TASA The Australian Sociological Association

Political Cleavages in Timor Leste

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Abstract: The difficulty of governance in some developing nations in Asia and the Pacific is obvious. Governance has broken down and conflict has arisen in several developing nations in the region. This paper examines Timor Leste's 2006 political crisis and the cleavages within Timorese society that may oppose each other. It does so by using Stein Rokkan's theory of political cleavages to better understand the roots of the 2006 conflict, and the groups that may oppose each other in Timorese society and why.

Governance is particularly hard in developing nations. Whilst many approaches have claimed to be the panacea to this problem, many developing nations in our region still struggle. Neoliberalism and its chiefly laissez-faire approach to governance should empower citizens to reach previously unforeseen economic wealth.[1] Economic growth however, is dependent on society being unrestricted and stable; conditions seldom present in many developing nations. Timor Leste since independence in 2002 has struggled to maintain a fully democratic and stable society. This paper will use Stein Rokkan's theory of political cleavages to understand issues that have affected governance in Timor Leste. Political cleavages within Timorese society have jeopardised social stability, thereby making neo-liberal approaches to governance difficult.

Timor Leste has started from scratch to create a system of governance. The government has been creating state infrastructure, establishing an efficient administration and bureaucracy, as well as building a national culture and identity. The goal of governance in the modern era is to create a harmonious and prosperous nation-state with free and fair elections. This is the starting point for understanding political cleavages. To have elections, some parts of society will cling to one political party whilst other parts of society cling to another party, think liberals and conservatives. Political parties however, do not appear at elections without a history.[2] Political parties are rooted within the political cleavages of society. An effective examination of political cleavages within society is integral to understanding the social cohesion of a nation.[3]

Joel Selway describes a political cleavage as:

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1   David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

2   Seymour M. Lipset & Stein Rokkan, "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: an Introduction," in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, ed. Seymour M. Lipset & Stein Rokkan (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 2.

3   Stein Rokkan, "The Structuring of Mass Politics in the Smaller European Democracies: A Developmental Typology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* Vol 10, No. 2 (1968), 179.

"a division on the basis of some criteria of individuals, groups, or organizations [between] whom conflict may arise. These criteria can be ascriptive, such as race, caste, ethnicity, language, or attitudinal, that is, ideology, preference, class, or religion".[4]

Political cleavages are a vital issue for developing countries working on governance and nation-building processes. If the political cleavages are not united or "crosscut", social cohesion will be problematic and democratic reform will not become stable enough to have elections and society may disintegrate into conflict or civil war.[5] The study of political cleavages, and uniting or cross-cutting of political cleavages is a vital issue for effective governance of developing nations as cleavages effect stability, peace and prosperity. States destabilised by warring cleavages then become breeding grounds for terrorist groups, thereby becoming an issue for regional and world security.[6]

There are many political cleavages in a nation-state, they are essentially the gaps between peer groups. Individuals identify with people they see as similar and gravitate to groups of similar people. The cleavages occur between different groups who do not see eye to eye; they are in opposing groups and have different approaches to how society and the political system should run. Cleavages occur between people that have different ethnic backgrounds, come from different linguistic groups, subscribe to different religions, have different socio-economic backgrounds and reside in different regions, as well as other factors.[7]

Rokkan created the concept of political cleavages whilst analysing nation-building in post-World War 2 Europe.[8] Political cleavages were found to occur between groups based on issues of region, race, language, religion and income:

- Region being the geographical Centre (or capital) vs. peripheries: the regional areas may have different ethnic and/or language groups that oppose the dominance of the Centre's ethnicity or language.

- Church vs. Secular State: rejection of central (religious) culture based on opposing religions or moralist reasons.

- Worker vs Owner: issues of wage and labour conditions.

- Rural/agricultural vs. urban/industrial interests: issues based around regional governance and service and regional economic input.[9]

Nation-states have a centre, the capital. This is the base of governance and nation-building, where the political elites are geographically located. Stein Rokkan introduces a geographically based model to understand the structure of political organisations and the cleavages between them. These cleavages are dependent on:

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4   Joel Sawat Selway, "The Measurement of Cross-cutting Cleavages and Other Multidimensional Cleavage Structures," *Political Analysis*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2011), 48.

5   Joshua R. Gubler & Joel Sawat Selway, "Horizontal Inequality, Crosscutting Cleavages, and Civil War," Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2012), 207; Paul Colier & Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and grievance in civil war," *Oxford Economic Paper*, Vol. 56 (2004), 570.

6   Hamid Karimianpour, *Nation Building: Or democracy by other means* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2011), 102.

7   Joshua R. Gubler & Joel Sawat Selway, "Horizontal Inequality, Crosscutting Cleavages, and Civil War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2012), 207.

