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DYNAMICS AND CHANGES OF THE EXECUTIVE-PARTIES DIMENSION OF THE MONGOLIAN DEMOCRACY AND ITS EFFECT ON DEMOCRATIC PERFORMANCE[1]

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Keywords: Mongolia, consensus democracy, majoritarian democracy, executive-parties dimension, turnout, women's representation

Abstract:
The main objective of this paper is to analyse dynamics and changes of the executive-parties dimension of institutional pattern of Mongolian democracy (i.e. one of two dimensions of Lijphart's majoritarian-consensus framework) on democratic performance or quality of democracy (in such areas as for instance electoral turnout, women's representation etc.) since establishment of Mongolian unicameral parliament in 1992 to last parliamentary elections in 2020. Our aim is to show whether frequent changes to the country's electoral laws (most of the electoral reforms tended to exaggerate disproportionality and favour the two largest parties), which often resulted in strong majoritarianism on the executive-parties dimension, tended to transform location of Mongolia in this dimension and whether this transformation also had an effect on the changes in democratic performance.

Introduction

Since its democratization in 1990 (see Fritz 2008; Fish and Seeberg 2017; Aagaard Seeberg 2018), Mongolia has held eight elections (1992–2020) to its unicameral parliament – the Great State Khural. Previously, Mongolia's electoral system has attracted only scant attention in comprehensive comparative studies of electoral institutions (Maškarinec 2017, 2019c; Jacob and Schenke 2020) and of politics generally (Croissant 2007; Reilly 2007; Croissant and Schächter 2010; Croissant and Völkel 2012; Maškarinec 2019a; Kasuya and Reilly 2022), although Mongolia is one of the few countries (if not the only one) of post-communist Asia which experienced successful long-term democratization and consolidation (Fish 2001; Fritz 2002; Schneider and Schmitter 2004). The success of these processes was not precluded even though the country lacked the many prerequisites which are normally considered favourable for democratization (see Fish 1998).

Concerning the institutional patterns of Mongolia's democracy, or generally many Asian countries for which the 1990s and the early 2000s was a decade of institutional reform, in most cases scholars identified a 'majoritarian turn' in Asian electoral and party systems (see Reilly 2006, 2007) with regard to Arend Lijphart's (2012) majoritarian-consensus framework. Furthermore, Croissant and Schächter (2010) showed that neither Lijphart's two-dimensional democracy pattern, nor an alternative pattern exists in Asia (from the turn of the 1990s until 2005) and majority of Asian democracies appeared to by hybrids, combining elements from both types (i.e. consensus and majoritarian categories). Finally, Kasuya and Reilly argue that since the 2000s the institutional patterns in Asia have shifted to more

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consensual direction. However, although the new 'Asian model' typically involves increasing the proportional components of existing electoral formulas, women quotas, multi-ethnic party lists, or quasi-federal elements onto ostensibly majoritarian state structures, these changes are not associated with greater democratic quality across Asia (see Kasuya and Reilly 2022).

The main objective of this paper is to analyse dynamics and changes of the executive-parties dimension of institutional pattern of Mongolian democracy (i.e. one of two dimensions of Lijphart's [2012] majoritarian-consensus framework) on democratic performance or quality of democracy (in such areas as electoral turnout or women's representation) since establishment of Mongolian unicameral parliament in 1992 to last parliamentary elections in 2020. Our aim is to show whether frequent changes to the country's electoral laws (most of the electoral reforms tended to exaggerate disproportionality and favour the two largest parties), which often resulted in strong majoritarianism on the executive-parties dimension, tended to transform location of Mongolia in this dimension and whether this transformation also had an effect on the changes in democratic performance.

Theoretical framework and research design

In his study *Patterns of Democracy* (2012), Lijphart identified two ideal types of democracy, namely *majoritarian* (*or Westminster*) *democracy* and *consensus democracy*. When Lijphart analysed 36 different democracies across the globe, he found two separate dimensions according to which democracies fit into the majoritarian or consensus model (Table 1).[2] The main difference between the two types of democracy then according to Lijphart (2012: 2) raises from a fundamental question: "Who will do the governing and to whose interests should the government be responsive when the people are in disagreement and have divergent preferences?" Lijphart's (2012) answer to this question is the size of the majority of the people. While in majoritarian model (and its institutions), political power and political decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a bare majority (or often even merely a plurality), the consensus model is not satisfied with narrow decision-making majorities (accepting majority rule only as a minimum requirement) and tries to maximize the number of actors (the size of majorities) involved in decision-making.

