

# Cnrt Timor Leste Party Parliamentary Candidate Recruitment System

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## Abstrak

This study examines the process and strategies of recruiting prospective members of parliament for the CNRT Party in Timor-Leste as a key indicator in strengthening political positions through democratic internal mechanisms. Using a qualitative research approach and data collection methodology through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis, this study aims to understand the stages of the recruitment process, the factors that influence it, the main challenges faced, and the extent to which the recruitment system complies with democratic principles. The results show that although the CNRT Party's recruitment process follows structured stages, patronage practices and local culture influence the selection of candidates and the selection mechanism, resulting in obstacles to achieving full transparency and inclusiveness. Internal factors such as meritocracy mechanisms and inclusive policies contribute positively to the success of the process, but patronage practices and cultural resistance are major obstacles to the implementation of ideal democratic principles. The main challenges include the obstacles of a patronage culture, internal resistance to transparency reforms, and limitations in the administrative system and supporting infrastructure. The recruitment system that has been implemented is capable of producing legislative candidates who are relatively representative in certain aspects, but it does not yet fully meet the values of democratic openness and accountability. These findings contribute to the development of contextual recruitment models in developing countries and countries in democratic transition, while offering policy recommendations for improving the effectiveness of a more inclusive and transparent recruitment process in order to strengthen democratic legitimacy in Timor-Leste.

**Kata Kunci:** Recruitment Process, Internal Democratic Mechanisms, Patronage, Inclusiveness

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## 1. Pendahuluan

In the current era of globalization, the process of democratization has become one of the main goals of political development in various countries, including in the Asia Pacific region. A healthy democracy requires active participation from the community through a transparent and accountable representative system. In this context, political parties have a strategic role as bridges for public aspirations and agents for public policy formation. The success of a political party in gaining support and winning elections is greatly influenced by the quality of its recruitment process for parliamentary candidates. Effective recruitment mechanisms and democratic principles are crucial in determining the integrity and legitimacy of a party, as well as public trust in the democratic system itself.

In the national context, the recruitment process for parliamentary candidates is a key indicator of the health and fairness of the political system. In Indonesia, for example, various studies confirm that inclusive and transparent recruitment strategies can increase the participation of minority groups and strengthen fair political representation (Berg et al., 2020). In the international context, recent studies show that the success of political parties in recruiting qualified candidates who adhere to democratic principles is greatly influenced by structural and cultural factors in each country's political system (Gulzar, 2021).

In the Asia-Pacific region, such as in Timor-Leste, the democratization process has experienced unique dynamics influenced by colonial history, internal conflicts, and non-compliance with human rights principles in

the political process (Shoesmith, 2020b). After gaining independence from Indonesia in 2002, Timor-Leste experienced a long and challenging period of political transition, including in establishing a democratic and inclusive political party system. The CNRT (Congresso Nacional de Reconstrução de Timor) party, which is one of the major forces, plays an important role in the process of building political stability and institutional reform.

However, research on the recruitment process for parliamentary candidates in Timor-Leste is still relatively scarce, especially from the perspective of the strategies and challenges faced in ensuring that the process is democratic and inclusive. This point indicates a gap in the literature that needs to be filled so that the development of contextual political recruitment can be more comprehensive. In particular, recent studies show that cultural, economic, and institutional factors greatly influence the recruitment strategies of political parties in small and developing countries (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2024).

This study will focus on examining the dynamics of the CNRT Party's parliamentary candidate recruitment process in Timor-Leste using a comprehensive, empirical data-based approach. Through a thorough analysis of the influencing factors, challenges faced, and recruitment systems implemented, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of political party winning strategies at the national level in the context of democratic transition can be achieved. This approach is important because various studies show that reforming internal party processes is one of the key factors determining the stability and sustainability of democratic systems in this region (Kavasoglu, 2022).

In an international context, this study is also relevant to enriching the literature on factors that influence the success of internal party reforms in countries with complex political development challenges. Several recent studies have examined how external factors such as international assistance and pressure from the global community influence internal party processes in small countries (Góis & Marques, 2023). Through empirical analysis, this study will show that successful recruitment depends not only on formal systems, but also on the indirect influence of cultural factors and social networks.

Through this comprehensive and analytical approach, this study will emphasize the importance of internal political party reform, particularly in the process of recruiting legislative candidates, as a strategic step in strengthening the national democratic system in Timor-Leste. As a country whose democratization process is still in its early stages, Timor-Leste needs to adapt various effective and contextual strategies to ensure that the recruitment process is democratic and capable of attracting candidates in accordance with the principles of merit and inclusiveness. This study will provide new insights into the strategies and challenges in managing this process based on empirical data and the latest literature review from international studies.

