



## Post-Soviet transition in Mongolia

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### ABSTRACT

*Through its modern history, Mongolia has lost and restored its statehood several times. In 1924, after twelve years of independence from Manchu rule Mongolia became virtually a Soviet satellite state. Mongolia remained under communism for seventy years and it was after the disintegration of former USSR that Mongolia became really independent. Mongolia's political opening, occurred when Mongolians overturned the ruling dictatorial regime during the 1990 strikes and demonstrations. An active young generation which promoted these reforms helped to set in motion this shift in society. These actions formed the basis for the social preconditions that moved Mongolia towards democracy. The case study of Mongolia confirms the importance of the economic, political and social historical preconditions because without the external factor of the Soviet Union, Mongolia may not have been pushed towards democracy. This political opening was crafted very carefully by leaders who did not want to foster dramatic state repression. Mongolia's Communist Party introduced Political pluralism but unlike its counterparts in those countries, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) has retained powers since 1990 despite allowing electoral competition and political freedom. It has introduced significant economic reforms which have begun to produce positive growth. When the Soviet bloc disintegrated and cut off its aid to poorer socialist countries, Mongolia experienced the most serious peace time economic collapse any nation has faced during this century. Yet Mongolia's political road has proved remarkably smooth compared to most of the former Soviet republics. There has been no violent attempt to overthrow the government, although the opposition has been active and vocal. Political conflict has by and large been resolved through negotiation and compromise. This article traces socio economic and political transition in Mongolia' since the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990.*

**Keywords**— The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), Socialist, Multiparty democracy, Post-communist world, independent foreign policy, Nuclear-weapon-free zone, GDP

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Mongolia after gaining independence had to replace not only the state government structure but also political, economic and social structures. Additionally, it faced the task of creating an independent foreign policy. In 1992, after having to witness major changes in international affairs Mongolia adopted a new constitution that became a formal framework of policies and actions of post-socialist, democratic Mongolia in the twenty-first century, assuring to its people political freedom, respect to human rights. [1] The first step towards changing the political system of Mongolia has been undertaken in 1990 when Mongolia held its first multiparty election. Mongolia has shown peaceful transfers of power in both parliamentary and presidential elections. Mongolian people gave power to the Mongolian People's Republic Party at the first parliamentary election under the new constitution in 1992. [2] After selecting Ochirbat, nominated by the National and Social Democrats, as the president in 1993 and experiencing a divided government, the people shifted the momentum of the pendulum toward the democratic coalition for the first time in 1996. However, the citizens did not give the power to any one group for a long time. This indicates that the Mongolian people were strict in judging the performance of the democratic coalition government and again swung the direction of the pendulum to the MPRP. Such peaceful and stabilized transfers of power show that procedural democracy has been established in Mongolia. Generally, the 2016 election results show that the younger generation is coming into power. Mongolia holds regular elections that are competitive, and generally free of massive fraud. [3] Free and fair elections is one of the ways that is required to call a country a democracy however simply holding elections will not necessarily improve political participation and the stability of the government. The elections held in 1996, 2004 and 2016 confirm that the system is still susceptible to flaws. It is possible that these flaws could be rectified with further reforms to the electoral system. Regardless of these flaws, Mongolia has made exceptional strides in its transition to democracy. Its democratic electoral system allows multiple political parties to participate and has been characterized by a high voter turnout. This is especially impressive given that only twenty years ago the system had been dominated by single party rule. Mongolia is a country that has proven its democratic achievement within the last decade and has taken the steps necessary to promote further democratization. Not only has Mongolia conducted fundamental political and economic reforms simultaneously, but its political leaders have displayed an unexpected degree of maturity in crafting a coalition-formation process which recognizes and accommodates the realities of electoral outcomes.

