



CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN MONGOLIA

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Abstract: *In 1992, Mongolia proclaimed the concept of civil society in its first democratic Constitution. More than 30 years later, we are not only looking at the development of civil society, but also at the idea and thinking about civil society. The issues on development of society, its principles to be upheld and, theory and conception to be taken as a basis are vital for the developing countries. What level are civil democratic social theory and its view in Mongolia at? How do people support in the development of civil society? What is the significance of people's education if public participation is an essence of democratic political system? How significant do people consider political education of Mongolians? Would eParticipation be a contemporary progressive type of participation in societal development? The author, here, shares some of possible responds to them through this paper.*

Keywords: *Mongolia; civil society; democratization; NGO; CSO; participation; eparticipation*

1. Introduction

Huntington defined three waves of democratization that have taken place in history (Huntington, 1991). Democratization of Latin America and post-Communist countries of Eastern Europe is part of the third wave which began in 1974. Mongolia was not left behind the effect of the third wave of democracy. As a result of Mongolia has been democratizing peacefully and intensively, the social relation based on free speech and thought, democratic political regime, pluralism and free market economics is already inescapable for Mongolia. Hence, the country, which had been capture by one theory and doctrine and defined the development orientation

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through it, is in its process of search for the philosophy of development and the theory of development in terms of research works as well as research explorations and is full of certain debates. It is, itself one of the effects of democratization in Mongolia.

One of the historical and visible findings of democratic changes in the country is the Constitution of Mongolia confirmed in 1992. The Constitution of Mongolia ratified to strengthen the new democratic system and to provide a legal basis and guarantees to the country's development, replaced the former structure, and identified political and legal norms to establish the democratic principles of constitutionalism. Briefly, the new Constitution of Mongolia is very significant and specific in comparison with the laws and constitutional periods in the history of Mongolia (Janar, 2005, p. 189).

Significance and peculiarity of this Constitution can be explained more detailed through many things. Most importantly, Mongolia dismissed totalitarian regime completely in this constitution and confirmed the aims to establish a "humane, civil and democratic society" in conformity with principles and requirements of constitutionalism. This means that Mongolian society took up paying attention to the conceptual idea and theory on civil society as well as human and democratic society. On the other hand, it seems to reflect search for the theory towards that development.

2. Conceptions and Ideology of Civil Society

The collapse of Soviet bloc's regimes in Europe was interpreted because of civil society in opposition to the state socialist system. Since Mongolia emancipated from totalitarian regime and chose the way of democratization as a door to development of society, it was historically certain to compose legal state¹ and to overcome the challenges faced in society in assistance with it first. This contributed to the activation of civil society ideas and the spontaneous emergence and development of civil society institutions.

¹ The author used the term legal state as a rule of law which means the principle that no one is above the law. In continental Europe and legal thinking, the rule of law has frequently, but not always, been associated with a *Rechtsstaat*. According to modern Anglo-American thinking, hallmarks of adherence to the rule of law commonly include a clear separation of powers, legal certainty, the principle of legitimate expectation and equality of all before the law. The concept is not uncontroversial, and it has been said that "the phrase 'the Rule of Law' has become meaningless thanks to ideological abuse and general over-use" (Shklar, 1987, p. 1).

As in the introductory part of the Constitution of Mongolia claims that “We, the people of Mongolia, aspire toward the supreme objective of building a humane, civil and democratic society in the country” (*The Constitution of Mongolia*, 1992: Preamble). This means that Mongolian society took up paying attention to the conceptual idea and theory on civil society as well as human and democratic society. This proclamation has a large scope on practice and a deep meaning about ideas of civil society. Since then, the language and term of civil society is widely used in Mongolia.

As an important measure of social progress, civil society is something to promote achieving a good and well-being society. Origin of civil society is concerned with the appearance of a person-citizen who realizes that he or she is a member of society and, holds moral or any other accountable for own affairs or the society and considers to be free and rightful one. Human kindness and compassion only manifest themselves in a civilized society and have an impact on other members of society.

