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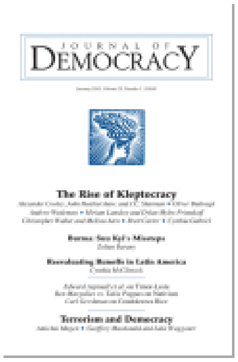

Journal of Democracy, Volume 29, Number 1, January 2018, pp. 153-167 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0013*

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https://muse.jhu.edu/article/683644

Accessed 23 Jan 2018 02:27 GMT

TIMOR-LESTE VOTES: PARTIES AND PATRONAGE

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On 22 July 2017, the tiny Southeast Asian island nation of Timor-Leste (East Timor) held its third parliamentary election since its vote to secede from Indonesia in 1999. Timor-Leste now rivals Indonesia as Southeast Asia's most democratic country. Freedom House's survey for 2016 scores Timor-Leste as Partly Free in terms of civil and political liberties. Elections are held regularly and are generally considered to be free and fair. Freedom of association and expression are respected, and there is a lively public sphere and vigorous competition among parties. Many of the country's formal institutions, however, function poorly; structural constraints such as limited media capacity, low levels of education and literacy, and growing corruption and inequality mean that not all citizens enjoy equal protection under the law or equal access to basic rights such as education and healthcare. There are particular concerns about interference in the judicial system—especially after, in 2014, the government sacked international judges and legal advisers, a feature of the country's justice system dating back to a postindependence period of UN administration. Fears of violent disorder haunt the country's politics. A major episode of communal violence erupted in 2006–2007, linked to national political conflict, and many Timorese worry about a recurrence. Over the last decade, Timor-Leste has nonetheless enjoyed an extended period of stability, though this era may be nearing its end.

Democratic politics in Timor-Leste remains heavily marked by the

Journal of Democracy Volume 29, Number 1 January 2018
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legacy of struggle against Indonesian rule. Political parties are rooted in clandestine resistance networks, and movement heroes dominate national politics. Much of the international media coverage of the 2017 election focused on competition between Timor-Leste's two main resistance-legacy parties, the National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) and the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin), as well as on whether the violence that had marred past races would recur. In the end, the election was remarkably well-run and peaceful. Fretilin squeaked out a one-seat victory over CNRT, leading to a change of government: In September, a minority government led by Fretilin in alliance with the smaller Democratic Party (PD) took office, ending two years of informal cooperative rule by the two major parties. Marí Alkatiri, a Fretilin leader who had served as Timor-Leste's first prime minister until 2006, returned to the premier's post. Yet Fretilin's grip on government appears fragile, especially after the national parliament voted down its program in October, and at the time of this writing in December 2017, new elections or a return to CNRT-dominated government are possibilities.

Why So Little Clientelism?

One seldom-remarked aspect of the 2017 election, however, was puzzling. Timor-Leste experienced very little of the voter-focused electoral clientelism found in much of the surrounding region. In many of Timor-Leste's neighbors, retail vote buying—in which parties or candidates distribute cash payments directly to individual voters—is commonplace. By contrast, this practice has been all but unknown in Timor-Leste despite the fact that, in many ways, conditions seem ripe. Timor-Leste is one of Southeast Asia's poorest countries, and inequality is growing. Over the last decade, a new politics of patronage and distribution has emerged, facilitated by oil wealth. Corruption has been on the rise. Normally, such conditions promote vote buying and other forms of retail clientelism. Why not in Timor-Leste?

Our research on the 2017 parliamentary elections at the grassroots level offers several answers. Most previous studies of electoral politics in Timor-Leste have analyzed national-level dynamics;[1] we wanted to examine what determined how different communities voted, which networks parties relied upon to mobilize voters, and the extent to which the delivery of material rewards factored into voters' choices.[2] Accordingly, we conducted interviews with political leaders and party workers and observed campaign events, while also partnering with a local NGO named Belun to gain detailed appraisals of community-level political dynamics. Belun's national Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) System has a network of 86 volunteer monitors who together cover 275 of the 442 villages (*sucos*) around the country. After receiving training from our team, Belun monitors observed election campaigning at the community level, identified the key social leaders and political networks involved, and tracked promises made and benefits delivered.