8   Seymour M. Lipset & Stein Rokkan, "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: an Introduction," in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, ed. Seymour M. Lipset & Stein Rokkan (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 2-3.

9   Stein Rokkan, "The Structuring of Mass Politics in the Smaller European Democracies: A Developmental Typology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol 10, No. 2 (1968), 198.

1. The unique and culturally inclusive consolidation efforts of the centre and the centre's economic, political and cultural strength;

2. The cultural/social/political/ethnic as well as geographical distance of the peripheries from the centre and if the peripheries economic resources and political structures are strong enough to resist against integration into the centre;

3. The internal strength of the centre and its external resources that are able to link and embed the central culture across the nation-state in locally organized subcultures such as churches, sects and other groups;

4. The internal economic strength and the external resource links of nationally spread, locally organized economic units that help to incorporate the peripheries into the centre such as; trade associations, credit systems and international corporations.[10]

The starting point to help understand Timor Leste's political cleavages is its first democratic election which was dominated by FRETILIN and the Presidential election in 2002, that was dominated by Xanana Gusmão (CNRT), an ex-FRETILIN member who had drifted from the group since 1987.[11] Xanana however, has been strongly supported by FRETILIN since independence, with FRETILIN leaders agreeing with Gusmão in many areas and quickly resolving disputes, with both CNRT and FRETILIN holding coalition Governments the entire period from 2002-2014.

Political cleavages in Timor Leste emerged as an issue during the time of Portugal's decolonisation and brief period of independence in 1975, and the subsequent occupation by Indonesia from 1975 until 1999. During this time political conflict occurred between political groups/parties in Timor. The Timor Popular Democratic Association (APODETI) was a political party formed in May 1974 and was pro-Indonesia so much that its original name was Association for the Integration of Timor into Indonesia.[12] They believed that East Timor could not survive as an independent state and annexation into Indonesia would be more prosperous.[13] They believed that Indonesia could guard them from outside threats, preserve their culture and protect Timor from communists.[14]

The Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) was the first political party formed in Timor Leste, it was created in May 1974 by 13 Timorese locals and one Portuguese plantation owner. Originally they called for Timor to stay a part of (or at least strongly connected to) Portugal. Portuguese leaders however, confirmed this would not happen so they asked for a transition period. They then formed a coalition with FRETILIN and after this collapsed, they called for integration into Indonesia.[15] THE UDT party's support came from the rich who wished to maintain the status quo, mostly landowners who owed their success to Portuguese rule.[16] Critics of UDT see them as neofascist.[17]

FRETILIN or the "Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor" began life as a political party under the name of the Timorese Social Democratic Association (ASDT) which started

10   Stein Rokkan, "Centre formation, nation-building and cultural diversity: Report on a symposium organized by Unesco," *Social Science Information* Vol. 8 No. 1 (1969), 89.

11   Dwight Y. King, "East Timor's Founding Elections and Emerging Party System," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (2003), 747-748.

12   Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: the Price of Liberty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 44.

13   Bill Nicol, *Timor: A Nation Reborn* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2002), 73-74.

14   Idid., 75.

15   Bill Nicol, *Timor: A Nation Reborn* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2002), 83.

16   Bill Nicol, *Timor: A Nation Reborn* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2002), 84.

17   Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: the Price of Liberty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 47.

in May 1974, but fell apart after a propaganda error.[18] It was reformed in September 1974 as FRETILIN and has enjoyed great support across the nation since 1975.[19] FRETILIN has a Marxist approach, opposed to Portuguese colonisation and has stood defiantly against Indonesian occupation.[20] Critics of FRETILIN claim they are influenced too much by China and subscribe to communism.[21] The differences in these three distinct parties show the political cleavages in Timor Leste. APODETI had support from (some) traditional leaders,[22] UDT from elites and rich land and business owners[23][24] and FRETILIN from many different groups.[25]

Timor Leste has ethnic, linguist and regionally based political cleavages. Whilst the official language is Tetum, there are many languages widely used. Tetum, Portuguese, Indonesian and Mambai related languages will be the main focus.[26] Tetum (and dialects of) historically had been a geographically western language. Mambai related languages are historically linked to central-east Timor (and the ethnically Mambai people).[27] Portuguese is seen as a language used by elites and English as language learned by Timorese people learn it in the hope of securing work with international organisations or foreign companies.[28] According to the Timor Leste 2010 census only 36.6% of the total population spoke Tetum at home,[29] over 45% of people can still speak Indonesian[30] and over 12% of people speak Mambai related languages at home with many speaking other dialects.[31]

Language and religion have an interesting relationship in Timor. Catholicism became important in Timor Leste because of the role it played in liberating Timor from Indonesian occupation.[32] The Catholic Church started preaching their services in Tetum (a language used only in Timor), and became known locally as "the language of the baptised".[33] The 2004 census found the population to be 923, 198.[34] Of that number, 715,285 people identified as Catholic. There are however, many religious groups including; Protestants (16,616), Muslims (2,455), Buddhists (484), Hindus (191) and 5883 that follow "traditional religions".[35] Over 180,000

18   Bill Nicol, *Timor: A Nation Reborn* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2002), 92.

19   Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: the Price of Liberty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 47-48.