This approach will also emphasize that reforming the recruitment system in political parties is an important instrument in building public trust in the political process and improving the quality of democracy in Timor-Leste. Thus, this study not only contributes academically to the development of theory but also offers practical solutions and policy recommendations for reforming the political party recruitment system in developing and lagging democracies such as Timor-Leste.

## 2. Metode

The research approach used in this study is qualitative, based on the general understanding that this approach focuses on a deep understanding of social and political phenomena through the collection of narrative, descriptive, and interpretive data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative approach was chosen because the main focus of this study is to describe and understand the processes, factors, and challenges faced in the recruitment system for parliamentary candidates of the CNRT Party in Timor-Leste. Through this approach, researchers can gain rich insights into the internal dynamics of the party, political culture, and the perceptions of actors involved in the recruitment process, which are difficult to measure quantitatively.

The type of research chosen is a case study, as this approach allows researchers to conduct an in-depth analysis of a particular entity or situation, in this case the CNRT Party in Timor-Leste. In this study, the data collection techniques used are in-depth interviews and documentation studies, as both techniques are suitable for the characteristics of qualitative data needed to gain an in-depth understanding of the party's internal dynamics and the socio-cultural context that influences the recruitment process.

In this qualitative study, which aims to explore the factors, processes, and challenges in the recruitment of prospective parliamentary members of the CNRT Party in Timor-Leste, the analysis technique used is thematic analysis. This technique was chosen because it facilitates the identification, grouping, and interpretation of patterns, themes, and meanings that emerge from the interview, documentation, and observation data collected during the research process.

In this study, the techniques used to test the validity of the data were source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data from various informants, such as CNRT Party members, internal administrators, and external observers related to the recruitment process. Meanwhile, method triangulation was carried out by combining various data collection techniques, namely observation,

interviews, and documentation. This technique was chosen because it is in line with the characteristics of qualitative data, which requires a multifaceted approach to verify the validity of findings and reduce the subjectivity of interpretation during the analysis process (Denzin, 1978).

### **3. Hasil dan Pembahasan**

#### **Factors Affecting the Success of the CNRT Party Recruitment Process**

In general, the results of the study show that the success of the CNRT Party recruitment process is greatly influenced by internal factors such as organizational structure, level of transparency, inclusive policies, and meritocracy mechanisms. On the one hand, external factors such as social and local political pressure, economic conditions, and community relations also play an equally important role. Furthermore, the interaction between internal and external factors forms a complex dynamic that determines the success or failure in obtaining parliamentary candidates who are in line with democratic expectations and principles.

#### **Cultural and Traditional Barriers**

The partial conclusion of this sub-chapter states that cultural and traditional barriers in Timor-Leste significantly slow down the realization of a transparent, meritocratic, and democratic recruitment process. These barriers underscore the need for adaptive strategies that respect local values while ensuring the continuity of inclusive and fair democratic principles, so that recruitment system reforms are not only normative but also contextual and culture-based.

#### **Effectiveness of the Recruitment System Implemented by the CNRT Party Output and Representation of Elected Candidates**

Internal party statistics show that the percentage of elected candidates from diverse social, economic, and geographical backgrounds has increased following the reform of the recruitment system. For example, data from the Timor-Leste General Election Commission shows that the proportion of legislative candidates from minority groups and remote areas increased by about 15% in the last election, compared to the previous period which was dominated by candidates from local elites and patronage networks. These findings are consistent with previous studies which state that reforming the recruitment process and implementing meritocratic mechanisms can increase more diverse and inclusive representation (Clark, 2021).

#### **System Compatibility with Democratic Principles**

The compatibility of the recruitment system with democratic principles is an important measure in assessing its effectiveness. The basic principles of democracy emphasize fairness, transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability in the legislative candidate selection process. In the context of the CNRT Party, data shows that internal reforms have yielded several positive indicators related to the achievement of these principles. Interviews with party officials revealed, "With a more open and merit-based selection mechanism, this process reflects the principles of inclusive and accountable democracy" (Interview, 2023).

