



## Freedom in the World - ↑ Mongolia (2010)

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Capital:  
Ulaanbaatar

Population:  
2,708,000

Political Rights Score: 2 \*

Civil Liberties Score: 2 \*

Status: Free

Trend Arrow

Mongolia received an upward trend arrow due to a fair and competitive presidential election, as well as the peaceful transfer of authority from one prime minister to another.

### Overview

**Tsakhagiin Elbegdorj of the opposition Democratic Party won the May 2009 presidential election, which international observers deemed free and fair. The incumbent quickly conceded defeat, and the country avoided the sort of violent protests that had followed disputed parliamentary elections in 2008. Although many of those arrested in that year's unrest were freed under an amnesty law in 2009, observers raised concerns over beatings in detention and a lack of punishment for police who used deadly force to disperse the protesters. In October, the prime minister since 2007 resigned for health reasons, and power was transferred without incident to a new premier.**

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Once the center of Genghis Khan's sprawling empire, Mongolia was ruled by China for two centuries until Soviet-backed forces took control in the early 1920s. A people's republic was proclaimed in 1924, and the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) established a one-party communist state. In response to persistent antigovernment protests, the MPRP legalized opposition parties in 1990. However, facing a poorly prepared and underfunded opposition, the MPRP easily won the first multiparty parliamentary elections that year, and won again in 1992.

The MPRP was voted out in the 1996 parliamentary elections after 72 years in office, and power was transferred peacefully to the opposition Democratic Union Coalition. The new government sought to implement political and economic reforms, but after an economic downturn the following year, the MPRP regained power with victories in both the 1997 presidential election and the 2000 parliamentary vote.

The June 2004 parliamentary elections were marred by irregularities and gave neither side a majority. The MPRP consequently agreed to a power-sharing

government with the Motherland Democracy Coalition (MDC), the latest incarnation of the opposition alliance. Former prime minister Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj of the MDC returned to the premiership, while Natsagiin Bagabandi of the MPRP carried on in the largely ceremonial presidency.

The MPRP's Nambaryn Enkhbayar, the parliament speaker and a former prime minister, won the presidential election in May 2005, despite street demonstrations by protesters who accused him of corruption. In January 2006, the MDC-MPRP coalition government broke down, and the MPRP formed a new government with several small parties and defectors from the MDC. Miyeegombo Enkhbold of the MPRP became prime minister, but he was replaced in November 2007 by Sanjaa Bayar after being accused of excessive political favoritism and corruption.

The initial results of the June 28, 2008, parliamentary elections handed the MPRP a solid majority, and the opposition Democratic Party (DP) and others challenged the outcome. Small-scale political protests escalated into large demonstrations in the capital, and buildings including the MPRP headquarters were looted and burned. Five people were killed, scores were injured, and over 700 people were arrested. The government declared a four-day state of emergency on July 2. The final vote tally in August gave the MPRP 46 seats and the DP 27, and Bayar remained in office as prime minister.

Elbegdorj of the DP took 51.2 percent of the vote in the May 2009 presidential election, becoming the first DP president, though he had previously served twice as prime minister. Enkhbayar, the incumbent, quickly admitted defeat, averting a repeat of the previous year's unrest. International observers deemed the election generally free and fair. In October, Bayar resigned as prime minister for health reasons. He was replaced by Foreign Minister Sukhbaatar Batbold, reputedly one of the richest men in Mongolia.

The combined effects of the global economic downturn and an extremely harsh winter exacerbated Mongolia's high poverty and unemployment rates in 2009. In October, a \$5 billion contract was signed with Ivanhoe/Rio Tinto, a Canadian and Australian company, to develop copper and gold mines. Though the deal was widely seen as a positive development, some observers expressed concerns over ongoing corruption and a lack of transparency surrounding the contract's negotiations. Also in 2009, the government set up a Human Development Fund to distribute mining royalties to citizens.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties**

Mongolia is an electoral democracy. The 2009 presidential election was generally considered free and fair by international observers. Parliamentary balloting has varied over the years between multimember and single-member districts, and there is concern that these frequent changes make it difficult to stabilize the expectations of political elites or enhance popular confidence in democratic government. The prime minister, who holds most executive power, is nominated

by the party or coalition with the most seats in the 76-member parliament (the State Great Hural) and approved by the parliament with the agreement of the president. There is no requirement that the prime minister be an elected member of parliament. The president is head of state and of the armed forces, and can veto legislation, subject to a two-thirds parliamentary override. Both the president and the parliament are directly elected for four-year terms.