Using indicators of both dimensions Lijphart found two-dimensional pattern, whereas the summary characteristics of both dimensions can be used to place each of the democracies on the two-dimensional map of democracy. Here, the horizontal axis represents the executive-parties dimension and the vertical axis the federal-unitary dimension, which resulted into four different categories of democracy (see Lijphart 2012: 243–257). Finally, Lijphart examines the relationship between patterns of democracy (consensus and majoritarian democracy), effective government, policy-making, and the various indicators of quality of democracy. Here, Lijphart claims that consensus democracies perform (in contrast to majoritarian democracies) better in socio-economic performance, as well as in quality of democracy (higher representation of women and minorities, or higher participation and egalitarianism), which results in Lijphart's clear preference of consensual democracy as an ideal type of democracy upon all democratic countries (see Lijphart 2012: 255–294).

Table 1. Lijphart's variables of majoritarian and consensus democracy

[2] While the executive-parties (or 'joint-power') dimension is based on output indicators, the federal-unitary (or 'divided-power') dimension is based on input indicators (see Taagepera 2003).

Dimension	Variable	Majoritarian democracy	Consensus democracy
Executive-parties dimension	Party system	Two-party system	Multiparty system
	Concentration of executive power	Single-party cabinets	Power sharing in broad coalition cabinets
	Executive-legislative relations	Executive dominance	Balance of power
	Degree of electoral disproportionality	Plurality or majority system with high disproportionality	PR system with low disproportionality
	Interest group system	Pluralism	Corporatism
Federal-unitary dimension	Degree of centralization of the state	Unitary-centralized government	Federal-decentralized government
	Bicameralism	Unicameral system	Strong bicameralism
	Constitutional rigidity	Constitutional flexibility	Constitutional rigidity
	Judicial Review	Absence of judicial review	Strong judicial review
	Central bank autonomy	Central bank controlled by the executive	Independent central bank

Source: Lijphart (2012).

As, the main objective of this paper is to analyse dynamics and changes of the executive-parties dimension of Mongolian democracy and its effect on some indicators of quality of democracy, this paper uses slightly modified Lijphart's approach. More specifically, we use only one of the Lijphart's dimensions, namely the executive-parties dimension (EPD); for similar approach, see Ganghof and Eppner (2019). Furthermore, with respect to some critique, we do not use interest group system variable, as some authors (see Taagepera 2003), as well as Lijphart (2012: 170) himself, highlight the fact that this variable is the only variable that is not logically and causally connected to the others. Therefore, this variable is excluded from this paper. The remaining four variables are operationalized as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Variables and measurement

Variable	Measurement
Party system	Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP) as a measure of parliamentary fragmentation.
Concentration of executive power	Average of the lifespan (percentage) of minimal winning single-party cabinets during the period of analysis (Lijphart 2012).
Executive–legislative relations	Cabinet duration in months (Lijphart 2012).
Degree of electoral disproportionality	Gallagher (1991) disproportionality index (LSq Index). The index measures the disproportionality of an electoral outcome, i.e. the difference between parties' shares of the votes and their shares of the seats in parliament. The index ranges from 0 to 100. The lower the index value, the lower the disproportionality and vice versa.

Source: Author.

Finally, to compute the value of the executive-parties dimension, in order for the four variables to be averaged, they first had to be standardized (so as to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1), because they were originally measured on quite different scales. Moreover, their signs had to be adjusted so that high values on each variable represented either majoritarianism or consensus, while low values indicate the opposite characteristic; just like Lijphart, we also gave the high values to majoritarianism (which entailed reversing the signs of the effective number of parties). The executive-parties dimension factor is then an average of the respective standardized original value of the four indicators in Table 2.

