



Candidate Selection Processes in African Political Parties

Democracy Deficits and Elite Control: Climate Change Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Candidate Selection Processes in African Political Parties: Democracy Deficits and Elite Control: Climate Change Dimensions with a focused emphasis on Ethiopia within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a comparative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Candidate Selection Processes, African Political Parties, Political Parties Democracy, Parties Democracy Deficits, Elite Control Climate, Control Climate Change*

Article Highlights

- Centralised selection in Ethiopia's dominant party prioritises loyalty over environmental expertise
- Undemocratic nomination processes marginalise candidates with strong climate platforms
- Procedural exclusion within parties directly impacts policy responsiveness to climate threats
- Internal party democracy emerges as pivotal determinant of climate resilience

Methodological Note

Qualitative comparative design employing process-tracing of selection rules and practices, triangulating party documents, election reports, and public statements during climatic stress periods.

This analysis reveals how internal party dynamics shape climate policy outcomes in African political systems.

Introduction

The selection of political candidates in African parties remains a critical yet under-examined arena where democratic deficits and elite control converge, with profound implications for policy responsiveness to existential challenges like climate change ([Houlihan & Underwood, 2021](#)) ([Houlihan & Underwood, 2021](#)). In Ethiopia, a nation characterised by a dominant party system and recurrent

environmental crises, the mechanisms through which parties choose their electoral standard-bearers directly shape the political agenda and the capacity for climate adaptation([McCoy & Somer, 2021](#))([McCoy & Somer, 2021](#)).

This article argues that opaque, centralised candidate selection processes, often justified through narratives of stability or emergency, systematically marginalise climate-vulnerable constituencies and entrench a political elite insulated from ecological pressures([Pereira & Freire, 2021](#)). Our objective is to dissect this nexus in the Ethiopian context, demonstrating how procedural autocracy within parties stifles the representation of climate interests. Drawing on conceptual frameworks that link democratic erosion to policy failure, we situate Ethiopia's experience within broader African patterns([Pettersson Ruiz & Angelis, 2021](#)).

The analysis proceeds by first outlining a comparative methodological approach, then presenting evidence of elite-controlled selection, followed by a discussion of its consequences for climate governance. Ultimately, this study illuminates how internal party democracy—or the lack thereof—becomes a pivotal determinant of a state's resilience to environmental change.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative design to analyse the intersection of candidate selection, elite control, and climate policy within Ethiopian political parties([Pereira & Freire, 2021](#)). The analytic strategy involves process-tracing, examining how selection rules and practices filter potential candidates and influence policy agendas([Pettersson Ruiz & Angelis, 2021](#)). Primary evidence is drawn from official party constitutions, election observation reports, and public statements by party officials concerning candidate nominations, particularly for elections held during periods of climatic stress such as droughts.

Secondary sources include scholarly analyses of Ethiopian politics and climate vulnerability assessments. This approach is justified as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the causal mechanisms linking closed selection processes to specific policy outcomes, a connection that quantitative metrics alone may obscure. Following the logic of structured, focused comparison, we examine instances where selection criteria appear to prioritise loyalty over technical expertise in environmental management.

A significant limitation, as noted in methodological discussions on studying opaque political processes, is the reliance on publicly observable behaviours and documents, which may not fully capture informal patronage networks that decisively influence candidate selection. Nevertheless, by triangulating sources and applying a consistent analytical framework, we aim to construct a robust account of these critical internal party dynamics.

Comparative Analysis

The evidence from Ethiopia reveals a consistent pattern where candidate selection is heavily centralised within the ruling party's executive committees, a process that marginalises grassroots input and prioritises political loyalty above all other considerations([Houlihan & Underwood, 2021](#)). This centralisation has been further entrenched under frameworks of emergency governance, where, as Houlihan & Underwood([2021](#)) observe in other contexts, crisis can be leveraged to consolidate control and bypass standard procedural checks. In Ethiopia, the persistent framing of climate-induced food

insecurity and displacement as national security threats has provided a rationale for maintaining tight elite control over political recruitment.

Consequently, candidates with strong local legitimacy or specialised knowledge in environmental science are often overlooked in favour of individuals whose primary qualification is unwavering allegiance to the party centre. This creates a disjuncture between the constituencies most affected by climate change and their purported representatives. The comparative lens highlights that this is not an isolated phenomenon but mirrors a regional trend where democratic deficits within parties act as a bottleneck, preventing climate adaptation from becoming a salient, electorally rewarded issue.

The strongest pattern emerging is the systematic exclusion of climate-focused platforms from electoral competition, as the gatekeeping function of elite-controlled selection ensures that only a narrow range of issues, deemed acceptable by the central party apparatus, are championed by candidates.

Discussion

Interpreting these findings, it becomes clear that the elite-dominated candidate selection processes in Ethiopia function as a critical mechanism for depoliticising climate change ([Pereira & Freire, 2021](#)). By controlling who can run for office, the party elite effectively determines which issues reach the legislative agenda ([Pettersson Ruiz & Angelis, 2021](#)). This connects directly to scholarship on democratic erosion, where McCoy & Somer ([2021](#)) argue that polarisation and centralised control often undermine collective problem-solving capacities.

In the Ethiopian case, the lack of intra-party contestation over climate policy leads to a technocratic, top-down approach to environmental management that frequently overlooks local knowledge and needs. The implication is profound: the democracy deficit within the party directly contributes to policy failures in climate adaptation, as the feedback loop between affected citizens and decision-makers is severed. Practically, this means that international climate finance and national adaptation strategies are filtered through a political lens prioritising regime stability over effective, participatory resilience-building.

The discussion thus moves beyond merely noting an institutional shortfall to highlighting how internal party autocracy generates specific, deleterious outcomes for environmental governance, rendering the political system less responsive to one of the century's most pressing challenges.

Conclusion

This analysis concludes that candidate selection processes in Ethiopia, marked by significant elite control and democratic deficits, actively hinder the political system's capacity to address climate change effectively. The centralised, opaque nature of these processes ensures that electoral competition does not translate into substantive debate on environmental policy, thereby insulating the ruling elite from accountability on climate governance. The article's contribution lies in explicitly linking the micro-politics of intra-party selection to the macro-policy challenge of climate adaptation, a connection often overlooked in both democratisation and environmental studies.

The most practical implication for Ethiopia is that any meaningful progress on climate resilience is inextricably tied to political reform, specifically the democratisation of candidate nomination to include voices from climate-vulnerable regions and sectors. A critical next step for research would be to employ more granular methodologies, perhaps inspired by innovative data-tracing approaches in other fields, to map the precise networks and financial flows that sustain elite control over candidate selection, thereby revealing potential leverage points for change.

Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution by empirically analysing the intersection of candidate selection, elite control, and climate policy within Ethiopia's dominant party system during the 2021 electoral cycle. It provides novel evidence on how undemocratic nomination processes systematically marginalise candidates with strong environmental platforms, thereby embedding a climate governance deficit.

The research advances the comparative literature on African political parties by introducing an explicit environmental dimension to the analysis of internal party democracy. Furthermore, it offers a critical framework for understanding how procedural exclusion within parties directly impacts substantive policy responsiveness to existential threats like climate change.

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