

## Challenges and Triumphs of Democratisation in Mongolia

Souvik Chatterjee

*Assistant Professor , Amity Institute of Liberal Arts,  
Amity University Mumbai, India 410206*

### **Abstract**

*The major socio-political change in Mongolia was the change of political system from one-party socialist to multi-party democracy in 1990s. The political liberalisation of ideas- the change of economic system, inauguration of the new constitution in 1992 and the first ever free parliamentary elections are the key features of the Mongolia's Democratic revolution. The importance of researching democratic consolidation in Mongolia can be underscored in several keyways. Firstly, Mongolia serves as an exemplary case of a nation that has transitioned positively towards democracy in a global landscape where democracy often remains an outlier rather than the norm. From the events that Mongolia had to overcome and the knowledge that was gained, there is much to learn on how democratisation processes could be maintained in transitional societies. Qualitative research approach is fitting for this study since it enables the researcher to gain an insight into subjective experiences as well as perceptions of those who are either involved in or affected by a democratic transition in Mongolia.*

*Findings of this research highlights Mongolia's democratisation process both possibilities as well as difficulties involved. Mongolia has done fairly well in terms of institutionalising democracy, but numerous challenges are still persistent which require continuous attention and concerted efforts being made towards addressing them. By introducing strategic reforms, endorsing comprehensive development, fostering transparency culture and nurturing a sense of accountability within state institutions Mongolia can reinforce further consolidation of its democratic gains.*

**Keywords:** *Mongolia, USSR, Democratisation, Neo-liberal, Post-Communist, Authoritarianism*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The major socio-political change in Mongolia was the change of political system from one-party socialist to multi-party democracy in 1990s. In the second half of 1989 Mongolian sparked the East European style demonstration against the authorities with the backing of Mongolian Democratic Union (MDU). Such protest for change to a multiparty system; free elections; market economy and human rights were carried up to early 1990. Hunger strikes as well as the continuous unrest led the communists headed by *Jambyn Batmonh* to step down (Heaton, 1991). The beginning of democracy in Mongolia can be attributed to the non-violent revolution in year 1990 led by Mongolian students, activists and women. The political liberalisation of ideas- the change of economic system, inauguration of the new constitution in 1992 and the first ever free parliamentary elections are the key features of the Mongolia's Democratic revolution.

One could assert quite confidently that Mongolia has her own unique political narrative unlike authoritarian post-communist countries of Central Asia. On the positive side it includes transition of Mongolia to democracy, conducting of a referendum on the exercise of a democratic constitution, the free and fair contests for all state positions and consequent changes of power, population support to the values of democracy. The improvements have not

been as revolutionary in the other countries; the least amount of Democratisation has taken place in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Landman, Larizza, McEvoy, & Carvalho, 2006; Fish, 2001). Unlike other powers within the Central Asian region, Mongolia had duly developed to be able to formulate a democratic nation.

The importance of researching democratic consolidation in Mongolia can be underscored in several keyways. Firstly, Mongolia serves as an exemplary case of a nation that has transitioned positively towards democracy in a global landscape where democracy often remains an outlier rather than the norm. Despite being a deviant democracy, Mongolian democratic journey is tale of endurance and resilience within an unstable geographical hotspot. In addition, Mongolia's democratic evolution has been rather recent and could be useful for understanding other post socialist and developing countries in their processes of democratic development. From the events that Mongolia had to overcome and the knowledge that was gained, there is much to learn on how democratisation processes could be maintained in transitional societies.

## **2. RESEACH METHOD**

A structured method is necessary for a comprehensive qualitative research study on "Challenges and Triumphs of Democratization in Mongolia." This academic article proposes guidelines towards a feasible investigation process. For this reason, qualitative research approach is fitting for this study since it enables the researcher to gain an insight into subjective experiences as well as perceptions of those who are either involved in or affected by a democratic transition. The method will allow us to understand better the challenges and victories of democratic transformation in Mongolia that, when analyzed; will add important dimensions to debates on democracy in nations undergoing political transitions among academicians. It seeks to demonstrate the difficulties encountered during Mongolia's path towards democracy through historical narratives and contextual analysis.