These observations reveal a political sphere in which, reflecting a combination of institutional design choices and resistance-era legacies, parties rather than candidates take center stage. In this setting, Timor-Leste features an alternate model of clientelistic politics—one shaped by collective ties involving parties, local notables, and state contracts, resources, or services rather than by politicians' purchase of individual votes. Moreover, these clientelistic ties, although common, remained on the whole secondary to historical networks in binding voters to politicians.

As expected, one critical finding is that electoral politics and campaigning in Timor-Leste are strongly party-focused, unlike in many neighboring countries where individual candidates and their personal networks are key. In villages, the major parties draw upon networks of party workers (or *militantes*) to mobilize voters, and at rallies, supporters deck themselves out in party colors and listen to speeches by national leaders. It is telling that one of the few forms of retail clientelism that we *did* find to be widespread—the provision of party paraphernalia and transportation to party rallies—was aimed at boosting *party* visibility rather than the visibility of individual candidates.

The use of a strongly party-focused electoral system, closed-list proportional representation (PR), has helped to produce this state of affairs; but legacies of Timor-Leste's liberation struggle also play a crucial role in shaping and sustaining partisan loyalties. The country's population is deeply engaged politically, and many voters take their cues from veterans of the independence movement. This means that voting patterns often reflect historical political and military affiliations. For example, from the very first democratic elections in 2001, the country's east has been a bulwark of Fretilin, the vanguard of the independence movement from the 1970s. The CNRT leans heavily on the authority and charismatic appeal of its founder—guerrilla commander and independence hero Kay Rala ("Xanana") Gusmão, who served from 2002 to 2007 as Timor-Leste's first president and then from 2007 to 2015 as prime minister.

Although parties are key in Timor-Leste's political sphere, informal politics also counts for a great deal. In addition to liberation networks, personal and family networks have traditionally shaped local voting patterns. Given this situation, parties' mobilization efforts focus in large part on winning over local notables, such as village heads, clan leaders, traditional authority figures, and veterans, whose views are a powerful influence on voters in many villages. This focus helps to explain the relative weakness of retail vote buying: While there was plenty of clientelistic politics at the grassroots, it mostly took the form of long-term network-building aimed at securing community leaders' allegiance, rather than that of short-term exchanges between parties and voters. That is not to say that parties did not attempt to use patronage to expand their networks of supporters. CNRT in particular has held onto its place in government in part through the copious spending of Timor-Leste's oil wealth. The party is a loosely organized patronage machine that greases its wheels by distributing government funds and other economic opportunities.[3] Though other parties lacked such resources, we did see evidence that some used promises of patronage to try to lure away opponents' supporters. Overall, however, the short-term distribution of material benefits to voters had a relatively marginal effect on voting behavior.

Timor-Leste's Democratic History

Timor-Leste's birth as an independent state was exceptionally difficult. The independence movement in East Timor, then a remote Portuguese colonial outpost, grew rapidly after Lisbon's 1974 Carnation Revolution. In swift succession, Timor experienced a civil war in August 1975, a declaration of independence by Fretilin in November 1975, and a full-scale Indonesian invasion in December 1975. Indonesia annexed the territory and occupied it for 24 years, during which estimates suggest that as many as 200,000 people—in a country whose population at independence numbered less than 900,000—lost their lives due to a deadly mix of conflict, disease, and starvation.[4] A small but popular independence movement remained alive in East Timor and abroad. Then, after the collapse of Indonesia's authoritarian Suharto regime in 1998, interim president B.J. Habibie allowed the East Timorese a UN-supervised referendum; 78.5 percent chose independence. Indonesian-organized militias and their military sponsors went on a violent rampage in response, triggering international intervention under the auspices of the United Nations. Under UN supervision, Timor-Leste began its transition to democracy.

