (Belun, 2013a). This incident resulted in the permanent banning of three martial arts groups identified as being involved in a number of violent incidents. In our interviews, both government and civil society sources tended to argue that a significant decline in martial arts incidents was related to these bans. However, some civil society groups and security sector specialists raised concerns about the long-term effects of such policies, arguing that the banning of martial arts groups was a narrow political response to a broader social problem (for example, youth unemployment).

### 3.5.3 Political threats

A clear aim of governments since 2007 has been to maintain a consensus between various political views and personalities (see Section 3.2). However, there are some groups in Timor-Leste which remain on the outside, including a variety of groups that dispute the legitimacy of the constitution and the institutions that came with it, such as the defence force and the police. The state's response to such actors has entailed a mix of approaches, including dialogue, proscription and strong security measures. If the state's management of these groups can be deemed a driver of security progress, there is also an element of using such approaches to shut down legitimate dissent on the basis that it risks disrupting the peace. For example, in 2014, the government used a Parliamentary decree to ban the existence of certain veterans groups.<sup>27</sup> One group, the Maubere Revolutionary Council (KRM), had mobilised around 300 supporters, including veterans, farmers and other sympathisers. They were dressed in military uniforms

(illegal for civilians)<sup>28</sup> and were preparing to stage political protests. After the decree, several of the leaders voluntarily handed themselves in and were arrested. But when many members of the groups failed to follow suit, a joint security operation was launched. Raids were conducted in the districts of Baucau and Viqueque. The banning of the groups appears to have largely stopped their activities, yet troublingly local leaders report several incidents of excessive use of force by the police and military during the raids.

The state's response to recent events shows a willingness to use stronger security and judicial responses to perceived threats to the peace where reconciliation does not work. While this has worked to maintain security in the short term, and while many feel the use of joint command did at times succeed, few interviewees believe it is still necessary, unless the viability of the state itself is seriously threatened. This is explored in more depth in Section 4.

## 3.6 Local responses to violence

Sustained peace depends heavily on national-level dynamics, but local responses to violence are often the most relevant to the Timorese in their day-to-day negotiation of violence and insecurity. Responses to violence at the local level, more often than not, involve a negotiation of various levels of authority. For example, the police are required to deal with criminal matters where 'blood is spilled', but in practice the police work closely with local leaders, even deferring to local practices or ceremonies rather than dealing with matters according to the formal criminal code (Cummins and Leach, 2013: 172). A recent study by the Asia Foundation (2014) found that community leaders are more than three times as likely as general public respondents to have had contact with the police in the past year. Box 4 (overleaf) sets out some of the key providers of security and how they have interacted to resolve incidents of violence at the local level.

### 3.6.1 Local authorities

A plurality of actors beyond the police are engaged in security provision and dispute resolution at the local level in Timor-Leste. These include a variety of local authorities, customary leaders and other community security actors, groups and forums that exist in a given local context (see box 4, overleaf). According to a 2013 perceptions survey, 61% of the population approach these local authorities first in response to crimes, rather than the police (The Asia Foundation, 2014: 60).

At the local level, there are two systems of governance: a formal system of the district and sub-district

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26 Conversation with Belun District Coordinator for Covalima, 2010. Notes on file with authors.

27 This included the Maubere Revolutionary Council (KRM) (led by Sr. Paulino Gama, alias Mauk Moruk), the Popular Democratic Council of the People's Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (CPD-RDTL) and *Bua Malos*.

28 According to Article 194 of the Penal Code: Abuse of public signals or uniform.

administrations and *suco* (village) council, and an informal system that supports traditional customs and law (Interpeace, 2010: 14). *Suco* councils or ‘village councils’ were given a legal mandate for local governance in Law 3/2009 and are elected by residents of a village, but are not connected beyond this to the formal state structure. Elected *Xefe Sucos* have a legal mandate to offer mediation to resolve local-level conflicts and disputes where they do not involve a crime requiring a police response. According to the Asia Foundation’s survey, 21% of people feel community leaders bear primary responsibility for local-level security (The Asia Foundation, 2014: 25).

### 3.6.2 Customary practices

Customary practices play an important role in local conflict management. Boege et al. (2009: 25) argue that since independence there has been:

*[an] extraordinary resurgence of customary practices, many of which were repressed under Indonesian occupation. They contribute to conflict management, social order and social welfare in the local context, but are widely ignored by the East Timorese political elites and the international donors.*

The Asia Foundation perception survey of 2008 indicated that 75% of the general public in Timor-Leste rely primarily on traditional justice mechanisms (i.e. elders, *suco* chiefs, and community leaders in general) for maintaining security, which aligns with its 2004 Law

Survey, in which 81% of respondents said they primarily hold community leaders, elders and *suco* chiefs responsible for law and order in their community. Cummins and Leach (2013) highlight that traditional authority figures obtain their legitimacy through their connection with *lisan*, or customary law. Particularly in rural areas, *lisan* is an ‘important facet of contemporary Timorese political, social, ecological, and spiritual life’ and represents an unwritten but central body of law ‘through which their lives are guided and social structures understood’ (Cummins and Leach, 2013: 167).

It is clear that spirituality has a major role to play in providing leaders with authority, but also in processes of dispute resolution at the local level. This is because *Lia Na’in* play a strong role in local-level governance and conflict resolution as they preside over ceremonies such as *Tara Bandu* (a customary communal agreement, see box 5) and *Nabe Biti Bo’ot* (‘stretching the big mat’). *Nabe Biti Bo’ot* ceremonies are used in traditional marriage ceremonies, but are also used to reconcile conflicting parties in cases of family, group or community violence. The process involves community dialogue, the assignment of sanctions to rebalance relationships, and ritual ceremonies. The use of such cultural ceremonies appear to be in decline in the case of public crimes, but they continue to be used in many less severe cases, particularly in rural areas (The Asia Foundation, 2014: 60).

*Tara Bandu* featured prominently in our research in Ermera, where every interviewee cited its importance in improving security conditions in the district by restricting

#### Box 4: Local non-police actors engaged in responding to security issues

**Local authorities:** District and sub-district administrations are appointed by the government and are responsible for coordinating and managing government-led development activities. Proposals for new municipal governance structures, which would receive more decision-making powers devolved from central government, have not yet been implemented.