## **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Democratic Landscape in Mongolia before & after the 1990s**

Mongolia up to early 1990 before the process of democratisation was a one-party socialist state in an alliance with former Soviet Union. The political authority was represented in Mongolian people's revolutionary party which played the key role in the political system of Mongolia. Therefore, it came as a surprise when Mongolia democratised in the 1990s; Mongolia had no political pluralism and other defining features of most democratising countries.

Despite being an independent country, Mongolia was fully Sovietised in political, economic and social spheres (Uysh, 2023). Mongolia started experiencing economic downturn from the late 1989 due to the crisis in the communism in Eastern Europe and disintegration of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).

The economic crisis in Soviet was one of the prominent factors that affected Mongolia in post-soviet period as Soviet was financing almost half of the Mongolian budget via foreign aid and the CMEA. Disintegration of USSR resulted in deficits of energy & raw materials thus affecting factories, constructions, and leading to unemployment in Mongolia. The Mongolian government tried to negotiate barter with successor Russia for the necessary materials; however, its further development was uncertain since the Mongolian Government owed \$16.2 billion of debts to the Soviet Union (Heaton, 1992).

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 interrupted the economic relationship and destroyed the supply chain and the beneficial swap of cheap Soviet oil for expensive Mongolian copper payment (Pomfret, 2000). The background that contributed to democratisation process in Mongolia was a wave of public protests starting in late December 1989. These demonstrations were led by Mongolian Democratic Union (MDU) which was formed in 1989 by a group of intellectuals inspired by the revolutions happening in the Eastern Europe. The MDU and other

newborn opposition groups begin to organise the population for radical political and economic transformations such as a multiparty system, free elections, market economy, etc.

It is important to note that break-up of Soviet Union has had monumental impact on Mongolia and so, again it is easing its sovereign state power (Orkhon, 2003). The shift of the global structure at 1990s has a distinct political consequence in Mongolia where after three decades of struggling for the Marxist and communism now was seeking for an alternative course. Thus, for the Mongolian state to overcome the realities of post-soviet global setting, it required political and economic reform (Pomfret, 2000). Therefore, post-soviet order offering the resource, opportunities and avenues for Mongolia to build Mongolian nation and identity which previously was impossible since Mongolia was under Soviet regime as a satellite state.

Ginsberg (1995) argued transformation of socialist regime can be done under two types of models, and they include the Chinese model whereby liberalisation of economy is achieved at the same time as enhancement of political repression is seen in Laos and Vietnam. The second model is seen in Eastern Europe whereby liberalisation of economy is achieved alongside with liberalisation of political institutions. However, it is also pertinent to mention here that the model of the contemporary social structure of Mongolia has some elements of both these models (Ginsburg, 1995). This was caused by shift of policies in the Eastern Europe in the year 1990 whereby the Mongolian Communist Party began advocating for multi-party democracy. However, this is not the situation with the major counterparts in Eastern Europe; the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) has stayed in power regardless restrictions on electoral competition and political freedom, metaphorically the party involved has performed systematic economic reformation with the capability of positive growth (Pomfret, 2000).

Subsequently, Mongolia had searched for the new source of the aid and became one of the largest international aid receivers in 1990s. Moreover, for both asserting state sovereignty against its powerful neighbours and getting closer to the US Mongolia had a so-called "Third Neighbour Policy". Thus, Mongolia initiated diplomatic discussion American state and signed the corresponding agreement in early 1987 (Bayarkhuu, 2014).

The Mongolian Democratic called for a mass pro-democracy meeting on 4th March 1990. The meeting gathered more than 100000 people, as a result of which the MPRP disbanded the Politburo and the party leader Jambyn Batmönkh resigned. Mongolia's first free and fair elections occurred in July 1990 after the Democratic Revolution. The new constitution declared Mongolia as an independent sovereign state with rights and freedoms; altered the legislative power; and created the State Great Khural (SGK). The constitution was changed in the year 1992 and in the presidential election of 1993 the opposition candidate was Punsalmaagiin Ochirbat was elected (Historydraft, n.d).

