

## **Challenges for Political Development in Mongolia: Political Party System, Political Culture and Corruption<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper addresses party system changes, political culture circumstances, as well as the phenomenon of corruption considered as challenges for the political development in present-day Mongolia. Party system movements from multi- to two- have become a characteristic of politics in Mongolia today. However, political democracy is being progressively viewed and instituted as the fundamental value of Mongolian development sustainability.*

**Keywords:** party system, political culture, political corruption

### **Introduction**

Political development is mutually interrelated with the formation and changes of the political system and political culture as well. The 1992 Constitution of Mongolia provided democratic state systems based on the principles of separation of power, and defined its organizations and regimes. Representative institutions formed by free universal election, multi-party system and civil society institutions, which are considered as a real manifestation of public political participation, represent the democratic system which has been formed in Mongolia for the last years. A free public media, independent judiciary and civil society institutions as means of human rights and freedom defence are operating as institutions of democratic countries. This paper offers an overview of present challenges for the political development in terms of political party system, political culture and political corruption.

- The Political Party System

People affirm their political opinions, set up political parties and then engage and compete in a free electoral process. These aspects have become a fundamental part of the current Mongolian political life. Therefore, political pluralism is supporting political development and encouraging it greatly in terms of political ideas as well as ideology. Still, the progress in party formation, politicians' ethics, economics and social development do not manage to reach ordinary people's life. Thus, activities conducted by political parties cannot gain that much favour with public.

The existence of any political regime is connected with trust in political institutions (Easton, 1965). Whether there is trust or mistrust, this fact has an important influence on political sustainability (Pharr et al., 2000). Mistrust is a

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sign that social and economic development has not yet succeeded and that the “dream” of being one of the Asian tigers during the democratic reform has not come true yet or, maybe, it will not be fulfilled in the years to come! Furthermore, corruption, unemployment and poverty are increasing rapidly and people consider them consequences of the policies and activities performed by the political parties, particularly, by those which have state power, have seats in the Parliament and the Government. Another risk for political and economic stability and progress is represented also by the continuous struggle and ‘plotting’ for high positions among party leaders.

In comparison with other countries of the third wave of democracy, Mongolia, no matter how many parties have taken seats in the parliament, has a peculiarity of the political formation of dominant two-party system. The lever to it is the majority system of parliamentary election. Generally, there are still two main players in the parliament arena such as Mongolian People’s Party and the Democratic Party which were established during the democratic period.

According to the comparative conclusions of researchers such as Fritz (2002: 75-100), Pomfret (2000: 149-160), Sabloff ( 2002: 19-36), the following point is explained again, which means it is easy to hold political responsibility owing to the fact that this two-party system has been rather stable. Compared to Lijphart’s view (1999), the legislative regulation in Mongolia builds a favorable environment to support a ‘winner-take-it-all’ or dominant two-party system. This system is characterized by the fact that the party which has more votes forms the government unilaterally and operates in the same manner.

In brief, the Mongolian party system is on the crossroad of a multi-party system and a dominant two-party system. In any case, the election system lays down a condition that supports main political competitors in turn. The dominant two-party system and the majority election system might bring an adverse outcome which divides Mongolians in terms of their political attitudes. One way to prevent it is a precise variant of election system. The election system reform may be one way to form political democratic pluralism. Although, political parties show initiatives related to the election system reform before every selection, unfortunately, political parties and their authorities in their ruling period care more about whether their initiative can influence positively the strengthening of their authority in the next election.

In the future, it is required to change our election system and carry out list proportional election system in order to support political development in Mongolia. This issue is still being searched for the best solution for the future Mongolian political development by politicians and researchers. Thus, it is necessary to learn experiences from other countries on implementing mechanism and how to estimate election results clearly and accurately for the public.

- Political Culture

It is right to consider the consolidation of democracy in relation to political culture. The role of political culture is a lot significant in the development of democracy and democratic government. One of the commonly cited definitions of political culture is derived from Almond’s early work: “Political culture is the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations toward politics among members of a political realm which underlies and gives meaning to political actions” (Almond and Powell 1966: 50). Almond and Verba refer to a “... *participant*, in which the relationships between specialized institutions and citizen opinion and activity is interactive. A participant is assumed to be aware of and informed

about the political system in both its governmental and political aspects" (Almond and Verba 1989: 79).

According to some researchers' point of view, political trust and evaluation influence on and guide people's behaviour. Therefore, composition of political culture is trust, an evaluation and a perception are the basis of strengthening democracy (Eckstein 1988: 789-804; Putnam, 1993).

There is a point of view that political culture in Mongolia has still not finished its transition from an authoritarianism into democracy, yet democracy is not the only game played in the country of Mongolia (Shin and Wells 2005: 56-67); Mongolians have been said to be proud of themselves being one of the real democratic countries similar to the Japanese and South Koreans (Kohn 2007). Moreover, Fish agrees that Mongolia meets the democratic criteria (Fish 1998).