***Suco* councils:** Locally elected community leadership structures, which are not included in the public administration and whose decisions are not binding upon the state. *Suco* councils consist of the *Xefe Suco*, *Xefe Aldeia* for each hamlet, youth and women’s representatives, elders and *Lia Na’in* (customary leaders). *Xefe Suco* have a legal mandate for dispute resolution of ‘minor disputes’ according to Article 14 of Law 3/2009.

**Customary leaders:** Also relevant to local governance are the *Lia Na’in*, defined as ‘owners of the word’, elders with connections to the spiritual realm. The *Lia Na’in* are expected to be the transmitters of knowledge and tradition from previous generations to the present generation (Belun and The Asia Foundation, 2013: 18). *Lia Na’in* preside over traditional conflict resolution ceremonies, including *Tara Bandu* (a customary community agreement) and *Nabe Biti Bo’ot* (the stretching of the big mat, a customary reconciliation ceremony). See Section 3.6.2.

**Conflict Prevention and Response Networks:** Belun’s Early Warning, Early Response System has established Conflict Prevention and Response Networks in 43 of Timor-Leste’s 65 sub-districts. These networks bring police, local authorities and civil society together to identify conflict drivers and conduct prevention and resolution activities.

**Community Policing Councils:** The Asia Foundation and the New Zealand Police have supported the establishment of Community Policing Councils at the *suco* level. These are coordinated at the district level by District Policy Councils co-chaired by police and local authorities.

## Box 5: Tara Bandu

*Tara Bandu* is a traditional Timorese custom that is, in effect, a localised conflict-mapping and problem-solving exercise which enforces peace and reconciliation through the power of public agreement. *Tara Bandu* has three categories: (1) regulating people-to-people relations; (2) regulating people-to-animal relations; and (3) regulating people's relationship with the environment, each of which are commonly supported 'not only for their environmental or peace dividend but also as a way to enhance traditional culture and mutual respect within society' (Belun and The Asia Foundation, 2013: 10). Our interviews showed that *Tara Bandu* is widely viewed as being a powerful way of reducing crime and violence. It can have considerable benefits, but there are concerns that marginalised community members are not always consulted about the exact nature of the *Tara Bandu* that will be imposed upon them (Belun and The Asia Foundation 2013: 4).

the frequency and costs of cultural ceremonies. These tend to put a considerable financial burden on families which, when unpaid, can lead to long-running tensions and violence between families and communities and can prevent families from investing in other priorities such as education, nutrition, housing quality and health care. The Ermera *Tara Bandu* also put a ban on late night drinking that many interviewees suggested led to a marked decline in violence. In this case, these *Tara Bandu* regulations were developed through extensive community consultations as to how to prevent and reduce conflict and tensions. If families are identified as killing too many livestock or requesting excessive financial contributions for cultural ceremonies or parties, they are fined by the *Kablehan*: citizen volunteers who enforce *Tara Bandu* regulations, presided over by local authorities, church and police representatives. These fines contribute to a community fund used to invest in community meetings or small-scale development activities.

Having the *Kablehan* enforce the *Tara Bandu* regulations provoked varying responses from our interviewees. While some felt that this is a dangerous practice and could encourage vigilantism, others thought that it was a way of dealing with local insecurity through practical solutions. One *Xefe Suco* in Ermera outlined how, in the aftermath of the martial arts ban, he 'made lots of martial arts people into *Kablehan*, so then people will be scared of them'. The PNTL are also experimenting with formal engagement of community security volunteers, in the style of neighbourhood watch models that they have been exposed to through study trips abroad.

Local and international organisations have been supporting *Tara Bandu* in communities as a means of strengthening natural resource management systems and addressing identified conflict drivers in communities (Belun and The Asia Foundation, 2013). When asked what happens if people do not follow the *Tara Bandu* in their area, one *Xefe Suco* in Ermera reiterated the role of spirituality:

*They have to follow it. If he doesn't want to follow the regulation, then the Lia Na'in will do a spell that takes the spirits of the mountains in Ermera and make him*

*really stupid ... You are a prisoner of nature; nature will react to you in some way.*

In urban areas, however, traditional ceremonies have less impact on local conflict dynamics due to the multiplicity of ethnicities and cultural groups who live alongside one another in different areas of the city. The cultural symbolism of the *Tara Bandu* is often linked to a particular *uma lulik* (sacred house) that represents family lineages. Some *Tara Bandu* in Dili have attempted to supersede these limits by linking the *Tara Bandu* to national symbols, such as the national flag – but such strategies do not appear to carry sufficient cultural weight to constrain violence in these areas (Belun and The Asia Foundation, 2013).

### 3.6.3 Youth groups and martial arts groups

Violence related to youth and martial arts groups can be a cause of insecurity, but these groups also provide protection for communities, positive activities for young people, community welfare activities, and solidarity through political activism for those affiliated with the resistance movement.

As highlighted by one conflict prevention network coordinator, in the absence of clear land laws and limited access to police protection and justice processes, many rural families encourage young men to join martial arts groups to provide security for the family and to protect their land. In urban areas too, people often see the need to be associated with a group or gang in order to gain protection (interview with Timorese security sector expert). Some groups are very small, unproblematic from a security viewpoint, and even engaged in conflict resolution (Simonsen, 2009: 582). During the 2006 crisis, for example, the solidarity of some youths who came together 'to play sports, conduct social services, hold language classes (or just hang out on the street and drink) crystallised into "neighbourhood watch" security providers' (Carapic and Jütersonke, 2012: 40). In the wake of the crisis, many youth groups proactively conducted peace-building activities, such as drama, sports and music, to promote cohesion in IDP returnee communities.

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Martial arts groups were similarly said to contribute to social welfare and community cohesion. A martial arts leader in Baucau described their contribution to community work, such as cleaning the streets and providing support to vulnerable people by fixing the homes of widows and the disabled. He lamented that such activities have all but ceased since the ban on three other martial arts groups due to the stigma now associated with them. With the ever-increasing youth population of the country, the structure brought by some of these groups also enabled them to engage in economic activities that could steer the youth away from violent or criminal activities. In Ermera, we were told by a local government administrator that:

*sometimes you have groups of 10 youths who come together and put \$200 together each and build each one of them a home each year. After the ban on martial arts groups one of the groups got together and formed a cooperative and did the same thing.*

The mixed role of youth and martial arts groups points to how our drivers of change do not necessarily all lead in the same direction, and in fact may even be in tension with each other: banning martial arts groups may work to improve security in the short term, but it may also prevent important peace-building efforts at the local level.