Results

Since Mongolia's transition from authoritarian rule to democracy in 1990, frequent changes have been characteristic of its electoral system.[3] As most of the types of electoral systems used tended to exaggerate disproportionality and favour the larger parties, electoral outcomes confirmed a consistent, but not linear, movement towards bipolar electoral competition (Croissant and Völkel 2012; Reilly 2007). Thus, in some elections, only weak institutionalization of the Mongolian party system blocked the assumption that plurality rule would create two-party competition (Maškarinec 2017), although in many cases the electoral competition indicated a rather shift from bipolar competition to one-party dominance (Maškarinec 2018). Mongolian case thus was in line with the general development of party systems in East Asia, where effect of the majoritarian changes (in case of electoral systems reforms) resulted in rise of disproportionality and decline of party numbers, as throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, election outcomes became less proportional in Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand, and the Philippines (see Reilly 2006).

Tendency to asymmetrical competition (or disruption of the bipolarization of Mongolian electoral competition) confirmed values of *ENPP* (as a measure of parliamentary fragmentation), which in four elections (1992, 2000, 2016, 2020) oscillated between 1 and 1.5 (Table 3). In contrast, only outputs of three elections (1996, 2004, 2008) suggested

[3] While in the elections of 1992 and 2008 Mongolia used the so-called unlimited vote (or multiple vote), for 1996, 2000 and 2004 a specific plurality-majority modification of the two-round system (TRS) was used in the SMDs, with a required plurality of at least 25% of the vote for first-round victory. For the elections of 2012 a mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) system was implemented, the following parliamentary elections in 2016 was held under a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, and finally, for last parliamentary elections in 2020 the unlimited vote was reintroduced (see Maškarinec 2014, 2018).

symmetrical two-party competition, and while the introduction of the MMM in 2012 resulted in emergence of multiparty competition – the effective number of parliamentary parties ranged between 2.68 (the district tier) and 3.35 (the PR tier),[4] transition to FPTP in 2016 and unlimited vote in 2020 confirmed some expectations attributed to these electoral systems. Furthermore, results of both elections suggested the complete disruption of the tendency to multiparty competition observed in the elections of 2012. This finding was also confirmed by the effective number of electoral parties (*ENEP*) values (1.34 or 1.46, respectively), which, at the parliamentary level, indicated a shift to one-party dominance (see Maškarinec 2018).
Similarly, the fact that electoral systems generally favoured the larger parties and resulted in highly disproportionate electoral outcomes illustrates also the values of Gallagher's (1991) disproportionality (LSq) Index. This index is especially useful for comparing proportionality across electoral systems and across time. In Mongolia, the LSq Index was the lowest in 2004 and 2012 parliamentary elections (reaching 2.16 or 2.84) and the highest in 2000 and 2016 elections (equalling 33.19 or 32.91), although also in 1992 and 2020 elections the value of LSq Index approached 30. So, low disproportionality does not go hand in hand with the type of electoral system, but rather the fragmentation of the 'democratic camp' was decisive for the shape of the party system and disproportionality of electoral outcomes.[5]

Table 3. The executive-parties dimension and its components, 1992–2020

Election	ENPP	Minimal winning one-party cabinets (%)	Index of executive dominance (in months)	LSq Index	EPD
1992	1.17	0.0	47	27.36	0.702
1996	1.85	0.0	11.5	14.7	–0.453
2000	1.11	100.0	48	33.19	1.407
2004	2.22	0.0	9	2.16	–0.900
2008	2.05	13.3	15	12.27	–0.441
2012 (N)	2.68	0.0	15	11.73	–0.748
2012 (PR)	3.35	0.0	15	2.84	–1.176
2016	1.34	100.0	23	32.91	0.868
2020	1.46	100.0	24	28.18	0.742
Mean	1.91	34.8	24.1	18.37	

Source: Author.

Notes: Although the 2020–2024 electoral period has not yet ended, due to the complete dominance of the MPP in the parliament, the number of the Minimal winning one-party cabinets in this period is counted as 100%. In the case of the cabinet duration, the change of prime minister in January 2021 is considered.