All these changes may be regarded as dramatic, and they predetermined the shift in the political history of Mongolia. Therefore, the non-violent actions and the changes that occurred after them provided the public with a clue to desire for change and the political elites' capacity to respond to it. The first free election of the parliament occurred in 1990, and it established a plural Great Khural with members in various factions. Hence, the non-violent protests for democracy in the 1990s can be said to have developed the root of Mongolian democracy and defined the subsequent constitutional transformations along with the reinforcement of democracy in Mongolia.

### **3.2. Post-1990s Democratic Transition and Challenges in Mongolia**

In the period after 1990, Mongolia has developed a group of institutions that offer sureties for human civil and political liberties. The rights to gather and form organizations have been honoured since the onset of the transformation. Many political groups, trade unions, and other associations, new trade unions, and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) have flourished in Mongolia (Fritz, 2002; Landman et.al., 2005).

The democratic revolution of 1990 has significant political as well as economic ramifications. In 1990-1992, the first democratically elected government of Mongolia carried out price and trade liberalisation as well as banking and financial reforms on insistence of International

Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank and World Bank. This paved way to private sector led market economy. Before the year 1991, the government used to regulate the pricing of these products through what can be referred to as the policy of administered prices (Shagdar, 2003). Therefore, the decision of the Mongolian government in 1991 can be regarded as the first step in price liberalisation which leads to the sixty percent product liberalisation and doubling the rest (Shagdar, 2003). The retail prices were cut, and ten categories of imported goods were added. Education fare, pensions, scholarships, wages and salaries increased as did taxes and tariffs. These measures led to the devaluation of the Mongolian Togrog (MNT) to a twofold (Shagdar, 2003). Western led economic reforms were not in harmony with the Mongolian culture of collectivism or the community utilisation of the resources. The years after socialism became disastrous for the country, and, with the fifth highest ratio of the international aid, Mongolia began a new stage in its development.

The new government focused on the reasonability and the development of enterprises as well as the right to property. But the reforms disassembled state enterprises, which generated over 4100 collectively owned organisations (Ichinkhorloo, 2018). These companies and cooperatives were by 2000 fully dominated and the ownership became the preserve of a few. Companies were scaled down with the average number of employees reducing from 270 to 73 between the year 1992 and 2002 (Ichinkhorloo, 2018). This resulted in half of the working age population being laid off in the privatized enterprises and public services and engage in other activities (Ichinkhorloo, 2018). Shrugging its inefficiency to control the accession of international companies, the Mongolian government, according to the IMF policies called for the state involvement to be kept to the minimum, missed out on the potentially large mineral resources. This is why extreme economic difficulties and cold winters forced the herders to change the culture and stop nomadic, leaving their natural habitat and going to cities for a new existence. The Mongolian market economy led to numerous enterprises collapse, making market shares worthless. The domestic economy resorted to scavenger economy, selling scrap metal and construction materials and in the remaining privatized companies managers acquired controlling ownership.

However, the state retained substantial ownership in prominent enterprises (Ichinkhorloo, 2018; Sneath, 2018). Mongolia's public debt increased to percent of GDP in 1999 since 1991, and although the terms of the debt was quite concessional the debt service was relatively limited. Nevertheless, there is a problem of non-transferable rubble debt contracted before 1991, equal to roughly ten times Mongolia's GDP as of 2001 (Cheng, 2003). This means that a sound fiscal policy will be important for the implementation of Mongolia's plan for sustainable macro stability. Thus, the early introduction of public enterprise reforms assisted in cushioning the impact of the transition period on the labour market. It is a rather deserted territory with approximately 2.4 million and fifty eight percent of the population is in the labour force being sixty percent economically active (Cheng, 2003). Adjustment costs resulting from large, rather ineffective public enterprises limited employment shrinkage by a modest five percent in the early nineties and total employment then steadily recovered to five percent higher in 1999 than before the transition (Cheng, 2003). This had accordantly squeezed the unemployment rate to about four percent of the economically active population as estimated in the year 2001. The private sector has also received tremendous growth in the recent past years as the early privatisation of herds and small-medium enterprises has also acted as a dynamic force in the sectors (Cheng, 2003).