### **3.6.4 Civil society, security networks and individual responsibility**

Various networks exist that bring together different actors engaged in improving security. They are supported by international or national NGOs and also by state actors, such as the police (through internationally funded community policing programmes) and the Secretariat of State for Security (which hosts a national-level conflict prevention network and supports civil-society led networks at the local level). These networks, established as forums for identifying and preventing conflict drivers, are seen as a new and positive influence on the way conflict is viewed in Timorese society: that is, not always as inevitable but often as preventable. This aligns with a growing sense of responsibility by individuals for their own security.

The Asia Foundation's 2004 Law Survey and 2008 Community-Police Perceptions Survey indicated an absence of a clear consensus on who had primary responsibility for maintaining security, which suggests that there are several types of actors and unique social patterns specific to each locality which work to maintain security (The Asia Foundation, 2004, 2008). Interestingly, a parallel survey in 2013 showed a dramatic increase in the proportion of people who perceive citizens themselves as having the primary responsibility for maintaining security: 51% of the general public and 66% of community leaders now hold this view, compared to 8% and 12% respectively in 2008 (The Asia Foundation, 2014: 25)

There could be a number of interpretations of what could be driving this shift in perceptions. It could be indicative of a loss of trust in state actors' ability to guarantee citizens' safety and security, echoing perceptions discussed in Section 2, particularly the increase in citizens who are 'very concerned' about their safety. One local NGO coordinator noted that respected community members are often appointed to defuse disputes that arise in the community. They may feel that this is necessary because of the lack of a pervasive PNTL presence beyond sub-district-level police stations and limited access to the legal system. However, the fact that the majority of citizens reported that they would still contact the police or community leaders in the event of public forms of crime implies increasing cooperation and complementarity between the citizens and the police.

Qualitative research by the Asia Foundation revealed that 'the shift may be the result of people's awareness that, after the UN departure, security is now their own responsibility' (The Asia Foundation, 2014). Our interviewees at national and district levels often cited the government's strong promotion of the message 'goodbye conflict, welcome development' and previous UN messaging around 'What am I doing for peace?' Civil society members, veterans, security sectors specialist and others often mentioned in interview the increased maturity of Timorese citizens: disillusioned with political leaders who had led them into the 2006 crisis, they now see a stronger role for individual citizens in determining the future security situation.



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# 4. What are the challenges?

Despite the progress in security in Timor-Leste since 2008, there are considerable challenges. This may suggest that a short-term ‘security first’ approach has not created structural roots of peace deep enough to ensure long-term stability. We will discuss these issues through four lenses:

- limited improvements in personal security
- maintaining political stability and limiting political violence
- problems in the security sector
- socioeconomic problems that threaten long-term security.

The challenges outlined here are not exhaustive but form a series of issues that need to be addressed for Timor-Leste’s security to be consolidated. These challenges were identified in the existing literature and also in the voices of various civil society members, both in Dili and in the districts. They also reflect socioeconomic trends, which inevitably have major effects on personal security. The findings that emerge from this analysis seem at first glance contradictory. Many of the dynamics that have driven positive improvements in personal security may well undermine them in the future.

## 4.1 Persistent, under-reported and new forms of violence

While several indicators point to the improved personal security of the Timorese, certain forms of violence persist, and may even be getting worse. One interviewee from an international NGO in Dili argued that Timor-Leste was ‘not a low crime environment, it’s just that lots of crime isn’t being recorded’. This reflects a widely held opinion from our interviewees that while state-led violence or civil conflict is now limited, many forms of violence do continue, sometimes out of view of crime reporting statistics or other measures. The national and regional datasets – as well as the views of the majority of our interviewees – challenges this view to some extent. However, there are clearly diverging trends on violence. There are forms of violence we know little about (such as SGBV and black magic), those we know are prevalent despite reform efforts (security sector violence), as well those that are increasing and appear likely to increase in the future (land, youth and urban violence). The interrelationships between these

different forms of violence are crucial to recognise; this implies that while the gains made on political violence and martial arts violence to date are important, their decline may be accompanied by persisting or escalating forms of other violence.

### 4.1.1 SGBV

There is a considerable body of literature which points to widespread SGBV in Timor-Leste. This is not a new phenomenon: while data are lacking, it is well known that Indonesian military and militia groups committed politically motivated and systematic SGBV during the occupation; during the 1999 violence, the systematic rape of Timorese women and girls occurred in the context of their forced deportation to West Timorese camps (TLAVA, 2010). While gender-based violence data are not consistently monitored in Timor-Leste, the Demographic and Health Survey in 2009 confirmed that more than a third (36.1%) of women who had ever been married reported that they had experienced emotional, physical and/or sexual violence committed by their partner or husband. In the Asia Foundation’s 2013 community-police perception report, domestic violence was seen as the most serious security problem by both community leaders and police across the country (The Asia Foundation, 2014: 20-21). This is a major issue in its own right. However, while the relationship between gender-based violence and other forms of violence is often unclear, a World Bank report found that physical and sexual violence in some parts of Dili would at times escalate into violence between martial arts groups when victimised women or girls turned to their family members or friends for help (Muggah, 2010; Carapic and Jütersonke, 2012). While cases of domestic violence are increasingly being taken to the police (see The Asia Foundation, 2014; JSMP, 2013), and the stigma around domestic violence has increased, it is too early to tell whether this will eventually reduce its prevalence.

### 4.1.2 Black magic

‘Black magic’ is another source of interpersonal and intercommunal violence that persists in Timor-Leste. Ermera, for example, suffered a series of incidents in early 2013, when a self-proclaimed ritual arts group called 5-1 was selling membership cards and promised magical

**‘The very same things that have allowed Timor-Leste’s stability could be Timor-Leste’s undoing... The current phenomenon is not a development of law and order but a development of power... They have enough resources to buy the peace for the moment, [but] it’s not peace, its stability for the elite’ (Local NGO leader in Dili)**

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powers. People felt insecure owing both to the threat of black magic itself and the threats, suspicions and revenge attacks that it could prompt. The problem is not unique to Ermera. Belun highlighted a number of violent incidents relating to accusations of sorcery in the districts of Liquiça, Manatuto and Dili between November 2013 and February 2014 (2014c). However, the violence in Ermera is generally perceived to be of a smaller scale than in the past: one local state administrator said, ‘events do arise that have an impact on people’s freedom of movement, their feeling of security, but it’s never for a long period’.