Although the history of civil society covers hundreds of years, its classic model formed with its major features, that is based on the ideas of liberalism by John Locke and Adam Smith in the end of 18th and the beginning of 19th century. Locke exercised a profound influence on philosophy and politics, in particular on liberalism (For further reference on Locke’s liberalism, see Taylor, 1989). Moreover, Hegel made distinction between the state and the society in his *Elements of Philosophy of Right*. In this classic, civil society was a stage on the dialectical relationship between Hegel’s perceived opposites, the macro-community of the state and the micro-community of the family (Pelczynski, 1984, pp. 1-13). Hegel uttered a civil society is a distinction between family and state, however, the development of civil society has appeared later than the development of state (Borisov, 1997, pp. 73-74). Niccolo Machiavelli defined major values of civil society: peace and civil security, enjoyment, with his/her own wealth, and people’s rights to protect his/her own belief (Machiavelli, 1990, p. 28).

The more civil society is developed, the more democratized type of the Government becomes strengthened and advanced. This means civil society is a basis of a democratized organization. On the basis of it, “civil society” is probably determined as a unification of human-people and collective community to which is given opportunities to express and develop themselves without a direct state participation and impact basing on such as socio-economics, culture, religion and so on.

On the basis of modern literatures on civil society, generally, the modernity of civil society is determined by the following criteria:

- scope of social life, including classes, which are not regulated by political norms and not included in the state structure, social strata and groups, NGOs, movements, political parties, unions, family, educational institutions, religion, art and et cetera;
- scope of people's private daily life;
- economic basis consists of public and private property;
- existence of the citizens who are independent have learnt to be free and rightful;
- self-government;
- economic, social and political developed relations, political culture.

It is hard to imagine contemporary Mongolian society without democratic state. In the manner similar to this, it is insufferable to be democracy without human right and freedom.

One of the important features of development of society is an implementation of political and civil rights and freedom in the country. Freedom House rated Mongolia on political rights with 36/40 and on civil liberties with 48/60. Freedom House considers Mongolia as 84/100 as to be a free country. Political rights and civil liberties have been firmly institutionalized, though political parties continue to rely on patronage networks rather than a competition of policy visions, and widespread corruption hampers further development. (Freedom House, 2024). Mongolia has been joined to international treatments and conventions on civil and political, social and economic rights.

It is said in the Constitution of Mongolia that "State power is vested in the people of Mongolia. The people exercise it through direct participation in state affairs and through representative bodies of state power elected by them. Illegal seizure of state power or attempted seizure is prohibited (Constitution of Mongolia, 1992: 3-4). Doing so, most importantly, democratic political system is proclaimed by the Constitution. In the phrase of Abraham Lincoln, democracy is a government "of the people, by the people and for the people" (U.S. Department of State, 1991, p. 4). The meaning of the Constitution is close to it shows that our political system is possible to be concerned with the category of the world state political system of countries. Moreover, Fish agree that Mongolia meet democratic criteria (Fish, 1998). Democratic state system has appeared based on that criterion or principle of democracy is proclaimed in the Constitution and it meets people's dream and wish, and it serves for the sake of their interest and social progress. In this sense, democratic state system is a complex system of power and mechanism which serves

for the development of society. Stable and effective operation of civil society institutions has an intense significance for the state to be stable. Different kinds of groups and strata of our population have started to be involved in NGOs with a lot of numbers.

Democracy, in its broadest sense, is a system of theory, methodology, organization, way and mechanism that involves population group and strata in political, economic, social and intellectual sector affairs. Citizens are a subject of democracy and social basis. Now the following will be more detailed about it.

In order to view the basis of political democratic system it is vital to compare three notions of *population*, *citizen* and *society*. In demography, psychology, sociology, ethnology and social psychology, population is considered to be a total complex of each individual leads a life in society, regardless of individual's age, sex, origin, property, education, belief or occupation. This is a social frame of society. Legal and political studies consider citizens who have a right to participate in government action directly by themselves or through their representatives and to be elected or to elect candidates of all state and government stage from assembly of local representatives of the citizens to the head of the state- presidential institution. Therefore, population has a broad frame, but citizens have a narrower frame than that. However, society has a much broader scope than those. These are clear to be expressed with the formulation "*citizens-population, society*".

