

**SMALL ISLANDS OF DEMOCRACY IN AN AUTHORITARIAN SEA:
EXPLAINING MONGOLIAN AND KYRGYZ DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT**

by

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Abstract

My dissertation investigates the democratization of Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, small states in the Sino-Russian sphere of influence. Taking Mongolia as a primary case, I ask why an electoral democracy has succeeded in an authoritarian neighbourhood where Western democracy promoters lack interests and leverage. Bridging the international relations and comparative politics literature, I develop a theoretical framework to examine how geopolitical interests of great powers and the presence or absence of a strong political party impact the democratization process in a small state.

I posit two explanations for Mongolia's successful transition to and consolidation of electoral democracy. First, I contend that the absence of direct geopolitical competition of Western and neighbouring great powers made Mongolia's democratic transition possible and Western democracy promotion credible. I explain how the absence of direct geopolitical competition fosters contestation in domestic politics whereas the presence of direct geopolitical competition among great powers reduces the likelihood of democratization. Second, I argue that the presence of a strong political party that is highly institutionalized and dominated by pro-reform and collective leadership prevents political violence and hijacking of state institutions by populist leaders during the transition stage. The survival of a former ruling party provides a model and anti-incumbent impetus for new parties and contributes to the development of a competitive party system in the consolidation stage.

To apply my framework to other cases, I examine the democratization process of Kyrgyzstan and find that the main causes of reversal were the re-emergence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers and the former ruling party dismantlement, which resulted in a weak party system. The study of Kyrgyzstan shows how overriding security interests undermined Western democracy promotion efforts, while the absence of a strong party explains the transfer of political power through violent protests rather than regular, competitive elections.

This framework applies to the democratization of small states, many of which have operated in authoritarian neighbourhoods. The majority of these states conducted political reforms in favourable international settings in the post-Cold War period, but some succeeded

whereas others failed. Geopolitical and political party dynamics could explain such divergent outcomes.

Lay Summary

My dissertation examines the democratization process of Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan in the period from 1984 to 2010. The key objective is to explain why an electoral democracy succeeded in Mongolia and why it failed in Kyrgyzstan. The research explains the success of the Mongolian case in terms of its peaceful external environment, where all great powers have avoided competing for geostrategic advantage in Mongolia, and the continuing presence of a strong ruling party. In regards to the Kyrgyzstan case, the intense geopolitical competition among Russia, China, and the United States and the dismantlement of the former ruling party are responsible for the failure of its democracy. The dissertation also presents insightful discussions about Mongolian politics in the 1980s, which has been little examined, and interesting facts about US engagement with Mongolia.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Mendee Jargalsaikhan. The fieldwork reported in this dissertation was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H15-01124 approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) on June 4, 2015 and extended on March 15, 2017.

The earlier version of Chapter 3, “The Mongolian Democratic Transition in 1984-1990,” was presented at the “The Quest for a Voice: Revisiting Asia’s Democratic Revolt” conference, UC Berkeley, on April 14, 2017.

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List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AID	Agency for International Development
AU	African Union
CADI	Central Agency on Development and Investment
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CT	Computed Tomography
CWP	Civil Will Party
DMK	Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan
DOD	Department of Defence
DSM	Democratic Socialist Movement
DU	Democratic Union
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EMO	Election Monitoring Mission
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FY	Fiscal Year
G7	Group of Seven
GUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDS	Institute for Defence Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRI	International Republican Institute
KAS	Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti
MDP	Mongolian Democratic Party
MDU	Mongolian Democratic Union
MFLP	Mongolian Free Labor Party
MFN	Most Favoured Nation
MIA	Manas International Airport
MISS	Mongolian Institute for Strategic Studies
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MNPP	Mongolian National Progressive Party
MPR	Mongolian People's Republic
MPRP	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party
MRP	Mongolian Renaissance Party
MSDP	Mongolian Social Democratic Party
MSU	Mongolian Student Union
MUP	Mongolian United Party
MUTP	Mongolian United Traditional Party
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NPM	New Progressive Movement
NSC	National Security Council
OAS	Organization of American States
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PGH	People's Great Hural
Politburo	Political Bureau
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SGH	State Great Hural
TAF	The Asia Foundation
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Dedication

To my dad, who encouraged me studying, and grandparents, who inspired my curiosity

Chapter One: Introduction

In June 2011, the US Senate issued two notable statements concerning Mongolia and the Kyrgyz Republic. The first was a Senate Resolution, issued in recognition of the visit of Mongolian President Elbegdorj Tsakhia to the United States, acknowledging Mongolia's sustained commitment to "lasting democratic and free market reforms" and the substantial, longstanding support of the US government to that end since 1991. In essence, the resolution described Mongolia as a success story of Western democracy promotion efforts.¹ The second was a congressional statement by Senator John Kerry, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, who also authored the aforementioned resolution on Mongolia. Expressing Western faith in Kyrgyzstan's Interim President Roza Otunbayeva's orchestration of the transition to democratic rule after the removal of previous authoritarian presidents, Senator Kerry wished "the people of Kyrgyzstan [would] seize this moment and advance the cause of democracy for the benefit of their country, the region, and the world."²

In the early 1990s, despite a lack of vested security and economic interests, the US government responded positively to requests by Mongolian and Kyrgyz leaders to support their dual-track political and economic reforms. At that time, both states made distinct moves towards political reform. Mongolian leaders facilitated democratization and reached out to Western powers when all other non-European communist states repressed the opposition and became resilient single-party states such as Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam. Kyrgyz leaders, unlike their counterparts in other Central Asian republics, initiated political reforms and also sought Western assistance. This prompted the US administration to foresee Mongolia as a potential democratic model for other Asian communist states and Kyrgyzstan for other Central Asian republics. This forecasting was based on US assumptions about reformist leaders, educated populations, and small economies of agriculture and mining in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan alike.

After two decades, results were strikingly different even as these countries had received similar attention and assistance from Western powers. Political power in Mongolia has been

¹ US Senate Resolution 208, June 15, 2011 (enacted). Retrieved from <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/sres208>.

² The US Congressional Record, Senate, June 28, 2011. Retrieved from <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2011-06-28/pdf/CREC-2011-06-28-pt1-PgS4149.pdf>.

³ Mongolia also ranks similarly in the Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (BTI) 2010 and Polity IV in comparison to Asia Pacific and Central and Eastern European countries, whereas Kyrgyzstan maintains a similar ranking in comparison to other former Soviet republics, especially the Central Asian ones.

⁴ Process tracing is a within-case analysis method to investigate and evaluate causal processes. See George & Bennett, 2005; *The US 2006 Economic Reform Scorecard*, June 28, 2011. Retrieved from <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2011-06-28/pdf/CREC-2011-06-28-pt1-PgS4149.pdf>.

transferred peacefully between two major political parties through six regular parliamentary and presidential elections, while power in Kyrgyzstan has been transferred between three presidents through violent protests in 2005 and 2010. Kyrgyzstan’s first president, Askar Akayev, sought refuge from Russian President Vladimir Putin, while his successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, secured similar protection from the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko following violent protests. Former presidents, family members, and close allies remain on the long-overdue extradition requests of the Kyrgyz government, but Presidents Putin and Lukashenko continue to deny these requests.

According to a 2011 Freedom House report, Mongolia’s rating of civil liberties and political rights was closer to that of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, than the rest of the Asia-Pacific countries, while matching with ratings of Bulgaria, Latvia, and Romania in the “Free” category. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan’s rating switches back and forth between the “Partially Free” and “Not Free” categories; however, Kyrgyzstan still ranks higher than all other Central Asian republics (see Table 1).

Table 1. Freedom House Rating (2011)³

Countries	Category	Freedom Rating	Civil Liberties	Political Rights
Mongolia	Free	2.0	2	2
Japan, Taiwan, South Korea	Free	1.5	2	1
Poland, Czech, Hungary, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania	Free	1.0	1	1
Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia	Free	2.0	2	2
Kyrgyzstan	Partly Free	5.0	5	5
Moldova, Ukraine	Partly Free	3.0	3	3
Georgia	Partly Free	3.5	3	4
Armenia	Partly Free	5.0	4	6
Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Russia	Not Free	5.5	5	6
Belarus	Not Free	6.5	6	7
Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	Not Free	7.0	7	7

Source: Freedom House Report, June 18, 2019. Retrieved from www.freedomhouse.org.

³ Mongolia also ranks similarly in the Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (BTI) 2010 and Polity IV in comparison to Asia Pacific and Central and Eastern European countries, whereas Kyrgyzstan maintains a similar ranking in comparison to other former Soviet republics, especially the Central Asian ones.

Notes: Freedom House assesses the conditions for civil liberties, political rights, and overall freedom and then assigns grades of 1-7; highest score indicates the lowest performances of democracy. This table aims to compare Mongolia's rating of civil liberties and political rights to that of East Asian democracies and Central and Eastern European states as well as Kyrgyzstan's rating to that of former Soviet republics.

Current studies demonstrate that states which are geographically proximate to Western democracies (Kopstein & Reilly, 2000) and have high linkages and leverage (Levitsky & Way, 2010), membership arrangements in regional organizations (Whitehead, 2001), strong civil societies (Perez-Diaz & Victor, 1993; Howard, 2000; Putnam, 2000) and/or economic development (Lipset, 1959; Przeworski, 1997; Boix & Stokes, 2003), are more likely to succeed in democratizing than states in authoritarian neighbourhoods (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010; Plattner, 2015; Bader, 2015) or states with readily exploitable natural resources like oil and gas (Madhavy, 1970; Karl, 1997; Ross, 2001). Although these theories provide reasonable explanations for successes and failures in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet republics, and in the Asia-Pacific region, they offer few insights into cases like Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan. Both are: extremely dependent on their neighbouring authoritarian great powers, China and Russia; isolated from developed democracies; non-aspirants in regards to membership in European Union (EU) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); economically poor; and have weak, vulnerable civil societies. But they raise important questions, such as: Why did the leaders of these countries make similar commitments to democracy? What explains their divergent trajectories of democratic consolidation versus authoritarian reversal? What can be learned from the successes and failures of their democratization processes? Why and when does Western democracy promotion support or hinder the democratization process? And, how do external and domestic factors interact to support or challenge democratization?

