



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Election FAQs: Timor-Leste

2023 Parliamentary Elections

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Asia-Pacific

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Election Snapshot

- Election Day: May 21, 2023
- Registered voters: XXXX
- Polling stations in-country: XXXX
- Polling centers: XXX
- Candidates: XXXX

When is Election Day?

On February 13, 2023 the president of the Republic of Timor-Leste announced that parliamentary elections in Timor-Leste are to be held on May 21, 2023.

What is the legal regulatory framework governing the parliamentary elections?

The legal framework for the 2023 parliamentary election is substantially the same as for the early parliamentary election of May 12, 2018. Since this election, there have been changes in 2021 to two of the laws governing electoral processes (Law 6/2016 on Voter Registration and Law 5/2006 on Election Management Bodies). There have been no changes to Law 6/2006 on Elections of the National Parliament, Law 3/2004 on Political Parties and Law 6/2008 on Financing of Political Parties or to the government regulations on voter registration (Decree 12/2016); submission of candidate lists (Decree 16/2017); oversight, observation and media coverage of the election (Decree 17/2017); election campaigns (Decree 18/2017); out-of-country voting (Decree 19/2017); and the organization and operations of polling centers and voting, vote counting and tabulation of results (Decree 21/2017).

In February 2023, an amendment to Law 6/2006 on Elections of the National Parliament was passed by Parliament but then vetoed by the President on March 13, 2023. Parliament then voted to confirm the amendment to the law and sent it back to the President for compulsory promulgation, as is allowed by the Constitution. However, despite the government's claims to the contrary, the confirmation vote did not meet the constitutional requirements. After a short period of dispute, the government acquiesced in the President's refusal to promulgate the amended law.

The proposed amendment would have made significant changes to voting procedures very late in the electoral cycle. Prominent among these were the introduction of postal voting for out-of-country voters, and providing more assistance for voters with a disability, including providing Braille ballot paper templates in polling stations. The proposed amendment also brought the Law on Election of the National Parliament in line with the provisions of the Law on the Election of the President.

As a result of the amendment being vetoed some reforms to electoral processes implemented for the 2022 presidential election will not be in place at the 2023 parliamentary election. For example, there will be no 'parallel voting centers' in Dili, at which voters registered in other

areas of the country could vote; not all journalists on duty will be able to vote where they are stationed on election day; National Election Commission (Comissão Nacional de Eleições, CNE) will not be required to recheck all null and void ballots sent to the national tabulation center; no numerical order number will be printed on the ballot paper beside the symbol and flag of each contestant; and there will be a number of other minor differences.

Who administers parliamentary elections in Timor-Leste?

Timor-Leste's two election management bodies are the National Election Commission (Comissão Nacional de Eleições, CNE) and the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration (Secretariado Técnico de Administração Eleitoral, STAE).

The CNE is an independent body of seven commissioners appointed for five-year terms. Commissioners may be reappointed once. The president of the Republic of Timor-Leste appoints one member; the National Parliament appoints three (of whom one must be a woman); the government appoints one; and one is elected from among judicial magistrates and one from among public prosecutors. The National Parliament then elects one member to serve as the president of the CNE. Currently, one member is a woman.

The CNE's major task is to supervise the STAE's work to ensure that constitutional and legal norms are followed and that citizens are treated lawfully and equally. It also verifies the voter register database and ensures that political contestants are free to campaign. Following the amendment of the Law on Election Management Bodies in 2021, the CNE has powers to issue an opinion on government implementing decrees issued under the authority of electoral laws and approve codes of conduct issued by STAE. The CNE supervises municipal-level tabulations of election results and compiles a provisional national results tabulation for review by the Supreme Court. It handles procedural complaints and notifies the public prosecutor of apparently illegal electoral acts. The CNE also provides civic education programs.

The STAE is a government body within the Ministry of State Administration. It is led by a civil servant with the rank of director general. The STAE is responsible for implementing all electoral activities. This includes the drafting of electoral regulations, compilation and management of the voter register, provision of electoral information to voters, procurement of electoral supplies and equipment, administration of voting, counting of ballots and municipal level tabulations of votes, and conduct of out-of-country voting.

What is the election system used for the parliamentary election?

The members of the National Parliament are elected using a proportional representation closed list electoral system, with the whole territory of Timor-Leste (including any votes cast abroad) as a single electoral district. Political parties or coalitions of parties must obtain at least four percent of total valid votes to be included in the distribution of seats for the Parliament.

How many members are there in the National Parliament and how long is their term of office?