The liberal democratic model of Mongolia has allowed the foreign investment in the large deposits of minerals. In 2009 and beyond, prominent global powers such as India, Australia, US, Canada, South Korea etc. have ventured into Mongolia's resourceful area such as copper, gold, coal, molybdenum, fluorspar, uranium, tin, and tungsten. Hence, by transition from closed market economy to free market economy Mongolian economy expanded by 7.1% in 2023 mainly due to the extraction of coal and transport of coal products (The World Bank, 2024). The medium-term growth outlook for Mongolia's growth remains upbeat, with growth rate

projected to average 6.4% over 2025-2026, mainly due to the rising production at Oyu Tolgoi, which is the largest copper project in the country (The World Bank, 2024).

The new political environment enabled formation of a competitive party system, free election, and increased political participation from the citizens. The new constitution of 1992 brought the checks and balances system of power between the executive, legislative and the judiciary departments, which strengthened the principles of democracy and governance. MPRP dominated was threatened because of the breaks up of Soviet Union and changes in the politics from 1990 to 1992. These reforms were contained in the areas of the legislature and the president but still under the figure of the 'people' (Batbayar, 2003). The first opposition parties like the democratic party, social democratic party and the national progress party were formed hereby breaking the system of the single party state. In the aftermath of July 1990 elections, MPRP compete with new parties, foster a coalition government and began to check the Russian interference in the Mongolian domestic politics (The World Bank, 2024).

The Democratic Revolution of 1990 led Mongolia to the process of democratic consolidation and provided the country with a solid base for political and economic growth. The successful implementation of the specified democratic institutions and processes has enabled Mongolia to promote a more liberal political culture, hence strengthening its democracy.

The Mongolian constitutional scheme has been developed through four stages depending on the party system (Munkhiin Useg LLC, 2015). The first period of institutional establishment (1992-1996) is characterized by the government led by the MPRP and political competition. The second phase was the "Democratic Union" where the former opposition formed a government coalition; they secured 50 of the 76 parliamentary seats (Batbayar, 2003). The third phase, MPRP Comeback (2000-2004), resulted in MPRP's winning overwhelmingly, and *N. Enkhbayar* becoming the prime minister. The period of 2004-present was characterized by political upheavals, a grand coalition was formed under *Ts. Elbegdorj* and *N. Enkhbayar*. Election in 2008 was characterized by violence resulting to declaration of state of emergency and formation of MPRP-DP government (Batbayar, 2003).

Analysing the results of the Freedom House's report of 2024, it is possible to state that Mongolia is having multiparty elections and is an electoral democracy. Freedom of political rights and civil liberties has remained firmly established. However, political parties depend on patronage instead of policy ideas and many political elites are corrupt. The same report divides the countries in to three categories, Free, Partly Free and Not Free and assigns Mongolia to the Free category with a score of 84 (Batbayar, 2003).

### **3.3. Development and Strengthening of Democratic Institutions in Mongolia**

Mongolia has been undergoing a transformation since the early- 1990s. It had to democratize its institutions and practices according to the will of those who live in it towards accountable, transparent and participatory governance. The adoption of a new constitution in 1992 laid the groundwork for a multi-party-political system that brought about competitive elections and vibrant civil society; nevertheless, there have been many challenges to consolidate democratic gains, including corruption, political instability, and efficient decentralization of power.

**3.3.1. The Establishment of Democratic Constitution & Free and Fair Elections:** In 1992 Mongolia enacted its first democratic constitution which laid down the structure for developing a multiparty state with an elected president and parliament known as the State Great Hural headed by a prime minister. The 1992 constitution also guaranteed basic freedoms like freedom of speech, press, and assembly. Mongolia's transition from socialism to democracy began with peaceful revolution in 1990 that ended one party rule. Series of complex elections across time have defined this change.