To answer these questions, I develop a theoretical framework from the international relations and political party literatures to explain how the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers and absence/presence of a strong party affect the democratic transition and consolidation process. I posit two explanatory factors. First, I contend that the absence of direct geopolitical competition between Western and neighbouring great powers is a necessary but not sufficient factor in the democratization of a small state. The absence of direct geopolitical competition fosters contestation in domestic politics. The presence of geopolitical competition increases external pressure and involvement in the domestic politics of a small state; this provides justification for authoritarian leaders to suppress the opposition or, if the transition already happened, to reverse the democratization process. Therefore, the presence or emergence of

Western and neighbouring great powers' geostrategic interests undermines the credibility of democracy promotion efforts in small states.

Second, I argue that the presence of a strong political party that is dominated by pro-reform and collective leadership is a necessary but not sufficient factor in the democratization of a small state. During transition, the presence of a strong ruling party, if highly institutionalized and led by moderate leaders, prevents political violence and hijacking of state institutions by populist leaders. The survival of the ruling party, if party leaders commit to principles of electoral democracy, provides a model and anti-incumbent impetus for new parties and contributes to the development of a competitive party system. A highly institutionalized political party provides an organizational platform to internalize political reform and, more importantly, facilitates leadership succession. The absence of a strong, socially rooted political party increases the uncertainty for all political actors and provides opportunities for populist leaders to bolster their positions by hijacking the state institutions and building a personalistic party.

It is important to acknowledge that I am not proposing a general theory of democratization in small states, and recognize that democratization may or may not occur due to a variety of other reasons. The two factors I focus on – the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers and the absence/presence of a strong political party – have causal importance, but they do not explain democratization entirely. However, transition does not occur in the presence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers, and electoral democracy does not get consolidated in the absence of strong political parties. Both factors are necessary but not sufficient conditions for democratization. I demonstrate the utility of my explanation through a comparative study of Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan between 1984 and 2010. Through process tracing, I investigate how the dynamics of the overall geopolitical setting impact the domestic politics of small, peripheral states and how the presence/absence of a strong political party affects democratic transition and consolidation.⁴ Also, I will investigate the interplay between external and internal factors only to a limited extent since it requires a thorough, comprehensive process-tracing of both factors over a long timeframe.

Based on a qualitative analysis of expert interviews, archival materials, and secondary data, I examine the dynamics of the geopolitical interests of great powers, namely, China, Russia, and

⁴ Process tracing is a within-case analysis method to investigate and evaluate causal processes. See George & Bennett, 2005; Checkel, 2006; Bennett & Elman, 2006; and Tansey, 2007.

the United States, and the development of political parties and party systems in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan. I undertook over 50 interviews with Mongolian academics, politicians, bureaucrats, and civil society activists and interviews with a few Kyrgyz experts during five months of fieldwork in Mongolia and a brief study trip to the Kyrgyz Republic in 2015-16. (See Appendix B for the list of interviewees in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan.)

Key Arguments

In the era of democracy, the fate of democratic transition and consolidation for small states depends on two critical factors: the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers and the absence/presence of a strong, institutionalized political party. One is external and necessary, but not sufficient, for the transition stage; the other is internal and necessary, but not sufficient, for the consolidation of the electoral democracy.

Absence/Presence of Direct Geopolitical Competition

The Transition Stage – The transition to democracy becomes possible only in the absence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers. The emergence or presence of competitive geopolitical interests causes great powers to intervene in the domestic politics of a small state in order to secure their national (self-serving) interests. This intervention provides opportunities for ruling elites or the regime of a small state to bargain with great powers and acquire international political recognition, economic assistance, and security guarantees for the regime. The geostrategic interests of great powers, in particular, provide a justification for ruling elites to take authoritarian measures in connection with any external and internal security threats. Moreover, the emergence and presence of direct geopolitical competition among great powers increases their control and influence over ruling elites or the regime of a small state using their political, economic, and military leverage; in particular, this reduces the will and credibility of Western democracy promotion efforts. Therefore, in the presence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers, the likelihood of democratic transition and consolidation is slim.

The Consolidation Stage – The dynamics of the geopolitical interests of great powers is as important for the democratic consolidation process as it is for the transition process. In the consolidation stage, if a country already made a transition to democracy, the presence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers mostly produces negative effects because geopolitical dynamics provide the bargaining opportunities for ruling elites and justifications for taking authoritarian measures, and reduces the credibility of Western powers' normative persuasion or pressures for democratization. But, in this stage, the presence of conflicting geopolitical interests

of great powers also plays a neutral or positive role. It has neutral effects when all great powers refrain from taking any measures to endorse or strengthen the existing regimes or use political, economic, and military leverage to cause domestic instability. The increased geopolitical interest of great powers also plays a positive role by increasing the international visibility of domestic politics, imposing conditionality (e.g., economic, political, or membership), and supporting opposition leaders and political organizations. Any attempts by great powers to endorse or interfere in the domestic politics have the unintended consequence of enhancing the opposition and triggering anti-colonial sentiment. Therefore, unlike the transition stage, the geopolitical competition of great powers plays multiple roles in the consolidation process.

Absence/Presence of a Strong Political Party

The Transition Stage – The peaceful transition to democracy also depends on the presence of a strong political party. The defining characteristics of such a party include that it is (1) dominated by reform-minded political leaders, has (2) clear, institutionalized collective decision-making procedures, and (3) a nation-wide infrastructure for reaching out to, representing, and mobilizing its constituency. Such a party also has strongly observed rules; as a result, it provides political stability. First, the institutionalized collective decision-making process provides a stable platform for internalizing the reform agenda. In other words, it has the ability to adapt to new circumstances. The more supporters endorse reform, the more likely that the reform becomes inevitable and sustainable. Second, a strong political party with its bureaucracy and popular support facilitates leadership succession. The clearer and more stable the leadership succession procedure is, the less wary ruling leaders are to transfer political power. The party has the capacity to enforce rules and manage conflicts, thus reducing the uncertainty for concerned leaders. Third, the strong political party prevents takeovers by populist leaders or special interest groups. Because the political party has its own rules for human resources, including training, education, and career advancement, the strong political party facilitates leadership rotation. Therefore, a strong political party – *if it is dominated by reformist leaders and has internalized the inevitability of political reform* – is instrumental for the peaceful transition to democracy. The transition process becomes more sustainable and socially rooted. Otherwise, an externally imposed or pro-liberal individual-led process will lack the support of a socially rooted, nation-wide, bureaucratized political institution – the political party.

The Consolidation Stage – The consolidation of electoral democracy will not be sustained without a strong party system, which is the most difficult endeavor for emerging democracies

unless all new parties receive similar packages of financial support to institutionalize their bureaucracy and outreach and representation capacities. The survival of the ruling party plays a critical role in this effort. First, the strong political party, which has collective decision-making procedures, supports a similar constitutional arrangement for collective governance in order to constrain populist leadership takeovers. Second, the presence of a strong political party provides a model and anti-incumbent motives for all other emerging political parties. This requires new opposition parties to form an electoral coalition to compete in the election. Third, the survival of the ruling party also makes it easy for Western democracy promotion efforts to assist the opposition parties in competing for elections. Therefore, the presence of a strong party, if it commits to the principles of electoral democracy, is a necessary but not sufficient factor in the institutionalization of the party system, in particular, and electoral democracy, in general. In the absence of a strong political party, the likelihood of electoral democracy, party system development, and emergence of nation-wide, bureaucratized parties is low.

In a nutshell, the absence of direct geopolitical competition and presence of a strong political party are both necessary but not sufficient conditions for the democratization of small states. In other words, these factors are located beyond the interests and area of responsibilities of Western powers and regional organizations that uphold liberal democracy as a core value.

Implications

My dissertation has theoretical and empirical (policy) implications for the study of democratization processes.

First, my emphasis on geopolitical interests explains *why* and *how* the dynamics of an overarching geopolitical environment affect the domestic politics of a small, peripheral state. Based on the comparative study of Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan at different periods, I show how the geopolitical dynamics affect the domestic politics of small states – the absence of direct geopolitical competition permits democratization, while the presence of it hinders democratization. In the 1990s, the absence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers created favourable conditions for democratization and increased the credibility and pressure of Western democracy-promotion efforts. But, in the following decade, the geopolitical setting changed in different ways for Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan: It has remained favourable for Mongolia's democratization, but not for Kyrgyzstan's. The conflicting security interests of great powers created opportunities for populist leaders to bargain with great powers and to justify their authoritarian acts.

Second, my theory of a strong party explains *how* the survival (adaptation) of a relatively modern political institution – a political party that is dominated by reformist leaders and is highly-institutionalized – plays a crucial role in the transition to and consolidation of an electoral democracy. The survival of the Mongolian ruling party as a whole facilitated the transition process by providing institutional stability and preventing takeovers by populist leaders or interest groups. It also contributed to the consolidation process by serving as an anti-incumbent motive for compliance with the ‘rules of the game’ of an electoral democracy. The Kyrgyz case demonstrates that the dismantlement of the communist party opened opportunities for hijacking state institutions by populist leaders, the re-emergence of traditional and informal networks, and the emergence of personalized political organizations. The survival of the ruling party was a key element in Mongolia’s peaceful transfer of power through elections, and the absence of a strong party explains Kyrgyzstan’s violent political power transfers.