In the 1997 Freedom House survey of political rights and civil liberties, only the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, and the three Baltic states scored higher than Mongolia, which was the only post-communist country outside of Eastern Europe to be

ranked "free." Roughly half the countries of Eastern Europe, as well as all of those of the former Soviet Union except the Baltic States, were rated "partly free" or "not free." Mongolia also scored high in terms of press freedoms. In 1997 it ranked ninth in the post-communist world, just three points after Hungary.[4] Although media censorship has been banned by the 1999 media law, the government still questions journalists about information sources, conducts investigations about media ownership, editorial perspectives, and sources of financing. With a plan to decentralize the media the freedom of the press should be improved to ensure a sound democracy. The Parliament is now more open to citizens, with opportunities for viewing parliamentary sessions and obtaining proceedings with individualized records of votes. Standing committees or working groups have meetings on proposed legislation, such as that on the NGO law and the revised Family Law. [5] Rural communities are exploring new models of citizen participation that will increase the effectiveness and responsiveness of local decisions. These factors represent a very positive growth in Mongolia's democracy, as they all promote accountability and transparency. From the institutional building perspective, Mongolia made achievements favourable for the strengthening of democracy. On several aspects, Mongolia is better governed than a number of countries of possible comparison. [6]

In its foreign policy, Mongolia sets to enhance its status on the world map by strengthening its solidarity and cooperation with all the countries both the developed as well as developing countries including the neighboring ones at the international flora as well as actively contributing, to the extent possible, to the efforts of the International community to strengthen peace and security. The declaration of nuclear-weapon-free zone status was a positive step.[7] A next move involves tightening the state apparatus, including better protection of its borders and ensuring that Mongolia remains ethnically Mongolian. Today Mongolia entertains diplomatic relations with 143 countries and adheres to 178 international multilateral treaties. Furthermore, Mongolia is a member of 49 international relations; the number of the country's foreign representatives is also increasing. Regarding Mongolia's foreign policy there is no doubt that national interests remain the key issue in its formulation. Mongolia is reaching out to advance its regional and global relations such as Western Europe, Japan and the United States. As a new democracy, Mongolia also places a high priority on cultivating good relations with the United States, which government officials in Ulaanbaatar have referred to as Mongolia's "third neighbour." Having served as a geopolitical buffer in the relations between Russia and China, Mongolia is trying to pursue a balanced relationship with them.

The formation of a new type of a social system was one of the major challenges that independent Mongolia faced. A weak civil structure cannot effectively facilitate participation in state building. The formation of a new type of social affairs in Mongolia is carried out via stimulating institutionalization of public participation. In this regard, it is important to mention the adoption of a law "On Non-Governmental Organizations," which regulates the process of formation of civic unions. At present NGOs which represent various aspects of civilian life, function in Mongolia. Furthermore, Mongolia has seen the emergence and institutionalization of various organizations within its now vibrant civil society. Many of the national NGOs are run by women who focus on gender-specific concerns. Comparatively, women are more actively engaged in civil society in Mongolia than men and they could contribute greatly to Mongolia if they were to be elected into crucial political positions.

Differently, from most newly independent countries, Mongolia has avoided the intervention of the military and set up a secular and civilian democratic state where civilians have formal control over the military and the police forces throughout the country. The Mongolian government has downsized the military, particularly since 1998. There is no additional significant group or organization seeking to overthrow the democratic rules of the game. However, the social costs of Mongolia's rapid transition from a central command economy to a market-oriented one have been very high. The major casualty in the first phase became education, healthcare, workers and above all womenfolk and children. Basic social and human development services once available either stopped functioning or became inaccessible to the majority of the population. The transition has been accompanied by a concomitant increase in poverty and unemployment levels, deterioration in the status of women and the disabled, and a surge in rural to urban migration. The situation of women within the broader socio-economic framework of the transition period is vulnerable. Government's reform strategies have led, in general, to the marginalization of women, and the deterioration of women's social and welfare services, and job opportunities.[8] The unemployment, with ever increasing inflation, closure of the factories and collective farms resulted in the termination of the services of women force.[9] They were forced indoors, starving and struggling. The current situation is the underlying cause of the rise of alcoholism in men and women, prostitution, domestic violence against women and the breakdown of traditional values. During the transition, the nation's leadership elite has become conspicuously more male in composition. Although women currently in Parliament have improved their professional competence, However, women are still the minority in Parliament and their representation in politics is still limited. [10] Mongolia's transition to a market-oriented economy adversely affected the Government's ability to finance and deliver health services. With the cessation of Soviet financial assistance, drastic cuts had to be made in the Government's health expenditures and in subsidies for social welfare programs. [11]