As in many countries that won independence after protracted struggle, the liberation movement has loomed large over Timor-Leste's postindependence politics. Tensions persist from disagreements over strategy during the struggle, personal disputes among leaders, arguments over who sacrificed most, and difficulties connected to the demobilization of former fighters. Unlike many countries with similar dynamics, however, Timor-Leste has avoided sliding toward outright authoritarianism.

The most militant of the pro-independence groups of the 1970s, Fretilin with its armed wing Falintil (Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor) had been the vanguard of the independence struggle. Fretilin was thus well-positioned to capitalize on popular euphoria after independence, and it carried the 2001 election for the Constituent Assembly—Timor-Leste's first transitional election—by a landslide with 57 percent of the vote (the Constituent Assembly was later transformed into Timor-Leste's first parliament). In 2002, resistance hero Gusmão claimed a resounding victory in Timor-Leste's first presidential election, running as an independent. In 1988 during the liberation struggle, he had separated Falintil from Fretilin in order to found a broad pro-independence coalition, the National Council of Maubere Resistance (later renamed the National Council of Timorese Resistance), which he would lead.[5] This event is pivotal to understanding tensions between Gusmão and Fretilin in the postindependence period.

After independence, a range of historical and contemporary enmities soon surfaced, ultimately erupting into what is now dubbed "the crisis" of 2006. Between April and June of that year, protests by a group of sacked soldiers led to armed confrontations among the army, police, and paramilitary groups. These events, in turn, sparked communal conflict on a national scale that endured for about another year, displacing at least 150,000 people (about 15 percent of the population) and resulting in multiple fatalities and widespread destruction.[6]

In the immediate aftermath, Gusmão, who was nearing the end of his presidential term, formed a new party: CNRT. This organization appealed to a disparate coalition of groups and individuals who either felt themselves to be Fretilin's historic enemies (or victims) or were simply loyal to Gusmão personally. Meanwhile another independent candidate, José Ramos-Horta—a Nobel Prize–winning activist who had been an advocate for the liberation movement in exile—replaced Gusmão as president following a May 2007 election.

Communal violence marred the June 2007 parliamentary elections, the tensest since independence. Though Fretilin placed first, securing 29 percent of the vote and 21 seats, CNRT came a close second, with 24.1 percent and 18 seats. After protracted contention, new president Ramos-Horta invited Gusmão to form a government. A coalition comprising CNRT and two smaller groupings (the Democratic Party [PD] and the Timorese Social Democratic Association–Social Democratic Party [ASDT-PSD] alliance) took power, with Gusmão as prime minister. The 2012 parliamentary elections saw CNRT surpass Fretilin's vote share by about seven percentage points (36.7 to 29.9) and secure 30 seats to its rival's 25. With the support of minor parties (the PD and Frenti-Mudança, originally a splinter faction of Fretilin), Gusmão again formed the government and Fretilin initially headed the opposition.

Gusmão transformed governance in Timor-Leste. Largely reliant on donor funds, under Prime Minister Alkatiri Fretilin had adopted a cautious approach to managing the country's finances. Alkatiri had followed the counsel of the World Bank and other advisers by establishing a petroleum fund to manage revenues from offshore oil—Timor-Leste's primary source of national income—and setting restrictions on annual withdrawals in order to safeguard resources for future generations. Gusmão adopted a more expansive approach. Almost immediately after gaining power, he embarked on a lavish spending program to buy social peace and build a stable governing coalition. Civil-service numbers increased by nearly 46 percent after 2008 and salaries rose by 33 percent.[7] The day after the 2012 election campaign began, the government announced that it would begin paying the pensions due to more than 27,000 veterans and their families, worth around US$46 million. Veterans also received $78 million in contracts—awarded without tender—for projects related to the national electrification scheme.[8] Supplementing this spending were large development projects—notably the Oecussi Special Economic and Market Zone (ZEESM) and the south coast resources corridor, an ambitious plan encompassing a refinery, port, and highway. Government spending on infrastructure rose dramatically between 2008 and 2011, and has remained at an unsustainable level ever since.[9]