#### 4.1.3 Security sector violence

Allegations of mistreatment, particularly by the PNTL, are common. This was particularly the case in the months following the creation of the Dili Task Force in December 2007, where there were allegations of ‘excessive use of force and ill-treatment during arrest, unlawful searches of houses and abusive behaviour’, according to UNMIT’s 2007/2008 report on Human Rights and Development in Timor-Leste (The Asia Foundation, 2008). While their records are very unlikely to encompass all instances of PNTL or F-FDTL violence, the state monitoring mechanism, Human Rights and Justice Provedoria (PDHJ), has received at least 28 allegations of excessive force every year since 2009.<sup>29</sup> Our research trip took place shortly after the government’s joint military-police operation against dissident groups in Baucau; many of our interviewees in the affected sub-district of Laga alleged that excessive force had been used on civilians in that area, which was corroborated by numerous national human rights monitoring groups.

#### 4.1.4 Urban, youth and land-related violence

Often seen as the ‘amphitheatre’ of conflict and violence in Timor-Leste, the capital Dili has been the main location for the violent protests, political conflict, crisis and violence that have occurred since independence. The 2006 displacement crisis hit Dili most heavily, with only a small fraction of the displacement occurring in other districts. Belun data show that Dili has the highest number of incidents recorded, with particularly high rates of youth violence. Even when compared with population statistics (e.g. crimes per 10,000 people), Dili remains among the districts with the most incidents. PNTL data in 2013 rank Dili as the third highest district for incidents per 10,000 people, following Oecusse and Baucau. EWER data have identified ‘youths’ as far and away the top perpetrators of violent incidents, with many more incidents reported as perpetrated by youths than by students or martial arts groups every month from 2012 to 2014.<sup>30</sup>

In the Asia Foundation’s 2013 survey, land grabs were cited by the general public and community leaders as the greatest security issue (The Asia Foundation, 2014). They were also cited as the most commonly experienced dispute in both the 2008 and 2013 surveys (The Asia Foundation, 2008, 2014), with specifically high rates of land grabbing in Dili. Cases arise where there are competing claims to land by two different parties, often within and across families, and violence can occur. However, land grabbing can also relate to instances where the state or businesses attempt to claim land from local people as part of a process of state or corporate expansion (Carapic and Jütersonke, 2012). Urban, youth and land-related violence are key parts of the security landscape in Dili and beyond, and appear to be issues that will continue to have a major presence in the future.

Many of the limitations we have outlined above are symptomatic of deeper tensions in the political, social and economic landscape of Timor-Leste. Muggah (2010) points to a number of factors that shape violence in Dili: informal security groups, the process of returning IDPs, unemployment and migration, property disputes and socioeconomic inequalities. The country more broadly has experienced high population growth, low-quality services for poor people and growing inequality. In spite of these issues, Timor-Leste has made considerable progress in addressing insecurity. Since the violence associated with the 2006 crisis abated in 2008, Timor-Leste has made considerable steps in reducing violence, in particular political and martial arts-related violence. This is reflected in most Timorese’s perceptions of security: while people do not necessarily feel safe, they recognise that security has improved. Next we review the specific drivers of change that have led to Timor-Leste’s relative national stability and improved perceptions of security.

## 4.2 Maintaining political stability and limiting political violence

### 4.2.1 Political transition beyond Xanana

Xanana has helped hold a young nation together, but any future leader is unlikely to command the same level of public confidence. It is unclear when Xanana will step down from power (it was to happen in 2014 but has been delayed), and as the International Crisis Group argues, given the almost ‘mythic primacy afforded to Gusmão by many voters, his eventual exit from politics is certain to prompt a period of uncertainty and a reconfiguration of power’ (ICG, 2013: 15). Timor-Leste’s next Prime Minister will probably ‘face the challenge of how to address

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29 2009: 37; 2010: 28; 2011: 31; 2012: 34; 2013: 28. Data obtained from PDHJ office in Dili.

30 The category ‘youth’ refers to young people who are not currently attending university and not expressing allegiance to a particular martial arts group at the time of the incident.

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potential sources of social and political unrest without Gusmão's unparalleled authority' (IPAC, 2014).

Xanana's quote from 1998 shows he is well aware of the potential problems of resistance leaders heading government. One local NGO leader argued that 'many problems come down to Xanana moving people around like pawns in his game of chess; using incompetent people so that they can't challenge him'. The very same things that have allowed for political stability could well be Timor-Leste's undoing in the future. This includes an absence of clear ideological grounding in the current leading party, bound together as it is by Xanana's personal authority.

The danger in vesting such power and authority in one man is that institutional development stagnates. This is perhaps best reflected by his decision to merge the defence and interior ministries and put himself in charge, with deputies lacking a significant power base. Leadership is highly centralised, creating weak foundations across several key institutions in the security sector. As highlighted by IPAC (2014), 'the creation of a unified Ministry of Defence and Security may have been a necessary stopgap measure to ease tensions within the security services and restore stability to a badly shaken nation', yet it also demonstrated the huge reliance on Xanana as former FALINTIL commander-in-chief. Longer-term institutional changes need to be made to ensure civilian control of the military and police to dissuade the authoritarian temptations that come with such concentrated executive power.

#### 4.2.2 Buying the peace or fuelling conflict?

It is clear that oil and gas reserves have already had a strong effect on Timor-Leste's political settlement: they have enabled the aggressive pursuit of state-led development, which is changing the dynamics of national politics and 'encouraging a style of political patronage that may further weaken party representation' (Shoesmith, 2013: 121). There are considerable benefits to being involved in politics, linked to a deepening of patronage structures, a substantial lifetime pension guaranteed after five years of service and the possibility of benefitting from lucrative state-led contracts. This perpetuates an interest in maintaining the status quo and may skew political decisions away from pro-citizen reforms and towards increasing wealth among elites.

