

# ELECTIONWATCH MONGOLIA



## Mongolia Post-Election Watch: June 2009 Presidential Election

Mongolia is the only country in Central Asia, and one of a handful of countries in East Asia, that continues to boast dynamic institutions of democracy. Mongolia embarked on its democratic path when it ratified its constitution in 1992. Since that time Mongolia has held five parliamentary elections, five presidential elections and five local elections. From election to election, Mongolians successfully exercise their right to choose a democratic government and proudly point to successive peaceful transfers of power.

Throughout this 17-year period, Mongolia has created and strengthened democratic institutions including the national legislature, judiciary, political parties and civil society. In 2007, helped by the strength of those same institutions, Mongolia was one of the few countries in the region to qualify for Millennium Challenge Corporation assistance.

## Political Environment

A year ago, on June 29, 2008, Mongolia held parliamentary elections. Although international observers deemed the election largely free and transparent, election day was marred by violent protests against the election results by those who had lost trust in the government, political parties and the General Election Commission (GEC). The post-election violence led to the tragic death of five individuals, serious injury to hundreds of people and significant loss of property. The risk of a further spread of post-election violence forced the President of Mongolia to declare a state of emergency for the first time in Mongolia's history. Incoming Prime Minister S. Bayar tried to unite the country after the election by forming a coalition cabinet and asking the State Great Hural (SGH), the Mongolian parliament, to work closely together on key issues of legislation to demonstrate national unity.

Lingering dissatisfaction with parliamentary elections spilled over into local elections held later in 2008. In some districts of the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, local elections had to be repeated because the 50 percent voter participation threshold could not be met – a first in the country. In an attempt to build trust in the electoral system and make the elections more transparent and fair, the GEC revised its election procedures to include tighter control on the issuance of national identification cards, which are used for voting and increased numbers of political party poll watchers in all polling stations.

Further, in January 2009, the SGH amended the Law on Mongolian Presidential Election to provide enhanced checks and balances in the organization, implementation and oversight of the election process, from the compilation of voting lists, to monitoring on Election Day, to post-election vote counting. In addition to clarifying the roles and responsibilities of election committees (EC), the revised law also seeks to ensure greater political parity among

EC commissioners, who are nominated by local provincial parliaments called *hurals*.

In the past, the *hurals* nominated commissioners almost exclusively from the political party in power, effectively giving one party control over every aspect of the election process. The new amendment mandates that local provincial parliaments seek balanced representation among the major political parties when nominating EC commissioners.

According to the Law on Mongolian Presidential Election, any political party represented in the SGH can nominate a candidate in the presidential election. Four political parties – the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), Democratic Party (DP), Citizen's Will Party (CWP) and Green Party – legally qualified to participate in the 2009 presidential election.

The MPRP nominated its incumbent President N. Enkhbayar to run on its behalf, while former DP Chairman and Prime Minister Ts. Elbegdorj beat five other candidates to win his party's nomination. The two remaining parties, CWP and Green Party agreed to form a "democratic alliance" with the DP and its candidate Ts. Elbegdorj.

MPRP candidate N. Enkhbayar put forward an election program based on the MPRP's parliamentary elections platform, promising to fulfill his party's election promise of a 1.5 million MNT (approximately \$1,100 USD) allowance and a free public university education for all Mongolian citizens. The DP candidate Ts. Elbegdorj ran on a platform of "change," advocating for reform of Mongolia's judicial sector and enhanced anti-corruption measures.

## Election Process and Results

On Sunday, May 24, 2009, Mongolians went to the polls to elect their fifth president since the adoption of their democratic constitution in 1992. Voting took place in 1,699 polling stations across the country. According to the GEC, 1,098,875 voters out of 1,493,217 registered voters (73.59 percent) cast their ballot on Election Day.

According to the official election results, DP candidate Ts. Elbegdorj won the election by winning 562,718 votes (51.21 percent) versus 520,948 votes (47.41 percent) for MPRP candidate N. Enkhbayar. To the surprise of many, voter participation in the 2009 presidential election was only 1.39 percent less than the previous presidential election in 2005.

While the International Republican Institute (IRI) did not field a full election observation, it did see a number of positive changes in polling and election procedural practices for the 2009 presidential election, such as efforts to assure more politically balanced ECs, equal representation of political party poll watchers, measures to prevent double voting, use of video cameras in polling stations in Ulaanbaatar to document vote counting and the use of color-marked ballot papers for added security. Despite these positive measures, much remains to be done to improve polling and vote-counting practices.

## Election Impact

Persistent economic hardship, pervasive corruption and rising unemployment were believed to be the major factors that drove Mongolian voters to select new leadership and a new

direction in hopes of better results from their government. The higher than expected voter turnout for this election was a stark example of the commitment of the Mongolian people to actively impact the political direction of the country. Despite fears of low voter turnout or post-election violence, Mongolian voters demonstrated their refusal to be alienated from the political decision-making processes of their country by actively participating in the election.

## IRI in Mongolia

IRI began working in Mongolia in 1992, focusing on political party development, institutional capacity building of the SGH and electoral capacity working with the GEC. IRI's long-standing presence in Mongolia has established a reputation as an expert organization willing to work with all political parties and civil society organizations, both in Ulaanbaatar and at the grassroots level in *aimags* across Mongolia.

For example, Mongolian democrats believe IRI's assistance was crucial to their 1996 victory, and their resulting government cemented democratic institutions and practices in the country. The relatively small size of the national parliament, just 76 members, has allowed IRI to work directly with a majority of members of parliament (MPs) and their offices, further cementing IRI's key role in advocating reforms and providing recommendations and advice. In April 2009, a longstanding and fruitful cooperation between IRI and SGH culminated with the passage of the historic ethics legislation for Mongolian MPs.

Public opinion analysis is a major component of IRI's activities in Mongolia. IRI utilizes public opinion research to help governing and opposition parties remain focused on the priority issues that motivate voters, and to develop responsive, issue-based policies and electoral programs. As part of the 2009 election program, IRI conducted six regional focus group discussions. The results of these focus group discussions were used throughout the 2009 pre-election period to inform political parties at national and local levels. Additionally, IRI provided political parties and presidential candidate campaigns with data regarding the issues Mongolians were concerned most about: Corruption, the economy, jobs and better living standards.

IRI, with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, currently works with the SGH and political parties to increase public input in decision-making, empower civil society to increase awareness of important issues among elected officials and expand the political space for increased participation of youth.



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