Then, why is it evaluated so differently from external views? Even though, such evaluations are not false at all. It would not be wrong to say that there is no way for the Mongolian democracy to go backward. However, the economic and social development is not fast enough for the rapid development of our democratic system and governance which causes the above mentioned distinctive evaluations.

Social democracy can be explained in relation to the civil society development. The main criteria of a civil society formation are an institutionalization of interest groups, and the citizen activity in election and political participation. Moreover, a formation and a transformation of political culture have significant influence over the civil society development. We can say that the cultural pattern of the Mongolians is transiting into the participation pattern on political level. The process of the civil society institution founding and operating with the purpose of supporting citizens' participation in politics and implementing a civil oversight on government policy and activities is a common and legalized phenomenon in the current social life. Nowadays, there are almost 10,000 NGOs running their operation in all social sectors in Mongolia. In the last two years, a number of social and political movements such as "Civil Movement for Healthy Society", "Radical Reform Movement", "Civil movement for development" and movements for land nature, and environment protection such as "The River Ongi", "The Land of our Mongolia" and "Movement for Fair Privatising of Land" have been actively operating, demonstrating and organizing assemblies with certain requirements to government, raising political issues.

Due to the Constitution of Mongolia, we have democratic institutions as other democratic countries have, but the public evaluation on how democracy is implemented, *de facto*, has not been well enough. Most of the citizens do not know how to fight according to their legislative right and give politicians a chance of populism and manipulation.

- Political Corruption

Corruption is a serious dysfunction of the rule of law and undermines democratic institutions (Molutsi et al. 2003: 23). Corruption is becoming one of the obstacles affecting economic and political development in Mongolia. In general, the main need in Mongolia is for effective disincentives for corrupt behaviour at both administrative and political level. In its broadest configuration, this implies a strategy of increasing transparency and effective citizen oversight, as well as intra-governmental checks and balances (United States Agency International Development 2005: 2).

One of the main factors abetting political corruption is, at present, the funding of election campaign and political parties, and access to high political

positions. It is manifest that laws and rules regulating those mentioned do not meet the requirements to curb and tackle political corruption.

The more images that the government in East Asia is affected by corruption, the less the people trust in state. Corruption has become a burning issue from Prague to Moscow and Seoul to Tokyo (Rose 2005: 127-128), and Ulaanbaatar has already been included in this route.

Which can be the ways to reduce the corruption level in the country? The most effective thing which can influence the reduction of corruption is to build the legal environment to punish strongly those who corrupt and are corrupted, and to strictly obey this rule. It is commonly viewed in our society that corruption is wide spreading all around because people with a low potential and few abilities are recruited and employed in the state administrative offices.

Corruption does corrode political trust (Mishler et al. 2001: 52). The raise of the corruption level influences the reduction of public trust in government and state institutions. These indicators are in inverse relationship to each other. The process of case decision on corruption, which is a worrying issue among people, is slowing down and gradually going to be forgotten. It is directly affecting the widespread of suspicion without purpose in the society and the decrease of the people's trust in government activities and the functioning of political institutions.

Having a political power and authority in the present Mongolian society gives them a chance to control, distribute and share financial resources. Although democracy is a condition to keep corruption limited, there is not that much good outcome seen. Therefore, corruption has become the most pressing issue in our society. There is no progress in solving this problem. The national justice system with the people's active participation and effective control mechanism against corruption is extremely significant in society as well. Moreover, if activity and the decision-making of every representative of the government hierarchy is more transparent and open to public, it will be an important factor to decrease corruption.

## **Conclusion**

The first and most important conclusion is that democratic institutions in Mongolia are being formed and Mongolians are learning democracy and democratic political culture. Nevertheless, we face the biggest challenge of how to use and make those newly formed democratic institutions our own in terms of political development. We are right and wrong. But most importantly, democracy is being successfully developed, which is considered to be the basis of the Mongolian development sustainability in this changing world.

Mongolia is a country which is strongly sensitive to democracy and reflective to the advantages of foreign culture and values. However, the risk can affect the democratic strengthening that politicians are not potential enough to hold political responsibilities and their function is carrying on in a far distance to public interests, wishes and necessities. This may be concluded Mongolian democracy is on the crossroad (Kohn, 2007).

Some initiatives on development strategy on the basis of mining of natural resources of Mongolia have appeared in recent times. Mongolia is a rich country with a lot of natural resources. The development of Mongolian economy is likely to depend on how to use and manage natural resources in a thoughtful and clever way in future. Although we can earn a lot from natural resources and mining, it is not the only source of development. We can see bitter experiences from some African countries which have not managed to use their natural

resources properly as an opportunity for development, however there is a lot of natural resources. Therefore we are facing another challenge, either to be developed as Scandinavian countries, pursuing a clever development policy which supports education, and cares about social and human development, or to be "fallen down" as those African countries.

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