One basis of democratic state system is citizens should actively participate in politics and social life. Therefore, the basis of state system is determined by people's obligations in a whole frame of politics, economics, of social life and social and intellectual frame. For instance, in frame of politics our community and citizens are having the government under their having the government under their authority, participating directly or through their representatives in the founding the government and its sustainable, balanced function, and executing state laws, legalized acts, state orders, directives and decisions. If there are not any citizens to fulfill or execute to have made decisions, laws and resolutions or even they don't fulfill them, the state and government would operate or have no way to exist at all.

Citizens' ideas, suggestions, recommendations, criticisms, requests, information, evaluations on the state are extremely significant to stabilize. Anti-society phenomena will not be eliminated, and social order will not be kept even "very strict" laws are made or number of soldiers and policemen are increased, if people do not realize, make efforts and participate by themselves. "Citizen - first" is one basis of development of democratic civil society as well.

The more political education, culture and consciousness of citizens improve, the more their participation in politics becomes activate. On the basis of it, it is certain that the government will be more strengthened, and democracy will be more consolidated. If people are smart, the government is wise. It is predestined that the government based on its people's joint intelligence can make sane laws and judicious decisions which meets people's request or their life requirement; and, as a result, public accepts them with a great gratitude and executes them duly on practice.

Table 1. Evaluation on necessity of knowledge on politics and political education (percentage of respondents)

Indicators	Extremely important	Important	Fairly important	Unnecessary	Do not know
Age group					
18-25	29.7	61.2	6.9	0.9	1.3
26-35	28.2	59.0	9.8	3.0	0.0
36-45	22.7	65.7	8.8	2.2	0.6
46-60	31.1	54.6	13.4	0.8	0.0
61+	72.4	24.1	0.0	3.4	0.0
Gender					
Male	33.9	54.8	8.2	2.7	0.3
Female	26.2	62.4	9.5	1.3	0.6
Education level					
Elementary school	16.7	66.7	16.7	0.0	0.0
High school	27.1	59.5	11.0	1.9	0.5
Universtity/Graduate school	31.8	58.9	6.9	1.9	0.5
Employment					
Government organization	30.9	62.3	5.7	1.1	0.0
Private sector	25.0	57.7	13.5	3.2	0.6
Non-government organization	32.5	47.5	12.5	7.5	0.0
Self-employed	22.3	65.7	10.2	1.2	0.6
Unemployed	28.6	56.0	10.7	2.4	2.4
Pensioner	52.1	37.5	8.3	2.1	0.0
Student	33.3	62.7	4.0	0.0	0.0
Totally	29.4	59.2	8.9	1.9	0.5

Note: This is the results of survey research conducted by the Center for Democracy Studies, National University of Mongolia. Random sampling size is 800 with a scope included one aimag (province) representing each region of entire Mongolian territory.

Table 1 shows an overview of how respondents evaluate necessity of knowledge on politics and political education. As shown here, Mongolians consider knowledge on politics and political education to be highly significant. For the level of political education, people with higher education consider knowledge on politics and political education extremely important (31.8 per cent) while people with lower education regard it as important (66.7 per cent). Otherwise, nobody regard it unnecessary. It tells us how much citizens – voters with a low level of education are looking forward to get knowledge on politics and political education. Moreover, it shows that how necessary training or advertisement on it is for the people to elect, participate in politics or get understanding on political life.

Citizens of our country has been discharging their, obligation / duty, having a right to elect President and members of Parliament, and representatives of local citizen assemblies publicly, freely, directly and secretly. Doing so, citizens are learning political culture and gaining experiences on participation in politics. Moreover, Mongolian political system is developing and overcoming a lot of obstacles as same as its society at the period of transition. It is approval and expression of progress in consciousness knowledge on politics, and in awake ness of national consciousness and enthusiasm of the citizens who are declared their rights to rule the government with the constitution. However, for over 30 years since the new constitution was proclaimed, people's participation in each election held has been declining in general. Table 2 shows the following indication.

