

REGIONS ISSUES

[Reports](#) [Programs](#) [Initiatives](#) [News](#) [Experts](#) [Events](#) [Donate](#)

FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

- \

Mongolia

Mongolia | Freedom in the World 2012 |

OVERVIEW:

Recent contracts awarded in 2011 to Australian and German companies for the operation of the Tavan Tolgoi coal mine signaled the continuing trend of heavy foreign involvement in Mongolia's extractive resource industry, while the commitment to distribute mining royalties to all citizens has not yet been fulfilled. Meanwhile, a clothing factory outside the capital was discovered to be employing North Korean workers, whose wages were sent directly to the North Korean government.

Once the center of Genghis Khan's sprawling empire, Mongolia was ruled by China's Manchu Qing Empire for nearly 270 years. Mongolia declared its independence in 1911. After Chinese troops entered the country in 1919, Mongolia invited Russian Soviet forces to help secure control. Mongolia founded a people's republic in 1924, with the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) governing the country as 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 again in 1992.

The MPRP lost the 1996 parliamentary elections, and power was transferred peacefully to the opposition Democratic Union Coalition. After an economic downturn the following year, the MPRP won both the 1997 presidential election and the 2000 parliamentary vote. The 2004 parliamentary elections were marred by irregularities and gave neither side a majority. The MPRP consequently agreed to a power-sharing government with the opposition Motherland Democracy Coalition (MDC).

The MPRP's Nambaryn Enkhbayar, the parliament speaker and a former prime minister, won the 2005 presidential election, despite street demonstrations by protesters who accused him of corruption. In January 2006, the MDC-MPRP coalition government collapsed, and the MPRP formed a new government with several small parties and MDC defectors. 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 2008 parliamentary elections handed the MPRP a solid majority, but the opposition Democratic Party (DP) and others challenged the outcome. Small-scale protests escalated into large, violent demonstrations in the capital. Five people were killed, scores were injured, and over 700 others were arrested. The government declared a four-day state of emergency on July 2. The final vote tally released in August gave the MPRP 46 seats and the DP 27, and Bayar remained prime minister.

Former Prime Minister Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj of the opposition DP took 51 percent of the vote in the May 2009 presidential election, which international

2012 SCORES

STATUS

Free

FREEDOM RATING

2.0

CIVIL LIBERTIES

2

POLITICAL RIGHTS

2

observers deemed generally free and fair. In October, Bayar resigned as prime minister for health reasons and was replaced by Foreign Minister Sukhbaatar Batbold.

The global economic downturn, combined with an extremely harsh winter, exacerbated Mongolia's high poverty and unemployment rates in 2009. In October, after years of negotiations, a \$5 billion contract was signed with the international mining companies Ivanhoe Mines and Rio Tinto to develop a copper and gold mine in Oyu Tolgoi. Some expressed concerns over ongoing corruption and a lack of transparency surrounding the contract's negotiations. In response, the government set up a Human Development Fund (HDF) in 2009 to distribute mining royalties to citizens. However, the HDF has been controversial; President Elbegdorj wants to end most of the program, directing its funds toward children's services and university tuition.

In April 2010, a series of large-scale protests erupted over the government's failure to fulfill a campaign promise to distribute aid from mining royalties. In the largest demonstration, approximately 10,000 people convened in Ulaanbaatar, calling for the dissolution of the parliament. An agreement to officially end the protests was concluded on April 22, outlining constitutional modifications, government reporting requirements, and pledges to disburse funds to citizens in 2012 in the form of tuition fees, health coverage, and cash handouts.

Following German chancellor Angela Merkel's visit to Mongolia in October 2011, the contract to operate the Tavan Tolgoi coal mine was awarded to a joint venture between the German company Operta GmbH and the Australian company McMahon Holdings. Disputes over mining continued to dominate public debate in 2011, including concerns over water resources, labor rights, and protectionism.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES:

Mongolia is an electoral democracy. 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 instill confidence in democratic governance. 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 renamed itself the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) in November 2010 and elected Enkhbayar chairman in January 2011. The MPP continues to be the most powerful party, but a number of smaller opposition groups are competitive.

Corruption remains a serious problem in Mongolia. The Independent Authority Against Corruption (IAAC) has been actively investigating corruption allegations since 2007. In March 2011 the head of the IAAC, Chimgee Sangaragchaa, was sentenced to two years in prison for leaking state secrets and other charges. Sangaragchaa was released from prison on bail in October by order of the State Supreme Court, although his convictions were not overturned.

Although the government operates with limited transparency, the first Citizens' Hall was established in Ulaanbaatar in 2009 to encourage civic participation in the legislative processes. Citizens have the opportunity to provide feedback on draft laws and government services by attending such hearings or submitting their views via letter, fax, e-mail, or telephone. Transparency International ranked Mongolia 120 out of 183 countries surveyed in its 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index.

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 nongovernmental organization Globe International

released several statements in 2011 about journalists charged in defamation suits by ministers of parliament and businesspeople; in many cases, the charges were dropped.

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 Broadcaster. 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 an influx of Christian missionaries to Mongolia and 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, authorities in Töv Aimag 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. A number of environmental, human rights, and social welfare groups—while largely reliant on foreign donors—operate without government restriction. However, some journalists and nonprofit personnel have alleged government monitoring of e-mail accounts and wiretapping. 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 and traffic stops, hold detainees for long periods, and beat prisoners. Deaths in prisons continue to be reported, as insufficient nutrition, heat, and medical care remain problems. Ejbegdorj issued a moratorium on the death penalty in January 2010, and talks on abolishing capital punishment permanently are ongoing.

A unit to investigate human trafficking cases was created within the Special Investigation Department of the Police in July 2010. According to the U.S. State Department's 2011 Trafficking in Persons report, 13 cases have been filed since then, leading to 9 prosecutions. The report also stated that about 525 North Koreans are used as contract laborers in Mongolia, without access to most of their wages or freedom of movement. Additionally, an October 2011 BBC investigation revealed that most of the wages of North Korean workers at the Eermel garment factory are sent directly to the North Korean government.

While women comprise 60 percent of all university students as well as 60 percent of all judges, they hold only 5 parliamentary seats. Spousal abuse is prohibited by law, but social and cultural norms continue to discourage victims from reporting such crimes.

[About us](#)

[Careers](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Credits](#)

Related websites:

[Democracy Web](#) | [Derecho a Voz](#) | [Family Law - Khaleej](#) |

[Peace in the Caucasus](#) | [Undermining Democracy](#) |

[Voice of Freedom](#)