The MPRP continues to be the most powerful party, but a number of smaller opposition groups are competitive, as evidenced by DP's victory in the 2009 presidential election.

Corruption remains a serious problem in Mongolia. A 2009 survey conducted by the Asia Foundation and Sant Maral Foundation found that one in five households had paid bribes, an increase from the findings of an earlier poll. Since its creation in 2007, the Independent Authority Against Corruption has been active in investigating allegations and verifying asset declarations. According to government figures, over 53,000 officials and civil servants complied with income-declaration rules in 2009; at least 54 people who gave false or late statements were punished with dismissal or other disciplinary measures. Transparency International ranked Mongolia 120 out of 180 countries surveyed in its 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The government operates with limited transparency. In December 2009, however, an unprecedented public hearing was held on human rights abuses surrounding the 2008 postelection violence, with participation by civil society, the police, the parliament, and the National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR).

While the government generally respects press freedom, many journalists and independent publications practice a degree of self-censorship to avoid legal action under the State Secrets Law or libel laws that place the burden of proof on the defendant. The government has at times filed libel suits or launched tax audits against publications or journalists in the wake of critical articles. The media faced tight restrictions during the state of emergency in 2008, but the situation returned to normal in 2009.

There are hundreds of privately owned print and broadcast outlets, but the main source of news in the vast countryside is the state-owned Mongolian National Broadcasting (MNB). MNB's coverage of the 2009 presidential election was reportedly balanced, while commercial stations largely favored the incumbent. Foreign content from satellite television and radio services like the British Broadcasting Corporation and Voice of America is also increasingly available. The government does not interfere with internet access.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution. The fall of communism led to a growth in various Christian sects, as well as a revival of Mongolia's traditional Buddhism and shamanism. Religious groups are required to register with the

government and renew their status annually. While most registration requests are approved, according to the U.S. State Department, authorities in Tuv province have routinely denied registration to Christian churches. The Kazakh Muslim minority generally enjoys freedom of religion. Academic freedom is respected.

Freedoms of assembly and association are observed in law and in practice. However, in June 2009, the authorities denied registration to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Center, claiming that the group's name conflicted with Mongolian traditions; following public and international pressure, the authorities recognized the center in December. A number of environmental, human rights, and social welfare groups, while largely reliant on foreign donors, operate without government restriction. Trade unions are independent and active, and the government has generally protected their rights in recent years, though the downsizing or sale of many state factories has contributed to a sharp drop in union membership. Collective bargaining is legal, but in Mongolia's poor economy, employers are often able to set wages unilaterally.

The judiciary is independent, but corruption among judges persists. The police force has been known to make arbitrary arrests, hold detainees for long periods, and beat prisoners. Deaths in prisons continue to be reported, due largely to disease—often tuberculosis—exacerbated by insufficient food, heat, and medical care. In an NCHR survey of 100 people detained following the 2008 postelection riots, 88 reported being abused in detention. In several cases, coerced confessions were allegedly used to convict detainees of offenses such as "creating mass disorder." Police reportedly used live ammunition during the riots, which killed at least five people. A total of 10 police officers and four senior police officials were under investigation regarding the deaths, and all have been removed from their posts. It remained unclear at year's end whether they would be formally charged or covered by a general amnesty law passed in July 2009. The measure applied to minor crimes committed before late June 2009, and covered most civilians still in detention for the 2008 unrest.

The NCHR consists of three senior civil servants nominated by the president, the Supreme Court, and the parliament for six-year terms. It has played an active role in investigating the alleged 2008 police abuses, but at least 11 cases it submitted for prosecution were dismissed with little explanation.

While Mongolia is not a party to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and lacks legislation enabling the granting of asylum, the government frequently provides protection to refugees, including those fleeing persecution in China. However, in October 2009, a Chinese national, his wife, and his nine-year-old daughter were reportedly arrested by Chinese police officers with Mongolian police escorts outside the local office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Ulaanbataar. The family was immediately taken back to China without a court hearing, and the arrested man, the operator of a Mongol-Tibetan medical school in China, remained in detention there at year's end.

While women make up 60 percent of all university students as well as 60 percent of all judges, only five parliamentary seats are occupied by women. A 2005 law prohibited spousal abuse, and there have been dozens of convictions in recent years. However, social and cultural norms continue to discourage victims from reporting such crimes.

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*\* Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom. Click [here](#) for a full explanation of Freedom in the World methodology.*