Table 2. Parliamentary and Presidential elections voter turnouts 1992-2024

Election Year	Election Type	Number of Voters		
		Listed	Voted	Turnout (%)
1992	Parliamentary	1,085,129	1,037,392	95.60
1993	Presidential	1,106,403	1,025,970	92.73
1996	Parliamentary	1,147,260	1,057,182	92.15
1997	Presidential	1,155,228	982,640	85.06
2000	Parliamentary	1,247,033	1,027,985	82.43
2001	Presidential	1,205,885	1,000,110	82.94
2004	Parliamentary	1,351,721	1,091,201	82.2
2005	Presidential	1,123,219	927,586	74.9
2008	Parliamentary	1,534,074	1,139,984	74.31
2009	Presidential	1,493, 217	1,098,875	73.59
2012	Parliamentary	1,833,478	1,198,086	65.34
2013	Presidential	1,833,478	1,239,784	67.62
2016	Parliamentary	1,911,047	1,406,123	73.58
2017 June	Presidential (1 st Round)	1,978,298	1,357,788	68.63
2017 July	Presidential (2 nd Round)	1,990,787	1,207,787	60.67

2020	Parliamentary	2,003,969	1,475,895	73.65
2021	Presidential	2,049,379	1,215,063	59.29
2024	Parliamentary	2,224,233	1,553,627	69.85

Source: Election statistics were compiled by the General Election Commission of Mongolia (2024) and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2024) but table is made by the author.

What is the reason that electoral participation has been declining? Table 3 responds to it with a result of the survey undertaken by the Center for Democracy Studies, National University of Mongolia.

Table 3. Evaluation on reasons causing the ecline of voters participation in elections (percentage of respondents)

Reasons causing the decline of participation	Percent
It is usual in democratic society	7.8
It is because of politicians' activity	26.9
It relates to that people are fed up with politics	24.5
There is no improvement in living standard	28.6
Do not agree with the fact that voters activity is declining	5.5
Do not know	6.7

Note: This is the results of survey research conducted by the Center for Democracy Studies, National University of Mongolia. Random sampling size is 800 with a scope included one aimag (province) representing each region of entire Mongolian territory.

As we can see here 28.6 per cent considers the reason in relation to non-improvement in living standard, while 26.9 per cent considers that it is because of politicians' activity and 24.5 per cent expresses that people are becoming fed up with politics. It means that reduction in electoral participation is a common negative phenomenon in a socio-political life. For instance, it is a phenomenon which is directly related to the fact that politician's reputation has dropped, living standard and quality is decreasing more and more and in general people are fed up with politics and considering things with a political ideology. We can conclude that a consequence of all those phenomena affects negatively in the political right and freedom of the voters and in their vote in elections expressing their opinions.

Certainly, it is impossible to ensure state independency or sovereignty and national security without a variation of support by people and their participation. Unfortunately, our government is not taking measurements on this occasion to include people in a wide range, challenge and encourage them. Not considering the fact that President, Speaker of Parliament and Prime Minister of our country at times visit countryside and MPs see their voters very rarely. It seems that our government tends to conduct its work inside the building of State Palace. Actually, Mongolia is a country of youths. Unfortunately, the meeting with President, Speaker of

Parliament, Prime minister and MPs is usually attended by pensioners but not by young people. This can be an expression that young people of our country are not interested and active in political affairs. On this occasion, the interests of our democratic society require all stages of state and institutions, political parties and NGOs to unite their power and organize certain works on a scientific basis.

3. NGOs as CSOs

Every individual's social activity, initiative and participation are necessary to develop civil society more and more. It is clear that society and social development are not understood apart from human. If citizens become more active, enthusiastic and attempted, gradually there will be a favourable and environment for the society to be more open, more civic and more democratized. The use of the term civil society organization is relatively recent, and acknowledge all types of civil society organizations, including non-government organizations.

The NGO law promulgated in 1997 defined NGOs as not-for-profit, self-governing organizations operating independently from the state and established voluntarily by citizens or by legal persons other than state legislative, executive, and judicial bodies, on the basis of their individual or social interests and opinions. The law applies to all NGOs, except political parties, trade unions, and churches and monasteries, including international and foreign NGOs operating in Mongolia.

The law identifies two types of NGOs: (i) a public benefit NGO, which operates for the public benefit in the fields of culture, art, education, science, health, sport, nature and environment, community development, human rights, the protection of the interests of specific groups and subsets of the population, and charity and other fields; and (ii) the mutual benefit NGO, which serves its members and pursues activities in the interests of its members.