As the government began to tap oil revenues more aggressively, Timor-Leste began to take on neopatrimonial features, including corruption and the clientelistic distribution of resources and contracts. For example, during the 2012 campaign it emerged that a group of foreign and national companies, including recipients of government contracts, had pledged sums ranging up to $250,000 at a CNRT fundraising event.[10] At the same time, Timor-Leste's economic future began to look less secure as the Petroleum Fund's balance began to decline in 2015.

Unexpectedly, that same year Gusmão engineered a political rapprochement with Fretilin despite the bad blood between him and some of the party's leaders, including Alkatiri. In February 2015, Gusmão stepped down as prime minister, handing the reins to Fretilin member and former health minister Rui Maria de Araújo. (Gusmão assumed the position of minister of planning and strategic investment.) Two years earlier, Alkatiri had been put in charge of the ZEESM project in geographically isolated Oecussi, a western exclave on Timor's northern coast that is entirely surrounded on land by Indonesian territory. This move was widely viewed as an attempt to simultaneously appease and marginalize the former Fretilin premier. In the March 2017 presidential election, Gusmão's personal endorsement helped Fretilin leader Francisco "Lú-Olo" Guterres to score a convincing win.

Effectively, government came to resemble a cartel, with every parliamentary party represented in the cabinet and government legislation routinely passed without opposition. While no longer prime minister, through his new ministry—popularly dubbed the "ministry for everything"—Gusmão retained effective control over the capital budget and, therefore, over patronage resources. In effect, rather than devolving or ceding power, Gusmão further centralized it.[11]

The 2017 Contenders

Such was the political backdrop to the 2017 elections. The campaign saw 21 parties competing for 65 seats in the national parliament. Only five of these parties, however, ultimately passed the 4 percent threshold needed to secure representation. Fretilin placed first, by the narrowest of margins: Its 29.7 percent of the vote was only about a thousand votes (out of a total of approximately 568,000 valid ballots cast) ahead of CNRT's 29.5 percent, yielding 23 seats for Fretilin to CNRT's 22. Rounding out the list of parliamentary parties were the new Popular Liberation Party (PLP) with 10.6 percent and 8 seats, the PD with 9.8 percent and 7 seats, and a youth-oriented party known as Enrich the National Unity of the Sons of Timor (Khunto) with 6.4 percent and 5 seats.

The campaign followed a path shaped by historical legacies as well as by an electoral system that places parties front and center. Under UN tutelage, Timor-Leste adopted a closed-list PR system with a single national electoral district. Rather than choosing individual candidates, voters simply punch a party's symbol on the ballot paper. Once the votes are totaled, seats are allocated to candidates according to their positions on their respective parties' candidate lists. This system means that candidates' incentives are firmly in line with those of their parties. At the head of each party list were national party leaders. The rest of the 65 spots went to lower-level party leaders and local district coordinators, selected for regional balance and candidate appeal. In addition, as per a mandatory quota, every third seat on the lists was allocated to a woman.

Closed-list PR steers campaigners in a different direction than do the electoral systems used in neighboring Indonesia, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea. In these countries, candidate-focused electoral systems discourage party-based-campaigning and instead generate atomized political landscapes in which candidates nurture personal connections with voters, often via cash and goods. Such systems have tended to avert polarized party competition, but have encouraged electoral clientelism.[12]

In Timor-Leste, the independent role of individual candidates is much smaller. Although parties try to boost their chances by selecting candidates with name recognition and influence in each of the country's thirteen *municípios,* or districts, they tend neither to publicize their party lists widely nor to highlight individual candidates outside their regional bailiwicks. Unlike in election campaigns elsewhere in the region, posters bearing images of candidates were rare. Instead, campaign advertising emphasized national leaders, party symbols, and national programs.