Third, my study also contributes to the literature on democracy-promotion efforts. Political reform was initiated by pro-liberal leaders in the Kyrgyzstan case and was internalized through ruling party organizations in the Mongolian case. In Mongolia, ruling party leaders opened and encouraged a critical reform discourse, party members and intellectuals engaged in critical appraisals, and party-affiliated public organizations and members/supporters were involved in the political reform process. This political reform, which is backed up by a political institution and operationalized through the party structure, has a broader base and support from the public than the *personalized* political reform of Kyrgyzstan. The *institutionalized* reform *via* the political party has more sustainability than *personalized* reform, which is attached to a populist leader. Also, Western democracy promotion has a greater impact when it supports an opposition political organization (i.e., an opposition political party) than when supporting pro-liberal politicians (individuals) and/or diverse civil-society organizations. Unlike the assistance to civil society organizations, the support for opposition parties contributes to the establishment of a competitive party system, which is a key element for electoral democracy. The Mongolian case demonstrates the effectiveness of party-assistance projects more visibly and more quickly in the short term, while the Kyrgyz case shows that assistance to civil society organizations had little impact on electoral democracy in the short term as such assistance requires a long-term commitment to be effective.

Fourth, my dissertation offers a three-level analytical framework to examine the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers; the degree of political party institutionalization; and, to a certain extent, the actions of key political leaders of great powers and small states. Building on

existing theories, I identify the conditions necessary for democratization in authoritarian neighbourhoods. Unlike most studies that theorize domestic factors, my analytical framework examines the interactions of key external and internal factors and how they affect the democratization process.

Case Selection

There are several important rationales behind my selection of Mongolia as a primary case and Kyrgyzstan as a shadow case. In particular, the study of these two cases makes interesting theoretical contributions to explaining the democratization process, as each presents a different outcome under quite similar structural conditions: political power transfers by peaceful elections in Mongolia versus violent protests in Kyrgyzstan.⁵

First, Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan share a similar geographic, demographic, and cultural heritage as states that are located between two large, populous, and nuclear great powers, China and Russia. Inheriting Inner Asian nomadic and Buddhist heritage and culture, Mongolia has maintained its statehood between China and Russia with its population of three million and its small economy, which is based mostly on mining and agriculture. Kyrgyzstan, part of the former Soviet Union, has a population of five million and a small economy based on natural resources and agriculture, and it maintains Central Asian nomadic and moderate Islamic heritage. Important differences exist between Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan in terms of the ethnic composition and number of neighbours. In spite of its well-integrated Muslim minority (five percent), Mongolia is ethnically homogenous, whereas Kyrgyzstan has a multi-ethnic society with substantial Uzbek and Slavic ethnic minorities. The Kyrgyz ethnic group has constituted about 52 percent of the total population in 1989, versus over 70 percent 2013 (Schuler, 2007; Elebayeva eds., 2000, p. 344). The other important difference is that Kyrgyzstan borders China while sharing borders with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, but not with Russia. Mongolia borders only China and Russia.

Second, Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan both deviate from two different sets of countries to which they belong – Asian communist states and former Soviet Central Asian republics, respectively. Mongolia's democratization was triggered by changes in Soviet foreign policy, but Mongolia reacted differently than did other Asian communist states at the time. Mongolia responded in a similar manner to the European communist states (Fritz, 2002; Dierkes, 2012, p. 4). The democratization process in Kyrgyzstan, a part of the Soviet Union, was triggered by changing

⁵ The case selection is based on John Stuart Mill's method of difference. In accordance with the method of difference, two cases share many similarities, but present different outcomes (JS Mill, 1884; King, Keohane & Verba, 1994).

Soviet domestic policies and occurred in the same timeframe as other Central Asian Soviet republics, although it reacted differently from those other republics. Tajikistan was caught up in a civil war (1992-1996) and remained under the control of its Kremlin-backed regime. Leaders of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan institutionalized tight control over state institutions and society while relying on rents from natural resources. Only Kyrgyz leaders relaxed the political atmosphere by permitting civil liberties and providing space for civil society organizations (Pride, 1994). This presents a unique opportunity to examine similarities and differences in how small states reacted to the changes in their respective larger systems – Mongolia to the broader communist bloc collapse and Kyrgyzstan to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Third, a number of variables that usually complicate our study of the democratization process are absent in both cases. Because of their geographical isolation from Western democracies and regional organizations, the impacts of regional organizations such as the EU, NATO, and the Organization of American States (OAS) are absent. Neither state had ethnic diaspora links with any Western democracies in the 1980s and 1990s. Explanations based on the resource curse, particularly ones related to the presence of oil, gas, or other high-market demand, readily exploitable resources, are not relevant to these two cases since neither country possesses large deposits of these resources. Both countries are still resource-dependent, but their key resources – copper, coal, uranium – require massive investment for building mines and relevant infrastructure as well as depend on specific market demands. Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan did not face any external military threats or secessionist groups, thus reducing the external and internal threat variables. Finally, with their communist pasts, religious factors had a minimum impact on domestic political developments, especially as both states maintained traditional secular state institutions. The absence of these factors enables us to isolate key factors in the democratization process.

Fourth, in a larger context, Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan are potential representatives of many other small states in Asia-Pacific, Eurasia, and Africa – all located away from democratic neighbourhoods, but experienced similar structural factors during the third and fourth waves of democratization.⁶ Most of these small states are affected by the changing dynamics of the geopolitical interests of great powers and have differing degrees of institutionalization of their

⁶ The Mongolian and Kyrgyz cases have often been excluded from studies of comparative politics, just as many other small states in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific have also been excluded. But the study of these small states, as argued by Katzenstein and Veenendaal, is theoretically important (Katzenstein, 1985, 2003; Veenendaal & Corbett, 2015).

political parties and party systems. The analytical framework based on a comparative analysis of Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan could be extended, for example, to the democratization processes in East Asia (e.g., South Korea and Taiwan), the Caucasus (e.g., Armenia, the Baltic states, and Moldova), Africa (e.g., Botswana and Tanzania), Pacific Island states, and/or to the selective Arab Spring cases (e.g., Tunisia).

Table 2. Some Comparative Indicators

	Mongolia (Primary Case)	Kyrgyzstan (Shadow Case)
Period of Democratization	1989 Communist bloc	1991 Former Soviet republics
Democratic Neighbour (land)	None	None
Colonial Legacy	A satellite state of the Soviet Union	A Soviet republic
Independence	1921	1991
Geopolitical Importance (US)	None	Yes, from 2001
<i>(% of GDP in 1990)</i>		
Economy*	Mining – 42% Agriculture – 13% Services – 45%	Mining – 35% Agriculture – 34% Services – 31%
GDP	1,670 USD in 1989	575 USD in 1991
Population*	2.18 million in 1990	4.39 million in 1990
Ethnic Composition	Mongol – 95% Kazakh (Muslim) – 4% Others – 1%	Kyrgyz – 72.6% Uzbek – 14.4% Russian – 6.4% <i>Dungan</i> (Chinese) – 1% Others – 5.5%
Literacy	97.4	98.7
Religion	Secular State Buddhism (53%-60%) Islam (4%) Atheist (40%)	Secular State Islam (80%) Orthodoxy (17%)

Source:

*The Country Profile (Mongolia) of the World Bank (1990). Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/mongolia>; The Country Profile (Kyrgyzstan) of the World Bank (1990). Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/kyrgyz-republic>.

Plan of the Dissertation

My dissertation contains seven chapters. Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 reviews three major approaches – the structuralist, actor-focused, and external dimensions – of democratization theories and introduces my analytical framework of the dynamics of the geopolitical interests of great powers and absence/presence of a strong political party. The chapter also discusses a few notable alternative approaches which are used to explain democratic development in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, and discusses the methods for the dissertation.

Applying this analytical framework, Chapter 3 investigates Mongolia's democratic transition between 1984 and 1990 and argues that the absence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers and presence of a strong ruling (communist) party that was dominated by reformist leaders, resulted in a peaceful transition to democracy. The chapter examines the impact of Sino-Soviet rapprochement, the end of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's reformist policies on Mongolian politics, while process tracing the internal dynamics of the democratic transition, which ended with the first multi-party election, marking the end of authoritarian period.

Chapter 4 examines Mongolia's democratic consolidation from 1991 to 1999 and contends that electoral democracy has succeeded in Mongolia because of the absence of direct geopolitical competition among great powers. During this period, China was satisfied with Mongolia's geopolitical neutrality, Russia was too busy with its own domestic economic and security challenges, and the United States was only interested in promoting Mongolia's democratic consolidation. This created a favourable external security environment for Mongolian domestic politics, in which a democratic constitution was passed in 1992, and political power was transferred to opposition parties through peaceful elections.

Chapter 5 investigates the democratic consolidation from 2000 to 2010, a period – which witnessed changes in geopolitical interests of the great powers. The United States shifted its attention and resources to the fight against terrorist organizations and launched large-scale military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. China and Russia began shifting their attention to small states in their peripheries, especially in Central Asia, by institutionalizing new regional organizations and reacting against US involvement in the region. However, all great powers avoided direct geopolitical competition in Mongolia, thus providing another favourable decade for domestic politics. With the survival of Mongolia's former ruling party, electoral democracy was firmly

consolidated in its domestic politics, in which two major parties transferred political powers only through regular elections.

Chapter 6 brings the comparative insights of the Kyrgyz democratization process, from 1986 to 2010, and argues that Kyrgyz democracy failed due to the absence of a strong political party and the re-emergence of geostrategic interests of great powers following the start of Western military operations in Afghanistan. The chapter examines the geopolitical dynamics surrounding Kyrgyzstan in two separate periods: in the 1990s and in the post-9/11 period. In doing so, it discusses *why* and *how* the country's presidents – Akayev from 1990 to 2005, and Bakiyev from 2005 to 2010 – ascend to power, abuse power, and are removed from political powers by violent protests.

