



Timor-Leste



Background The island of Timor was actively involved in Southeast Asian trading networks for centuries, and by the 14th century, it exported sandalwood, slaves, honey, and wax. The sandalwood trade attracted the Portuguese, who arrived in the early 16th century; by mid-century, they had colonized the island, which was previously ruled by local chieftains. In 1859, Portugal ceded the western portion of the island to the Dutch. Imperial Japan occupied Portuguese Timor from 1942 to 1945, but Portugal resumed colonial authority after the Japanese defeat in World War II. The eastern part of Timor declared itself independent from Portugal on 28 November 1975, but Indonesian forces invaded and occupied the area nine days later. It was incorporated into Indonesia in 1976 as the province of Timor Timur (East Timor or Timor Leste). Indonesia conducted an unsuccessful pacification campaign in the province over the next two decades, during which an estimated 100,000 to 250,000 people died.

In a UN-supervised referendum in 1999, an overwhelming majority of the people of Timor-Leste voted for independence from Indonesia. However, anti-independence Timorese militias -- organized and supported by the Indonesian military -- began a large-scale, scorched-earth campaign of retribution, killing approximately 1,400 Timorese and displacing nearly 500,000. Most of the country's infrastructure was destroyed, including homes, irrigation systems, water supply systems, schools, and most of the electrical grid. Australian-led peacekeeping troops eventually deployed to the country and ended the violence. In 2002, Timor-Leste was internationally recognized as an independent state.

In 2006, Australia and the UN had to step in again to stabilize the country, which allowed presidential and parliamentary elections to be conducted in 2007 in a largely peaceful atmosphere. In 2008, rebels staged an unsuccessful attack against the president and prime minister. Since that attack, Timor-Leste has made considerable progress in building stability and democratic institutions, holding a series of successful parliamentary and presidential elections since 2012. Nonetheless, weak and unstable political coalitions have led to periodic episodes of stalemate and crisis. The UN continues to provide assistance on economic development and strengthening governing institutions. Currently, Timor-Leste is one of the world's poorest nations, with an economy that relies heavily on energy resources in the Timor Sea.

Capital	name: Dili
Government type	semi-presidential republic
Area	total : 14,874 sq km land: 14,874 sq km water: 0 sq km
Climate	tropical; hot, humid; distinct rainy and dry seasons
Natural resources	gold, petroleum, natural gas, manganese, marble
Population	total: 1,506,909 (2024 est.)
Population growth rate	2.04% (2024 est.)
Ethnic groups	Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) (includes Tetun, Mambai, Tokodede, Galoli, Kemak, Baikeno), Melanesian-Papuan (includes Bunak, Fataluku, Bakasai), small Chinese minority
Religions	Roman Catholic 97.6%, Protestant/Evangelical 2%, Muslim 0.2%, other 0.2% (2015 est.)
Languages	Tetun Prasa 30.6%, Mambai 16.6%, Makasai 10.5%, Tetun Terik 6.1%, Baikenu 5.9%, Kemak 5.8%, Bunak 5.5%, Tokodede 4%, Fataluku 3.5%, Waima'a 1.8%, Galoli 1.4%, Naueti 1.4%, Idate 1.2%, Midiki 1.2%, other 4.5% (2015 est.)
Executive branch	chief of state: President José RAMOS-HORTA (since 20 May 2022) head of government: Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana GUSMAO (since 1 July 2023)
Legislative branch	legislature name: National Parliament
Diplomatic representation in the US	chief of mission: Ambassador José Luis GUTERRES (since 17 June 2024)
Diplomatic representation from the US	chief of mission: Ambassador (vacant); Chargé d'Affaires Marc WEINSTOCK (since 22 February 2025)
Economic overview	lower middle-income Southeast Asian economy; government expenditures funded via oil fund drawdowns; endemic corruption undermines growth; foreign aid-dependent; wide-scale poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy
Real GDP (purchasing power parity)	\$5.863 billion (2024 est.) \$5.995 billion (2023 est.) \$7.322 billion (2022 est.)
Real GDP per capita	\$4,200 (2024 est.) \$4,300 (2023 est.) \$5,300 (2022 est.)
Exports	\$278.047 million (2024 est.) \$701.808 million (2023 est.) \$1.858 billion (2022 est.)
Exports - partners	China 46%, Singapore 25%, Japan 15%, Indonesia 5%, USA 3% (2023)
Exports - commodities	crude petroleum, natural gas, coffee, scrap iron, telephones (2023)
Imports	\$1.197 billion (2024 est.) \$1.169 billion (2023 est.) \$1.286 billion (2022 est.)

Imports - partners	Indonesia 34%, China 26%, Singapore 9%, Taiwan 5%, India 4% (2023)
Imports - commodities	refined petroleum, rice, cars, plastic products, trucks (2023)

Population Pyramid