The parties' policy positions, however, are not the most important factors shaping voter preferences. The CNRT came to power in 2007 on a platform of "spend the oil money," with campaign banners featuring enticing pictures of gleaming high-rise buildings and modern highways, as well as Gusmão's face. With the exception of the PLP and, to a lesser extent, Fretilin, this election was little different, with most parties promoting programs that consisted primarily of generic commitments to improving services, generating more employment, and improving tourism. Instead of policy appeals, parties tend to rely on informal networks and party structures, together with historical loyalties, to get out the vote.

Party structures were prominent in voter-mobilization efforts at the community level, although their outreach took somewhat different forms across parties. Most parties relied on networks of *militantes* to get out the vote. By far the best organized was Timor-Leste's "historic party," Fretilin. We encountered villages in which the party had hundreds of card-carrying members, though with varying levels of commitment. In at least some areas, these members were required to submit names of other individuals who agreed to support the party; these lists were compiled at the district, then national levels. (Other large parties mimicked this strategy, but generally less consistently or successfully.)

Legacy or Program?

Though Fretilin's platform and campaign advertisements stressed national development, education, health care, and other services, its grassroots appeal largely depended on its historical legacy. Party supporters at the local level emphasized Fretilin's role in achieving independence and could rarely articulate a broader party vision. At the same time, the party's cohabitation in government and reconciliation with Gusmão helped to reduce tension during the vote. Many stressed Fretilin's mantra of "support Xanana, vote Fretilin."

This reliance on legacies of the liberation struggle helps to explain a striking pattern in Fretilin's support: The party has mobilized essentially the same base in every election. In 2017, Fretilin's vote share turned out to be virtually identical to the percentage it won in 2012 and 2007. Geographically, too, apart from shifts in a few areas, Fretilin's regional support remained remarkably stable. Personal and family loyalties to Fretilin established during the liberation struggle remain salient today; on the other side of the coin, grievances and rivalries dating back to that time still limit the party's ability to expand its base.

Timor-Leste's other large party, CNRT, combines the features of a personalistic party, built around charismatic leader Xanana Gusmão, and of a patronage machine. Asked to explain why they supported CNRT, voters often answered simply: "Xanana." Gusmão is *the* legendary leader of the independence struggle. Although he left the presidency in 2007, he has remained the country's dominant political figure. Party propaganda features his image and little else, and he was the major attraction at party rallies—speaking at great length, singing, and even engaging in choreographed quasi-spiritual ceremonies in which, for instance, supporters of other parties were "converted" to CNRT or children released doves signifying a peaceful future under Gusmão's leadership. As in previous election campaigns, Gusmão's central message was a call to spend oil revenues instead of "worshipping" them. Specifically, he argued that continued security and stability are contingent on government infrastructure spending, not "foreign-imposed" priorities such as health and education.

As a party, CNRT resembles a loose coalition of local notables forged by their links to Gusmão and by the patronage—jobs, contracts, and other economic opportunities—that he provides. CNRT is not a mass-membership party on the Fretilin model, and it commands much less institutionalized party machinery at the village level. It has coordinators but lacks card-carrying members. Instead, it relies on local influence-wielders or, as a CNRT coordinator put it, "people who can easily bring people together," to get out the vote by drawing on their own social networks and influence. It has also sought to coopt all manner of social organizations. For example, Rede Feto, a coalition of women's organizations, allegedly shifted its support to CNRT in light of funding it had received from the incumbent government.

