

Timor-Leste

East Timor, with a population of 1.2 million, has territorial subdivisions but no meaningful decentralization. There are four levels: thirteen *distritos* (districts), 65 *subdistritos* (subdistricts) (including the capital city), over 400 *suco* (villages), and over 2300 *aldeias* (communities).

Distritos, the highest tier, have an average population size of 90,000. *Suco* are the traditional units of Timorese governance, and the *chefes* (chiefs) are directly elected.

East Timor was a Portuguese colony until 1976, a province of Indonesia from 1976-99, under UN administration from 1999-2002. Civil strife broke out after the population voted for independence in August 1999 in a UN-supervised referendum. The conflict destroyed large portions of the country's infrastructure and economy (Hill and Saldanha 2001: 9-10; Molnar 2010). East Timor became independent in May 2002.

Distritos are deconcentrated, but decentralization is on the agenda. The 2002 constitution announced decentralization (Sec. 72), and in 2009, the government introduced three laws in parliament. The Law on Administrative and Territorial Division (Law 11), which delineates the boundaries of the *distritos* and *subdistritos*, passed in June 2009, but the other two laws, one on local government and one on local elections, await approval and municipal elections, originally slated for 2014 to accommodate the delay, have yet to be held.

The constitution also identifies two areas for special status: the *distrito* of Oecussi Ambeno, a coastal exclave adjacent to the Indonesian side of Timor island, which is expected to receive greater autonomy (C 2002, Sec. 71.2); and the *subdistritos* of the island of Ataúro, part of the capital city, Dili, which will have a special economic status (C 2002, Sec. 71.3).

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