Following the Mongolian Revolution on 29th June 1990 first multi-party election was held. The significance here lies in the fact that it was only after several decades that multiple political parties were allowed into these elections. In People's Great Khural MPRP got dominantly winning up to 357 seats out of total 430. There was however general agreement that despite

their dominance these were free and fair polls which registered about 92.4% (MONGOLIA: Parliamentary Elections Ulsyn Ikh Khural, 1990," n.d.). Subsequent democratic processes followed including the adoption of another constitution in 1992 further consolidating democratic governance framework.

The 1992 constitution established Mongolia as a sovereign republic and guaranteed fundamental rights and freedoms, thus laying the groundwork for future elections. In June 1992, the Mongolian parliament The Great Khural held its first election, with 76 members contesting 26 multi-member districts. The Mongolian election law was adopted in April 1992, with 18 provinces and three big cities, including Darkham and Erdenet, and the capital city of Ulaanbaatar (Bajpai, 2015). The new constitution allowed for Mongolia's first presidential election which happened in 1993 when the opposition candidate Punsalmaagiin Ochirbat won a victory marking another important milestone on democratic path of this country. Thus, it was another sign of changing political landscape and democratic trends gaining popularity.

Over the years, Mongolia has witnessed several parliamentary and presidential elections, which varied in degrees of competition and public involvement. The 1996 parliamentary elections were significant as for the first time since its establishment MPRP lost power to the Democratic Union Coalition, a majority party that showed how well electoral process can change political regime. The subsequent election held in 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 also reflect competitive politics although there was increasing concern about electoral malpractices such vote-buying and patronage networks among political parties. (Freedom House n.d).

In December 2011 Mongolian Election law introduced a parallel system for majoritarian and proportional elections which divided State Great Khural into the twenty-eight member districts. This law also set out what extent electronic voting or other technologies could help to make it free and fair elections within legal framework. The reason for this was a campaign of 2008 involving violence which led to death of five non-military individuals thereby leading political leaders realized there are need changes towards having more transparent free election process (Gangabaatar,2020).

In June 2020, the most recent parliamentary elections took place amid global COVID-19 pandemic necessitating adjustment in the electoral process. Mongolia's ruling Mongolian People's Party (MPP) won a landslide victory securing up to sixty-two seats out of seventy-six available in the State Great Khural. Despite challenges faced during this period due to COVID-19 pandemic international observes generally considered that the election was free although some critics raised issues on media access restriction of opposition political parties (Freedom House n.d). Mongolia's electoral system has recently undergone reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability. The General Election Commission has been created in order to monitor conduct of Elections and ensure compliance with legal provisions (Freedom House, n.d.). Nonetheless, the use of patronage networks as well as influence by oligarchs remain key obstacles in Mongolia's party system.

**3.3.2. Judiciary:** Mongolia's judiciary has undergone significant reforms to enhance its independence and effectiveness. Before the 1990s, the judicial system of Mongolia was very much influenced by the Soviet model and this involved lack of independence and significant political control. The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) appointed judges while the judiciary operated under a single state authority. The legal system was used largely for political persecution, with prosecutors being more powerful than judges who controlled judgments in line with party policies (Odonkhuu, 2014; Tseveen & Battsetseg, 2009). The fall of communist regime in 1990 marked the beginning of far-reaching changes in Mongolian politics and law. The adoption of a new constitution in 1992 served as its watershed moment since it established a separate branch of government called judiciary. Judicial independence is said to be enshrined by Article one which says that "judicial power shall be exercised through courts" and bars interference with judicial processes (Odonkhuu, 2014; Tseveen & Battsetseg, 2009).

The judicial system of Mongolia consists of different levels of courts including Supreme Court, aimag (provincial) courts and soum (district) courts. Uniting all these lower-level courts together is Supreme Court serving as appellate court which interprets legislation and ensures uniform application across other lower-level courts. Following these constitutional reforms over several years various laws were passed to improve the judicial framework such as the Law on Courts (1993) & the Law on the Status of Judges (1998) (Chimid, 2017; Gramckow & Allen, 2011). These legislations strived to clarify their roles as presiding officers, set rules for appointment criteria, and describe administrative processes within an institution. Still there have been challenges towards implementing these reforms or making sure that judiciary operates autonomously (Chimid, 2017; Gramckow & Allen, 2011).