The most successful new party to compete in 2017 was the PLP. By far its most important national figure is José Maria Vasconcelos, popularly known as Taur Matan Ruak. Commander of the armed wing of the liberation movement at the end of the Indonesian occupation, then of the Timor-Leste military in 2002–11, Taur Matan Ruak was elected to the national presidency as an independent and served in 2012–17. During his presidency, he built a reputation as a leading critic of official corruption and of Gusmão. He also visited each of Timor-Leste's *sucos,* listening to popular grievances and promising redress, before affiliating with the nascent PLP. This party presented a strongly programmatic critique of the government, calling for a purge of corruption, an end to political privileges (including a widely unpopular lifelong pension for parliamentarians), and more effective spending on welfare programs and local infrastructure, such as water and sanitation projects. It drew significant support from the urban middle classes but also bit into the support base of Fretilin in the east, especially in the municipality of Baucau, Taur Matan Ruak's birthplace. Many observers see in PLP's success signs of a new, politically literate demographic emerging within Timor-Leste's electorate. At the same time, it also relied heavily on veterans of the resistance networks in Taur Matan Ruak's home region, from which the PLP derived almost a third of its votes.

The final two parties to win seats were the PD and Khunto. PD was established by former members of the Timor-Leste Students' National Resistance (Renetil), a clandestine movement that was important among Timorese youth studying in Indonesia. Since 2007, however, it has become an established part of government. For its voter base, PD largely depends on familial and other informal networks in the west of the country. Khunto, which won its first seats in 2017, draws support from members of the martial-arts group Wise Children of the Land (KORK)—headed by the husband of Khunto's leader—and associated family networks. Martial-arts groups are an important social institution among young people, especially men, in Timor-Leste. In a procedure borrowed directly from the quasi-mystical culture of these organizations, Khunto supporters took blood oaths stressing their loyalty to the party and inviting misfortune should they betray it—an effort to lock in their vote and prevent poaching by other parties. In fact, though 89,000 persons had pledged their support, Khunto polled under 37,500.[13]

Campaign Dynamics at the Grassroots

The core election ritual in Timor-Leste is the party rally. Parties invest substantial financial resources and energy to ensure large turnouts. Streets leading to major rallies are clogged with convoys of people riding all manner of vehicles and bedecked in party colors. The rallies are highly festive occasions, with singing, dancing, and rousing speeches by party leaders. Parties frequently distribute free T-shirts and provide at least a meal and either transportation or gas money to participants. Timorese often speak with amusement of individuals who attend multiple party rallies, wearing different party T-shirts for each, motivated by the festive atmosphere and free food. Early post-Suharto elections in neighboring Indonesia saw similar party-based rallies, but a shift to open-list PR drove these gatherings out of fashion by providing incentives for candidates to organize their own separate campaigns. In Timor-Leste, in contrast, parties continue to rely on rallies, less to win over undecided voters than to fire up their base and test the effectiveness of their get-out-the-vote machinery.

Apart from such minor benefits as food, T-shirts, and rides to rallies, we found relatively few examples of retail vote buying or other forms of voter-focused particularistic patronage. In an exit poll conducted on voting day, only 4 percent of respondents said that they had been given money or goods by party campaigners; in contrast, the rate of vote buying reported in Indonesian surveys is around 30 percent.[14] In our field research, we also found no evidence of the practice, common in Indonesia and the Philippines, of candidates using large teams of brokers to distribute cash payments to thousands of constituents just before they vote—despite the fact that at least some parties in Timor-Leste have an organizational apparatus capable of engaging in this practice should they choose. In other settings, activities such as the efforts of Timorese party *militantes* to collect names of sympathetic voters in their villages and pass them up to party coordinators are an integral part of the vote-buying process. The virtual absence of mass vote buying in Timor-Leste's elections offers strong evidence that a party-centered electoral-system design can deter this particular form of electoral clientelism. In Indonesia, where campaigns previously followed patterns similar to those seen in Timor-Leste, a dramatic increase in vote buying followed the introduction of open-list PR.

