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Elections in Timor-Leste

2016 Local Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Asia-Pacific

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:
These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Timor-Leste elections authorities as of October 28, 2016, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

Local (*suco*) elections in Timor-Leste are scheduled for October 29, 2016. Elections will be held for Village Chiefs (*Chefe do Suco*), delegates for Village Councils (*Conselho do Suco*), and Hamlet Chiefs (*Chefe do Aldeia*).

If no candidate wins more than half of the valid votes for the Village Chief or the Hamlet Chief, a run-off election will be held. The law calls for a same day run-off for the Hamlet Chief and for the run-off for Village Chiefs to be held two weeks after Election Day. By November 24, 2016, all run-off elections must be finalized.

In addition, newly formed Village Councils will immediately meet to designate the *Lian-na'in* (traditional authorities or "word masters") and to elect one male and one female youth representative to the Village Council. If there is no run-off for Village Chief this will take place on November 9 and if there is a run-off, it will occur on November 24.

What is the legal regulatory framework governing the local elections?

In July 2016, the Government of Timor-Leste enacted Law No. 09/2016, also known as the *Suco* Law. The new law governs the election of the Village Council, Village Chiefs, and Hamlet Chiefs.

How is the local government organized?

Local government is organized into four organs:

- Village Council (*Conselho do Suco*)
- Village Chief (*Chefe do Suco*)
- Hamlet Assembly (*Assembleia do Aldeia*)
- Hamlet Chief (*Chefe do Aldeia*)

The Village Council is comprised of the Village Chief, the Hamlet Chiefs, a female delegate from each Hamlet, and a male delegate from each Hamlet. In addition, the Village Council includes three representatives elected by the aforementioned council members: a female youth representative (between 17 and 30 years of age), a male youth representative (between 17 and 30 years of age) and a representative of the *Lian-na'in* (traditional authorities or "word masters").

The Hamlet Assembly is not elected – it is comprised of all eligible voters in the geographic unit designated as the hamlet who are recognized as such by the other hamlet members.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

On Election Day, Timor-Leste citizens will elect Village Chiefs (*Chefe do Suco*), delegates for Village Councils (*Conselho do Suco*), and Hamlet Chiefs (*Chefe de Aldeia*). In total, 442 Village Chiefs, two delegates (one man and one woman) for each Village Council, and 2,225 Hamlet Chiefs will be elected.

How long is the term of office?

It is a seven-year term for Hamlet Chiefs, Village Chiefs and Village Council delegates.

How many registered voters are there?

There are 726,017 registered voters (374,854 men and 351,163 women) for the local elections.

How many polling stations are there?

The new *Suco* Law (Law No. 09/2016) has increased the number of polling stations to one per hamlet, or 2,225. This is an increase from a total of approximately 800 polling stations in previous local elections.

How many poll workers are there per polling station?

On Election Day, there will be two teams of three poll workers per polling station:

1. The first team will be the hamlet polling team of three representatives selected by the Hamlet Assembly (one of whom must be a woman). Election Day will start with the hamlet electing their Hamlet Chief and two delegates for the Village Council.
2. The second team, for the Village Chief election, is determined by the *Suco* Law (Law No. 09/2016) and consists of the former Hamlet Chief, one Village Council delegate, and a representative of the *Lian-na'in* (traditional authority). One of the three has to be a woman. Village Chief elections are administered by this team of poll workers following the election of the Hamlet Chief and the Village Council delegates.

Who administers elections in Timor-Leste?

Timor-Leste's two electoral management bodies are the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration (*Secretariado Tecnico da Administracao Eleitoral* [STAE]) and the National Election Commission (*Comissao Nacional de Eleicoes* [CNE]).

STAE is a government body organized under the Ministry of State Administration and Territorial Management, whose responsibilities include drafting of electoral regulations and codes of conduct; organizing voter registration; and administering voting. The CNE is an independent body comprised of

seven Commissioners who oversee STAE's work, approve statutes prepared by STAE and handle procedural complaints.

According to the new *Suco* Law (Law No. 09/2016) enacted in July 2016, the electoral committee of each Hamlet Assembly (consisting of three members of which one must be female) has the following electoral administration functions for the local elections:

- Receiving and verifying applications of candidates and accepting or rejecting them;
- Granting candidates whose applications have been accepted a period of at least 15 minutes to present before the Hamlet Assembly their reasons for application and their proposals;
- Designing, producing and distributing the ballots for the Hamlet Assembly members;
- Monitoring of the ballot box;
- Counting the votes and establishing and announcing the results of the voting;
- Receiving and resolving the complaints submitted during the process of voting, vote counting, and announcing of the results;
- Submitting any appeals resulting from the electoral committee's decisions for a vote by the Hamlet Assembly;
- Announcing the delegates to the Village Council; and
- Recording the minutes of the electoral operations.

STAE will have only a limited role in training, information dissemination and logistical support.

How are seats allocated?

The local elections are conducted as a winner-take-all system. For the Village Council delegates, the male and the female candidate with the greatest number of valid votes win the election. The youth and *Lian-na'in* (traditional authority) representatives are elected indirectly by the Village Council members. See provisions for reserved seats for women and youth below.

In the Hamlet Chief elections, the candidate who has obtained more than a half of valid votes is elected. This is also the case for the Village Chief. If there is no clear majority winner for the Village Chief or the Hamlet Chief, a run-off election will be held.

Are there reserved seats for women?

On each Village Council, there must be one female delegate and one female youth representative. On the Hamlet Assembly Electoral Committee at least one of the three members must be female. The law also includes provisions on women candidates and polling station workers.

For the election of Hamlet Chief, the law requires that there be a minimum of one woman candidate. If there are no women candidates, the Hamlet Assembly Electoral Committee can only continue with the electoral process after hearing from the local women's organization of their intention not to compete for that particular election.

For the election of the Village Chief, the law requires a minimum of two candidates of which one needs to be a woman. If there are no women candidates, the Village Council Electoral Committee can only continue with the electoral process after hearing from the local women's organization of their intention not to compete for that particular election.

Are there reserved seats for youth?

Yes, on each Village Council there must be one male youth representative and one female youth representative who are elected indirectly by the newly formed Village Council.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

The *Suco* Law (Law No. 09/2016) does not provide for out-of-country voting.

Resources

- Constitution of Timor-Leste ([English](#) | [Tetum](#) | [Portuguese](#))
- Government of Timor-Leste Suco Law (Law No. 09/2016) ([English](#))