Finally, Chapter 7 introduces the findings of the comparative analysis of the Mongolian and Kyrgyz democratization processes and contends that there is potential application of the analytical framework to other cases to demonstrate the generalizability of my theories. Also, the chapter identifies gaps and lessons learned from the dissertation project.

Figure 1. Map of Asia



Source: Library of the University of Texas, July 11, 2018. Retrieved from www.lib.utexas.edu/maps.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

At a press conference a day after Mongolia's 5th presidential election on 24 May 2009, the MPRP, a successor communist party, and its candidate Enkhbayar Nambar, the incumbent President, congratulated opposition candidate Elbegdorj Tsakhia and accepted the results of the most competitive election in Mongolia's history. The Democratic Party candidate Elbegdorj won with 51 percent of the votes versus 47 percent of the votes for Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) candidate Enkhbayar.⁷ Elbegdorj was one of the opposition leaders, who successfully staged the hunger strike against the communist party in March 1990 and this election marked another power transition between presidents through a regular democratic election. International observers univocally regarded the election as free and fair and congratulatory remarks on Mongolia's exemplary democratization were echoed in Washington, Berlin, Tokyo, and Seoul – praising Mongolia's steadfast commitments towards democracy.

In contrast, on 24 July 2009, Kyrgyz watchers received two conflicting messages about the presidential election. The Election Observation Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) concluded that the presidential election was a “disappointment” and “failed to meet OSCE standards” for Kyrgyzstan as a member of the OSCE.⁸ But their counterparts, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Election Observation Mission and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) observers reported that the presidential election was “open and free” and even 136 observers of the CIS, a much larger contingent than the OSCE team, had “not observed any serious violations of voters' rights.”⁹ But, in the following months, the majority of Kyrgyz voters complained and some protested over unfair elections. Following the pattern of political dynamics in 2005, opposition leaders removed the country's second president Kurmanbek Bakiyev through nation-wide violent protests in April 2010.

This raises an interesting puzzle – *why* was the political power transferred by peaceful regular elections in Mongolia versus the violent protests in Kyrgyzstan? Under quite similar external and internal structural constraints, political leaders' commitments toward democratization were initially highly applauded by Western governments regarding them as democratic outposts in

⁷ General Election Commission of Mongolia, *Results of Presidential Elections* (Ulaanbaatar: 2017), 189-193. Retrieved from <http://www.gec.gov.mn/uploads/erunhiilugch%202013%20book%20last.pdf>

⁸ OSCE, *Kyrgyzstan, Presidential Election, 23 July 2009: Final Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/39923>

⁹ The US Embassy Cable, 24 July 2009. Retrieved from https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BISHKEK812_a.html On election monitoring of the CIS and SCO, see Cogan, Hurd & Johnstone, 2016, pp. 518 – 521 and Hyde, 2011.

the authoritarian neighbourhood of Inner and Central Asia, especially between two authoritarian great powers.

I argue that two factors – the geopolitical interests of great powers and political parties – are important to explain these diverging trajectories. The dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers has a direct impact on the democratization process of a small state. The absence of direct geopolitical competition creates an opening for the democratic transition while increasing the credibility and leverage of Western democracy promotion efforts in a small, peripheral state. The presence of geopolitical competition closes the opportunity for democratic transition and reduces the credibility and leverages of Western democracy promotion efforts. However, this external factor alone is not sufficient for transition to and consolidation of electoral democracy. The other key factor is the absence/presence of a strong political party and party system. The strong political party provides an institutional stability during the transition and becomes an indispensable element for the consolidation of the electoral democracy as it serves a model and anti-incumbent platform for the opposition parties.

In a nutshell, I argue that the transition would not have occurred with the presence of direct geopolitical competitions among great powers and that electoral democracy would not succeed in the absence of strong political parties in small states in the authoritarian neighbourhood. To be clear, I am not proposing a general theory of democratization in small states and I agree that democratization may not occur due to many other reasons even with these facilitating factors. By tracing these two factors, I explain different modes of power transfer in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan either by regular elections or violent protests.

This chapter begins by explaining key concepts. Then, I review three major approaches – the structuralist, actor-based, and external dimensions – of the democratization literature and identify pros and cons of each approach in answering my research question. Also, I discuss the specific set of works that examined the democratization process of Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan before introducing my analytical framework. Then, I explain my analytical framework, which consists of the external factor (i.e., the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers) and the domestic factor (i.e., the absence/presence of the strong political party). The chapter concludes a brief discussion of the prominent alternative explanation – institutional choice.

KEY CONCEPTS

The concept of democracy is defined in *minimalist* terms, focusing on the competitive elections, or *maximalist* terms, concerning the quality of democratic institutions. This work

employs the minimalist definition, also known as the procedural definition of democracy, based on well-known formulations of Joseph Schumpeter, Robert Dahl, Samuel Huntington, and Juan Linz.

Schumpeter defined democracy as an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for people’s vote” (1943, pp. 242, 269). While criticizing Schumpeter’s definition as an elitist one, Dahl extended the definition beyond the process of establishing governments through electoral competition among elites by identifying five critical elements for the democratic process: effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, controlling of the agenda, and inclusion of adults (Dahl, 1971, pp. 1-9). Similarly, Huntington defines democracy as a political system in which “the most important collective decision makers are selected through periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote” (Huntington, 1991, pp. 6-8). One of the most comprehensive procedural definitions was advanced by Linz, defining democracy as:

“Political systems that allows the free formulation of political preferences through the use of basic freedoms of association, information and communication for the purpose of a free competition between leaders to validate at regular intervals, by non-violent means, the claim to rule without excluding any office of national decision-making from that competition” (Linz, 2000, pp. 182-183).

I define an *electoral democracy* as a political system that (1) facilitates free, fair, inclusive, and competitive elections, (2) ensures full adult suffrage, including civil liberties and (3) resolves political conflicts through non-violent means. This stresses the self-enforcing political equilibrium, in Przeworski’s words, “democracy becomes the only game in town, when no one can imagine acting outside the democratic institutions, when all the losers want to do is to try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost” (Przeworski, 1991, p. 26). Therefore, the peaceful transition of political powers, especially of the legislative and executive branches, as a consequence of contested elections is the foremost criterion for the electoral democracy.

Following the tradition of transitology (O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Linz & Schmitter, 1996), I divide the democratization process into two distinct, but connected stages – transition and consolidation – while acknowledging challenges to the transition paradigm, particularly overlapping elements between these stages and the difficulty of classifying transitional regimes in the grey zone (Collier and Levitsky, 1997; Carothers, 2002).

Transition is the stage between the collapse of the authoritarian regime and the construction of a new regime. This is in agreement with the definition of O'Donnell and Schmitter as they define transition as an "interval between one political regime and another" and starts "at the moment that authoritarian rulers announce their intentions to extend significantly the sphere of protected individual and group rights" and ends with an establishment of a democratic regime through a relatively free electoral process (1986, pp. 2, 11-12). Therefore, in the transition stage, political leaders facilitate competitive, inclusive elections and abstain from major violations of civil and political liberties. Or, ruling political leaders take measures to strengthen the authoritarian regimes by closing opportunities for and/or delaying the transition stage.

Consolidation is the stage of institutionalizing regular elections and strengthening institutions to protect civil liberties. In the consolidation stage, the majority of political actors complies with the minimum procedural elements of democracy and abstains from competing for political power through any violent means. For the purpose of this research, the consolidation stage begins with the passage of the constitution, which sets the new rule for the electoral democracy, and successful completion of regular elections under the new constitution. The consolidation stage of electoral democracy ends as the electoral democracy passes the two-turnover test. By the two-turnover test, according to Huntington,

"a democracy may be viewed as consolidated if the party or group that takes power in the initial election at the time of transition loses a subsequent election and turns over power to those election winners, if those election winners then peacefully turn over power to the winners of a later election" (Huntington, 1991, pp. 266-267).

For the purpose of my research, the threshold for the transition stage is the acceptance of multi-party elections and cessation of any violence against civil liberties of the population whereas the 'two-turnover test' is considered as a key criterion for the consolidation stage of electoral democracy.¹⁰

In this research, I use the terms 'Great Powers' and 'Western' extensively. Following the generally accepted definitions in the international relations literature, great powers are states with political, economic, and military powers and a preponderant capability to exert power and influence on the processes of international relations, regionally and globally (Waltz, 1979, p. 131;

¹⁰ In the words of Adam Przeworski, "a democracy is a system, in which parties lose elections" (Przeworski, 1991, p. 10). Also, it is quite similar to 'ex-ante uncertainty' of Przeworski et al and 'habituation' of Dankwart Rustow (Rustow, 1970).

Organski & Kugler, 1980, p. 42; Levy, 1983, p. 16). My usage of ‘Great Powers’ refers explicitly to China, Russia, the United States, and to lesser extent to Japan and India. China, Russia and the United States are historically regarded as Great Powers in the international relations literature, especially based on the criteria of realist school scholars, and behave as great powers in contemporary international relations.¹¹ Japan and India are often referred to historically as “regional powers” or “regional hegemons” rather than “Great Powers” on a global scale. This is not to preclude that Japan and/or India could become or possibly were Great Powers in the past or future, but in the time period of the discussion, they are “regional powers” to international relations scholars (Nolte, 2010; Destradi, 2010).

I follow the general usage of the “Western” in the democratization literature to refer to longstanding, wealthy democracies, mostly in Western Europe and North America. But, I acknowledge that the term is contested when one discusses the roles of non-European democracies, for example, Japan and South Korea, who had played crucial roles for political and economic transitions in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, the term ‘Western’ in this work includes Japan especially in discussions about the democracy promotion.