This does not mean, however, that clientelism was insignificant in Timor-Leste's elections. On the contrary, it was central. But rather than paying *voters,* parties focused on securing the loyalties of local *notables*. In Timor-Leste's mostly agrarian society, community-level leaders not only exercise authority, but can also help citizens to access employment, government assistance, or other benefits. Those local leaders include heads of clans, traditional authorities known as *liurai* and *lia na'in,* village heads, civil servants, and veterans, many of whom have transformed themselves into construction contractors and entrepreneurs and thus control access to local-level development projects. The power to dispense jobs and other perquisites reinforces the influence that veterans in particular enjoy thanks to their liberation-struggle credentials. In this regard, clientelistic networks are also fused with historical legacies from the resistance era.

These dynamics mean that community leaders—whose own allegiances may reflect clientelistic ties—are highly influential in shaping voter preferences. For example, we met one *chefe de suco* (village head) who had previously been aligned with PD because the party had funded a village hall for his community. His subsequent shift to CNRT had turned sour when that party failed to deliver funds to renovate the village office; he was contemplating a last-minute switch to PLP and believed that about a third of local voters would follow his lead.

Such claims are not idle. One recent study found that up to 42 percent of people in rural areas rely on local leaders for information, a circumstance that gives those leaders considerable potential sway over voter decisions.[15] It is therefore reasonable to believe that recruiting leaders, in some cases by awarding government contracts or launching development projects, goes a long way toward securing villages. While it seems that bloc voting has declined somewhat since previous elections, election-day returns still show a single party garnering more than 60 percent of the vote in many villages. The last few years have also seen a number of press reports of village heads announcing that their communities were switching their loyalties en masse from one party to another. Having access to state resources is obviously a boon in winning over such community leaders. The most advantaged party in this regard was CNRT, which had dominated the government for the preceding decade.

While a lack of robust campaign-finance laws or reporting requirements makes the precise amount spent hard to gauge, our findings suggest that CNRT ran by far the most lavishly funded campaign of the parties contesting the election. Many among our observers as well as other sources suggested that CNRT distributed cash to party coordinators, although the figures they reported varied widely (from $400 to $3,000 per *suco*). Party coordinators apparently enjoyed significant discretion in deciding how to spend these funds. Most used them to cover community-level meetings, transportation, and similar campaign expenses, but we also received reports from some communities of coordinators simply divvying up the money among a handful of party cadres (causing resentment among those excluded), or making straight-out payments, ranging from $40 to $3,000, to low-level leaders of other parties as inducements to switch sides. Despite this richly funded campaign, CNRT's efforts were often ineffective, presumably because much of its funding ended up being poorly targeted or soaked up at the party's middle ranks without providing benefits to ordinary voters.

Beyond the immediate distribution of campaign cash, there were promises of community-level projects—improvements to village roads or water supplies; connections to the electricity grid; construction of wells, village halls, chapels, or schools; and even roofing materials or seeds. Belun observers from throughout the country provided reports of party coordinators promising such improvements should their party win. As one put it, "If the *suco* needs a road, they'll promise a road. If they have rice fields, they'll promise irrigation." Yet coordinators rarely made their promises of these goods and services explicitly contingent on a win in the particular village or community concerned, as often happens elsewhere in the region. Many candidates also promised to expand the already-bloated veterans' pension, a payment received by only 1 percent of the population that currently consumes nearly two-thirds of the total social-assistance budget. Such promises underline the importance of social-assistance programs as patronage tools. Notably, all these promises were understood as dependent on the party's winning power at the national level. Unlike in Malaysia, for example, parties themselves and their elected candidates do not directly fund services at the local level.

In this regard, too, incumbency advantaged CNRT and, to a lesser extent, PD. In at least some parts of the country, CNRT had become so enmeshed with the civilian bureaucracy that voters believed they needed to support CNRT in order to access benefits. For example, in Liquica, near Dili, the key leaders of the governmental apparatus—including the *município* head and all subdistrict (*posto-administrativo*) heads—were CNRT members. Though these officials are prohibited from using the powers of office or office hours to campaign, most voters would have found it hard to know whether a municipal administrator was acting in his official role or as a party coordinator when knocking on doors.