Later on, corruption has become an important problem for Mongolian politics and democratic governance. Its appearance is partly due to Mongolia's small and integrated population, influences from Russia and China, from the process of liberalization, and from currently weak enforcement mechanisms. Nonetheless in Mongolia's corruption is worsening and overall quality of governance appears to be declining since the late 1990s. The elites have strong incentives to engage in corrupt behaviour related to the three available rents from aid, privatization and especially from the recent natural resource boom. The democratic competition itself has become a source of corruption due to the cost of election campaigns and all major political groupings are implicated in corrupt exchanges. As of 1995, Mongolia allocated 10% of its public expenditure towards education. The proportion allocated to education has declined slightly over the past several years. The school dropouts took to street begging. The UNDP estimates that in 2007 around 3000 children were living on the streets.

Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, geography has returned as a decisive factor in Mongolian perspectives. In areas of trade, travel, lifestyle and culture, Mongolia is undeniably drawing closer to the Asian world, following the rapid development of trade

with Asian partners and establishment of diplomatic ties. [12] Cultural contacts are also rapidly extending along this line. At the personal level, where foreign trips once took Mongolians to Moscow or Prague, they are now destined for Beijing, Taipei, Bangkok, Seoul or Singapore. Similarly, exchange programmes with Asian institutions are becoming more prominent in higher learning, and are likely to inspire Mongolian students to compare their country with Asia rather than Russia and Eastern Europe. Mongolia had already established the rudiments of a market economy. The private share of livestock ownership, the staple of the rural economy, nearly tripled between 1991 and 1993, reaching 80 per cent of all herd animals. Large-scale privatization of small enterprises also advanced quickly in 1991-92. [13] These two economic stabilizers became especially important in easing the adjustment to a market economy from 1994 or 1995 onwards. The relationship between successful transition and democracy has been mutually reinforcing. The democratic system encouraged the politicians to respond positively to popular pressures for livestock privatization or for allowing the information to flourish. The contribution of these economic stabilizers to halting and then reversing the decline in living standards during the mid-1990s helped to strengthen democracy.

The positive assessment does not mean that all is plain sailing for the next decade. Financial reform requires further action. The informal sectors need to be gradually incorporated into the formal sector if public administration, is to function smoothly. The UNDP estimates that 70% of the poor are children or adolescents and that in 2015 around 2000 children were living on the streets, 60% of them in Ulaanbaatar. [1][14]

Mongolia is still highly dependent on foreign aid and assistance. Such external dependence might have a negative influence on domestic policy, undermining the social security system and the relative economic equality that had been previously created by Soviet development aid. [15] Foreign aid now makes up 25% of GDP, a situation of dependence not too different from the latter half of the 1980s when Mongolia's dependence on Soviet aid corresponded to 30% of its GDP. The international donor agencies have supplanted Russia as the main source of foreign aid, however, they have not succeeded in achieving an extraordinary increase in western investment and trade with Mongolia.

## **2. CONCLUSION**

The main conclusion reached is that Mongolia has accomplished democracy and free market economy by undertaking concurrent political and economic reforms in a peaceful manner which has contributed to the country's success. After establishing a procedural democratic system, Mongolian citizens support development toward a consolidated democracy even in the face of economic hardship. Mongolia needs to proceed to the status of a consolidated democracy. In Mongolia there is no group seeking to overthrow the democratic rules of the game, people in power follow constitutional rules and citizens support democracy even in the face of economic hardship. Mongolia has to resolve issues concerning institutionalization in the public sector, activation of civil society, and current economic conditions. The country has potential in terms of extensive natural resources, favourable legal environment; stable political environment and open economy; easy access to the giant markets of Russia and China; relatively young, educated population; vast territory, clean and undisturbed nature land and manpower. The population is not going to pose any problem for centuries.

Unlike other Asian countries, Mongolia is challenging and breaking the stereotype of alternating between authoritarianism and democracy. Mongolia's future democratic prospects look quite promising. The increasing involvement of young people in politics who are committed to democratization makes one even more optimistic about Mongolia's democratic future and helps to assure the continuation of the momentum for political change.

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