While the strategy of buying off potential spoilers with cash payments and contracts has led to relative political stability, as expectations of preferential treatment for elites

increase (alongside growing social inequalities), the seeds may be sown for future political grievances and instability. As one government advisor stated:

*Until now the government is buying the peace with money ... giving compensation of various forms. But when the time comes that the government has no money, problems will arise; therefore the government needs to resolve the root cause of the problem – if not, the small problems will accumulate into a big problem.*

There are two oil and gas fields which provide billions of dollars to Timor-Leste every year: Bayu-Undan and Kitan. But they cannot last forever. ConocoPhillips, the operator of Bayu-Undan, says the field will run out in 2020, and the Petroleum Fund may be empty by 2025 (La'o Hamutuk, 2014b). There are other underdeveloped fields, which could still increase Timor-Leste's wealth further. Yet even if this happens, it raises questions about the wider effects of continuing these multiple layers of patronage, and what the effects might be if they are withdrawn in the near future.

Even with the efforts to buy off spoilers, economic opportunities still preoccupy many veterans we met. The reasons for discontent varied: from feeling that they were not being adequately compensated or had not received contracts, employment or leadership opportunities, to the idea that simple financial compensation was not appropriate or enough, or that veterans are not adequately recognised. IPAC (2014: 12) argued that some veterans of the resistance believe they are 'entitled to a nearly endless stream of benefits, including state pensions, scholarships for their children, preferential access to state contracts, health care abroad and more'. This was supported to varying degrees by the veterans that we interviewed, some of whom argued that veterans 'shouldn't have an empty plate', with others bemoaning the low quality of houses they had been built by the state and others claiming that all veterans' children should be educated. When asked about the consequences when Xanana resigns, one prominent veteran stated:

*There are so many concerns related to this ... there are many veterans who have no house, they have kids and the daughters don't go to school, some are ill and cannot access a hospital or clinic ... there is no hope. Xanana is still alive and the veterans still face this situation! What will happen if he dies?*

**'The history of the Third World is repeating itself: the leader of the resistance will end up as president, even if he is not up to the task; guerrilla commanders will be generals and politicians will strive to become ministers... If this were to happen, it would be an outrage to the whole meaning of our struggle, the whole meaning of the sacrifices made by our people. It would be a betrayal' (Xanana Gusmão in Niner, 2000: 231)**

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This speaks to both an ongoing reification of Xanana and his empathy with veterans as well as an understanding that even now many veterans feel they are not getting what they deserve. There is a delicate political balance to be struck here. Despite some public criticism from President Ruak of veterans' sense of entitlement, as well as the poor execution of infrastructure projects they have won (IPAC, 2014), limiting their benefits in the near future would risk violence. But continuing their payments is also problematic:

*the formal recognition of this group and the associated status within both society and politics that is attributed to those recognized as 'veterans' presents a certain undemocratic tendency, particularly in a state with a weak legal structure prone to political influence. (Belun, 2013b: 11)*

Potential spoilers to the peace have essentially been rewarded for posing a threat. The fact that many of those who played leading roles in the 2006 crisis were awarded 'lucrative government contracts, has arguably established a perverse incentive for causing future trouble' (IPAC, 2014: 13). While understandable in the short term to gain stability, it is unclear where this path will lead. Many of those rewarded following violence in the aftermath of the 2006 crisis were not of the older veteran generation, but a younger cohort associated with the latter stages of the resistance in the clandestine movement, now members of martial arts groups or youth gangs. They will continue to play a role in Timor-Leste's political and security landscape for some time and serious attention needs to be given to strategies that reduce the patronage structures associated with violence. Without this, Timor-Leste's relative political stability could be in doubt.

### 4.3 Tensions in the security sector

Despite the contribution of the security sector to improving security, F-FDTL and PNTL officers maintain a variety of allegiances, causing many fractures and tensions. Further, the military is expanding its role in internal security, which creates challenging institutional dynamics linked to the unclear mandates of the PNTL and F-FDTL. Some of these issues can be attributed to flaws in international reform efforts, which some critics feel have been overly focused on lauding the Timorese success story (Wilson, 2012).

#### 4.3.1 Fractures and tensions within the F-FDTL and PNTL

The institutional dynamics within and between the police and army are heavily influenced by political affiliations to Xanana Gusmão, FRETILIN-affiliated factions, rivalry between ex-POLRI, veterans and former-clandestine members of the police, as well as affiliations

with martial arts or other informal groups. While these tensions appear to have subsided, partly thanks to efforts to recruit from all districts of the country, a former petitioner maintained that many of the causes of the 2006 crisis remain unresolved:

*In people's hearts the divide between east and west is still there, which could risk a future crisis ... [In the army] there is not a balance within the institution because those from the eastern side have more opportunities and have become the big guys, while opportunities for westerners are still minimal ... [And] within the police and the military there is not a very good balance, because political decisions can intervene in decisions made by the general commander, and because within the police people are aligned within different parties.*

One security sector expert explained that these relationships and influences mean that the PNTL operates under the 'rule of the deal' rather than the rule of law. While this study cannot explore the structure of these networks in depth, they form an important part of Timor-Leste's security context and highlight the difficulty of ongoing processes of security sector development.

A growing concern is the increasing militarisation and consolidation of power bases within each of the public order divisions of the 'special police unit', whose authority expanded under the 2009 security law, and over which the General Commander has dubious control. As one security analyst in Dili put it: 'There are a lot of those special units which are politically aligned. Some district commanders can go straight to the PM [Prime Minister] – that needs to change'. In addition, all new police recruits for 2014 were allocated to the core operational units and special police units. This meant that no recruits were allocated to the district PNTL units. The current curriculum for new recruits mainly focuses on physical combat skills and the laws governing the mandate of the police, with limited training on proactive problem-solving and crime prevention strategies. The training is still overseen by the Portuguese paramilitary force, the Republican National Guard (GNR), and builds on the perceived success of the role of the Special Task Force that helped put down violence in Dili in 2007-2008 (Belo and Koenig, 2011). The special units' proposed expenses budget for 2015 (\$2.75 million) is larger than the total budget for all 13 districts of operational police (\$1.8 million), which appears to reflect the police's continuing prioritisation of resourcing for reactive policing over preventive policing strategies. According to a government advisor, many of these units have unclear mandates, leading to competition between them. Such strategies raise questions about how effective community policing can be in improving police relations with the public in the

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face of the prevalence of those special units designed to quell unrest.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, there are concerns that the security sector has a high degree of impunity. The notion that violence will be rewarded was strengthened by the near total impunity granted to those associated with the 2006 political-military crisis as well as the events surrounding the purported assassination attempts on Ramos-Horta and Xanana Gusmão in 2008 (see CIGI, 2011). Whatever the short-term benefits for political stability, this approach may have created a culture of impunity that risks destabilising the security sector in the future.