Empirically, the system has provided space for candidates from different backgrounds to participate in the recruitment process and has implemented a more objective evaluation mechanism. On the other hand, external observers and several legislators have identified that the implementation of democratic principles has not been fully optimized. Some candidates still experience pressure from patronage groups and strong internal political influences, so that the selection process is not yet completely free from nepotism and favoritism. A previous study by (Collignon, 2024) states that local cultural factors and patronage mechanisms often hinder the application of the principles of openness and meritocracy in the recruitment process.

#### **Impact on Legitimacy and Public Trust**

Statistically, surveys conducted by independent research institutions show that public trust in internal party processes has increased by around 20% over the past two years, which has had a direct impact on the party's vote share in the last general election. In addition, several international studies examining the influence of internal party reforms on legitimacy and public trust show that transparency and inclusiveness in recruitment are positively related to public trust and perceptions of fairness in the political process (Gulzar et al., 2024).

However, these results are also accompanied by challenges from certain groups who still view the recruitment process with prejudice regarding the existence of certain political influences and continuing practices of nepotism. These observations show that the success of reforms has not completely eliminated old practices and has somewhat influenced public perceptions of the authenticity of the party's internal democratic processes. Theoretically, these findings confirm that perceptions of fairness and transparency are vital in building political legitimacy, and that internal reforms need to be supported by independent external oversight to reduce friction and increase public trust more broadly.

## **Discussion**

### **Analysis of Selection Stages and Mechanisms**

A critical interpretation of these findings shows that, at the formal level, the selection mechanism has been estimated to be quite comprehensive and contains certain elements of transparency. However, in reality, this process is often filled with patronage and personal trust, which are characteristics of informal selection that reduce objectivity and meritocracy in the process. Thus, the existing formal stages function more as administrative procedures that are often inserted by political practices that are more influenced by personal relationships and power. These results indicate the existence of tension between procedural formalities and the still strong practice of patronage politicization, which implicitly hinders efforts at reform and increasing fairness in the candidate selection process.

The link with previous literature confirms that, in the context of developing countries and democratic transitions, political party selection stages are often not entirely pure and free from patronage and nepotism (Camerlo et al., 2024). The study states that the formalization of the recruitment stage is often accompanied by informal practices that influence the final outcome, reduce transparency, and increase the possibility of arbitrariness in the selection of candidates (Gulzar et al., 2024). This study reinforces these findings, showing that in the CNRT Party, even though the procedures appear to be formally complete, patronage practices remain an integral part of the selection process. These findings also follow the consensus in the literature that formal stages of the process need to be supported by strict internal oversight and more mature transparency mechanisms in order to minimize nepotism and patronage practices.

### **Analysis of Selection Principles and Criteria and Patronage Practices**

A critical interpretation of these results shows that, implicitly, selection principles and criteria are still heavily influenced by the culture of patronage that has become part of the political ecosystem in Timor-Leste. The bias towards candidates affiliated with or having personal connections to party elites shows that patronage is not merely a practice of nepotism, but also a political strategy that is culturally and structurally embedded. This practice results in selection becoming less objective and oriented towards strengthening internal power relations, while the aspects of merit and diversity, which should be the main principles, are often overlooked.

Links to previous literature show that patronage and personal relationships remain major obstacles to achieving a truly meritocratic selection process in the context of developing countries and democratic transitions (Camerlo et al., 2024). According to the study, the implementation of meritocratic principles is often disrupted by internal power structures and political cultures that prioritize personal connections over formal competence. These findings are in line with the study by Gulzar et al. (2024), which confirms that in many cases, lack of transparency and patronage practices not only reduce the quality of candidates, but also hinder the creation of a healthy and fair competitive process in the selection of legislative candidates.

### **Confirmation of Its Relevance to Recruitment Process Theory and Patronage Practices**

The results of the analysis of the selection process stages and patronage practices have strong relevance and confirmation of recruitment process theory and patronage practices, as stated by Cameron et al. (2024) and Gulzar et al. (2024). Cameron et al. (2024) emphasize that the success of the recruitment process in the context of democratic transition is highly dependent on the sustainability of formal mechanisms supported by a transparent and meritocratic organizational culture. They argue that formal stages must be effectively integrated with a political culture that prioritizes accountability and integrity; otherwise, patronage and nepotism will continue to dominate the process, as evident in the findings on the CNRT Party.

Meanwhile, Gulzar et al. (2024) reinforce this argument by highlighting that patronage practices often transcend formal processes and become an integral part of the political culture of elites in developing countries. They state that patronage is not only an internal corrupt practice but also part of a political strategy aimed at strengthening power and maintaining internal loyalty. These findings are in line with the results in the field that formal selection principles and criteria are often ignored by informal practices dominated by patronage, which results in a selection process that is not fully meritocratic and transparent.

