

Electoral Violence Related to the 2016 Timor-Leste Local Elections



A Report from Belun's Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) System

March 2017



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Introduction

On 29 October 2016, all 442 *Sukus* (villages) in Timor-Leste voted to elect their *KonselluSuku* (Village Council) in local elections. The 300¹ villages in which no candidate for *Xefe Suku* (Village Chief) won a majority (i.e. 50% of the vote plus 1 vote) then voted again in a second round on 13 November.

In the previous local elections in 2009, the Technical Secretariat for Election Administration (STAE) was responsible for the administration and logistics of the elections. For the 2016 local elections however, with the passing of Decree Law IX/2016², the Government of Timor-Leste passed primary responsibility for the organization and undertaking of the local elections to the municipal, administrative post and village authorities themselves, with STAE playing a supporting role.³

While, in general, the 2016 local elections were undertaken successfully and peacefully, the significant change in procedure and the short time period which the *Sukus* were given to understand the lengthy new law and prepare for and implement the elections created much confusion among voters, candidates and the organizing committees in many *Sukus*. In some cases, this confusion led to violence.

This report will summarize the violence that occurred in relation to the local elections in October and November 2016 and will offer recommendations to prevent such violence in future elections.

Electoral Violence and Belun's Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) System

Belun's Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) system was established in 2008 and now monitors for violent incidents and changes to the security situation in 43 of Timor-Leste's 65 Administrative Posts, including at least three Administrative Posts in each municipality and all the Administrative Posts in Dili and the Oekusi Special Region. This monitoring area covers 275 of the country's 442 *Sukus*. In addition to its regular monitoring for violence, Belun focused special efforts on monitoring for electoral violence during the 2007 and 2012 Presidential Elections and the 2009 local elections, and is now continuing with the 2016 local elections and the 2017 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections.

Monitoring is carried out by 86 EWER volunteer monitors who are trained by Belun in data collection and conflict transformation techniques. When an incident occurs, the monitors fill an incident form and deliver it to one of the thirteen EWER Municipal Coordinators. The Coordinators then fill out an identical form on a dedicated tablet computer to send the information to EWER analysts in Dili for analysis (and referral on an emergency basis to relevant stakeholders, such as the police, when serious incidents are recorded). Monitors record incidents of physical violence, non-physical violence (such as threats or large public arguments that have the potential to lead to physical violence) and symbolic violence (such as burning political party flags).

¹Ministry of State Administration, Press Conference at which provisional results of the elections were announced, November 2016

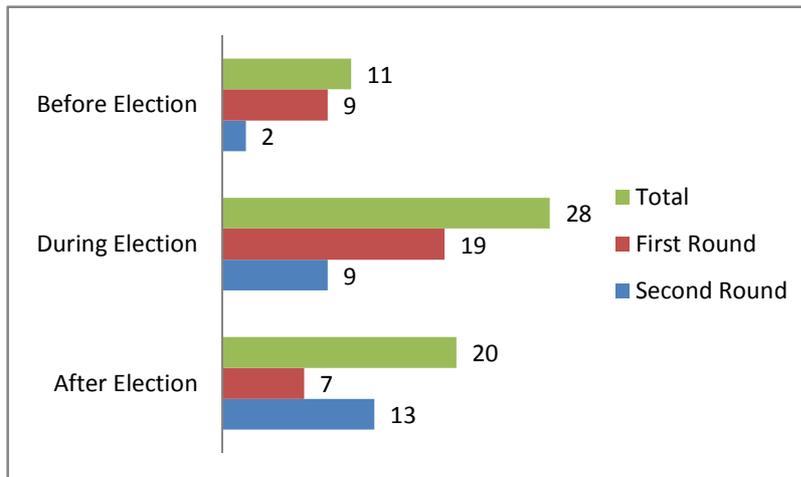
²Lei Suku, Lei No. 9/2016, Chapter IV, article 34-72

³Ministry of State Administration, 2016

With regard to electoral violence monitoring, Belun separates incidents into those that occur in the days and hours before voting begins (for example when an incident results from a candidate finding out he or she has been left off the ballot), those that occur during voting (usually at the voting center), and those that occur in the hours and days after voting ends (for example, when an incident results from a losing candidate's supporters not accepting the result peacefully).

Incidents of Electoral Violence Related to the 2016 Local Elections

EWER monitoring recorded 59 incidents of electoral violence during the 2016 local elections, with 35 incidents of violence recorded around the first round on 29 October and 24 incidents recorded around the second round on 13 November.