### 4.3.2 Limitations of security sector reform

Much has been written on the flaws of the formation, development and ongoing reform of the security sector in Timor-Leste (Rees, 2004; Lothe and Peake, 2010; Wilson, 2012; CIGI, 2009; ICG, 2009b, 2010). There have been failures on both government and donor sides in developing the kinds of political relationships that are prerequisites for security sector reform (SSR). Wilson (2012) points to the perceived need for a success story for the government, UN and other donors, particularly after the failings that led to the 2006 crisis. This led to more focus on the image of progress than on progress itself, a process she terms a form of ‘regulatory ritualism’: for example, ‘attempts to improve the poor relationship between the UNMIT and the government resulted in an increase in encouraging “positive speak” about government initiatives, extending to lauding unworkable government programs’ (Wilson, 2012: 83). As one donor representative put it, ‘There was a lot of stuff that was reported to happen but didn’t with the UN in Timor’. While the international community remains engaged in SSR, the government is now in the driving seat, backed up by a flow of oil and gas resources which allows it to fund its own agenda.

### 4.3.3 Strong security approach

There are also concerns about some of the stronger security approaches taken by the government, such as the joint police and military operations and responses to martial arts violence, youth gangs and political groups.

First, strong security approaches provide a reactionary response to what are political issues, and thus do not address the deeper structural problems underlying security incidents. According to one civil society activist commenting on the recent operations against KRM, ‘There have always been interventions by the state but these ones have been particularly revealing. It’s important not to be reactive but to see security as a transformative way forward’. This is in part because this strong security approach has been used to quell what many feel are political issues, not security ones.

Earlier, similar examples include the instigation of a six-month special operation against ‘ninjas’ in the border districts of Bobonaro and Covalima in 2010. Timorese human rights groups argued that this was also a politically motivated operation designed to scare CPD-RDTL into becoming a mainstream political party (ICG, 2010: 3). A Catholic priest who acts as an advisor on martial arts issues expressed exasperation at the government’s policies to ban martial arts groups’ activities, saying: ‘It’s not a problem of martial arts; it’s a problem of politics. Young people are an instrument for the politics – they use them and then blame them’. Recent research by Belun (2014a) argues there is no holistic long-term policy for martial arts groups, since after the ban there are few programmes to integrate the members into other activities.

Second, more aggressive security approaches can create rather than curtail insecurity at the local level. Interviewees in Baucau, particularly in Laga sub-district – where the joint operation against CPD-RDTL and KRM took place – accused the security forces of beating several civilians, which has also been highlighted in human rights reporting. One local leader explained to us how the recent joint operation has caused more insecurity in her *suco*, particularly in the six *aldeias* where the majority of CPD-RDTL and KRM supporters lived. Youths who were intimidated into helping the police are now the object of threats from other community members and renegade group members who have not turned themselves in.

Third, an aggressive security approach can discourage the sort of citizen activism and dissent that can provide an important check on governments and which may be particularly important as Timor-Leste attempts to consolidate its young democracy. The counterargument, of course, is that it is too risky to encourage activism and dissent early in a state’s existence – that it is important to secure enough years of peace and statehood first to ensure resilience. Yet there is a danger that an argument for state consolidation extends too long and leans towards authoritarianism.

## 4.4 Socioeconomic problems threatening long-term security

Timor-Leste has made a number of significant development gains since 1999 (see Section 2.3), but it is one of the most resource dependent countries in the world. While oil and gas revenues have been used somewhat successfully to buy the peace – and also fund cash transfers to vulnerable groups – there are major concerns that revenues from oil and gas are not being spent in ways that can sustain gains made over the longer term. Security and stability have been prioritised – and for good reason – but it may be time

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31 Set against this, the Secretary of State for Security and many members of the General Command said in interviews that they support the strategies of community policing and are actively considering strategies for PNTL to support the future budget of community policing structures currently being supported through donor funding.

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for priorities to shift towards a more holistic approach to security. When one considers Timor-Leste's rising youth population, high levels of poverty, rapid urban drift, growing expectations and finite oil and gas reserves, it appears clear that there is some way to go – if the Timorese are to embed the gains of their nascent security progress.

#### 4.4.1 The sustainability and use of oil and gas reserves

The window of opportunity afforded by oil and gas resources to build peace, the state and an economy may be short. The country now has \$16 billion in its Petroleum Fund, but the government is working on the assumption that oil and gas reserves may be depleted by 2025. According to government statistics, oil and gas represented 77% of Timor-Leste's GDP in 2011 and around 96% of its exports in 2013, making it the most mineral-export dependent country in the world after South Sudan and Libya (Scheiner, 2014). Aid fell from 80% of the state budget in 2002 to 16% in 2012 (from \$461 million to \$283 million) – and is expected to decrease further (OECD, 2014). A recent advocacy piece published by La'o Hamutuk argued:

*Timor-Leste does not have enough oil and gas to sustain the country for very long. If the non-oil economy hasn't developed when it runs dry in half a generation, many more Timorese people will join the swelling majority who live below the poverty line. When state revenues can no longer cover expenses, Timor-Leste will fall into austerity, with drastic implications for the state and its citizens. (Scheiner, 2014)*

Thus far, improving security through public spending has been a clear priority of the government. This is evidenced by budget decisions – for example, the proposed 2014 budget for cash transfers to veterans exceeds the budget for economic development (excluding infrastructure) and agriculture put together. Agriculture, which employs half the population and provides livelihoods for 80% of households, was allocated just 2% of the 2014 budget. Thus while the social assistance budget is large, the bulk of these transfers go to veterans, with vulnerable groups coming a distant second. These transfers are not designed to target poverty but to recognise past service in an effort to keep the peace.

Our interviews suggest there is growing discontent with the strong focus on security at the cost of broader dimensions of wellbeing. For example, one civil society leader argued that 'Improved security in the narrow sense may undermine future stability. Government has banned martial arts groups – but what are the solutions to youth unemployment?' Another government representative asserted, 'Peace is not a function of whether [there are] lots of police and army but of governance and the ability

to address poverty, land issues, housing and employment'. While pro-poor social protection measures can dent poverty, sustained and inclusive growth is also needed. As La'o Hamutuk argued, 'petroleum dominates decision-making about current and future plans, diverting attention and resources from sustainable, equitable, realizable development paths' (Scheiner, 2014). The presence of oil and gas revenues in itself is not a guarantee of sustainable employment or equitable growth.

