

Electoral System and Multiparty Democracy in Mongolia

RAJ DEEP

Ph.D. Scholar

Centre for Inner Asian Studies, School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (India)

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a word that has been most widely discussed and debated in the twenty first century. The different interpretations of the word have added several new dimensions to it making it more and more diversified. However, the two important features which could be delineated as the most fundamental for any democratic existence are the notions of 'equality' and 'liberty'. For a successful running of democracy, these two terms should always be complementary to each other rather than being antagonistic. The functional anomaly between these two fundamental features could pose a real threat to the very democratic existence. In other words, it could be said that the qualification for successful democracy is contingent on the semi balance of these two important parameters. The third wave of democratization has brought within its ambit most of the developing and third world countries by dispersing these very basic ideas of liberty and equality across the globe.

The disintegration of Soviet Union in early 1990's was an epoch-making event. It brought an end to the cold war era and consequent to it the bipolar world as after that for every practical purpose's the United States was seen as the sole power centre. With the USA attaining the super power status and growth of capitalism and liberalism, the ideological battle was being perceived as coming to a conclusive end. These liberal ideas have a turning effect on most of the countries which were earlier part of 'Warsaw Pact' and after the disintegration of Soviet Union were finding themselves on the losing side

of the global spectrum. Mongolia once considered as the client state of Soviet Union was one such country which found herself in the same spot. However, it is equally true that the disintegration of Soviet Union has not only brought along with it challenges only but opportunities also. Mongolia though was left vulnerable by the global and rapid changes tried to overcome the setback by devising strategies which could minimize the inherent losses.

Orchilan Baigalat and *Iltod* (the Mongolian version of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*) kick started the demand for political and economic reforms in Mongolia. Adoption of new constitution in 1992 based on liberal principles could be termed as a watershed in the democratic evolution of Mongolia. The political space was liberalized and made open for parties other than the dominant Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP). It made the people of Mongolia to think of alternative choices other than the MPRP. On the demand side, it provided the people with the liberty to choose from varied political spectrum and on the supply-side ensured a kind of equal opportunity for parties other than MPRP to claim their political stakes which were hitherto constrained by the political and institutional arrangements. However, an important question here to ponder upon was what could be the mechanism which could ensure the practice and sustenance of democracy in the region? Unanimously the best constitutive element which guarantees the same could be seen in terms of electoral output and hence corollary to this, elections are considered as the best innate exercise which could be conducive to the democratic

practices in the region.

The electoral trajectory in emerging and transient democracies like Mongolia have been conditioned by numerous factors ranging from the choice of electoral system to establishment of multiparty system to changes in electoral size owing to the fluidity of the political system. However not only the above-mentioned institutional changes but even behavioural changes like changes in voter's perception as well as the quantitative and qualitative changes within the party system also contributed to the efficacy of political transition. The role of institutions becomes very important for the proper functioning of democracy. The credibility and legitimacy of institutions have contributed to the strengthening of democratic norms in any country. Though there are many countries which are marked by the presence of institutions but still they are considered as undemocratic because of their minimalist role. Of all the institutional factors the role of electoral system deserves special attention as the choice of the same becomes decisive in determining the political winner or loser. In other way it could be said that it holds the key to power and hence it becomes a choice of policy outcome.

Electoral systems are considered as the mechanism through which the voter's preferences are aggregated and translated into electoral results. The best electoral system in this way can be defined as the one which can precisely and straightforwardly reflect the choices of voters. However, it is to be understood that none of the electoral systems can do this as a passive translation of individual preferences into collective choices. No electoral system is a perfect reflection of the preferences of voters or existing fault lines or cleavages operating in a society. The nature of every electoral system is structured and designed with certain biases and functional attributes. Hence there are always equal chances that the same set of voters or even a single voter could come up with different choices when confronted with a different sub set of electoral systems. Every electoral system has a mechanical and constraining effect on the choices of voters. Thus, it can be easily pointed out that not only there is imperfect reflection of voter preferences in the first instance but even the voter preferences are themselves shaped by the electoral system. Preferences do not and cannot exist independently of it (Horowitz 2003).