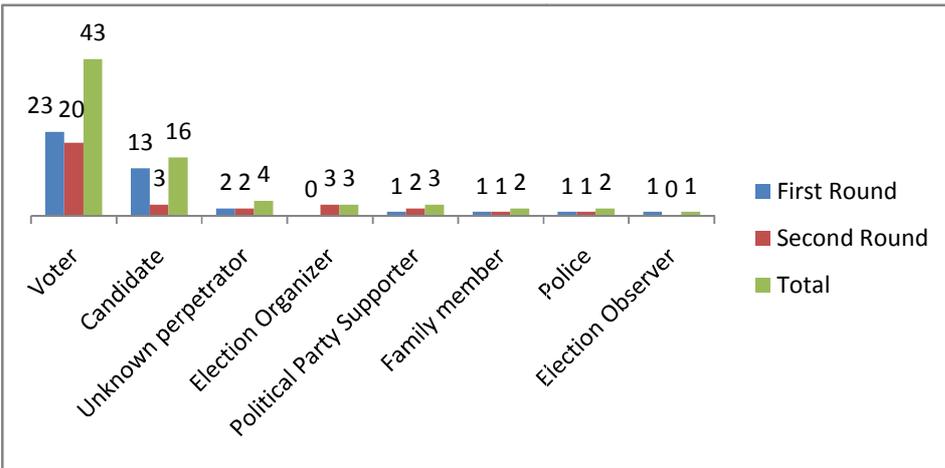
Of these incidents, 27 involved physical violence (12 in the first round and 15 in the second round) – including at least 15 very serious incidents in which people were injured and property was damaged – and 32 included non-physical violence (23 in the first round and 9 in the second round), including threats and arguments. The following serious incidents were recorded around the first round:

- in Uaibobo Suku, Ossu, a house was destroyed after opposing supporters provoked each other and fought;
- in Mau-Ubo, Hatolia, a fistfight between opposing supporters resulted in one injury;
- in Uailili, Baukau, a youth was beaten and stoned by a group of opposing supporters;
- in Buibau, Baukau, a youth was injured after rock-throwing between opposing supporters;
- in Balibo, Bobonaro, a group of youth beat up another youth during an election preparation event;
- in Luclai, Bazartete, a candidate was assaulted by his younger brother and political party supporters after the candidate grew angry that his brother was intending to support a different candidate (from a different political party);
- in Maudemo, Tilomar, PNTL and F-FDTL personnel assaulted a journalist because the journalist was photographing them assaulting a young man who was interrupting voting;
- in Raca, Lospalos, an intoxicated youth assaulted a doctor who was trying to prevent him from disrupting voting and provoking voters.

The following serious incidents were recorded around the second round:

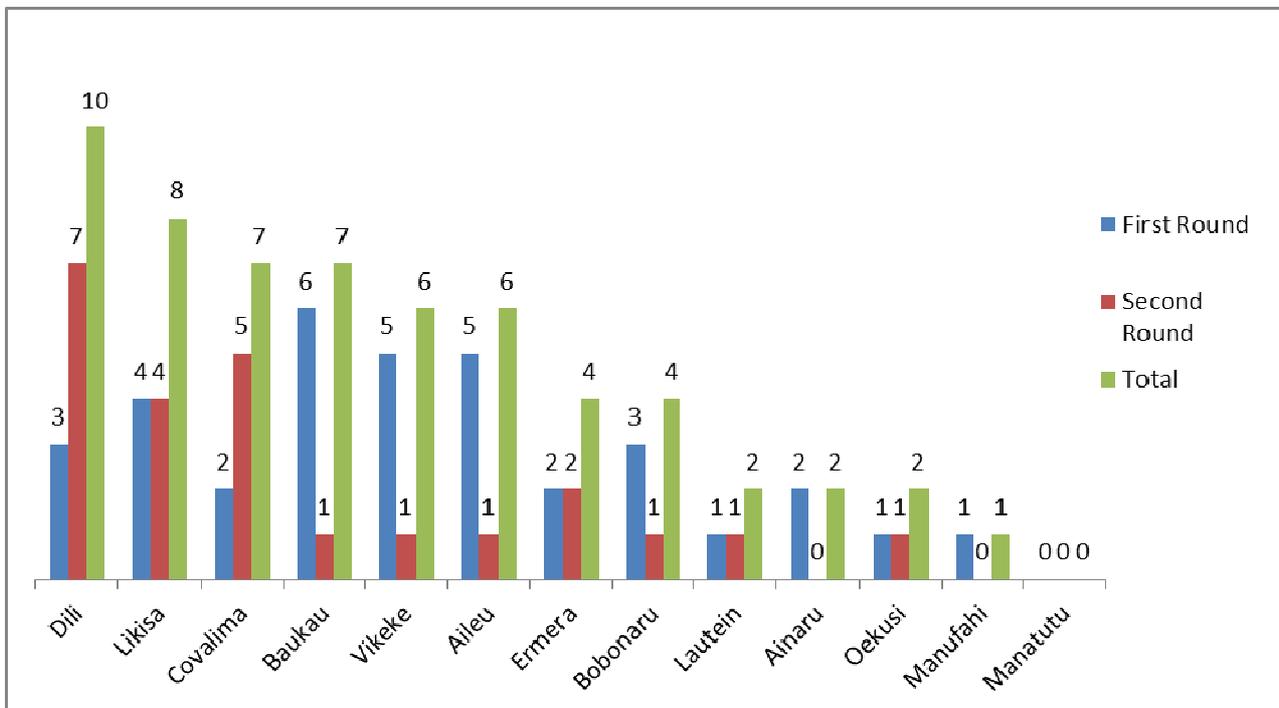
- in Afaloicai, Uatolari, an unknown person threw rocks at a car that was transporting voters from Dili to participate in the second round;
- in Bairo-Pite, Dom Aleixo, two men fought each other with machetes after one provoked the other by mocking him for supporting a losing candidate;
- in Dare, Vera Cruz, two family members fought with machetes after one of them refused to participate in the second round of the election;