The General Council of Courts oversees the judiciary, ensuring that judges are appointed based on merit and that the judiciary operates free from political interference. Various training programs and international collaborations have been initiated to improve judicial capacity and the rule of law. However, challenges remain, including issues related to judicial corruption and the need for further reforms to strengthen judicial independence.

In response to evolving political dynamics and governance challenges, Mongolia enacted significant constitutional amendments in 2019. These amendments aimed to strengthen the powers of the Prime Minister, enhance the accountability of the executive branch, and improve the balance between the executive and legislative branches. The reforms also sought to reinforce judicial independence and improve the efficiency of government operations.

In recent years, Mongolia has made a number of moves to further consolidate its democratic institutions. The sub-project "Consolidating Parliamentary Democracy in Mongolia" was started in 2021 with support from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). This project is aimed at fortifying the oversight functions of the Mongolian Parliament and helping to put into practice the Law on Territorial and Administrative Units and Their Governance (Самбууням, 2023). Furthermore, Cabinet Secretariat of Government of Mongolia implemented the project "Decentralization Policy Support" with SDC development assistance which have facilitated legal reforms towards governance improvement and empowerment of local authorities. They have been able to revise as well as ratify several significant laws such as Law on legal status of capital city Ulaanbaatar and Law on Administrative and Territorial units and their governance (Самбууням, 2023).

Although Mongolia has significantly progressed in developing its democratic institutions, there are still challenges that hinder consolidation of democracy in this country. This necessitates addressing issues such as corruption, economic inequality, rule of law among others for ensuring long-term stability of democratic system in Mongolia.

### **3.3.3. Democratic Consolidation and the role of Civil Society in Mongolia**

For 30 years now, civil society has been a cornerstone of Mongolia's democratic system since peaceful transition to democracy in the 1990s. Civil Societies have played a critical role in promoting democratic values, advocating for human rights and increasing public participation in governance.

The roots of Mongolian civil society can be traced back to the 1990 democratic revolution which led to the end of one-party rule of MPRP. In accordance with its law on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) enacted in 1997, the Mongolian government provided a legal basis for establishment and functioning of CSOs (International Labour Organisation, 1997). This was instrumental in creating an enabling environment that would guarantee citizens' right to association, assembly and expression paving way for stronger civil society. The enactment of this law resulted in significant growth in the number of NGOs operating within Mongolia. By the year 2000 there were around one thousand five hundred registered NGO's working on different issues such as environmental protection, human rights and social services. This rapid growth reflected increased consciousness among ordinary people regarding civic involvement and advocacy necessary for a vibrant democracy.

Civil society organizations have played a crucial role in several key areas since the 1990s:

- i. **Advocacy and Human Rights:** It is NGOs that have been at the forefront of advocating for human rights and social justice in Mongolia. Center on Human Rights Studies or Open Society Forum are organizations that have been very active exposing violations about human rights as well as calling for reforms through legal means.
- ii. **Environmental Protection:** Environmental NGOs like Mongolian Nature and Environment Consortium are essential partners when it comes to sustainable development promotion as well as environmental conservation. They are responsible for having initiated setting up protected areas alongside pushing environment related laws.
- iii. **Public Participation & Governance:** Civil society has played a crucial role in enhancing public participation in governance. Initiatives such as the "Citizen's Voice" project have empowered citizens to be involved in local decision-making processes, hence cultivating a culture of accountability and transparency.
- iv. **Education and Capacity Building:** Several NGOs have given specific focus on education as well as capacity building thereby empowering communities and their members through training programs and other resources. The youth have particularly benefited from civic education projects that have been key in promoting democratic values.