There are number of theoretical and empirical literatures which points out that the degree of government

effectiveness is one or more way linked to the workable majority of the legislature and the more dispersed and fragmented political system could be a kind of impediment to the effectiveness of government. This workable majority is a function of the electoral outcome and hence related to the electoral system. Hence if a system is able to garner workable majority in the legislature it is expected that there would be value consistency in terms of political outcome. In terms of electoral system, the plurality/majority system is considered to be producing electoral outcomes which are more effective. The main argument originally developed by Maurice Duverger was that as only one candidate could win from each party, candidates tried to garner support as wide as possible and this in turn provides a kind of incentive for accumulation of varied interests into a fewer number of political parties (Duverger, 1954). On the other hand, proportional system by providing space and voices to different opinions are thought to be promoting divisive tendencies and hence multiplication of parties and less effective governments (Menocal, 2011).

However, this kind of correlation between the electoral system and government effectiveness is more of probabilistic kind than being deterministic. In the book, '*Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*', the formal model of Duverger's law was tested by using data on the electoral system from 77 democracies. It was found that the Duverger's prediction towards a two-party system holds true only on the basis of certain assumptions which not necessarily always bears out in practice. Thus, it brings out a conclusion that the number of parties in a party system depends on the interaction between electoral and social structures (Cox, 1997).

There is another approach to look at the effectiveness of the electoral system irrespective of it's being either plural or proportional and it is related with the different dynamics and incentives associated with the various sub categories of electoral systems. It is found out that if the electoral system is more candidate centric and there is more pressure for intra party competition then there are high chances of party being fragmented irrespective of its being plural or proportional (Hallerberg and Marier, 2004). Now this kind of tendency can be problematic for emerging and incipient democracies where the party roots are not that strong and inherently weak. In most of the cases the thrust for capturing the political landscape led to the proliferation of political parties which are inherently

weak and worked with the single motive of using the political platform as a tool for accessing power. For e.g. in Thailand where Block Vote system was in use between 1975 to 1996 led to the fragmentation of party system with an average of more than five effective national parties. However, this sub category of plurality system was expected to be promoting a two-party system instead. But as the party system matures and evolved with time there was an increasing trend to abandon Block Vote in favour of other systems thereby promoting the development of political parties (Reynolds *et al.*, 2005).

There are different opinions regarding the suitability of different types of electoral systems in conflict prone states. One school of thought considers proportional representation as the best way to manage ethnic/religious conflicts as they provide the political space even to the least marginalized sections. This provides an opportunity for the so-called marginalized groups to express themselves into identity-based parties and represent themselves in the parliament according to their proportionality. Arend Lijphart's in the book, '*Patterns of Democracy*' attempts to correlate the relationship between the electoral system and violence and found that the consensual (i.e. PR) democracies performs better when it comes to managing violence. This model of consociational democracy was promoted after a detailed examination of some Continental European countries like Switzerland, Netherlands and Belgium (Lijphart, 1999).

However, another school of thought termed the PR system as more divisive and likely to increase conflict rather than generating compromise as they promote fragmentation and narrowing of social identities (Horowitz, 2003). Low thresholds resulted in proliferation of parties which can make or break the government and can have disproportionate effect on determining policy and receiving patronage. Thus, though this school of thought considers both proportionality and moderation as worthwhile goals but to achieve both simultaneously is a kind of impossible task as both operates in opposite directions (Horowitz, 2003). According to this tradition, electoral systems are expected of generating incentives for conciliation among different groups and help to forge alliances between them so that it becomes a patterned way necessary for electoral success. The plurality system is considered to be providing those kinds of incentives as the candidates here need to garner a wide net of support for victory. However, this is also to be noted that these features hold true only when the potentially conflicting

groups are not regionally located or/and the party system is not fragmented (Horowitz, 2003).

