

Political Deadlock Reflects Politicians' Egos



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Six months have passed since the [Parliamentary Election on July 22nd of last year](#). During this entire time, political deadlock has persisted, meaning that Timor-Leste's leaders are focused on [struggling for power](#) instead of serving the people. The ongoing standoff mainly results from personality clashes between the politicians, not from disagreement over policy. While this personality clash has deep roots, Timor-Leste's leaders should nonetheless prioritize the people's interest. Fundasaun Mahein (FM) urges the politicians to set aside their egos so that the Government and Parliament can focus their attention on ordinary people's needs.

The current struggle is primarily between the leadership of the FRETILIN party on one hand and the CNRT party on the other. The immediate cause of the current impasse is the close results of the recent Parliamentary Election, in which FRETILIN received slightly more votes than the CNRT. This outcome led to [FRETILIN forming a minority government](#), while the CNRT has assembled other opposition parties into a Parliamentary Majority Alliance that threatens to dislodge the current government. However, the roots of this conflict lie in personality conflicts between the FRETILIN and CNRT leaders that date back to the resistance era.

In 1984, a power [struggle](#) within the Timorese independence movement led to a schism between the resistance commanders. As a result, some resistance leaders were forced to surrender to the Indonesian army, while others remained in the jungle and continued the liberation struggle. The ousted commanders were roughly aligned with the leaders of today's FRETILIN party, while some of those who continued leading the guerrillas now head the CNRT. This intra-resistance conflict generated deep-rooted bitterness among the liberation movement's leaders. Now that these leaders have become the political elite of independent Timor-Leste, the same personality-based divide has become a fixture of national politics

As a result of this history, leaders' personalities—and not questions of policy or ideology—constitute the major fault line in Timor-Leste's political landscape. This ego clash generated the 2006 Crisis, in which politicians' [competing agendas](#) inflamed divisions between Easterners and Westerners in the security forces. In 2015, when FRETILIN and the CNRT joined together in a government of national unity, it seemed like Timor-Leste could finally move on from this decades-long personality dispute. Sadly, this division has

reappeared in the months since the 2017 Parliamentary Election. Once again, Timor-Leste's politicians are failing its people.

While the political elite has become belligerence, ordinary people have shown no appetite for violence. This indicates citizens' increased political maturity, since they are not allowing the politicians to manipulate them like in 2006. The Timorese people have learned that, when conflicts occur among the elite, the victims are usually ordinary people. Timor-Leste's leaders should emulate the levelheadedness of the rest of the population and work constructively to reach a compromise.

Monday (January 22nd) marks six months since the [Parliamentary](#) Election, meaning that the President of the Republic can now decide whether or not to call fresh elections. On Tuesday he consulted with the various political parties in the hope of finding a solution. Today (Wednesday) he is summoning the Council of State for advice. As this political uncertainty persists, FM urges all citizens to behave constructively and accept whatever decision the President of the Republic makes. If the people of Timor-Leste all remain calm, they can preserve peace in every bairo, suku, and aldeia.

Similarly, the political elite should focus on producing constructive outcomes for ordinary people. While Timorese politicians often invoke "[the national interest](#)," they tend to place their own interests above all else. Instead of continuing their intransigence, they should cooperate around a common policy program. They should also mentor younger politicians who can lead Timor-Leste in the future. The time has come for the aging leaders of the resistance to retire from politics and let the next generation try its hand at developing the country. For now, the current leadership should resolve their differences in order to avoid further destabilizing Timor-Leste. The absence of significant policy differences between the main political actors means that consensus is attainable. This destructive ego clash must end once and for all.