While thus the values of the two above-mentioned indicators confirm the overall

[4] In the case of a mixed system which Mongolia used for the 2012 election, we work separately with the results from both of its components (proportional and nominal).

[5] After the transition in 1990, Mongolian political competition was characterized by contestation between the former ruling party, the Mongolian People's Party (MPP), which had governed the country since 1921 (until 2010 under the name, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party), and political parties established after 1990 (parties of the so-called 'democratic camp'), of which, at present, the Democratic Party (DP) represents the main rival of the MPP.

direction of Mongolia towards majoritarian democracy on executive-parties dimension, two remaining indicators of this dimension show much more mixed results.[6] However, also in this case Mongolia follows Asian 'anomaly', more specifically the pan-Asian preference for oversized coalition governments (ensuring greater political stability if not accountability) which continues despite majoritarian turn in Asian politics. So, in democratic Asia the institutionalization of majoritarian politics is not automatically associated with single-party governments and dominant executives, as is the case in traditional democracies (Kasuya and Reilly 2022).

When we start with the concentration of executive power (measured by a cabinet type), we cannot confirm Croissant and Schächter's (2010) previous finding, namely that Mongolia is on the majoritarian end of the scale with a high degree of concentration of executive power in the form of single-party cabinets. In fact, the number of these type of government (minimal winning single-party cabinet) reached only one third (34.8%), and in the remaining cases Mongolian government were majority coalitions, namely surplus (oversized) multiparty coalitions or even grand coalitions cabinet; with the exception of the 1996–2000 electoral period when there was a minimal-winning coalition of the Mongolian National Democratic Party (MNDP) and the Mongolian Social Democratic Party (MSDP) which before the 1996 elections formed an election coalition, the Democratic Alliance (DA).[7]

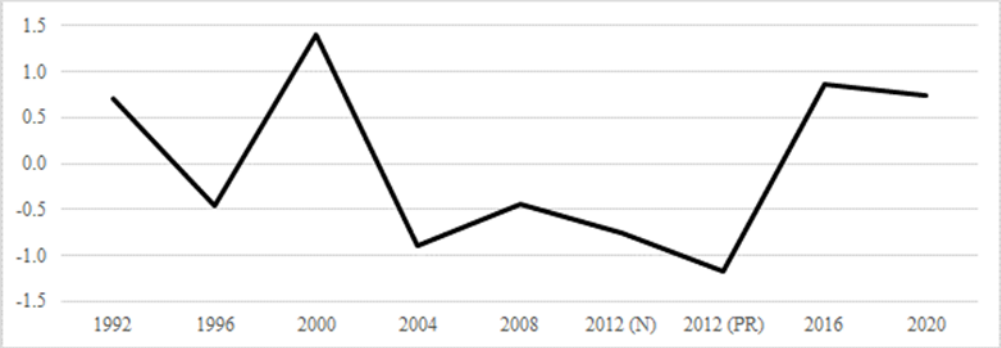
Considering the length of the average cabinet duration in months as an indicator of executive dominance, Mongolia (with an average of 24 months of cabinet durability) ranks rather among Asian countries with greater executive dominance. On the other hand, the majority nature of Mongolian electoral systems would lead to expectations of even greater stability of government cabinets. Perhaps surprisingly, the length of government duration is not only reduced by surplus coalitions, but governments were not stable even during the MNDP and MSDP coalition governments (1996–2000) when the average length of government fell to 11.5 months (between 7 and 21 months), but even the MPP's single-party cabinets in the 2016–2020 and 2020–2024 electoral periods did not last the entire election period, despite the clear dominance of the MPP in parliament.