20   Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: the Price of Liberty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 49.

21   Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: the Price of Liberty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 47.

22   Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: the Price of Liberty*, 44-45.

23   Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: the Price of Liberty*, 45.

24   Bill Nicol, Timor: *A Nation Reborn*, 84.

25   Bill Nicol, *Timor: A Nation Reborn*, 90.

26   Direcção Geral de Estatístical, *Census Homepage*, http://www.dne.mof.gov.tl/census/index.htm

27   Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: the Price of Liberty*, 34.

28   Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: the Price of Liberty*, 91.

29   Catharina Williams-van Klinken & Rob William, *Mapping the mother tongue in Timor-Leste: Who spoke what where in 2010?*, 1.

30   National Statistics Directorate, *Population and Housing Census of Timor-Leste*, 2010, xxii.

31   Catharina Williams-van Klinken & Rob William, *Mapping the mother tongue in Timor-Leste: Who spoke what where in 2010?*, 1.

32   Michael Leach, "Valorising the Resistance: National Identity and Collective Memory in East Timor's Constitution," *Social Alternatives*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (2002), 44.

33   Kerry Taylor-Leech, "The language situation in Timor-Leste," *Current Issues in Language Planning*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2009), 39.

34   Direcção Nacional de Estatístical, Timor-Leste: Population by type of residence and sex according to age groups, http://www.dne.mof.gov.tl/census/tables/national/population/table1_1.htm

35   Direcção Nacional de Estatístical, *National priority tables: Census of Population and Housing 2004*, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (Dili: RDTL, 2006), 78.

people have left the religious belief area blank. This shows the existence of religion-based political cleavages in Timorese society.

Rokkan's model emphasises the power of the centre whilst trying to bring in social extremities. It is important to show the existence of regional economic differences and geographical differences in services and infrastructure. Big geographic cleavages exist in Timor Leste when you compare the centre (Dili) to rural areas (the rest of Timor Leste). In Dili 87.7% of urban households have running electricity compared to 18.9% of rural areas.[36] Additionally, 91% of people living in Dili have access to running water or protected water sources, whereas almost 42.9% of people in rural areas only have to access water from unprotected wells, springs, lakes and rivers.[37] This geographical service inequality exacerbates conflict that arises between geographically-based political cleavages.

With the outbreak of independence, a diaspora of the political elite returned home. Whilst Xanana Gusmão returned home after being imprisoned in Indonesia, many of the political elite returned from overseas (or had recently).[38] Many members of the political elite did not experience the Indonesian occupation. They were not forced to learn Bahasa Indonesia to get by and they had not experienced the many years of oppression that the Indonesian occupiers had subjected the locals to. Many elites had not experienced a life where militias were physically abusing and killing people at different times, and they had not lived in a society where Indonesians looked down on them on a daily basis. The elites did not have to operate through Indonesian customs, they had not been inclined to follow Indonesia bureaucratic or social procedures. Many members of FRETILIN who spent time living overseas are seen as out of touch with society because they have not lived the horrid experiences the rest of society was forced to.

This links to the political centre's ability to include social peripheries. There have been major issues around social inclusion of Indonesian struggle veterans. Many former FALINTIL members had not been incorporated into the new defence force or been given a pension. They believed they were due more respect. Many have united to form the Popular Committee for Defence for the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (CPD-RDTL). This has become a rebel group that rejects the sovereignty of the National Government.[39] Other rebel groups have formed, including Sagrada Familia and Colimau 2000, which is almost exclusively linked to the districts of Timor west of Dili.[40] These rebel groups have been able to infiltrate and influence geographical cleavages.

Geographically based political cleavages have been seized by rebel groups and this was exacerbated by the 2006 crisis. On the 1st of February 2001, FALINTIL was retired and the FDTL (Forças Armadas de Defesa de Timor-Leste) was established by Xanana Gusmão, by October however, with the dominance of FRETILIN in the state institutions, it was renamed FALINTIL-FDTL (F-FDTL) in an attempt to link the defence force with FALINTIL and its importance within Timorese history.[41] This branding of the defence force as FALINTIL however,

36   National Statistics Directorate & United Nations Population Fund, *Population and Housing Census of Timor-Leste, 2010*, https://www.mof.gov.tl/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Publication-2-English-Web.pdf, xxiv.