DEMOCRATIZATION THEORIES & GAPS

The Structuralist Approach

One body of literature, known as the structuralist approach, suggests that structural factors like the level of economic wealth, inequality and education, or economic structure determine the likelihood of successful transition and consolidation. But this approach faces difficulties in explaining outcomes in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan.

The most well-known argument is that a country’s economic development, particularly its socio-economic status, serves as a key requisite for democratization. Lipset argues that “the more well-to-do a nation, the greater chances that it will sustain democracy” (1959, p. 75). Socio-economic development, which would result from industrialization, creates a large middle class, one that tends to be more open to democratic transition and stability; therefore modernization and democracy are correlated (Lipset, 1959). Several major scholarly works reinforced this modernization argument. Rostow (1960) contended that there is an inevitable, linear connection

¹¹ According to Waltz, “[s]tates are placed in the top rank because they excel in one way or another. Their rank depends on how they score on all of the following items: size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence” (Waltz 1979, p. 131).

Levy argues the “most important, a Great Power possesses a high level of military capabilities relative to other states” (1983, p. 16).

between economic modernization and democratization while Moore stressed the significance of the 'middle class' as a key condition: "No bourgeoisie, no democracy" (1966, p. 418).

Rueschemeyer (et al., 1992) presented a compelling argument that an organized labour class is more conducive to democratization rather than the landowning class. In spite of these appealing probabilistic associations between core elements of modernization (e.g., urbanization, wealth, education, and communication), Huntington criticized modernization theorists' neglect of the political order, especially the degree of institutionalization, which provides values and stability (1968). In Huntington's reasoning, economic development releases new social forces, which, in turn, overwhelm traditional institutions and lead to instability rather to an orderly democratic society in the absence of the political order (Huntington, 1968). Examining bureaucratic authoritarianism in Latin America, O'Donnell argues that economic development could also strengthen autocracy and is unlikely to prevent democratic breakdowns (1973). But, the core structuralist argument of the positive correlation remains influential in explaining some successful consolidation outcomes (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan, Czech, Hungary) of the third wave of democratization (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2009).

Later from 1997, Przeworski (et al., 1997) presented alternative views on the economic development and democracy relationship by questioning whether development brings democracy (i.e., endogenous theory) or helps democracy sustain once it happened (i.e., exogenous theory). Przeworski (et al., 1997) argues that transitions to democracy could happen at any level of economic development due to 'exogenous' causes like war or the death of dictators, but finds that economic development reduces the probability of democratic breakdown. Based on data from 1950-1990, Przeworski et al. (2000) find that no democracy has ever collapsed when the per capita income exceeded \$6,055 at the 1976 value. However, several scholars challenged Przeworski's findings and argued in support of endogenous correlation between economic development and democratization. Boix and Stokes extended Przeworski's dataset to the period from 1850 to 1950 and showed that economic development was a significantly important factor for democratic transitions (Boix & Stokes, 2003). Epstein (et al., 2006) challenged Przeworski's methodology and contended that if use a trichotomous measure of democracy, rather than dichotomous one (i.e., democracy *versus* autocracy), development has a strong effect on transitions to "partial democracy" and "full democracy."

The structural approach has been enriched by a number of specific studies, for instance, economic equality, which examines the relationship between inequality and regime change and the

resource curse, which investigates the correlation between oil wealth and dictatorship. The first set of works develops game-theoretic models to explain the causal mechanism between the degree of inequality and the probability of democratization. Boix argues that income equality and capital mobility, which tends to rise with economic development, reduce elites' fear of redistribution; this contributes to democratization (Boix, 2003). Acemoglu and Robinson created a model explaining the relationship between the degree of inequality and democracy. According to their model, at low level of inequality, elites can promote democracy as the threat of revolution increases, but, at higher levels of inequality, elites will repress democracy due to their fear of the redistributive consequences of democratization (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2001, 2005; Geddes, 2009). The second set of works, known as the resource curse literature, has examined the missing variable in the structural approach since modernization theory scholars did not discuss the relationship between natural resources and democracy in regards to petro-states in the Middle East and Latin America. The majority of quantitative inquiries show that resource wealth, particularly oil is strongly correlated with authoritarian governments (Madhavy, 1970; Ross, 2001, 2015; Wantchekon, 2002; Jensen and Wantchekon, 2004). Succinctly argued by Ross, the oil wealth reduces accountability (i.e., no taxation, no accountability), increases the patronage system to dampen the pressures for democracy, strengthens the repressive capacity of the regime, and slows down the modernization process (Ross, 2001). But, the findings of the resource curse literature are also ambiguous. Some studies indicate that natural resources have positive effects on democratization (Smith, 2004; Morrison, 2009; Tsui, 2011). Another set of studies did not find any evidence that natural resources either lead to democracy or stabilize democratic governments (Al-Ubaydli, 2012; Caselli and Tesei, 2011; Wiens, Poast, & Clark 2012; Andersen & Aslaksen 2013). Other scholars suggest that under certain conditions natural resources can either lead to democracy or contribute to the breakdown of democratic regimes. For example, Karl argues that reduced oil rents during the commodity bust cycles increase the demands for democracy (Karl, 1997) while Dunning finds that oil increases the probability of authoritarianism as well as democracy depending on the level of inequality (Dunning, 2008).

Besides presenting a strong correlation between economic factors and democracy, the structuralist approach has some disadvantages in excluding agency (i.e., of people), political institution, and international factors. For the purpose of this dissertation, it fails to explain why economically underdeveloped, poor, and resource-based states like Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan made transitions to democracy while presenting different outcomes in regards with democratic

consolidation. Although an economic investigation, especially the impact of the mining boom, is not in the focus of my work, Mongolia's potential escape from the political curse of the mining boom presents another interesting puzzle for resource curse theory.

Actor-focused Approach

The second body of literature is known as the actor-focused approach, which gives a higher priority to the interactions and choices of political elites, including ruling and opposition groups, than the structural determinacy of socio-economic requisite conditions. This approach considers democratization as a process, which goes through several phases. Rustow identified three phases – *preparatory*, *decision*, and *habituation* – through which states progress from authoritarian to democratic regimes (Rustow, 1970). Along quite similar lines, O'Donnell and Schmitter divided the transition process into two phases: *liberalization* of the authoritarian regime by extending rights, especially political liberties and *democratization* by introducing the fundamental democratic procedures and institutions (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). In this process, strategic interactions of a narrow set of elite actors determine the fate of democratization while the popular upsurge of the masses plays an ephemeral role (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, p. 55).

The fundamental argument of this approach is that the internal rift among authoritarian elites is the first step in a democratization process and subsequently leads to short-term bargaining before ending either in pacted transition toward democracy or autocracy (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, 1991; Karl, 1990; Linz & Stephan, 1996). The greater degree of uncertainty during the transition period forces competing elites to lock into a pact, providing stability, a guarantee of basic rights, and a check on the power of the ruling elites. Therefore, a compromise among ruling and opposition elites reduces the likelihood of conflict and, at the same time, strengthens institutions that would lead to democratization. Using the game-theoretic interpretation, Przeworski demonstrates a series of strategic interactions among regime hardliners and reformers and opposition moderates and radicals and argues that democracy is only possible when regime reformers ally with opposition moderates or radicals (1991). Karl and Schmitter (1991) develop four ideal-typical modes of transition – pact, imposition, reform, and revolution – by focusing on specific combinations of agents (i.e., elites *versus* masses) and strategies (i.e., compromise *versus* coercion). When elites are in advantageous bargaining positions, transition would end in pacted or imposed modes of democracy. Or, it would end in reform or revolution modes if the masses overwhelm the resistance of elites (Karl & Schmitter, 1991). Modifying actor-based theories, Linz and Stepan (1996) distinguish non-democratic regimes (i.e., totalitarian, post-

totalitarian, sultanistic, and authoritarian) and argue that the mode of transition is path dependent on the type of the previous regime. According to their argument, the pacted transition and democratization is the most likely if the previous regime is authoritarian or post-totalitarian while it is impossible from sultanistic and totalitarian regimes (Linz & Stephan, 1996, p. 57). Also, related to the actor-focused approach, Burton (et al., 1992) argues that elites control social mobilization; therefore, elites could influence their supporters in agreements that would result in democratic consolidation and stability. Elites can obtain agreements towards democracy through *elite consensus*, in which previously divided elites collaborate, or through *elite convergence*, in which elites gradually converge in favour of democracy (Burton, et al., 1992, pp. 24-25). In a nutshell, the actor-focused approach emphasizes the role of rational choice, decision-making, strategic calculation, and signalling of incumbent and opposition elites.

If the structuralist approach has its empirical basis in Western cases of the first and second waves of democratization, the actor-focused approach has its empirical bases in democratization processes in Latin America, Southern Europe, and, to certain extent, Central and Eastern Europe, where ruling and opposition elites interacted in uncertain political and socio-economic environments, and the location of transitions was not easily explained by structural factors. The actor-focused approach has three major shortcomings in relation to my research.

For one, the actor-focused approach usually examines the brief moment of transition or failed transition while over-emphasizing strategic interactions between regime hard-liners and soft-liners vis-à-vis the opposition elites at this condensed period of time. Pierson argues “game-theoretic approaches do not easily stretch over extended spaces (to broad social strategies) or long time periods without rendering key assumptions of the models implausible” (Pierson, 2003, pp. 200-201). Second, most of these works, particularly the early transitology work fails to explain the role of external factors, especially the rise of the democracy promotion agenda of the Western powers, membership conditionality and persuasion by the EU, NATO, and OAS, as well as the conditionality imposed by international financial institutions in promotion of the market economy and democracy. Third, it did not consider how the size of the state, the overarching geopolitical setting and the degree of vulnerability of a country could matter in political leaders’ decisions in regards with democratization. The smaller and more vulnerable a country is, the easier the decision-making process or strategic calculations could be – as argued by Katzenstein, in his seminal works on small states (Katzenstein, 1985, 2003). Because political leaders of small states demonstrate more cohesiveness, that makes them the most adaptable (Katzenstein, 1985, 2003).

