



# Parliamentary and presidential elections in Mongolia, 2012 and 2013



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## ABSTRACT

The 2012 Mongolian parliamentary election was historical as a new mixed-member majoritarian system was implemented. Compared with 2008, or even 2004, the 2012 election outcome indicates an at least tentative disruption of the bipolarisation of electoral politics in Mongolia. However, unlike in the past when the fragmentation of the party system was caused by the parties of the so-called “democratic camp”, the latest split occurred within the so-called “post-communist camp”. The presidential election took place on 26 June 2013. Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj of the Democratic Party was elected president and for the first time since the democratic transition of 1990, most executive and legislative powers shifted to the Democratic Party.

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Mongolia's sixth democratic direct presidential election was held on 26 June 2013. It was the first nationwide electoral contest following the 2012 parliamentary election, so the results were a litmus test of the popularity of the main governing and opposition parties. The incumbent president, Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, narrowly won in the first round and confirmed a strong domination of the Democratic Party in Mongolian politics. In the wake of the presidential election the party controls, for the first time since the democratic transition of 1990, all important positions in the country.

## 1. Background

Contrary to the past, the 2008 parliamentary election was a setback to the mostly peaceful evolution of Mongolian democracy. The preliminary results of the election gave the governing post-communist Mongolian People's

Revolutionary Party (MPRP) a strong majority of 46 seats in the 76-seat parliament (the Great State Khural), although polls had predicted a victory for the party that ended up in opposition, the Democratic Party (DP). On 1 July, following the announcement of the official results, DP leader Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj refused to concede defeat, and in subsequent opposition protests, five people died, more than 700 were arrested, and Mongolian president Nambaryn Enkhbayar declared a four-day state of emergency in Ulaanbaatar (see [Bulag, 2009](#)). Although the protests were pacified and the state of emergency was lifted, the situation in Mongolia continued to be tense and the constitutional crisis was not solved until 28 August. After a stalemate of nearly two months, the DP abandoned its boycott of the parliament. However, in reaction to an agreement between the MPRP and the DP, Elbegdorj stepped down and his position was assumed by Norovyn Altankhuyag, who was inclined to accept the election results. On 1 September, the leaders of both parties agreed to form a grand coalition government, and on 11 September, MPRP leader Sanjaagiin Bayar was elected the new Prime Minister; former the DP leader Elbegdorj was the only MP opposing Bayar's election.

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However, on 24 May 2009, Elbegdorj made a great comeback, defeating the incumbent Enkhbayar in the presidential election (see [Bulag, 2010](#)). The remaining part of the parliamentary term was marked by other important events, too. In November 2010, the MPRP congress decided to rename the party to the Mongolian People's Party (MPP), the name under which the party was founded in 1921. Some party members, however, disagreed with this step, broke away and, in January 2011, formed a new party under the original name, MPRP, led by former president Enkhbayar.

## 2. Electoral system

The 2012 parliamentary election was historical as the country moved to a mixed electoral system and, for the first time since 1990, Mongolian voters did not choose their representatives through plurality-majority or semi-proportional electoral systems (see [Schaffner, 2005](#)). For the first time, too, Mongolia used an electronic voting system, Mongolian citizens living overseas were permitted to vote, and a 20% quota for women candidates was introduced.

The new Mongolian mixed-member majoritarian system distributes the 76 seats by two mechanisms: 48 seats by plurality vote in 26 electoral districts, with district magnitudes ranging from one to three (nominal tier), and the remaining 28 seats via proportional representation (list tier). A voter has two ballots: one is cast for a candidate in a single- or multi-member district and the other for a party list. In a given single- or multi-member district, a candidate must obtain at least 28% of the vote to be elected, and at least 50% of the electorate need to vote for the election to be valid. Otherwise, re-polling is held for the remaining seats. In the proportional tier, a closed party list ballot is held using a 5% threshold for party lists as well as coalitions, and the largest remainder formula for allocating seats to each party or coalition. Candidates may stand either for a district, or appear on their party's list, but not in both tiers simultaneously. Individual candidates may also seek election if they receive support of at least 801 voters in their targeted electoral district.

## 3. Political parties and electoral campaign

A total of 544 candidates from 11 parties and 2 coalitions took part in the 2012 election; 26 of them ran as independent candidates. Almost for the entire electoral term from 2008, Mongolia had been ruled by the grand coalition of MPRP and DP. However, in January, as the election was approaching, the DP left the coalition in order to stand in the election as the main "opposition" force. But more important was the candidacy of Enkhbayar's MPRP, or the Justice Coalition formed in January with the Mongolian National Democratic Party (MNDP) and headed by Mend-saikhan Enkhsaikhan.<sup>1</sup> The polls indicated relatively high

support for the MPRP, threatening the success of the MPP and potentially also the chance that the winning party would be able to form a single-party government ([SMF, 2012a, 2012b](#)).

The official campaign begins a month and ends one day prior to the election day. Stricter regulation of political advertising was introduced in the new electoral law, as parties were forced to submit their campaign platforms to the General Election Commission (GEC) and to hold on to these platforms in their advertising. While the mining boom and related investment projects are bringing a great deal of wealth to Mongolia, as indicated, for example, by GDP growth,<sup>2</sup> neither this considerable growth nor the ongoing economic transformation translated into any apparent improvement of the wellbeing of the majority of the population. According to polls, unemployment, standard of living (poverty and income) and inflation continue to be Mongolia's major socioeconomic problems. At the same time, 86.6% of Mongolians think that government policies always or often fail to solve these problems ([SMF, 2012b](#)).

These issues, together with the extent to which foreign firms had control over Mongolian strategic resources and the issue of how most Mongolians should benefit from recent development of the mining industry were at the centre of political debates, as well as parties' platforms. However, these issues were partially overshadowed by another event which affected the dynamics of the campaign. On 13 April, the leader of the Justice Coalition and former president Enkhbayar was arrested on corruption charges. On 14 May, he was released on bail, yet the GEC rejected his nomination as a candidate.

## 4. Parliamentary election results

The election took place on 28 June 2012. Voter turnout of 67.28% was somewhat lower than the 76.46% in 2008. The outcome of the election was a victory for the DP, as opinion polls had predicted. The DP won 31 seats, an increase of 3 seats compared to 2008. In contrast, with 25 seats, the MPP lost almost half of its seats from the previous election, although it maintained the position of the second largest parliamentary faction. The Justice Coalition ranked third with 15.28% and 11 seats. This amounts to a historical success because no other third party in Mongolia since 1992 had won more than one seat. The parliamentary Civil Will – Green Party (CWGP) came in fourth with two seats, i.e. the same number which both parties had secured in 2008, before they merged.<sup>3</sup> Finally, independents won three seats, compared to one in 2008.

Comparison of the results in the party list and nominal tiers show that the latter was decisive for the main parties. While the margin of 4.01% of the vote between the DP and

<sup>1</sup> Enkhsaikhan was the first non-communist Prime Minister of Mongolia (1996–1998) and a DP leader (2003–2005). However, he was expelled from the DP, together with some other members, for participation in the MPRP coalition government (2006–2008) in which the DP as a whole did not participate.

<sup>2</sup> With the exception of 2009, the GDP grew throughout the election term from 2008 to 2011 by an average of 4% annually. GDP growth accelerated to 17.3% in 2011, and slowed down to 12.4% in 2012, still a very high value.

<sup>3</sup> The CWGP was founded in 2011 by two minor parliamentary parties, the Civil Will Party (CWP) and the Mongolian Green Party (MGP). However, some MGP members refused the integration and ran in the 2012 election under the original name, MGP.

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