There are 65 members of the National Parliament. Currently 26 seats are held by women. The

term of office for members of the National Parliament is five years, split into five, 12-month legislative sessions.

The Constitution of Timor-Leste provides that if a Parliament is dissolved during a legislative session, as was the case in 2018, the remaining portion of that legislative session is added to the term of office of the subsequently elected Parliament. However, the Constitution also states that members of parliament have a fixed five-year term. This latter provision was the one relied on by the President in setting the election date of May 21, 2023. This date was initially opposed by the current government, which argued that if the remainder of the legislative term from 2018 was considered, the election should not be held until late July or August 2023. This claim did not attract popular support, and the opposition to a May 2023 election date soon subsided.

Who is qualified to be a candidate for the election?

Candidates must be a citizen of Timor-Leste, 17 years or older and on the voter register. Citizens who hold certain positions, such as judicial officers, civil servants, defense and police force members, ministers of religion, diplomats, and members of the National Election Commission, are disqualified from being a candidate. All candidates must be included in a political party or coalition's candidate list. A candidate may not be included in more than one candidate list.

How are the candidate lists structured?

Each candidate list must contain 65 primary candidates, and 25 supplementary candidates. At least one out of every group of three persons on each candidate list must be a woman. The order in which a political party or coalition places the names of candidates on the list it submits is the order in which any seats won by the political party or coalition are distributed to its candidates. Seats are allocated according to the highest average system, using the d'Hondt method. Parties and coalitions obtaining less than four per cent of the total votes are not entitled to a seat. The list is in effect for the term of office of the National Parliament. Any replacement of an elected member of the Parliament who resigns or no longer has a mandate is replaced by the next available candidate in order on the relevant political party or coalition's candidate list. If the list of primary candidates is exhausted, any vacancies are filled in order by supplementary candidates.

Which political entities are eligible to submit candidate lists for the election?

Political parties registered with the Supreme Court and who have contested an election within the past five years were eligible to submit a single candidate list for the election by a March 15 deadline. A coalition of political parties may also submit a single candidate list for the election. Political parties that intended to form a coalition to contest the election were required to register the coalition with the National Election Commission no later than March 5.

Which political parties and coalitions will be contesting the election?

On March 29, 2023 the plenary of the Court of Appeal validated the final list of 17 political parties, the vast majority without any parliamentary representation, which are candidates for the Timorese legislative elections on May 21. The only newcomer to the list is the Os Verdes de Timor Party, which registered last year. Only seven of the 17 competing parties currently have parliamentary representation, namely Frente Revolucionario do Timor-Leste Independente (23 deputies), Congresso Nacional da Reconstrucao Timorese (21), Partido Libertacao Popular (8), Kmane Haburas Unidade Nacional Timor Oan and Partido Democratico (five each), and Uniao Democratica Timorese, and Partido Unidade e Desenvolvimento Democratica (with one each). Frente Mudança, which holds one seat in the current Parliament, submitted two candidate lists from warring factions within the party, both of which were rejected by the Court of Appeal. There are no pre-election coalitions, as the Court of Appeal rejected the three coalitions approved by the National Election Commission. Each legally qualified party within these coalitions had a brief opportunity to lodge its own candidate list.

The ballot paper order is as follows:

Political Party or Coalition	Position on Ballot Paper
Partido Desenvolvimento Nacional (PDN)	1
Partido Liberta Povo Aileba (PLPA)	2
Partido Libertacao Popular (PLP)	3
Partido Democratico (PD)	4
Kmane Haburas Unidade Nacional Timor Oan (KHUNTO)	5
Partido Os Verdes de Timor (PVT)	6
Uniao Democratica Timorese (UDT)	7
Partido Unidade e Desenvolvimento Democratica (PUDD)	8
Partido Republicano (PR)	9
Unidade Nacional Democratica da Resistencia Timorese (UNDERTIM)	10
Frente Revolucionario do Timor-Leste Independente (FRETILIN)	11
Congresso Nacional da Reconstrucao Timorese (CNRT)	12

Centro Acao Social Democrata Timorese (CASDT)	13
Movimento Libertacao do Povo Maubere (MPLM)	14
Partido Socialista Timor (PST)	15
Partido Democrata Cristao (PDC)	16
Associacao Popular Monarquia Timorese (APMT)	17

When is the election campaign period?

Political parties and coalitions may campaign for election during a 30-day period between April 19, 2023, and May 18, 2023. The National Election Commission oversees the conduct of the election campaign, and, following advice from the election contestants, on **DATE**, issued a campaign schedule defining where and when each political party or coalition is holding campaign events.