External Dimensions

Another body of literature studies external factors in the democratization process. The external dimensions literature, indeed, provides some explanations why Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan made the transition to democracy and presented different outcomes.

External dimensions of democratization have attracted more scholarly interest following the third wave of democratization than early periods (Geddes, 2009, pp. 331-333). Three main reasons that resulted from this neglect of external factors earlier in the literature, as summed by Whitehead, are: (1) inductive theorizing based on exemplary cases, all of which seemed internally driven; (2) democratization was understood as a regime change happening in a given pre-existing nation state; and (3) democratization was conceived as a brief transitional process between two stable regimes (Whitehead, 2001, p. 442). Therefore, scholars of the actor-based approach underplay the role of international factors, as concluded by O'Donnell and Schmitter, "domestic factors play a predominant role in the transition" (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986, p.19).¹² This situation has dramatically changed in the 1990s, when external dimensions played a decisive role in regards with the democratization process; this contributed to the emergence of theoretical shifts, which emphasize international influence.

The external dimensions literature evolved in quite interesting ways. To begin with, democratization scholars unanimously agreed that the end of the Cold War, particularly the geopolitical competition between the Soviet Union and United States, created a favourable external environment for democratization by providing breathing space for domestic politics and ending supports for authoritarian regimes. For example, Huntington argued that "the major shift in U.S. policies beginning in 1974 toward the promotion of human rights and democracy in other countries and Gorbachev's dramatic change in the late 1980s in Soviet policy toward maintaining the Soviet empire" played a significant role along with other four changes (1991, p. 45).¹³ Linz and Stepan conclude, "formal or informal empires, largely responding to their own internal and geopolitical needs, may open a previously closed gate to democratization efforts in subordinate regimes" (1996, p. 73). The end of superpower competition weakened authoritarian regimes dramatically and triggered political and economic reform processes, many of which led to democracy, which

¹² It is important to acknowledge that earlier scholarship did recognize the importance of external dimensions, especially in cases of democracy of being imposed by the occupation of Western powers (Dahl, 1971; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986, p. 18).

¹³ Huntington identified the deepening legitimacy problems of authoritarian systems, unprecedented global economic growth of the 1960s, activities of the Catholic Church, changes in the policies of external actors, and the snowballing/demonstration effects as five major changes that have played significant roles in the third wave (Huntington, 1991, pp. 45-106).

was also the *zeitgeist* (the spirit of the time) (Linz & Stepan, 1996, pp. 74-75). Undeniably, end of Cold War provides plausible explanations for the democratic transitions in many small states, who struggled to survive under the conditions of intense bipolar geopolitical competition.

Secondly, the timing of Western domination of the international order affected major international relations theories. As the international order shifted to a unipolar moment, the literature has been enriched by three sets of overarching theoretical debates that explain why and how the Western powers promote democracy. The first set has a closer affinity to hegemonic stability theory, which focuses mostly on the international political economy and the notion of world leadership (Krasner, 1976; Keohane, 1984; Gilpin, 1986; Organski and Kugler, 1980; Modelski, 1987). As hegemonic stability theory postulates that once a preponderant country becomes a hegemon, it needs to structure the international economic system to its benefits and also promote the norms for the stability of the international system. The second set is democratic peace theory, which argues that democracies do not fight one another because of normative principles (i.e., a democratic culture of peaceful norms) and institutional checks on political leaders (Russett, 1993; Owen, 1994; Russett et al., 1995). Studies in the democratic peace literature demonstrate a strong positive correlation between democratic states and peace; this certainly enhances the economic interdependence argument of liberal theories. The final set, which is rooted in the constructivist tradition, examines how a new global norm, for example, democracy and democratic governance, has prevailed as a result of socialization processes internationally and regionally (Checkel 2003; Flockhart 2004; Whitehead 2001; Schmitter 2001).

Thirdly, following the overly optimistic hope for a liberal democratic era (Fukuyama, 1989; Sen, 1999), the democracy promotion literature has enriched the democratization literature, but it advocated the view of democratization as a global phenomenon, for which the Western democracies have a decisive role in its proliferation. With little consideration of domestic factors, scholars have examined different mechanisms of democracy promotion such as coercion (or direct democracy promotion), political and economic conditionality, persuasion, diffusion and contagion.¹⁴ As a result, the democracy promotion literature has accumulated knowledge on two fronts. One examines the unilateral role of Western powers, especially the United States and Germany in democracy promotion internationally (Carothers 1999, 2006; Cox et al., 2000; McFaul

¹⁴ More on different mechanisms, see Whitehead, 1996, pp. 3-25; Schmitter, 1996, pp. 26-54; Bunce & Wolchik, 2013, pp. 123-148; and Youngs, 2012, pp. 287-315.

2004, 2010; Monten 2005; Rieffer & Mercer, 2005; Kopstein 2006). The other studies the role of international and regional organizations. A large amount of studies is devoted to the role of regional institutions in Europe, particularly the EU, NATO, and OSCE (Schraeder, 2002; Pevehouse, 2005; Pridham, 2005; Linden 2002; Pridham et al., 1994; Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier, 2005; Whitehead 2001; Dimitrova and Pridham, 2004; Epstein, 2005). Within this segment, the role of the United Nations (Joyner, 1999; Rushton, 2008) and other regional organizations like the OAS and African Union (AU) (Cooper & Legler, 2006; Legler & Tiekou, 2010) also generated some scholarly interest in democracy promotion. But the democracy promotion literature appears to explain a small set of successful democratization mostly in Central and Eastern Europe, which had been aided substantially by the EU and NATO.

Finally, starting from the late 1990s, with the resilience of authoritarianism in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, the emergence of semi-authoritarianism in many former Soviet republics, and reversals following successful democratic transitions, scholars began to revisit the overly confident claim about the liberal democratic era and propose different explanations for the failure of democracy promotion (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010, pp. 9-10). The well-known explanations include the proximity model, linkage and leverages, gatekeeper elites, and autocracy promoters (or black-knights). To explain the divergent outcomes of the post-communist transitions in Europe and Eurasia, Kopstein and Reilly (2000) demonstrate the plausibility of geographic proximity to the Western democracies as a positive influence on democratization. In other words, the closer to developed democracies the target states are, the more they will be exposed to Western norms, resources, and institutions. In linking external and domestic factors, Levitsky and Way (2010) identify five dimensions of linkages (i.e., economic, geopolitical, social, communication, and transnational civil society ties) and argue that democratization will succeed only if the Western actors have strong leverage and dense linkages or ties with the target state. Challenging the overwhelming structural determinism of the leverage and linkage approach, Tolstrup (2012) argues that the most important players in democratic transitions are gatekeeper elites, who play either a facilitating or restraining role vis-à-vis external influence based on their main values and/or strategic calculation. Recently, a new set of studies argues illiberal regional powers, namely China, Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia, act against Western democracy promotion efforts by providing economic assistance to authoritarian regimes, intervening in domestic politics of neighbouring states, and creating regional organizations to expand the reach of authoritarian norms (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010; Plattner, 2015; Bader, 2015; Obydenkova et al., 2015; Diamond et al., 2016).

The journals *Contemporary Politics* (2010) and *Democratization* (2015) devoted special issues investigating autocracy promotion claims and drew similar conclusions of scepticism about the overly claim about pro-democracy Western powers and autocracy promoting illiberal regional powers and stressed the necessity of examining the specific conditions for triggering anti-democracy reactions from regional powers as well as conflicting foreign policy objectives of Western powers.

Like the structuralist and actor-focused literature, there are some shortcomings in the external dimensions literature to explain my research questions. First, the external dimension literature has geographic foci mostly in Europe and Latin America where the developed democracies could have stronger effects on democratization than in other regions like Africa, Asia Pacific, Eurasia and Middle East. Second, it seems to assume that the external influence of Western democracies has mostly positive impacts on the democratization process while depicting roles of authoritarian major powers in mostly negative ways (Carothers, 1999, 2002, 2004; Levitsky & Way, 2010). Third, there is a tendency to examine external influence on the democratization process as if it is one-way process from the Western democracies to small states. This ignores the commitment, especially self-initiated strategic commitment from political leaders of small, weak states to make transition to and consolidation of democracy following their own motivations. Last but not least, geopolitical aspects require renewed attention as the global order moves from the brief unipolar moment to a multipolar order, especially at the regional levels (Whitehead, 2001, pp. 386, 406-410; Cavatorta, 2001, p. 175; Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 238).

Literature Review – Mongolia

The democratization process in Mongolia is under-examined. The existing English-language literature could be divided into three major categories. The first category is anthropological and historical analysis, including the works of Caroline Humphrey, David Sneath, Stephen Kotkin, Bruce Elleman and Morris Rossabi. In this category, Rossabi's work devoted more extensive focus on democratization by presenting the most critical appraisal of international developmental aid to Mongolia while accounting for changes in the economy, poverty, culture and foreign relations. But, these works paid little attention to the domestic political process. The second category includes studies which examined specific issues such as legal reform (Ginsburg & Ganzorig 2000), semi-parliamentarism (Munkh-Erdene, 2010; Moestrup & Ganzorig, 2007), civil-military relations (Bruneau & Mendee 2012; Mendee & Tuvshintugs 2013), elections (Maškarinec, 2014, 2015; Oleinik, 2014; Mendee & Last 2008; Schafferer, 2014; Radchenko & Mendee, 2018),

and socio-economic aspects (Dierkes et al., 2012). Although providing explanations within the democratization context, these works did not explain the democratization process. The final set includes works, which centered on investigating Mongolia's deviancy; this requires a bit more critical engagement. The existing literature considers Mongolia as an outlier case.¹⁵ For example, Seeberg found that Mongolia was considered a deviant case nine times in large-N analyses and twice in small-N analyses in the period of 1990-2010 (Seeberg, 2014).