#### 4.4.2 Persistent socioeconomic problems threaten long-term stability

While the use of these resources has bought Timor-Leste a period of stability, initial investment in infrastructure, and some clear development gains (see Section 2.3), many serious socioeconomic problems remain. This makes questions around the sustainability and use of oil and gas reserves particularly important.

##### *Malnutrition*

Perhaps one of Timor-Leste's most serious socioeconomic concerns is malnutrition. The Global Hunger Index ranked Timor-Leste 74 out of 76 countries surveyed in 2014 (IFPRI, 2014). The same index highlighted how Timor-Leste, Bangladesh, Niger and Yemen have the highest prevalence of underweight children under five (more than 35% in each country). According to the 2009-2010 Demographic and Health Survey, 58% of children under five years old in Timor-Leste are stunted, one of the highest levels in the world.

##### *Poverty and inequality*

World Bank data suggest that the poverty rate increased in both rural and urban settings between 2001 and 2007, with one in every two Timorese living under the national poverty headcount in 2007 (World Bank, 2008).<sup>32</sup> While per capita GDP of around \$4,048 in 2011 would classify the country as lower-middle income, this figure does not reflect actual living standards. Umapathi et al. (2013: 9) show that the non-oil GDP per capita of \$810 is more representative of the actual living standards, which places the country in the low income range, although still better off than many other fragile states. This is despite the increase in public spending, particularly in infrastructure and social spending, improved security and double-digit economic growth in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012.

While the limited data show a decrease in income inequality between 2001 and 2007 (World Bank, 2008), inequality appears to remain high. For example, the UNDP discounted the GNI per capita by 17% in 2014. Dili concentrates 91% of the population in the top two income quintiles (NSD, 2010) and intra-rural inequality might be even greater (Sharma et al., 2011). This was a

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32 36.3% in 2001 and 49.9% in 2007.

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major preoccupation of those in civil society during our interviews. As one activist argued:

*It only takes you five minutes to see a different situation outside of Dili. Dili does not reflect the rest of the country. There is so much disconnect between the government and citizens countrywide; and there is so much political and social difference between the haves and have-nots. For a small country to have \$1.1 billion a year ... you have more than enough to improve things in Timor and that has not happened.*

### **Unemployment**

Job creation is a huge concern: the World Bank estimates that 70% of the population are unemployed or underemployed (World Bank, 2012). There is a great deal of contestation on unemployment figures. Government unemployment figures as cited in the 2010 Timor-Leste Labour Force Survey show the overall unemployment rate in 2010 as 3.6%,<sup>33</sup> a comparatively low rate. However the UNDP (2011: 51) explains that the definition of employment used in this survey is: 'a person doing as little as one hour-work (paid or unpaid) during the reference week'. As such, the rates for 'underemployment',<sup>34</sup> 'vulnerable employment'<sup>35</sup> and the economically 'inactive'<sup>36</sup> are more revealing about the population's access to income. These figures show that 70% of all employment is 'vulnerable' and that just under half of the population (200,000 males and 300,000 females) are considered 'inactive'.

Problematically, the oil and gas economy 'accounts for virtually no on-shore employment. Its economic impact is entirely via government spending' (IMF, 2013). The non-oil and gas economy (which affects livelihoods most directly) remains very small, at 22% of GDP (IMF, 2013), and is led by government spending on infrastructure (40% of the 2014 budget – Ministry of Finance, 2014). While infrastructure is conducive to economic diversification and the country's integration into the regional economy, it is capital intensive. Job creation is also a growing concern as the working-age population is growing by 15,000 (or 2.5%) per year, and this will accelerate when the post-1999 baby boom generation reaches adulthood.<sup>37</sup> At 5.7 births per woman, Timor-Leste has one of the highest fertility rates in the world. Nearly half this emerging workforce is illiterate

(more so for women and girls) in spite of the government's big push on primary and secondary education.<sup>38</sup>

### **Urbanisation**

Rapid urbanisation also poses a threat, with the urban population growing at an average of 4.3% annually since 2000 and huge numbers of youths moving to the capital. Limited job prospects on arrival leave many of them without livelihoods or support networks, and rural–urban migration tends to loosen connections with the social structures and norms that act to prevent violence in rural areas. Partly due to patterns of displacement and rural–urban migration into Dili, the capital also has a unique tendency for district-based conflicts to play out between villages or between members of rival *sucos* or sub-districts (TLAVA, 2010; Jütersonke et al., 2010).

### **Land**

Land insecurity constitutes one of the biggest threats to the East Timorese, particularly in (but certainly not restricted to) urban areas (The Asia Foundation, 2014). The issue is of considerable importance in Dili and Baucau, which Carapic and Jütersonke (2012: 19) argue are 'the two urban areas that have been the sites of most of the strategic planning, development-based evictions, and conflict-related displacement'. The proposed land laws remain controversial, after initial drafts were vetoed by the former President. Revised versions have yet to be discussed again by parliament. One issue likely to affect land further in the future is government plans to develop onshore oil, gas and mining sectors. Given the value accorded to land, such disputes have the potential to disrupt security.

As major security threats have subsided, the socioeconomic issues reviewed here are at the forefront of citizens' minds, and there is a danger that a continued focus on stabilisation will cloud the issue of long-term sustainable and equitable development. While maintaining basic security and stability is a necessary precursor to development efforts, it is only one piece of the puzzle; underlying grievances that could fuel future conflict may be overlooked. Socioeconomic issues represent significant challenges in their own right, but also risk becoming security concerns over the longer term.

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33 Timor-Leste Labour Force Survey quoted in Government of Timor-Leste (2013).

34 'Underemployment occurs when people do not have full-time, continuous work, and are usually only employed temporarily or seasonally.'

35 'The "vulnerable employment rate" refers to those whose status in employment is given as being own-account worker or contributing family worker. The percentage of vulnerable employment is obtained by calculating the number of people in this category divided by the proportion of total employment.'

36 'The economically inactive population comprises all those who are neither employed or unemployed, due to conditions such as attending educational institutions, being retired from employment, being engaged in family or household work.'