Thus, we found that the choice of electoral system is dependent rather correlated with a number of factors ranging from cultural background to party system determinants to social structures and many other institutional and behavioural factors discussed above. It is under this background that the present study will make an attempt to analyse the emergence of multiparty democracy in Mongolia and the various electoral system choices since 1992 conditioned by the temporal and spatial factors.

Emergence of Multiparty Democracy in Mongolia: 1992-2016:

The 1992 parliamentary elections were fought under the block voting system, which was a part of majority system and here the plurality rules were applied in a multimember district rather than in a single member district. Hence accordingly, in April 1992, a new set of laws concerning the electoral System was passed which stipulated that the 76 members of the parliament would be elected by plurality votes in all the twenty-six districts with each district having multi-member constituency from two to four. This electoral system is known as the Block Voting system (Schafferer, 2004: 109-110).

After the first parliamentary elections of 1992, the democratic parties realized that the Block Voting system that requires a multi-member constituency-based election in the 26 districts of Mongolia was unduly favourable to the MPRP and detrimental to the opposition parties. Hence there were passionate debates about the changes in the electoral systems in the ensuing period. The election law was amended for the second time in 1996 by the Mongolian parliament. The electoral system was changed from the multi-member constituency plurality system to First Past the Post system that provides single member constituencies. Here, the number of electoral constituencies was demarcated into separate 76 units rather than the previously 26 districts with multi-member constituencies (Brick, Gastil and Kimberling, 1992). By the parliamentary election of 1996, the democratic parties realized about the invincibility of a further unity among themselves in order to oust MPRP from power. Thus, Democratic Party and MSDP came together and organized the 'Democratic Union Association' to participate in the elections. The 'Democratic Union Association' won fifty seats; the MPRP won 25 and the

Mongolian Traditional United Party 1 seat (Altantsetseg, 1999). They scored a dramatic victory and brought an end to the uninterrupted 75 years of rule by MPRP.

However, in the interim period between 1996 and 2000, Democratic Party witnessed major split due to internal strife and by the time of 2000 parliamentary elections many new political parties were formed. In fact, the democratic forces were split into twelve parties and three-party coalitions that altogether nominated 560 candidates. The MPRP, on the other hand, nominated 76 candidates, that is one in each of the 76 single seat constituencies, and ran a highly focused campaign targeting young voters. Unsurprisingly, the MPRP clearly showed that without unity the democratic forces cannot win elections.

Learning from the past experiences when a moment of unity brought the DA into power and fissures led to defeat, the opposition parties were solidly united against MPRP in 2004. Here, seven political parties took part in the election and together nominated 153 candidates. The party of Civil Courage, the Democratic Party, and the Motherland-Mongolian Democratic New Socialist Party formed a coalition called the Motherland Democracy (MLD). The remaining 15 candidates were independents. Apart from the MLD, only the ruling MPRP nominated one candidate in each of the 76 single-seat constituencies. Compared with the previous election, the average number of candidates contesting in each electoral district decreased from nine to three, which significantly increased the chances of the candidates nominated by the opposition camp. The MPRP indeed lost half of the parliamentary seats it had captured in 2000, whereas the opposition gained substantial support (Schafferer, 2004). Since none of the party or coalition had adequate majority to form the government on their own, the Democratic Party and MPRP, despite being the rivals, came together and formed the government. This was the symbol of the maturity of multi-party democracy in Mongolia. Both the parliamentary elections of 2000 and 2004 were held under the First Past the Post System, passed in 1996.