In the Mongolia-specific democratization literature, Mongolia is considered to be a deviant case on two accounts. First, from the "socio-economic requisites" approach to democratization, Mongolia is a deviant case because it was economically poor, aid-dependent, and under-developed. The only pre-condition that Mongolia fulfilled was near-universal literacy (Fritz, 2002, 2008). However, this high literacy rate applies to the majority of former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. The second aspect is geographical isolation from the developed democracies in Europe and North America and regional clusters of new democracies like Central and Eastern Europe or Latin America. Scholars like Linz and Stepan (1996), Kopstein and Reilly (2000), and Levitsky and Way (2010) contend geographical distances and ties with the West have significant implications for the fate of democratization. In this regard, Mongolia along with Kyrgyzstan presents a strong deviancy – as mentioned earlier. There are several explanations for Mongolia's unexpected democratic development in the current academic literature.¹⁶

Fish (1998) stressed the ability of compromise of political elites, the institutional choice of a semi-parliamentary structure,¹⁷ fast consolidation of the multiparty system, and a vibrant civil society as key factors for Mongolia's peaceful democratic transition. Later in 2001, Fish compared Mongolia with Central Asian states and argued that Mongolia's successful democratization was a result of the absence of negative factors like natural resources (i.e., oil and gas), geostrategic significance and external patronage, a national father figure, concentration of power, and regional power pretensions. He succinctly argues that the fate of Mongolia's democracy will depend on

¹⁵ As Carothers stressed "democracy seemed to be breaking out in the most unlikely and unexpected places, whether Mongolia, Albania, or Mauritania" (Carothers, 1999, p. 15; 2002, p. 8). Moreover, Huntington, Geddes, Doorenspleet and Mudde, and Seeberg have identified Mongolia as an outlier case (Huntington, 1991, 179-180; Geddes, 1999; Doorenspleet & Mudde, 2008; Seeberg, 2014).

¹⁶ Also, there are many articles, including those written as a part of annual review of *Asian Survey*, that discuss Mongolia's democratization process, but only a few (i.e., works of Fish (1998, 2001), Fritz (2002, 2008), Rossabi (2005, 2009) fully concentrate on the democratization process.

¹⁷ In his words, "Mongolia showcases the virtues of institutions that disperse power, and particularly of a legislature-dominant form of semi-presidentialism" (Fish, 1998, pp. 127-141).

“the skill and imagination of its political leaders,” but he did not provide extensive empirical evidence (Fish, 2001, p. 337).

Fritz (2002) argues that the success of the Mongolia’s democratization hinged on a mixture of structural factors (i.e., Buddhism, nomadism, weak clan structures, and ethnic homogeneity) and conjunctural factors like political party dominance (rather than an individual strong leader) and dependency on foreign aid. In a special issue of *Democratization* on deviant democracy, Fritz advances five key explanatory factors: well established statehood and stateness, a high degree of economic and strategic external dependency¹⁸, democratic contagion from Central and Eastern Europe, favourable constellation of domestic actors, and lack of concern about social liberalization (2008, p. 785). By isolating factors in transition and consolidation stages, Fritz highlights that Mongolia’s vulnerability vis-à-vis its two powerful neighbours serves as an important factor for political elites to seek technical, financial, and moral support from the consolidated democracies, but she did not fully explain why and how this was the case (Doorenspleet & Mudde, 2008, p. 826).

In her co-authored article on Mongolia and Central Asian states, Fritz also argues Mongolia’s independent statehood and relatively strong links with the West have made more positive contributions to democratization in Mongolia than in Central Asian states (Fritz & Wheatley, 2012). Probably due to the scope and limits of the journal articles, like Fish, Fritz does not provide sufficient explanations about why and how external and internal factors shaped Mongolian political leaders’ decision over the democratic transition and consolidation, but rather listed all potential conjectures. Authors overlooked the role of Mongolian security institutions, ruling party and its leadership while over-emphasizing Mongolia’s connection with Central and Eastern European states.¹⁹

Three main weaknesses of accounts of Mongolian democratization in the English-language literature stand out. First, roles of the communist party and its leaders were under-examined because Western scholars discussed mostly the opposition leaders of a brief period of transition

¹⁸ Fritz argues that Mongolia’s need for political and economic support from the developed democracies to balance against Chinese and Russian influence serves as a positive factor for both transition to and consolidation of democracy in Mongolia. But, she did not explain this logic fully.

¹⁹ Authors (2012) presented un-proven assumptions about contagion and diffusion from Central and Eastern European states through intellectuals who studied in Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia and also some authors (e.g., Rossabi, 2005) even argued that the democratization process was driven by a few elites in the capital city. These assumptions have been challenged by Mongolian scholars (e.g., Gundsambuu Kh, Chuluunbaatar G, and Tamir Ch) and political leaders who were taking part in the decision-making processes in the early 1990s – as acquired during my fieldwork in Mongolia.

that started in 1990 and focused exclusively on structural factors and conditions. Therefore, Mongolia's democratization process must be examined from the mid-1980s when reformist ideas were gaining popularity among political leaders as well as the public. The separation of the communist party from state institutions, especially from the legislature and bureaucracy were missing variables in these works. Second, scholars paid little attention to Mongolia's geopolitical environment of the late 1980s. Unlike European communist states, Mongolia has always been locked into the regional geopolitical structure of Sino-Soviet/Russian spheres of influence. Therefore, changes in this geopolitical environment of Mongolia had long-term structural impact on Mongolia's domestic politics as well as political leaders' perceptions and commitments towards democracy. Third, the literature paid little attention to positive roles of China and Soviet Union/Russia in Mongolia's democratization while giving overwhelming significance to Western democracy promotion efforts. If Moscow had not removed the long-lasting authoritarian leader, and Beijing had not pressured the complete Soviet military withdrawal, or Beijing and particularly Moscow had reacted against Mongolia's outreach to Western powers, Western democracy promotion could not have been possible. Moreover, Sino-Russian avoidance of engaging in direct geopolitical competition in Mongolia have created a favourable external environment for Mongolia's democratization and Western democracy promotion efforts. Finally, critical roles of key external leaders like Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and US Secretary of State James Baker at critical junctures were under-examined. Therefore, a careful process-tracing to examine the interaction of external and internal factors is important to examine the democratization process of a small, weak state in the authoritarian neighbourhood.

Literature Review – Kyrgyzstan

The existing English-language literature on Kyrgyzstan falls into four major categories. The first category includes studies of political and socio-economic reforms in Soviet Republics and most of them treat Kyrgyzstan as a comparative case, especially for Central Asia (Olcott, 1996; Ruffin & Waugh, 1999; Cummings, 2002, 2003, 2012; Luong, 2002; Kavalski et al., 2010; Stobdan, 2014). The second category involves works on post-communist transitions and authoritarian renewals (Anderson et al., 2001; Collins 2006; Bunce et al., 2010). The third category centres on geopolitics, especially the re-emergence of the Great Game and manoeuvring of small states in the post 9/11 geopolitical context (Banuazizi, 1994; Collins & Wohlforth, 2003; Olcott, 2005, 2007; Roy, 2007; Cooley, 2008, 2009, 2010; Jackson, 2010). The final category consists of works examining different aspects of democratization in Kyrgyzstan: revolutions and mobilization

(Radnitz, 2005, 2006, 2010; Khamidov, 2006; Lewis, 2008; Cummings & Ryabkov, 2008; Stewart, 2009; Temirkulov, 2008, 2010; Kubicek, 2011), opposition, institutions, and parties (Koldys, 1997; Ryabkov, 2008; Alkan 2009; Huskey & Iskakova, 2010, 2011; Ishiyama & Kennedy, 2010), semipresidentialism (Huskey, 2007, 2016) and religion/nationalism (McGlinchey, 2011).

The trajectory of arguments in these studies is quite interesting. Up to 1995, scholars and policy practitioners regarded Kyrgyzstan as the ‘island of democracy’ and identified a number of key factors – open-minded political elites, absence of natural resources, foreign aid, and a strong, vibrant civil society contributed to Kyrgyzstan’s democracy (Pryde, 1994; Anderson, 1999; Davar & Chukaeva, 2012; Fish, 2001). Later, as Presidents Askar Akayev (in power 1993-2005) and Kurmanbek Bakiyev (2005-2010) abused their political power, scholars began to doubt whether the democratic political order could succeed in Kyrgyzstan and investigated various causal factors for the de-democratization process. Collins (2002, 2006) points to clan networks, Huskey (et al., 2010, 2011) contend the institutional instability and weak opposition; Ryabkov (2008) highlights the regional divide between the north and south; Temirkulov (2008, 2010) stresses the neopatrimonial rule and the elite’s control of resources; and McGlinchey (2011) argues for structural causes, especially elite fragmentation and vulnerable civil society, in the failure of Kyrgyz democratization. Cooley argues that U.S. geostrategic interests of establishing and maintaining the military transit base to Afghanistan undermined US policies and conditionality for Kyrgyzstan’s democratization (Cooley, 2008). Others explained how institutional choice (of the super-presidentialism), tensions between Uzbek and Kyrgyz ethnic groups, regional competition, the revival of Islamic culture, and geopolitical interests of China, Iran, and Russia have negative effects on the democratization process in Kyrgyzstan (Fish, 2001; Ambrosio, 2009; Jackson, 2010; Wachtel, 2013; Stobdan, 2014). Considered as a deviant case among the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan still poses interesting questions for democratization theories after two violent power transfers in 2005 and 2010 respectively.