37 World Bank data, see <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.GROW>.

38 World Bank data, see <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.FE.ZS>.



UNPOL Officers with children in Timor Leste. Photo: © UN Photo / Martine Perret.

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# 5. What lessons can we learn?

In this paper, we have presented an analysis of the progress Timor-Leste has made in personal security since the crisis in 2006. We argue that notable improvements have taken place since 2008 and a degree of stability appears to have been achieved. The available data suggest that various forms of violence are declining and that this aligns with people's steadily improving perceptions of their own security. While many Timorese remain concerned about some forms of violence, such as SGBV, security sector violence and violence in relation to land, urban growth and youth groups, it is clear that some degree of progress has been achieved in this fragile context.

We have identified a number of drivers of these improvements. International intervention helped to legitimise Timor-Leste as a state in the early stages of the restoration of independence, enabling the creation of the basic state structures upon which domestic actors have built. A relatively stable political settlement, combined with state efforts to buy the peace, has disincentivised elites from acting as spoilers. We have also argued that the state has effectively dealt with threats to security through a variety of measures and made some progress, albeit with important caveats, in dealing with institutional problems in the security sector. Last, but not least, this paper has demonstrated that in the daily lives of the Timorese, security provision depends upon an array of local actors and old and new practices. It is these actors who are the face of security at the local level and contribute to building it in diverse ways.

The challenges Timor-Leste faces are substantial. The approach to improving security taken to date will leave Timor-Leste with a legacy of highly personalised rule and a range of powerful elites who are likely to expect to continue benefitting from development dividends. We have highlighted that attempts to quell tensions within the security sector may well have only provided short-term fixes and will require ongoing attention to protect against another crisis in the future. Perhaps most troublingly, poverty and inequality remain pervasive. A wealth of research highlights the potential for horizontal inequality to lead to conflict (Stewart, 2008), as well as constituting a concern in its own right.

This case study provides lessons for countries emerging from conflict or occupation, for resource-rich states and for the international community. Here we distil five key lessons:

- **State-building practices need to respond to local realities and citizen expectations, with broad consultation important for establishing legitimacy.** Through the initial period of 'state-building', international policy-makers made decisions in the design of key state institutions and policies that did not align well with citizens' expectations. Decentralised governance structures and localised service provision such as agricultural extension and market linkage support services that existed under the Indonesian administration were abolished. As a result the majority of the population, who rely on subsistence agriculture, lost trust in the state to provide the services on which their livelihoods most depended. In creating security sector institutions, the international community also relied too heavily on partisan advice, rather than broad consultation, embedding grievances among veterans and regional groups. These grievances were significant factors fuelling the 2006 crisis and continue to pose threats. Recent efforts to reintroduce local governance structures, rural development systems and infrastructure are beginning to ameliorate these challenges. Security sector reforms have gone some way to improve performance, but deeper challenges to institutional legitimacy linger. The grievances of the veterans, many of whom depend on subsistence agriculture, are still being dealt with through financial pay-outs.
- **There is a need to understand history and key personalities in post-conflict settings, as these relationships are likely to define what security progress is possible in post-conflict contexts.** The political settlement in Timor-Leste has been defined by the past: interpersonal relationships, the history of resistance, colonisation, occupation and more. These relationships are the foundation upon which a highly personalised leadership has taken root and on which politics more broadly continues to play out. Reliance on charismatic figures has proven key to Timor-Leste's improvements in security, which provides both positive lessons as well as warnings for other countries and international actors. Drawing on the popularity of key individuals may be a way to mobilise populations around a peace-building agenda. This is not just about understanding individuals, but about understanding the political economy of the networks of closely related individuals and families who may hold considerable power – and even legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. In Timor-Leste, this includes key

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former FALINTIL and clandestine resistance members, who continue to cooperate and compete in governance. Understanding history and networks of relationships is important in improving the chances of successfully negotiating them.

- **Successful strategies to maintain peace in the short term may undermine prospects for sustainable and equitable security arrangements in the long term.** Maintaining the peace is a critical precursor to development, but solutions that encourage patronage and centralise political power with individuals are likely to be effective only in the short term. Beyond that, it is critical that citizens experience a development dividend in order to ensure grievances are not fomented that could undermine peace in the longer term. This means shifting to inclusive development, in which the peace dividend is shared widely and not just with elites or those that pose a threat. In addition, structures for the accountability of state institutions need to be empowered. However, this should not be equated with a sequential view of how post-conflict transitions take place, with security first and development second. Trade-offs will be inevitable when making decisions that try to take into account the short-term need for security and political stability, alongside the longer-term goal of sustainable peace. This should not imply that longer-term goals cannot be embedded in major strategic decisions in the aftermath of conflict or occupation. Similarly, longer-term development strategies in fragile contexts should be accompanied by sustained investment in security sector

development and mechanisms that engage citizens in the state-building process.

- **Unconventional solutions can work well but bring their own challenges.** Maintaining the peace may require some unconventional approaches in the short term – like Xanana bringing together the command of the police and military in the aftermath of the 2006 crisis. This went against civil-military relations best practice, but it nonetheless defused inter-force rivalries in the short term and helped put an end to ongoing violence. Yet there is a danger that these strategies become normalised, used whenever there is a perceived security threat, and in themselves become a threat to the peace. It is therefore important that, in the longer term, a more democratic security sector culture is cultivated while civic activism and peaceful contestation are embraced more widely.
- **A diversity of actors shape personal security, and hybrid forums bringing together state and non-state actors are central to sustainable peace.** The Timor-Leste case study has shown that beyond the broader political dynamics affecting national stability, personal security depends significantly on a mosaic of local actors. The resilience of communities and their capacity to address conflict drivers such as land disputes or youth tensions depends largely on local leadership and local relationships. Hybrid forums for engagement between state and non-state representatives, community leaders and potential spoilers can have a positive impact on personal security. These forms of security provision need to be recognised and engaged with as part of any state-building enterprise by national or international actors.

**‘You can cut down a tree, but if you don’t pull up the roots, the tree will grow again’ (Xefe Suco, Baucau)**

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UN and National Police Training. Photo: © UN Photo / Martine Perret.



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Development Progress is a four-year research project which aims to better understand, measure and communicate progress in development. Building on an initial phase of research across 24 case studies, this second phase continues to examine progress across countries and within sectors, to provide evidence for what's worked and why over the past two decades.

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