Changing attitudes to national identity among Timor-Leste tertiary students: 2002-2017

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Understanding Attitudes to National Identity in Melanesia and Timor-Leste

• This research:
  – Examined tertiary students attitudes to nation and national identity in Timor-Leste.
  – Conducted medium scale surveys of tertiary students (n=300+ in each target country) and follow-up focus groups (n=20) in Dili.

• The data generated seeks to:
  – Examine the attitudes of (likely) future elites
  – Track longitudinal studies of changes in attitudes (e.g. 2002-2017)
  – Improve understandings of any regional, ethnic, intergenerational and linguistic fault lines.
  – Give voice to student perspectives
  – More nuanced understanding of ‘nation-building’
  – i.e. challenges of developing a cohesive national political community, as opposed to ‘institutional’ focus of state-building agendas.
Respondent Group: Tertiary Students

• While not “representative” of national population (or even of youth) this respondent group is an important one:
  – Surveys the attitudes of the (likely) future national elites
  – Surveys the attitudes of most educated section of demographically dominant group (youth)
  – Student populations in Dili come from diverse regional origins, and therefore tend to be geographically representative.
Key Questions

• **Subject information**
  - Age
  - Gender
  - District of Origin
  - Language proficiencies

• **Attitudes to National Identity**
  - *Subject information can be cross-tabbed with attitudes:*
    - To assess any regional / gendered differences in attitudes to national identity
    - To assess how cultural or linguistic affiliations inform / correlate with other attitudes to national identity
Affiliations

• How close, or emotionally attached, do you feel to:
  – Aldeia
  – Suco
  – District
  – Timor-Leste
  – South East Asia
  – Melanesian Region
  – Other countries
National Identity Questions

Some people say the following things are important for being truly East Timorese. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is?

- To have been born in Timor-Leste?
- To have East Timorese citizenship?
- To have lived in Timor-Leste for most of one’s life?
- To be able to speak Tetum-Dili?
- To be able to speak Portuguese?
- To be a Catholic?
- To respect tradition and adat?
- To respect Timor-Leste’s political institutions and laws
- To feel East Timorese?
National Pride Indicators

• How proud are you of Timor-Leste in each of the following?:

  – The way democracy works
  – Its distinctive culture
  – Timor Leste's history
  – Its fair and equal treatment of all groups in society
Other data

• Dispute resolution: who should resolve?
  • Disputes over land ownership
  • Disputes between neighbours
  • Crimes against property
  • Crimes against the person

• Regional and gender breakdowns
  • Crosstabs
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages Spoken in the Home</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tetum</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Timorese Language</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Easiest Written Language (n=312, 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Easiest</th>
<th>Second Easiest</th>
<th>Third Easiest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tetum</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How close do you feel to? (2002)

- Neighbourhood
  - Don’t Know: 42%
  - Not at all close: 14.5%
  - Not very close: 33%
  - Close: 31%
  - Very Close: 14.5%

- Subdistrict
  - Don’t Know: 33%
  - Not at all close: 14.5%
  - Not very close: 33%
  - Close: 31%
  - Very Close: 14.5%

- District
  - Don’t Know: 67%
  - Not at all close: 14.5%
  - Not very close: 33%
  - Close: 31%
  - Very Close: 14.5%

- East Timor
  - Don’t Know: 67%
  - Not at all close: 14.5%
  - Not very close: 33%
  - Close: 31%
  - Very Close: 14.5%

- SE Asia
  - Don’t Know: 14.5%
  - Not at all close: 14.5%
  - Not very close: 33%
  - Close: 31%
  - Very Close: 14.5%
How close do you feel to? (2007)

Neighbour...: 54
Subdistrict: 38
District: 39
East Timor: 67
SE Asia: 20.5
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Very close</th>
<th>Close</th>
<th>Total close</th>
<th>Not very close</th>
<th>Not close at all</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Papua</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Caledonia</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Importance of Being Born in East Timor to being 'truly' East Timorese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Not Very Important</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Importance of being a citizen of Timor-Leste to be being 'truly' East Timorese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Not Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>90.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Not at all important
- Not Very Important
- Important
- Very Important
Importance of having lived in East Timor for most of one's life