Who may vote in this election?

Citizens of Timor-Leste who are at least 16 years of age may register to vote. However, a person is not included in the voter register for an election unless the person is at least 17 years of age on the date of the election. While there are no disqualifications from registering to vote on the basis of sentence by a court or mental disability in the Law on Election of the National Parliament, Decree 21/2017 bars from polling stations persons who are “publicly known as mentally ill”*. The publicized voter registration period ends on March 31, 2023.

Registered voters may cast their ballots at a polling station within the geographic area for which they are registered by showing their voter registration card. Voters who do not have voter registration cards may cast ballots at a polling station if their name appears on the voter register for that station and they show a national ID card or passport.

How many registered voters are there?

There are **XXXX** voters registered within Timor-Leste who are eligible to vote in the parliamentary election. Additionally, **XXXX** people are registered as out-of-country voters. Therefore, the total number of registered voters is **XXX,XXX** (**XXXX** women and **XXXX** men). Article 42 of Law 6/2006 as amended by law 18/2021 states that no changes can be made to

* Decree 21/2017 on the Organization and Operations of Polling Centers, and the Voting, Vote Counting and Tabulation of Results as amended to 2018, Article 17(i).

the voter register after 30 days before election day (April 21, 2023 for the upcoming parliamentary election).

The total number of registered voters is XXX percent more than the number registered for the 2022 presidential election. Registrations increased the most in in XXX (XXX percent), diaspora (XX percent) and XXX (XX percent). The smallest increases were in XXX (XX percent), XXX (XX percent) and XXX (XX percent).

How many polling stations are there?

On April 21, 2023, the Technical Secretariat for Election Administration (STAE) announced that XXXX polling stations would be located in XXXX polling centers in Timor-Leste, with nine additional polling centers and polling stations abroad. This is an increase of XXX polling stations and XXX polling centers over the 2022 presidential election.

The number of polling centers and stations for this election cannot be changed after April 21, 2023.; however, the STAE may change the locations of polling centers until 10 days before Election Day (i.e., until May 11, 2023).

Polling stations will be open for voting between 7 a.m. and 3 p.m. on Election Day.

How many poll workers will there be at each polling station?

On Election Day, each polling center will be led by a president, and each polling station within that polling center will be managed by a secretary who supervises up to nine polling staff. However, polling stations may operate with a minimum of six staff. Overall, 20,000 staff are expected to work in polling centers on Election Day.

How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?

The Republic of Timor-Leste ratified the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in January 2023. Persons with a physical or visual disability may appoint a person of their choice to assist them in voting. Instructions to polling officials require that they bring persons with disabilities, along with the elderly and pregnant women, to the front of the queue of those waiting to vote. There are no specific facilities to support persons with disabilities in registering to vote or in voting. It is not known how many persons with disabilities are registered to vote.

How and when are the results tabulated for the election?

After the close of voting on Election Day, ballots will be counted and tabulated in each polling center. Initially, the secretary of each polling station within the center will count and secure unused and cancelled ballot papers. The ballot boxes are then opened, the ballot papers from all polling stations within the polling center are mixed, the votes are counted, and the results are tabulated and publicly displayed.

The tabulation records from all polling centers within each municipality are then amalgamated at municipal tabulation centers. The committees tabulating these votes are chaired by the municipal directors of the Technical Secretariat for Election Administration (STAE) and comprise the presidents of all polling centers in the municipality and officials appointed by the STAE. A municipal delegate of the National Election Commission (CNE) supervises their work. Within two days after the Election Day (by May 23, 2022), each municipal tabulation committee must send the results of its tabulation to the CNE, which then has 72 hours from the receipt of municipal tabulations to verify them (by May 27) and a further 72 hours to complete and publicize a provisional national tabulation of the election results (by May 30).

Following review of the tabulation records and consideration of any appeals, the Court of Appeal proclaims the election result no later than June 6, and the election result will be published in the state gazette no later than June 7, 2023.

Who can observe the election?

National and international observers may observe the election once they are accredited by the Technical Secretariat for Election Administration. Organizations who have a purpose of observing elections or which have previously been accredited by STAE to observe elections in Timor-Leste may apply for accreditation, by providing a copy of their constitution and rules and a list of their observers which contains proof of each observer's identity (a copy of a national observer's voter card or identity card or of an international observer's passport), and two photographs for the observer accreditation card. Applications must be received no later than May 14, 2023. A government decree defines the rights and responsibilities of observers. Accreditation may be withdrawn for a breach of this decree or other laws of Timor-Leste.