Figure 1 shows the variation of values of Mongolian democracy on the executive-parties dimension. At the same time, the presented data unequivocally show that, in this dimension, Mongolia came close to majoritarian democracy only in the period when the MPP clearly dominated the parliament (with the minimal winning one-party cabinets after the 2000, 2016 and 2020 elections, or surplus coalitions after the 1992 elections, when the MPP had a clear dominance in both the parliament and the executive), while in other electoral periods there was a significant deviation from the majority model of democracy. Although the biggest deviation can be seen when the mixed electoral system was used in 2012 (especially in the proportional component), a very strong shift from the majority model can be observed even after the 2004 elections (a large coalition of the MPP and DP supplemented in a certain period by smaller parties) or even after the 2008 elections (grand coalition of MPP and DP). Here, we can confirm previous findings that in Mongolia the existence of fragile multiparty or grand coalition cabinets was connected to the weak coherence of the coalition which reinforced problems of legislative coordination among the ruling majority in parliament (Croissant and Schächter 2010: 182).

[6] Similarly, Croissant and Schächter (2010) showed that Mongolia (between 1992 and 2005) combined majoritarian traits in the executive-parties dimension with 'consensus' elements on the federal-unitary dimension (in particular, judicial review, and constitutional rigidity), and for this reason Mongolia does not quite fit into the Lijphart's two-dimensional democracy pattern.

[7] Even if we count the DA government as a minimal winning single-party cabinet, the proportion of this type of government would still not even reach half (45.9%).

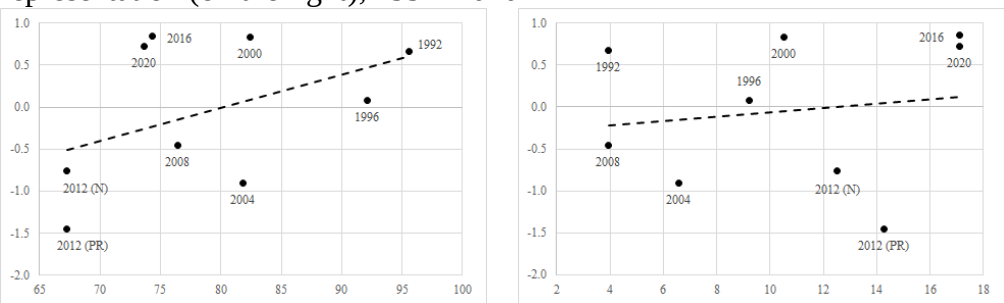
Figure 1. The development of the executive-parties dimension, 1992–2020



Source: Author.

Finally, our last question tries to confirm whether Lijphart's finding about the higher quality of consensus democracy is also valid in Mongolia, along with how the democracy takes on a consensual form on the executive-parties dimension. Figure 2 shows that in Mongolia, it cannot be confirmed the assumptions that the increase in majoritarian traits has a negative effect on the turnout or women's representation.[8] In both cases, on the contrary, we see a completely opposite trend.

Figure 2. Executive-parties dimension versus turnout (on the left) and women's representation (on the right), 1992–2020



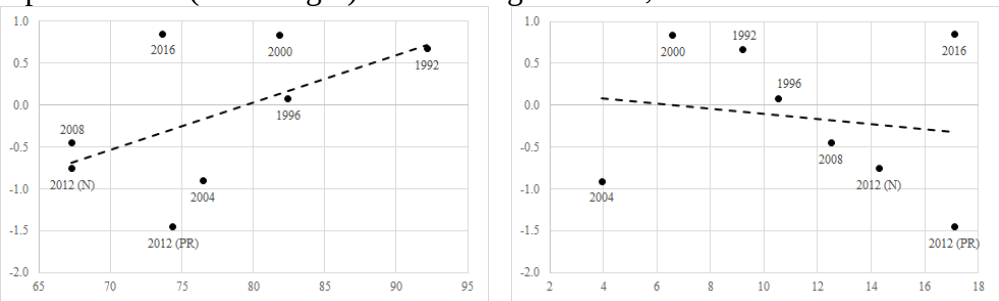
Source: Author.
Notes: *x*-axis: turnout (on the left) or women's representation (on the right), *y*-axis: executive-parties dimension, dashed line: trend line.

However, since an objection could arise that the form of democracy has an effect on the quality of democracy only after a certain period of time, we present (Figure 3) the relationship between the values of turnout and women's representation and the values of executive-parties dimension in the previous electoral term. Here, too, the positive relationship between turnout and executive-parties dimension remains, while in the case of female representation the relationship turns slightly negative. However, we still see several exceptions going against the trend, where a higher women's representation should ensure a more consensual arrangement.