- in Buibau, Baukau, a group of supporters of a losing candidate assaulted a man in the street;
- in Tapo, Maliana, two groups of opposing supporters fought each other after one group mocked the other about losing the election;
- in Beiseuk, Tilomar, a group of losing supporters stopped a car and beat two youth inside it after their candidate lost the election;
- in Haupu, Letefoho, two groups threw rocks at each other fought after one group lost the election.

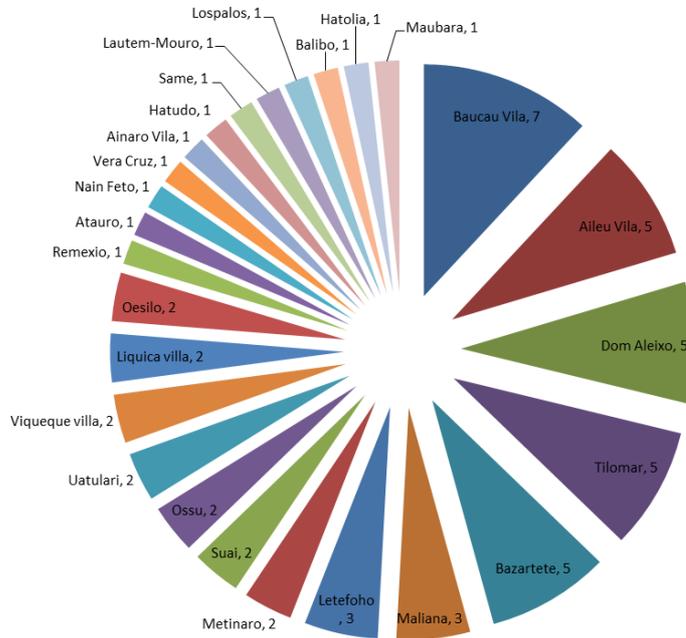


The majority of incidents were initiated by voters (43 incidents, with 23 in the first round and 20 in the second round), followed by candidates (16 incidents, with 13 in the first round and 3 in the second round). Please note that the total number of perpetrators in the graphic below is higher than the total number of incidents (59), because one incident can have multiple perpetrators and one perpetrator can be coded in more than one category.