Political parties contesting the election may request accreditation of political party agents by May 14, 2023. Each contesting political party may appoint up to five agents for each polling station and polling center, for each municipal tabulation center and for the national tabulation center. Only one agent from each political party or coalition may be inside a polling station at any time.

Who provides security for the election?

Election security is primarily the responsibility of the Timor-Leste National Police. Unless requested to act in response to emergencies or legal breaches, police cannot approach nearer than 25 meters from each polling station while voting is in progress. The Timor-Leste Defense Force may also have a role under its responsibilities for crisis management, intra-government cooperation and maintaining civil order.

How are election disputes resolved?

Alleged breaches of election law, regulations, codes of conduct or procedures can be referred to the National Election Commission (CNE) for decision. In polling stations, complaints about election operations are addressed in the first instance by a vote of a station's polling officials, who may consult the Technical Secretariat for Election Administration (STAE). If unsatisfied, a

complainant may then refer the complaint to the CNE, which must rule within 72 hours of receipt. The CNE has specifically defined responsibilities in relation to appeals against STAE decisions on the registration of voters.

The CNE is required to refer alleged criminal breaches to the public prosecutor. Decisions of both the CNE and STAE can be appealed to the Supreme Court. Appeals against the provisional national election results published by the CNE can be lodged with the Supreme Court within 24 hours of their publication. The functions of the Supreme Court are currently being implemented by the Court of Appeal.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

The Technical Secretariat for Election Administration (STAE) has announced that out-of-country voting will be available in-person at Timor-Leste diplomatic missions or consular offices in Darwin, Melbourne and Sydney, Australia; Lisbon and Porto, Portugal; Seoul, South Korea; and Dungannon, London and Oxford in the United Kingdom. Voters must be on the voter register compiled for the areas covered by these missions or offices and vote in person on Election Day.

Is postal voting allowed?

A new provision for postal voting by out-of-country voters was included in an amendment to the Law on Election of the National Parliament which was vetoed by the President in March 2023. There will be no postal voting at the 2023 parliamentary elections.

Resources

- Constitution of Timor-Leste ([English](#) | [Tetum](#) | [Portuguese](#))
- Government of Timor-Leste Law No. 06/2016 on Voter Registration as amended to 2021 ([English](#) | [Portuguese](#))
- Government of Timor-Leste Law No. 05/2006 on Election Management Bodies as amended to 2021 ([English](#) | [Portuguese](#) | Tetum)
- Government of Timor Leste Law No. 6/2006 on Election of the National Parliament as amended to 2017 (English | [Portuguese](#) | Tetum)
- Government of Timor Leste Law No. 3/2004 on Political Parties as amended to 2016 (English | [Portuguese](#) | Tetum)
- Government of Timor Leste Law No.6/2008 on Financing of Political Parties (English | [Portuguese](#) | Tetum)
- Government Decree 12/2016 on Voter Registration and Updating of the Voter Registration Database (English | [Portuguese](#))
- Government Decree 16/2017 on Submission of Candidate Lists (English | [Portuguese](#) | Tetum)
- Government Decree 17/2017 on Oversight, Observation and Media Coverage of the Parliamentary Election (English | [Portuguese](#) | Tetum)
- Government Decree 18/2017 on the Electoral Campaign (English | [Portuguese](#) | Tetum)
- Government Decree 19/2017 on Implementation of the Parliamentary Election Abroad, as amended 2018 (English | [Portuguese](#) | Tetum)

- Government Decree 21/2017 on the Organization and Operations of Polling Centers, and the Voting, Vote Counting and Tabulation of Results as amended 2018 (English | [Portuguese](#) | Tetum)
- Government Decree 4/2018 amending Decrees 19/2017 and 21/2017 ([Portuguese](#))
- Government Decree 1/2023 on Calendar of Voter Registration Operations Abroad (English | [Portuguese](#))
- Electoral Calendar, Parliamentary Elections 2023 (English | [Portuguese](#))
- IPU Parline ([English](#))
- The Constituency-Level Elections Archive (CLEA) ([English](#))

About IFES in Timor-Leste

Since 2001, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has been a key partner in strengthening the development of Timor-Leste's electoral sector. IFES conducted programming around the 2004-2005 local elections, 2017 parliamentary elections, 2018 early elections and 2022 presidential elections. IFES' programming focuses on inclusive civic and voter education, strengthening media engagement, technical support to election management bodies and supporting disability access monitoring.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Timor-Leste election authorities as of May 15, 2023, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.