

Policies over Personalities

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As the Court of Appeals gives each **political party** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2017/06/19/paktu-unidade-nasional-no-eleisaun-parlamentar-2017-entre-promesa-no-asaun-husi-partidu-politiku-sira/>) its designated election number and publishes the **campaigning** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2017/05/30/salva-labaraik-sira-husi-risku-no-ameasa-durante-periodu-eleisaun/>) schedule, Fundasaun Mahein (FM) urges all political leaders to focus on policy issues and avoid the barbed personal attacks that have characterized previous campaign seasons. For most of Timor-Leste's independent history, leaders have tended to use **inflammatory language** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2018/03/20/misuse-of-social-media-for-inflammatory-politics-statements-must-end/>). Such rhetoric creates a hostile atmosphere, raising the likelihood of conflict and instability.

During the **2006 Crisis** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2011/03/23/veteranu-sira-iha-timor-leste-dezdekrize-tinan-2006-nian/>), personality clashes among the **leadership inflamed** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2018/03/20/misuse-of-social-media-for-inflammatory-politics-statements-must-end/>) the division between Easterners (lorosae) and Westerners (loromonu), leading to devastating consequences for Timorese citizens. Similarly, during **election-related violence** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2018/01/24/impase-politiku-refleta-ego-politiku-nain-nian/>) in 2007 and in the conflict with Alfredo Reinado's group that lasted until 2008, many ordinary people lost their lives or their homes due to their leaders' squabbles. Some became internally-displaced persons (IDPs) or had

to flee the country. Therefore, the anxiety and economic downturn caused by the political impasse since the July 2017 Parliamentary Election represent only the latest instance in which disputes among Timor-Leste's ageing elite have caused suffering for the general population. All of these events have illustrated the tendency of **Timorese politicians** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2018/01/24/impase-politiku-refleta-ego-politiku-nain-nian/>) to pursue personality-based disputes at the expense of the nation's welfare.

In addition to directly harming the people, harsh campaign rhetoric also distracts attention from the issues that actually matter. Timorese elections tend to be **personality-based** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2012/04/04/can-we-still-trust-our-historical-leaders-to-lead-a-peaceful-stable-timor-leste/>), where the individuals running for office count for more than policy differences. This manifests in a campaigning style in which leaders lash out at one another, creating an atmosphere of enmity. Yet political parties in a democratic system are not supposed to be enemies. They should instead conduct an ongoing conversation about how best to improve people's lives. To that end, politicians should "agree to disagree," respecting the right to dissent as a key part of the democratic system. This means that **personality-based** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2012/04/04/can-we-still-trust-our-historical-leaders-to-lead-a-peaceful-stable-timor-leste/>) attacks have no place in political discourse. Instead, politicians should put forth arguments about the best ways to improve people's lives, particularly with regards to improving employment, education, and health. Such discussions will both generate **good policies** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2017/12/22/iresponsabilidade-politika-tenke-hakotu-ona/>) and educate the younger generation about how to tackle these issues.

The current style of **political discourse** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2018/03/20/misuse-of-social-media-for-inflammatory-politics-statements-must-end/>) is therefore sending the wrong message to young people. The nation's elder politicians should be preparing the younger generation to act as the **leaders of tomorrow** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2018/03/01/political-instability-reflects-political-cronyism/>) by explaining the key issues and setting examples of responsible political debate. Instead, the young people of this country are being trained to unthinkingly follow their leaders. This produces a partisan attitude in which loyalty to party chiefs is prioritized over thoughtful discussion of how to improve people's lives. The worst manifestation of this problem involves the use of Martial Arts Groups (MAGs) for political ends. When political leaders utilise **martial arts groups** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2017/11/14/governu-tenke-legaliza-fali-gurpu-arte-marsial/>), they are manipulating the disillusionment of jobless youth for their own ends. Furthermore, they are strengthening and perpetuating illegal organizations and therefore destabilizing the nation. Instead of using these MAGs as a tool, **politicians** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2018/01/24/political-deadlock-reflects-politicians-egos/>) should address the root problem of unemployment that makes these organizations so popular. Furthermore, they should use public discourse as an opportunity for educating youth on the key challenges in Timor-Leste's development. Otherwise young Timorese will perpetuate the errors of their elders.

Democracy requires people's willingness to countenance opposing views. It also requires that people focus on **differences in policy** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2018/01/24/political-deadlock-reflects-politicians-egos/>), not differences in **personality** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2017/12/22/politicians-must-end-irresponsible-brinkmanship/>). As long as Timorese politics remain personality-focused, no effective debate about how to develop the nation can occur. Instead of **blaming each other** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2017/12/22/politicians-must-end-irresponsible-brinkmanship/>), Timorese politicians should improve security, maintain national unity, and prioritize the nation's stability and development. Fundasaun Mahein therefore urges candidates to focus their public discourse on policy discussions—especially about health, education, and the economy—rather than **personal attacks** (<http://www.fundasaunmahein.org/2017/11/23/politicians-must-avoid-fear-mongering-statements/>) on other party leaders.