The Electoral System before 2008 parliamentary elections changed from single-member constituency based FPTP system to multi-member electoral constituency-based Block Voting System. However, it must be noted that this system was meant to benefit only two big parties and the smaller parties were going to be at the receiving end. However, in 2008 parliamentary elections, despite contesting as a united outfit, the

Democratic Party lost out to MPRP. In this election, the MPRP won 46 seats; the Democratic Party 27 seats; and three small parties one seat each. Those numbers gave the ruling party the majority it needs in the 76-seat Parliament to form a government (Wong, 2008). There was violence in many parts of the country due to the lack of faith in the fairness and freeness of this election and this particular juncture was the darkest spot in the evolution of Mongolian democracy. However, as a sign of the maturity of the political parties and Mongolian democracy, the MPRP that has absolute majority to form the government, invited and formed the government along with Democratic Party.

The 2012 parliamentary election was epoch making in many aspects. Firstly, Mongolia on December 14, 2011, adopted and operationalised the new revised electoral laws that stipulated a transition from the existing majoritarian (FPTP or Block Voting System) system to a Mixed-Member Majoritarian cum Proportional Representative System (Mongolia Today, 2011). This significantly changed the political dynamics of Mongolia as the new system allowed other parties to gain traction. Secondly, the new election law also introduced a candidacy quota of 20% for women. Also, to make it more inclusive an attempt was made to address the grievances of Kazakh minorities. Finally, a provision was also added to extend the facility of voting to the residents living outside Mongolia. The 2012 parliamentary elections, held on 28 June 2012 yielded the following results: The Democratic Party (DP) won 34 out of the 76 seats, the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) won 26 seats, the Justice Coalition won 11 seats, the Civil Will-Green Party won 2 seats, and 3 independent candidates each won a seat. The DP, Justice Coalition and Civil Will-Green Party took part in the coalition government. In the cabinet, the DP holds 11 seats, the Justice Coalition 4 seats and the Civil Will-Green Party one (BTI, 2014:2-4).

2016 parliamentary elections took place on 29th June 2016. Following the Constitutional Court's decision, the proportionality element was struck down on ground of being ultra vires and the electoral system was again changed from Mixed-Majoritarian cum PR system to plurality system *i.e.* FPTP. Though the last-minute change was made to suit the electoral design of the incumbent Democratic Party but the results went completely against them as they were able to retain only 9 seats with a total loss of 25 seats from the previous elections. Mongolian People's Party (MPP) bagged 65 of the 76 seats and

was successful in projecting itself as a better political alternative than the Democrats. Enkhbayar's MPRP got single seat and the rest one seat was taken by an independent.

To conclude it can be said that the democratic transition of Mongolia with the emergence of multi-party democracy since 1990 has been a difficult but highly successful story. Since beginning there has been a pattern of a single dominant party i.e. MPRP with its constant presence for the most part of the 1990s and 2000s and on the other side there was a coalition which as an oppositional symbol for the other parties, collectively known as Democratic Party/coalition, who witnessed both fissures and fusion among themselves at different electoral periods. The circle of unity and split of Democratic Party/coalition got completed when MPRP witnessed a split by 2010. However, another positive development that emerged during this period was the attainment of political maturity among the political outfits on the issue of stability of the democratic political systems. Therefore, when there was a need the first two largest political parties, MPRP and Democratic parties, who otherwise were rivals, formed coalition government in 2004 as well as 2008.

To be noted the choice of electoral systems become more important for transient democracies like Mongolia as its effectiveness and credibility added to the legitimacy of the government and the very subversion of the same could be debilitating for the successful running of the democracy itself. The choice of electoral system in Mongolia could be seen conditioned by the twin demands of representation and effectiveness i.e. oscillating between these two demands. However a continuous effort is being made to balance between the twin parameters of "effectiveness" and "representativeness" and the very balance between the two signified the emerging maturity, stability and responsibility among the political parties leading to the inference that the central characteristics that could be attributed to the multi-party system in Mongolia is "effectiveness" with a due sensitivity to "representativeness" as an implicit and inherent characteristics. Finally, as a concluding remark it can be said that the dominant characteristics of the pattern of evolution of multi-party election in Mongolia from 1996-2016 has been a move towards creating an effective and stable governmental system while accommodating the demand of representativeness simultaneously.

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