Figure 3. Executive-parties dimension versus turnout (on the left) and women's

[8] For more on the development of women's representation in Mongolia, see Maškarinec (2019b).

representation (on the right) in following elections, 1992–2020



Source: Author.

Notes: *x*-axis: turnout (on the left) or women's representation (on the right), *y*-axis: executive-parties dimension, dashed line: trend line.

Conclusion

The main objective of this paper was to analyse dynamics and changes of the executive-parties dimension of Mongolian democracy (one of two dimensions of Lijphart's [2012] majoritarian-consensus framework) and effect of this dimension on electoral turnout and women's representation since establishment of Mongolian unicameral parliament in 1992 to last parliamentary elections in 2020.

First, an analysis of electoral competition (using *ENPP* and LSq Index) confirmed the overall direction of Mongolia towards majoritarian democracy on executive-parties dimension. At the same time, the tendency to symmetrical two-party competition was present in less than half of the elections, and it almost disappeared in last two elections. So, transformation of the party system does not go hand in hand with the type of electoral system, but in most cases rather the fragmentation of the "democratic camp" was decisive for the shape of the party system, resulting in the frequent one-party (the MPP) dominance. Similarly, values of *ENEP* (as a measure of concentration in the distribution of votes across parties) showed the increasing trend against bipolarization of Mongolian electoral politics, which was caused not only by the transition to MMM in 2012, because persistent deconcentration of the party system prevailed also after the introduction of FPTP for the 2016 election, or unlimited vote for the 2020 election. More importantly, as this type of party competition existed in last two parliamentary elections of 2016 and 2020 (i.e., for the second time in a row), it cast doubt on the DP's position as the credible government alternative to the MPP.

Second, also Mongolian case confirmed (in contrast to previous studies) Asian 'anomaly', or more specifically preference for oversized coalition governments or grand coalitions governments, which constitute most types of governments in Mongolia after 1992. Especially fragile multiparty (often oversize) cabinets or grand coalition cabinets then was connected to the weak coherence of the coalition, and resulted not only in problems of legislative coordination among the ruling majority in parliament, but also in relatively low cabinet durability, especially considering the often strong dominance of government parties in parliament; only two Mongolian governments were able to survive the entire electoral period (in both cases, the MPP's single-party government in the years 1992–1996 and 2000–2004).

Third, our analysis did not confirm the expectation that rising degree of majoritarian traits in executive-parties dimension has a negative effect on selected indicators of the quality of democracy. Especially, turnout tends to rise with the higher values of executive-parties dimension, but also the development of the women's representation did not show a clear advantage of the consensual arrangement.

In conclusion, we can offer several explanations for our conclusions. First is associated with the finding that Lijphart's (1992) conceptual framework (two-dimensional pattern of democracy) does not fit well in Asia (Croissant and Schächter 2010), as well as in new democracies in Eastern Europe (Roberts 2006; Fortin 2008), which we showed on the example of two of the four indicators of the executive-parties dimension (concentration of executive
power and executive-legislative relations). Second, we can speculate whether the non-confirmation of expectations in the case of turnout is the high turnout in the first elections after the democratic transition.[9] However, even if we do not include in the analysis turnout in the 1990s elections (undocumented), the effect remains almost identical. Similarly, the question is whether the reason for the failure to confirm expectations in the case of women's representation is not the general low representation of women, typical for most post-communist countries. The increase in the women's representation after the introduction of a quota for women (i.e. a consensual element) before the 2012 parliamentary elections thus persists despite the otherwise rather majoritarian form of electoral rules. This once again proves that mixing Lijphart's consensus and majoritarian categories may result in hybrid character of Mongolian regime with regard to Lijphart's typology and the need to consider the local context of each country when creating the institutional arrangements, which speaks against Lijphart's clear preference for consensus model of democracy which Lijphart recommends for countries across the globe, especially for new democracies.

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[9] Overall, the electoral participation of Mongolian voters reaches relatively high values, both in comparison with other Asian countries and the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

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