Campaigning by local officials thus came with an implicit threat, encapsulated by one of our Belun monitors as: “If you don’t vote for us, you’ll have difficulties when you next want to deal with the government to get a land certificate or whatever.” By the same token, CNRT was able to rely on the support of small-scale contractors—often virtually the only businesspeople of note in their subdistricts—precisely because such people depend on government projects. As a local CNRT coordinator stated, a straightforward calculation is involved: Contractors know that after the election they will be able to come to the government with the reminder, “Don’t forget to repay my service when I want projects.” Many such clientelistic deals to win over local notables are struck long before campaign season begins.

Beyond Clientelism

Nevertheless, we should stress that this election was about much more than electoral clientelism. Given our experience of other countries in Southeast Asia, we were struck by the comparatively party-focused and programmatic nature of campaigning in Timor-Leste, even if the parties’ programs were often short on policy details or funding commitments. Some contenders—including Fretilin, not to mention PLP and Khunto—had relatively little access to government largesse. These parties, especially PLP, made real gains by criticizing government performance and promising better service delivery.

In many respects, Timor-Leste would seem to be ripe for electoral clientelism. It is a low-income country, with a growing gap between rich and poor. It is highly dependent on oil revenues and has increasingly experienced dynamics often seen as elements of a “resource curse”—including high-level corruption within government and a paucity of diversification that could make the economy less dependent on state support. Yet while elements of patronage politics were visible in the campaign, in comparison with the dynamics seen in Indonesia and the Philippines, mass-based retail clientelism is limited in Timor-Leste. The patronage politics that does occur mostly connects parties with community notables, rather than with ordinary voters. In many ways, then, this still-young democracy offers fertile ground to explore the impact of electoral rules and their interaction with family-based and other personalistic networks in shaping patronage politics. As new generations outnumber voters with personal memories of the resistance period, the evolution of these networks, along with the ability of parties to successfully build images that go beyond their resistance legacies, may determine the shape of future partisan alignments.

In the short to medium term, however, the return of political uncertainty in the aftermath of the 2017 election will likely increase pressures for patronage politics, at least at the elite level. The revenues available for development projects, construction contracts, civil-service jobs, and other forms of state largesse are not inexhaustible, and the Fretilin-led government (if it survives) will be unlikely to wish to continue Gusmão's aggressive spending. Yet Fretilin will also face pressures to distribute largesse to supporters and allies. Previously, patronage distribution, combined with Gusmão's personal authority, facilitated CNRT's political success and enabled it to shore up shifting coalitions, even without a significant grassroots political base. Whether the Fretilin government stabilizes or a renewed version of a CNRT-led coalition takes power, patronage politics will likely be central to efforts to renew Timor-Leste's fragile political settlement among disparate actors nursing aging rivalries.

NOTES

1. For example, Dennis Shoesmith, "Is Small Beautiful? Multiparty Politics and Democratic Consolidation in Timor-Leste," *Asian Politics and Policy* 4 (January 2012): 33–51.

2. Our research was an extension of a multi-year study of "money politics" in several countries of Southeast Asia that has already produced several publications, including Meredith L. Weiss, ed., *Electoral Dynamics in Malaysia: Findings from the Grassroots* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014) and Edward Aspinall and Mada Sukmajati, eds., *Electoral Dynamics in Indonesia: Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016). The authors acknowledge the generous research support provided by the Australian Research Council via a Discovery Project (DP140103114).

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13. Confidential interview, 27 July 2017.

14. "Exit Poll: Eleisaun Parlamentar Timor-Leste," Powerpoint prepared by Lembaga Survei Timor-Leste and Lembaga Survei Indonesia, 2017, 30–31.

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