### **Analysis of the Influence of Internal Factors (Organizational Structure, Transparency, Inclusion, Meritocracy)**

Interpretation of these results shows that internal factors such as organizational structure and practices of transparency and inclusion play a major role in strengthening democratic and sustainable recruitment processes. The application of meritocratic principles must be supported by effective control and evaluation mechanisms to

prevent irregularities and patronage. These findings expand our understanding of how internal factors can synergize and influence the success of recruitment directly and indirectly.

From a practical perspective, these results indicate the need for internal reforms oriented toward increasing transparency, accountability, and the consistent implementation of inclusive policies. Such policies are believed to improve the quality of recruited candidates and ensure a fair process, while strengthening the legitimacy and public trust in the party. The academic implication of these findings is the need for further study on the effectiveness of internal mechanisms in various political and cultural contexts, while expanding the theory of internal management of political parties in the recruitment process.

#### **Analysis of the Influence of External Factors (Social Pressure, Political Culture, Economic Conditions, Community Relations)**

The results of the study show that there are opportunities to strengthen the recruitment process through more participatory and inclusive communication strategies. Parties that are able to establish effective relationships with the community, provide space for dialogue, and demonstrate a commitment to democratic principles tend to gain more support from the people and community leaders. Therefore, these external factors are not entirely obstacles, but can be used as opportunities to strengthen the recruitment process, provided that there are strategic efforts to change the prevailing culture and norms.

In relation to the theories of Cameron et al. (2024) and van Haute & Ribeiro (2022), external factors can be seen as variables that interact and influence internal factors. Their studies show that the dynamics of external forces such as social and political cultural pressures can strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of internal party mechanisms. The implications of these results emphasize the need for parties to have the courage to adapt to complex social and cultural contexts that often conflict with ideal democratic principles. In the context of practical policy, strengthening the capacity of parties to build closeness with the community and demonstrate transparency in the process must be done simultaneously.

#### **Synergy and Internal and External Interactions in Influencing Recruitment Outcomes and Related Theoretical Dynamics**

Analysis of the synergy and interaction between internal and external factors shows that the success of the CNRT Party's recruitment process cannot be viewed as the result of a single variable, but rather as a complex and dynamic construct. The results of the study indicate that internal factors such as organizational structure, transparency, and inclusion policies must be able to adapt and respond to external pressures from society, political culture, and economic conditions. Conversely, external factors provide a context that influences the quality and legitimacy of successful recruits.

Within the theoretical framework of Cameron et al. (2024) and van Haute & Ribeiro (2022), this dynamic is seen as the result of a process of mutual influence that either strengthens or weakens each other. Cameron et al. (2024) emphasize that an effective recruitment process depends on the party's capacity to build synergy between formal structures and cultural norms. They argue that success is determined not only by formal rules, but also by sense-making and the interpretation of local norms that underlie the process. On the other hand, van Haute & Ribeiro (2022) assert that in the context of a transitional democracy, external factors such as public pressure and political culture must be strategically integrated into internal mechanisms, thereby forming an ecosystem capable of maintaining the sustainability and legitimacy of the process.

#### **Cultural and Traditional Barriers (Patronage, Nepotism, Customary Norms)**

In analyzing the findings on cultural and traditional barriers during the recruitment process for prospective CNRT Party members of parliament in Timor-Leste, it can be concluded that cultural and customary factors remain the main obstacles to promoting democratic and meritocratic processes. Empirically, the majority of respondents and field observations show that customary norms, traditional practices, and personal and family relationships often override the principles of transparency and fairness in the selection of legislative candidates. The phenomena of patronage and nepotism often color the candidate selection process, where loyalty to family or traditional groups becomes a more important factor than competence and political track record.

The interpretation of these findings shows that local cultures that emphasize patronage and personal relationships dominate the recruitment paradigm at the party level. These practices not only enrich nepotism but also negate the principles of fairness and meritocracy that should be the foundation of the democratic process. This is in line with the study by Kumar and Lee (2022), which states that patronage and traditional cultures in developing countries often become "cultural obstacles" that reinforce the practice of politicization based on social and family connections rather than professionalism and competence.

### **Internal Resistance to Transparency and Reform**

In the context of the CNRT Party's parliamentary candidate recruitment process, internal resistance to reform and the application of transparency principles emerged as a very significant challenge. Empirical findings show that the main force behind this resistance comes from internal power dynamics, especially from the party's elite and hierarchical structures, which have long developed patterns of patronage and complete control over the legislative candidate selection process. Many respondents revealed that the unwillingness to fully open up the recruitment process was due to concerns about losing control over the process and cadre development, which had been a source of power and a means of legitimization for the party elite.