As of 2018, 17,634 civil society organizations were formally registered at the General Authority for State Registration. This includes 15,241 NGOs for "public benefit" and 2,393 "mutual benefit" CSOs. While the total number of registered NGOs is high, only a small proportion of NGOs have regular operations. Over 80% of the NGOs are based in the capital Ulaanbaatar, and the remaining are registered at the local level.

Prominent CSOs in Mongolia are Trade Union, Women's CSOs (Mongolian Women's NGO's Coalition, 2007), research organizations and Think Tanks which are registered under the NGO Law, professional associations or sector-specific

professional organizations which include associations of teachers, doctors, construction workers, business owners, bankers, nonbank financial institutions, art councils, and many others. In recent years, a number of social and political movements such as "Civil Movement for Healthy Society", "Radical Reform Movement", "Civil movement for development" and movements for land nature, and environment protection such as "The River Ongi", "The Land of our Mongolia" and "Movement for Fair Privatising of Land" have been actively operating, demonstrating and organizing assemblies with certain requirements to government, raising political issues.

4. Participation and *e*participation

Citizen participation in governance is very important in the development of civil society. Moreover, citizen participation is a main influential factor to choose public policy. It indicates the circle connection of development and participation as the above mentioned again becomes a basis for social development.

Mongolia is a developing country with a vast area of territory and three million population. In this country the issues to keep representative democracy open and transparent and keep working it constantly require a lot of efforts and supports. The main requirement of modern representative democracy has been becoming, on one hand, to reflect citizens' interest in public policy, on the other hand to deliver those policy and decisions urgently to public.

Information, communication and technology era is already irreversible in the world. Development of society is becoming inextricable with it. In order to develop civil society, on one hand, social and public administration should be formed correctly, and other hand, citizens' authentic participation with assistance to information technology achievement should be increased. This is the top priority issue in the country. Implementing *e*governance and *e*participation which is considered to be an innovative achievement for increasing citizen participation effectively and for guaranteeing development of civil society.

*e*Participation is a term meaning information, communication and technology - supported participation in processes involved in government and governance. *e*Participation is hence closely related to e-governance. A more detailed definition sees *e*Participation as "the use of information and communication technologies to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives" (Macintosh, 2006, pp. 364-369). This

definition includes all stakeholders in democratic decision-making processes and not only citizen related top-down government initiatives. So *eParticipation* can be seen as part of *eDemocracy*, whereas *eDemocracy* means the use of information, communication and technology by governments in general used by elected officials, media, political parties and interest groups, civil society organizations, international governmental organizations, or citizens/voters within any of the political processes of states/regions, nations, and local and global communities (Clift, 2003).

eGovernance need to be a way for the citizens to increase their participation, to send their voice urgently to the government without any pressure and interference and to influence on public decision making. Implementing *egovernance* on the spot has some advantages to save time and solve problems and issues immediately, shortening the path which people send letters, complaints, requests, suggestions and so on to authorities, civil servants. Doing so, government action will be more efficient and urgent. Being urgent is essential to become interactive between government and public. It is viewed that there is a full of opportunities we can see as minimum outcome in participation when it is interactive or there is a feedback.

These advantages are crucially important for the social development and, on the other hands, they will be inextricably linked to human development of the contemporary democratic society. When citizen becomes an *ecitizen*, there will be a number of positive effects such as citizen realizes his or her duty in the social development or to be emancipated to be weak against the state and its institutions. Anyhow, the state will not be overloaded, legal state will be strengthened and developed, civil society will be successfully formed, democracy will consolidate, and human rights and freedom will be ensured, when citizen participation, culture and activity develop in different managements or organizations.

5. Critical Remarks

In many advanced and developing democracies, civil society and its institutions and elements play a key role to express people's will and their interests in politics and policy. It is said in many scholars' writings. In Mongolia, although it has a law and legal regulations involving civil society organizations like NGOs and other interest groups, the civil societal role in politics and policy has still been in weak and in liquid ways.

6. Funding

The author(s) received professorial base research support from the Center for Democracy Studies, School of Political Science, International Relations and Public Administration at the National University of Mongolia for the research and authorship of this article.

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