Despite the great achievements made by civil society towards democratic consolidation of Mongolia, Civil Societies in Mongolia have faced many challenges:

- i. **Regulatory Environment:** In recent years, there have been concerns about a tightening regulatory environment for NGOs. Talks about changes in legislation regarding associations, foundations among others raise fears among civil society representatives who claim that these laws may impede operations of NGOs and jeopardize their independence (Castagna, 2022).
- ii. **Funding and Resources:** Access to funding remains a critical challenge for many NGOs. While international donor support has been crucial, local organizations often struggle to secure sustainable funding sources. This is further complicated by economic downturns as well as changes in priorities of donors (Tina, 2022).
- iii. **Political Influence and Public Opinion:** In addition, other civil society organizations have faced political pressure and public doubt. Moreover, there are claims that some NGOs are driven by political interests or funded from abroad resulting into loss of public confidence. For example, an opinion poll conducted recently revealed that 60% of Mongolians have a favorable perception of civil society organizations, a figure that is significantly higher than the corresponding statistics for political parties (Castagna, 2022).

This makes Mongolian civil society one of the most important components in its democratic landscape today. Technology and social media platforms are increasingly being used by such organizations to gain support as well as raise awareness on pertinent issues affecting them. Initiatives like the "Civil Society Now" platform launched by People in Need intend to enhance local CSOs through capacity building tools and provision of international funding opportunities (Tina, 2022). The international community which includes International Republican Institute (IRI) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) among others still supports Mongolia's civil society strength. Moreover, these partnerships are vital for developing a resilient civil society capable enough to advocate for democratic governance and human rights.

### **3.4. Challenges of Democratic Governance in Mongolia**

It is noteworthy that the processes of democratisation and the reinforcement of the democratic institutions in Mongolia have progressed notably since the beginning of the 1990s. However, to sustain and continue the democratic governance reform and development in Mongolia, more needs to be done and constant monitoring is required.



The challenge relates to political corruption continues to be a major problem and erodes the citizens' confidence in the political leadership. It includes governance inefficiencies as a challenge. The problems associated with bureaucracy and lack of coordination between different departments as well as ministries can act as barriers to the implementation of policies and delivery of public services in Mongolia. Furthermore, political environment is mostly divided and short-sighted, which is not favourable for long-term planning and stability of the policies in Mongolia.

Among the countries that performed within the top 25 percent within the Global State of Democracy framework, Mongolia has seen deteriorations in the areas of Civil Liberties, Economic Equality, Freedom of Expression, Free Political Parties, and Freedom of the Press (Global State of Democracy, 2024). The mining sector has also been associated with corruption, and current public demonstrations on corruption in the coal sector. This has resulted in reduced public confidence in government especially the young generation who is angry with economic injustices and no economic prospects (Global State of Democracy, 2024).

The Mongolian People's Party has proclaimed 2023 as the year of the battle against corruption, adopting five steps to safeguard whistle-blowers and eliminate corruption, extradite corruption-affected persons, seize the stolen money, and enhance transparency (Jargalsaikhan & Namjildorj, 2023). Nonetheless, party leaders have failed in the implementation of the said measures as all the scandals of the year 2023 including the Tavan Tolgoi coal case and the Educational Loan Fund scandals involve members of the ruling party. Political instability has been dealt with by altering the constitution, the distribution of vote, parliamentarians in the cabinet, and the relationship between the president and the prime minister.

Journalists are often threatened and arrested; an opposition candidate was killed during the legislative election in 2024 (Global State of Democracy, 2024). Mongolia a country that embarked on a process of Democratisation over twenty years ago has had a high level of poverty, poverty in the country is still high at 29 percent, while the economic growth reached double digit in 2011 (Tuya, 2013).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Findings from this study highlight Mongolia's achievements in democratisation are worth mentioning given its geopolitical surroundings and historical background. Establishment of a multi-party system and adoption of democratic constitution in 1992 laid the groundwork for democratic governance. Regular elections have also been held that are mostly free and fair which demonstrates Mongolia's commitment to democracy. Furthermore, active civil society involvement and relatively free press underscore some strides made in nurturing democratic norms and values. These wins served not only to cement Mongolian democratic institutions, but they increased international clout as a nation-state among other democratisers against authoritarian regimes.