Interpretation of the data confirms that this internal resistance is more than just a concern about chaos or open competition; rather, it reflects the elite's need to maintain their dominance in the management of the party's internal processes. For example, one official stated that "we are afraid that if the recruitment process is too open, our positions and influence will be displaced by new candidates who are unknown to the elite" (interview, 2023). This confirms that this resistance is driven by a desire to preserve personal power and influence, which is rooted in a culture of patronage and opaque power structures.

### **Limitations of Supporting Systems and Infrastructure (Technology and Resources)**

Interpretation of these findings shows that the available technological infrastructure is still very limited and unevenly distributed, especially in remote areas of Timor-Leste. This creates inequality of access in the recruitment process, where candidates from certain regions experience barriers to accessing technology-based systems and data verification processes, which impacts the quality and fairness of the selection process. Conceptually, this inequality of access confirms that the development of digital infrastructure is a crucial requirement for the recruitment process to run equitably and inclusively.

International literature, for example (Cheng & Lai, 2019), confirms that the development of a mature technology system capable of supporting a broad recruitment process is an integral part of improving the quality of democracy and strengthening the accountability of political organizations. Failure in this aspect not only contributes to a lack of transparency but also reduces public trust in the party's internal processes. Furthermore, the capacity of human resources capable of managing these digital systems is also a determining factor in the success of the transition to a data-based and modern technology recruitment system.

### **Interpretation of Results Based on Theory on Recruitment Systems and Political Legitimacy and Implications for Strengthening Democracy in Timor-Leste**

The results of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the CNRT Party's recruitment system empirically show that the reforms carried out have increased the diversity of legislative candidates, improved aspects of democratic principles such as transparency and fairness, and strengthened public perception of trust in the party. These findings sharply confirm the theory that a fair, open, and meritocratic recruitment system is a major factor in strengthening political legitimacy and the sustainability of democracy.

Within this theoretical framework, the success of recruitment reforms is not limited to achieving formal procedural aspects, but must also be able to deliver a process that is truly inclusive and substantively accountable, thereby building strong public trust. The results of this study confirm that although the initial achievements are quite positive, the implementation of reforms must be maintained and strengthened through external oversight and consistent enforcement of rules. This is important because the sustainability of democracy depends heavily on the institutional legitimacy perceived by the public, as well as the ability of the political system to provide diverse and quality representation.

The practical implications of these findings for strengthening democracy in Timor-Leste are the need to develop more transparent and accountable internal mechanisms and to increase the capacity to manage the recruitment system. The strategic position of parties as agents of democratic development requires that the selection process for legislative candidates be able to perform a political education function and strengthen public trust. Broadly speaking, these findings confirm that continuous internal party reform greatly contributes to the formation of a more stable, inclusive, and democratic political system. In other words, the success of the CNRT Party's recruitment system illustrates a process of transformation that can serve as a model in the context of other developing countries and democratic transitions, provided it is supported by commitment, consistency, and continuous oversight.

## **4. Kesimpulan**

The conclusions that answer the research objectives are: 1) Based on the analysis of the recruitment process, it can be concluded that the party's internal mechanisms that prioritize transparency and meritocracy are relatively partial. 2) Internal factors such as a clear organizational structure and inclusive policies contribute positively to the success of the process, while patronage practices and a patronage culture that still persist are

major obstacles to achieving a truly open and fair process. External factors—including social pressure, local political culture, economic conditions, and community relations—also influence the dynamics of recruitment, both in terms of opportunities and obstacles. 3) The main challenges identified in the study include internal resistance to transparency reforms, the existence of patronage cultural norms, and limitations in the administrative system and supporting infrastructure. These obstacles show that the internal reform process still requires adaptive and contextual strategies in line with local culture. Although the CNRT Party's recruitment system is capable of producing representative parliamentary candidates in certain aspects, the system still does not fully meet democratic principles such as openness, fairness, and accountability. 4) The combination of these findings confirms that the success of recruitment process reforms in Timor-Leste depends not only on the design of formal systems, but also on changes in political culture and institutions that support democratic principles. Overall, this study contributes an empirical and theoretical framework that enriches our understanding of the internal dynamics of political parties in small and developing countries, particularly in the context of democratic transition.

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