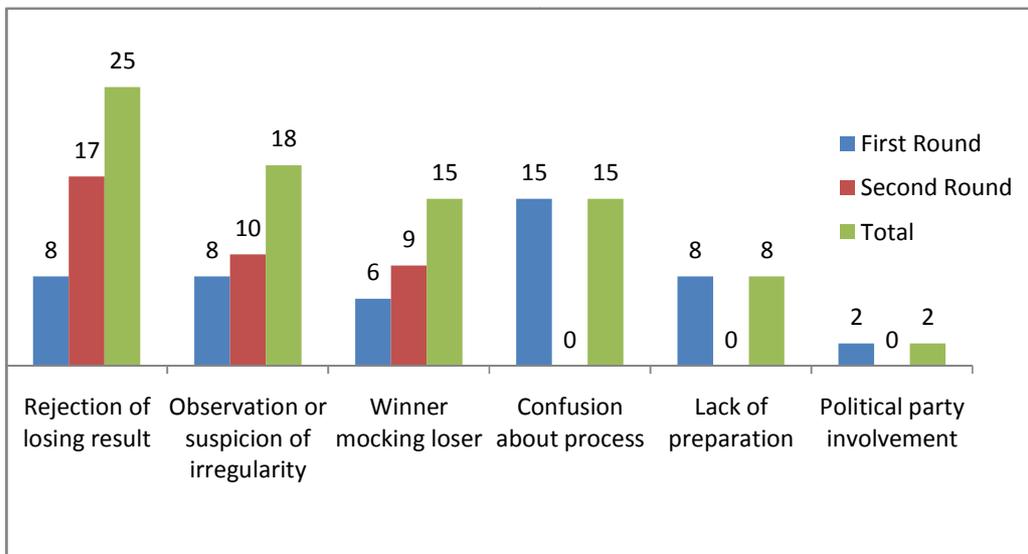
Dili had the highest number of incidents with ten, followed by Likisá (8), Baukau (7), Covalima (7), Aileu (6) and Vikéké (6).



The Administrative Posts with the most violence were Baukau Vila (7), Aileu Vila (5), Bazartete (5), Dom Aleixo (5), Tilomar (5), Letefoho (3) and Maliana (3).



There were various factors that contributed the onset of the 59 incidents, and many incidents could be linked to multiple contributing factors. In the first round, the primary factor that contributed to the outbreak of violence was people not understanding the election rules or procedures (15 incidents), followed by people being upset with the result (9 incidents), poor preparation (8 incidents), suspected irregularities in the process or result (8 incidents), and disputes about the involvement of political party actors in the election process (2 incidents).



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In the second round, the primary factor that contributed to the outbreak of violence was people being dissatisfied with the election result, which led to 17 incidents, followed by suspected irregularities in the

process or result (10 incidents), people mocking supporters of losing candidates (9 incidents). There were no incidents that resulted from a lack of understanding about process or insufficient preparation in the second round.

Overall, between both rounds, in 25 incidents, candidates or their supporters resorted to violence when they realized that they would likely lose or after they were announced to have lost. In many of these incidents, the candidate's supporters threw rocks at the voting center or their opponent's houses or vehicles, or initiated fights with their opponents.

In 18 incidents, incidents were initiated because of observed or suspected irregularities in the voting process or result, for example:

- when the voting box was not opened before voting for all voters to see that it was empty;
- when the organizing committee was suspected of having helped a disabled person to vote for the wrong candidate;
- when the ballots ran out before some voters had voted;
- when family members voted on family members behalves, and:
- when those responsible for directing voters allowed someone who had not received training from STAE to sit in for them.

In 15 incidents, candidates or their supporters who appeared to be winning or who were announced to have won mocked and provoked losing candidates and their supporters. These types of incidents were also reported between opposing groups of supporters from different political parties.