37   National Statistics Directorate & United Nations Population Fund, *Population and Housing Census of Timor-Leste, 2010*, xxvv.

38   Damien Kingsbury, *East Timor: the Price of Liberty*, 105-107.

39   Anthony L. Smith, "Timor Leste: Strong Government, Weak State," in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2004*, ed. Daljit Singh & Chin Kin Wah (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), 286.

40   James Scambary, "Anatomy of a Conflict: The 2006-7 Communal Violence in East Timor," in *Security, Development and Nation-Building in Timor-Leste: A cross-sectoral assessment*, ed. Vandra Harris & Andrew Goldsmith (New York: Routledge, 2011), 63.

41   United Nations, *Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste,* http://www.ohchr.org/

angered some veteran organisations, such as Colimau 2000 and Sagrada Familia.[42] This became a tipping point for these veteran groups to reject the legitimacy of the Government and turned them into rebel groups.[43]

The Government had also not been able to properly demarcate the police and defence force. The jurisdiction of and roles expected of the PNTL (Policia Nacional de Timor-Leste) and F-FDTL within Timorese society had become an issue,[44] at times doing the same job.[45] Both state institutions were weak and were soon to implode. There were allegations that the F-FDTL had been discriminatory against people from the western provinces.[46] People from eastern districts have however reported similar discrimination.[47]

There had been so many disagreements within the F-FDTL that on the 9th of January 2006, 159 soldiers signed a petition aiming to end mismanagement and discrimination within the service. After receiving no response, they deserted, gathered more supporters and a month later marched onto the Presidential Palace.[48] After more dialogue that resolved nothing, many disgruntled soldiers left on leave, deciding never to come back. As a result, the Chief of army, Taur Matan Ruak dismissed 594 soldiers. It has since been found that 200 of those soldiers had deserted for different reasons.[49] The defence force however, was imploding. The protesters protested more, with one protest attracted members from the rebel group Colimau 2000.[50] From that point on (April 25), the protests turned violent; they assaulted youths and burnt market stalls owned by easterners whilst making speeches calling for the violent overthrow of the government.[51]

On the 28th of April they entered the government palace, attacked policemen, burned cars and smashed the ground-floor offices.[52] They then headed towards Rai Kotu, passing through Comoro where they fired shots, killing one person and injuring many others. At Rai Kotu they burned down over 100 mostly Eastern owned houses.[53] It was then rumoured that F-FDTL troops loyal to Alkatiri massacred 60 people that night.[54] Protests and violence now consumed the streets, it would have seemed like Timor was close to civil war. PNTL Police Reserve Unit (URP) officers were encouraging violence between eastern and western groups.[55] F-FDTL and PNTL came into direct armed conflict against each other on several occasions.[56] Civilians had

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Documents/Countries/COITimorLeste.pdf, 18.

42   United Nations, *Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste*, 19.

43   Michael Leach, "The 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Timor-Leste," Australian *Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (2009), 225.

44   United Nations, *Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste*, 19.

45   Ibid., 29.

46   Ibid., 22.

47   Ibid., 20.

48   Ibid., 21.

49   United Nations, *Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste*, 21.

50   United Nations, *Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste*, 23.

51   Ibid., 23.

52   Ibid.,25.

53   Ibid., 26.

54   United Nations, Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste, 28; Mark Bowling, "Claim troops loyal to E Timor PM killed 60 civilians," *Lateline*, 09 June, 2006, http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2006/s1659926.htm

55   United Nations, *Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste*, 31.

56   Ibid., 34-36.

also been armed[57] and many civilians clashed violently based on east-west cleavages.[58] To resolve this conflict UN intervention was needed.[59]

Neoliberalism is used by the international institutions (eg. World Bank), who can impose their codes of behaviour onto smaller nations.[60] Political cleavages within Timor Leste however, have disrupted society to the point where a neoliberal, laissez-faire approach to governance has been problematic. This was exemplified during the events of the 2006 political crisis. In the preceding years to the conflict, the government has developed more consolidative efforts with veterans in order to unite political cleavages and maintain social stability.[61] These efforts however, have been stymied by legitimacy, and continue to be an ongoing challenge for effective governance.

57   Ibid., 40.

58   Ibid.,37.

59   Ibid., 35-37.

60   Noel Castree, "From neoliberalism to neoliberalisation: consolations, confusions, and necessary illusions," *Environment and Planning* 38 (2006), 4.

61   International Crisis Group, "Timor-Leste's Veterans: An Unfinished Struggle?," *Asia Briefing* 129 (18 November, 2011), 1.

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