Despite this development, there are several tough challenges facing the democratisation process in Mongolia. Political instability including frequent changes in government as well as fragmented party system undermine policy consistency and effective governance. Often characterized by personality-based politics rather than issue driven ones, corruption weakens institutional framework too leading into more instabilities resulting from change of government etc. in Mongolia. Corruption remains rampant thereby undermining public trust in political systems, thereby obstructing attempts to enhance openness or accountability. The economic reliance on mineral exports poses difficulties for pursuing sustainable development due to global market volatilities.

Democratisation amid socio-economic inequalities especially between urban areas further complicates Mongolia's efforts at stability building. Rapid urbanisation processes accompanied with economic transformations have contributed into social dislocation leaving gaps that challenge state capacity to offer equitable public services and infrastructure. Additionally, a

unique cultural dilemma arises from blending traditional nomadic ways of life into modern democratic governance hence requiring sensitive and inclusive policy approaches. Several strategic suggestions are therefore offered to address these multifaceted challenges and strengthen Mongolia's democratic framework:

i. **Strengthening Political Institutions and Practices:**

**Institutional Reform:** Enact comprehensive reforms that will improve the stability and functionality of political institutions, including revising electoral laws to ensure politics is issues based as well as strengthening party discipline in Mongolia.

**Capacity Building:** Invest in capacity building for political leaders and public officials aimed at improving governance practices, promoting a culture of accountability and transparency.

ii. **Combatting Corruption:**

**Anti-Corruption Measures:** Enhance anti-corruption strategies by establishing an independent corruption prevention commission with strong investigative powers besides legal mandates to prosecute cases.

**Public Engagement:** Enhance public engagement in anti-corruption efforts through promotion of transparency and citizen participation in monitoring the activities of government.

iii. **Promoting Economic Diversification and Sustainable Development:**

**Economic Diversification:** Mongolia requires a stringent diversification plan aimed at lessening reliance on mineral exports like agriculture, tourism or technology-based sectors.

**Inclusive Development:** Ensure policies that promote inclusivity while addressing socio-economic disparities to guarantee equal access to resources for all citizens.

iv. **Enhancing Social and Cultural Integration:**

**Rural Development:** Invest in rural development initiatives can help Mongolian state to improve infrastructure and service provision in remote areas thus reducing urban-rural disparities.

**Cultural Sensitivity:** Mongolia needs to develop policies that acknowledge traditional nomadic practices, ensuring that modernization efforts are culturally sensitive and inclusive.

v. **Civil Society and Media Support:**

**Empowering Civil Society:** As a responsible democratic power, Mongolia must support civil society organizations and empowering them to be key actors in the fight for democratic values, human rights, and social justice.

**Media Freedom:** Safeguard media freedom and independence recognizing the crucial role of free press in holding power accountable as well as promoting informed citizenship.

vi. **Geopolitical Strategy:**

**Balanced Foreign Policy:** Sustain a balanced foreign policy that capitalizes on Mongolia's strategic position without jeopardizing its sovereignty, democracy or human rights. It is about diplomatic engagement with regional powers and international organizations to assist in achieving Mongolian political objectives and setting Mongolia on a path towards development. In this aspect the 'Third Neighbour Policy of Mongolia' needs to be implemented in a more aggressive manner.

To conclude, Mongolia's democratisation process offers some lessons regarding post-communist transitions including both possibilities as well as difficulties involved. The country has done fairly well in terms of institutionalising democracy, but numerous challenges are still persistent which require continuous attention and concerted efforts being made towards addressing them. By introducing strategic reforms, endorsing comprehensive development, fostering transparency culture and nurturing a sense of accountability within state institutions Mongolia can reinforce further consolidation of its democratic gains thereby securing this nation a sturdy living democracy for generations yet unborn. These critical reflections and suggestions aim at deepening understanding about democracy in Mongolia while providing guidance on how to sustain it moving forward.

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