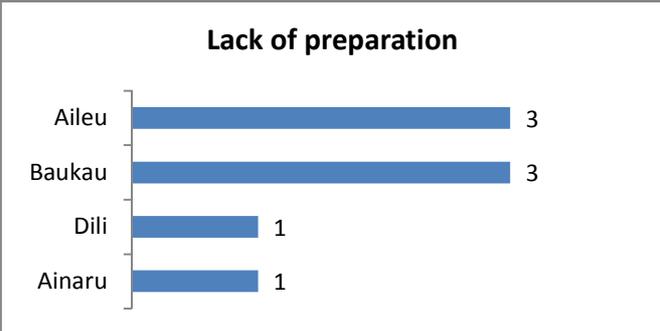
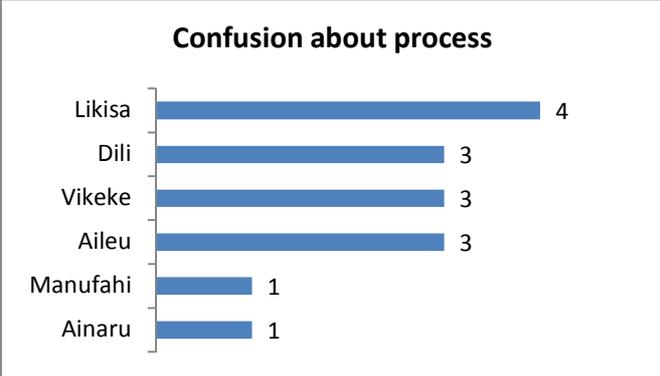
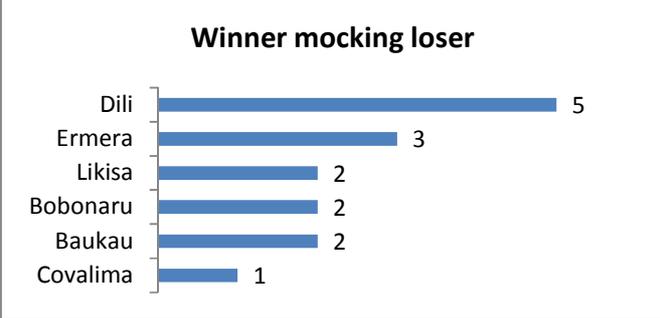
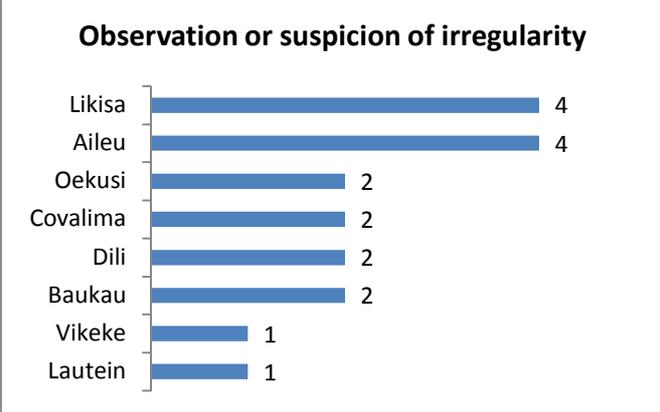
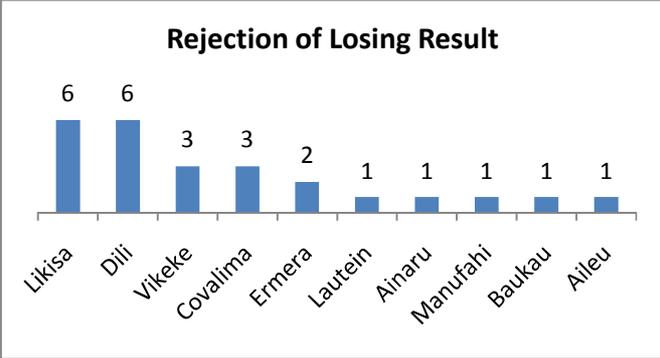
In 15 incidents, people became violent because either voters or the election organizers did not understand the election process, including, for example, about the threshold of victory needed to prevent a second round.

In 8 incidents, poor organization resulted in long lines and long waits, which led to pushing and fistfights.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Many differences between the incidents recorded during the first and second rounds can be explained by the difference in the number of individual elections held in each round (442 in the first round and 300 in the second round), however some interesting differences can be observed:

- In the first round, 15 incidents were recorded that resulted from voters or organizers not



understanding the election rules or procedures, while there were no such incidents recorded during the second round, suggesting that a lack of practice and preparation for election organizers and a lack of awareness among voters was an issue during the first round.

- In the second round, there were fewer overall elections (300 *Sukus* only compared to 442 in the first round) but many more incidents that resulted from winning candidates or supporters mocking losers, or losing candidates or supporters not peacefully accepting the result. These types of incidents are likely to replicate during the March and July 2017 national elections, and Dili and Likisá appear to be the places to watch for this type of violence.

To address the challenges identified above, Belun offers the following recommendations:

For the 2017 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections:

- STAE should focus their public awareness campaigns for the Parliamentary Elections in Aileu Vila, Bazartete, Dom Aleixo and Tilomar;
- Voters should peacefully accept the results of the 2017 national elections and supporters of the victorious candidates should not provoke supporters of losing candidates.

For future Local Elections and upcoming Municipal Elections:

- The role of the National Election Commission (CNE), STAE and local authorities with regard to each election should be decided well before preparations are due to begin;
- STAE, CNE and development partners should begin educating voters and local authorities well in advance, to ensure there is enough time for all parties to understand the election rules and process and reduce confusion on election days.
- STAE should continue to focus its efforts on providing comprehensive technical support to local authorities, including by ensuring consistency in ballot paper preparation and distribution.
- The government and Ministry of Education should increase its civic education activities throughout the country to ensure supporters of losing candidates accept the results peacefully.