- **2002**: 59.5%
- **2007**: 56.5%
- **2017**: 61.5%

Legend:
- Not at all Important
- Not very Important
- Important
- Very Important
Importance of Portuguese language ability to being 'truly' East Timorese

- 2002:
  - Not at All Important: 31%
  - Not Very Important: 24%
  - Fairly Important: 28%
  - Very Important: 39.5%

- 2007:
  - Not at All Important: 28%
  - Not Very Important: 52%
  - Fairly Important: 28%
  - Very Important: 39.5%

- 2017:
  - Not at All Important: 24%
  - Not Very Important: 54%
  - Fairly Important: 28%
  - Very Important: 39.5%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Fairly Important</th>
<th>Not Very Important</th>
<th>Not At All Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born in ET</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen of ET</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in ET</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak Tetum</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak Port.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Catholic</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect Tradition</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect Law</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel ET</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How proud are you of East Timor's History?

- **2002**: 81%
- **2007**: 76%
- **2017**: 76%

Legend:
- Don’t Know/ No Response
- Not at all Proud
- Not Very Proud
- Proud
- Very Proud
How proud are you of East Timor's Distinctive Culture?

- **Very Proud**
  - 2002: 70%
  - 2007: 69%
  - 2017: 70%

- **Not Very Proud**
  - 2002: 30%
  - 2007: 31%
  - 2017: 30%

- **Not at all Proud**
  - 2002: 0%
  - 2007: 0%
  - 2017: 0%

- **Don’t Know/ No Response**
  - 2002: 0%
  - 2007: 0%
  - 2017: 0%
How proud are you of the way democracy works in East Timor?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Very Proud</th>
<th>Not Very Proud</th>
<th>Not at all Proud</th>
<th>Don’t Know/ No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How proud are you of east Timor's fair and equal treatment of all groups in society?

- 2002: 67.5%
- 2007: 50%
- 2017: 45.5%

Legend:
- Light blue: Don’t Know/ No Response
- Purple: Not at all Proud
- Green: Not Very Proud
- Red: Proud
- Dark blue: Very Proud
Some people say that it is better for a nation if different ethnic groups maintain their distinct languages, customs and traditions. Others say it is better if these groups adapt and blend into one society. Which of these views is closest to your own? (% of respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>PNG %</th>
<th>Solomon Islands %</th>
<th>Vanuatu %</th>
<th>Timor-Leste 2010 %</th>
<th>Timor-Leste 2017 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is better if groups maintain their distinct languages, customs and traditions</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is better if these groups adapt and blend into society</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View</td>
<td>PNG %</td>
<td>Solomon Islands %</td>
<td>Vanuatu %</td>
<td>Timor-Leste 2010 %</td>
<td>Timor-Leste 2017 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People moving to the cities and towns causes social problems</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People should stay in the area where they grew up</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regional and Gender Breakdowns

• **In Summary**
  • *Very few significant differences* in attitudes between tertiary from Eastern and Western districts
  • Though the particular *exceptions* from 2007 survey were revealing
  • No longer major differences
  • Gender is a significant determinant of certain attitudes to traditional authority
### Importance of having “lived in East Timor most of one’s life” to being “truly East Timorese” (% by ‘region’, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Fairly important</th>
<th>Total Important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern districts</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western districts</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td><strong>82.5</strong></td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NB: no significant regional differences in 2002, 2010, 2017 surveys*
To build the nation of Timor-Leste, which of the following do you rate as most important (% of respondents) N=312, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Most important</th>
<th>Second most important</th>
<th>Third most important</th>
<th>Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving health</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving education</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>75.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving infrastructure</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening national government administration</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving communication between different areas</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening traditional leadership</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving gender equality</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening district administration</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

- Changing landscape around language proficiency and identity 2002-2017
- Ongoing importance of tradition and *adat* in understandings of political community in this urban, educated cohort
- But these are matched by *modern* indicators of national identity
- Notable increase in ‘cultural-integrationist’ view in this cohort living in Dili over time
- Likely associated with emergence of national culture in capital
- Significant *gender* differences in attitudes towards the role of traditional authorities
‘If you could improve your work or living conditions, how willing or unwilling would you be to move outside Timor-Leste?

“Very willing”

2002: 49%

2007: 61.5%

2017: 20.5%