Like the literature on Mongolia’s democratization, there are three major gaps in the study of democratization in Kyrgyzstan. First, scholars paid little attention to political developments preceding the Akayev presidency in 1990 and 1991, especially the promotion of semi-presidentialism in the Soviet republics and its consequences. Second, even though all scholars acknowledge the absence of the party system and institutionalization, scholars did not examine why that was the case and its implications for democratic consolidation as well as Western

democracy promotion. Third, studies highlight the changing geopolitical dynamics in the post-9/11 context, but they did not explain why Kyrgyz political leaders, unlike Mongolian counterparts, did not make a strategic commitment to democratization. Kyrgyz leaders do not see democracy as a crucial means to strengthen their state sovereignty probably because of their heavy reliance on the Russian protection, which seemingly ameliorates Kyrgyz concern about a potential China threat.

Overarching Problems & Gaps

There are two major gaps in the democratization literature, especially explaining democratization that is taking place in a remote, authoritarian neighbourhood between two great powers – China and Russia.

First, the geopolitical dynamics of the authoritarian neighbourhood are understudied. There is an assumption that Western powers unequivocally engage in democracy promotion globally while China and Russia, so-called illiberal major powers, promote autocracy. In the 1990s, Western powers, especially the US did not intentionally promote democracy in small states in the Sino-Soviet sphere of influence unless these states have made clear first move and commitments toward political and economic reform. The US was cautious and driven by its overarching interests of dealing with China and Russia on other issues with global and regional implications. In this context, the Sino-Soviet rapprochement and their retrenchment created a permissive geopolitical environment for contested domestic politics in peripheral small states. That dynamic changed by 2000, especially in Central Asia. The emergence of US geopolitical interests, re-assertion of Russian geopolitics, and Chinese rising influence have changed the overarching geopolitical setting. This rising direct geopolitical, especially geostrategic competition has undermined Western democracy promotion efforts while complicating the democratic consolidation process of small states. The relationship between the overarching geopolitical dynamics and the democratization process needs to be examined in order to explain the interaction of external and internal factors.

Second, the positive role of the old regime ruling party is under-examined despite scholarly agreement on the importance of the institutionalization of the political party and party systems immediately after the liberalization. In fact, there is a general tendency in Western scholarly works to downplay the role of political leaders, who related to the former ruling parties, especially communist ones, while wholeheartedly highlighting roles of the opposition leaders, civil society

organizations, demonstrations and media.²⁰ Until the recent emergence of the “authoritarian resilience” scholars, who examined the roles and adaptive process of the former ruling parties (mostly in East and Southeast Asia), positive roles of the former communist parties have drawn little scholarly interests.²¹ But, in reality, some communist parties (e.g., Central and Eastern Europe) played leading, constructive or facilitating roles for the transition to and consolidation of democratic political order (Grzymala-Busse, 2006). The strong political party channelled interests of newly liberated social forces, facilitated the leadership succession, and provided a motive, model or a platform for the emergence of new political parties. Therefore, the positive roles of former ruling party leadership, critical members, and institutional strength must be examined without any ideological bias.²²

My work will address these shortcomings and explain *why*, under *what conditions* electoral democracy succeeds or fails in small, weak states the authoritarian neighbourhood.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the era of democracy, especially in the late 1980s and 1990s, political leaders of most small states came under pressure from their domestic opposition and the international community, which had been dominated by Western powers, to adopt norms of liberal democracy mostly in terms of elections and civil rights. Opposition pressure was effective when political leaders lacked support from great powers, including democratic ones, economic resources, and immediate security rationales for controlling society. Opposition pressure was less effective when political leaders had support from great powers or coped with security threats, which, in turn, provided justifications for the institutionalized control of the opposition and society.

Also, in the early 1990, political leaders of small states, particularly those lacking support from great powers, economic resources, and security rationales, introduced simultaneous political and economic reforms mostly in order to secure assistance, investment, and loans from international donors and financial institutions. This was often the case for the post-communist transitions, including Central and Eastern European states as well as republics of former Soviet Union and Yugoslav Federation. With institutionalized support and membership conditionality of

²⁰ For example, even in the mid-90s, scholars alerted with the return of communism as many former communist parties winning in the consecutive elections in Europe and expressed doubts about the reform of these communist parties (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 454).

²¹ On authoritarian resilience, see Nathan, 2003; Slater, 2008, 2009; Pei, 2012; and Heydemann & Leenders, 2011.

²² One example of such bias is to categorize any political leaders, movements and organizations opposing the communist party (or dominant party) as pro-liberal while painting everyone else, whoever affiliated with the communist party as the anti-liberal force. In retrospect, this attitude leads to misleading explanations and understanding of the post-communist politics.

the EU and NATO, democratization succeeded in most Central and Eastern European states, Baltic States, Croatia and Slovenia while democratization was staggered in the rest, which is not considered an entirely democratic neighbourhood given their geographic proximity to Russia, China and other regional major powers. But, in this authoritarian neighbourhood, Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan both made the transition to democracy and presented different consolidation outcomes.

To explain these diverging outcomes after initial transitions, I investigate the effects and the interaction of two factors: the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers and the absence/presence of a strong political party. One is external and necessary, but not sufficient for the transition stage; the other is domestic and necessary, but not sufficient for the consolidation of the electoral democracy.

The Dynamics of Geopolitical Interests of Great Powers

Small states operate in different geopolitical settings which are mostly shaped by interests and actions of great powers; therefore, small states do not really matter.²³ This setting changes as great powers prioritize their geostrategic imperatives such as dealing with threats, resources, and strategic competitors. Since small states lack power, resources, and capacity to change the overarching geopolitical setting, small states have high adaptability while their domestic politics are often vulnerable to changes in sub-regional, regional, and global structures. As Katzenstein argues, domestic political changes of a small state are “understanding-a-thing-in-context” rather than “understanding-a-thing-on-its-own” (2003, p. 9). The geopolitical context sets the stage for democratization; therefore, interests of great powers matter for the fate of democratization.

Great Powers historically engage in geopolitical competition to increase their sphere of influence and to accumulate power (Waltz, 1988; Mearsheimer, 2001; Wohlforth, 2009). However, Great Powers also avoid direct geopolitical competition with each other in peripheral small states since such competition is costly and could lead to unnecessary military conflicts. Sometimes, such avoidance results in explicit and/or implicit agreements of not engaging in geopolitical competition and respecting the geostrategic neutrality of small buffer states.²⁴ Therefore, with respect to each other’s interests and concerns, Great Powers prioritize their interests, especially political/ideological, economic, and geostrategic (i.e., security and military) in regards with small, peripheral states. Direct geopolitical competition is defined as competitive policies and behaviours

²³ On the structural realist tradition, see Waltz, 1959, 1979; Walt, 1987; and Mearsheimer, 2001.

²⁴ On ‘buffer states,’ see Ross, 1986; Knight, 1988; Cullather, 2002.

of great powers to gain geostrategic advantages over each other in small, peripheral states. The absence of direct competition creates a favourable external environment for democratization. This work argues that geostrategic – especially security – interests had a particular impact on democratic transition. Above all, the dynamic of geopolitical interests of great powers is an important variable, especially for the transition to democracy.²⁵

The transition to democracy is possible in the absence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers because this absence creates a favourable external environment. First, ruling political leaders and regimes will lack support and backing from the allied or protective great power. Second, political leaders will have limited bargaining power with Western powers, who will lobby for democratization. Third, ruling political leaders will have little justification for controlling the opposition and society in alignment with security imperatives of great powers. The opposite of these dynamics is necessary, but not sufficient for authoritarian consolidation. Therefore, transition to democracy is *not* possible when (1) neighbouring great powers have vested geostrategic interests, (2) ruling political leaders have bargaining power, and (3) in the presence of immediate security threats. Therefore, the absence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for democratic transition. Along with two other domestic factors: the presence of a strong ruling party, dominated by pro-reform political leaders, and opposition, the absence of the geopolitical interests of great powers constitutes necessary, but not sufficient conditions for the democratic transition.

This explains *why* and *how* Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan made initial democratic transitions in an entirely authoritarian neighbourhood. The transition has occurred not only because of Western democracy promotion, but due to a geopolitical opening, which resulted from the Sino-Soviet rapprochement, Soviet retrenchment, and domestic pro-reform political leaders. The normalization of Sino-Soviet relations created a peaceful environment, which removed the China threat, reduced the geostrategic value for buffer states to the Soviet Union, and opened breathing space for contested domestic politics in peripheral states (Gombosuren, personal interview, 2016;

²⁵ On discussions about the geopolitical importance in the democratization literature, see Huntington, 1991, pp. 85-99; Linz & Stepan, 1996, pp. 239-244; Whitehead, 2001, p. 410; Cavatorta, 2001, pp. 176-179; McFaul, 2010, pp. 3-29; Cohen, 2015, pp. 87-92. Whitehead succinctly argues

“geopolitical considerations need to be reintegrated into the analysis of democratization processes in general, and of those embedded in post-Cold War regional integration in particular. International support for new democracies may be a moral good in its own right; and it may also serve the best political, security, and economic interests of the citizens of the established democracies in the long run; but these hortatory arguments should not blind us to the hegemonic purposes and balance-of-power consequences that are also involved” (2001, p. 410).

Bayarkhuu, personal interview, 2016). The declining power, the Soviet Union/Russia, dismantled its political control, withdrew its military and security presence, and reduced its economic assistance (Byambasuren, 2012; Batbayar, 2002). At the same time, both China and Russia were reluctant to intervene in domestic politics of small states mostly in avoidance of triggering a security dilemma as well as anti-colonial sentiments among political leaders and society of neighbouring small states (Gombosuren, personal interview, 2016). Geopolitical interests of China and Russia were satisfied by their explicit agreement of keeping peripheral states geostrategically neutral, especially those states with limited economic value (e.g., oil and gas, transit routes). In the absence of overriding security and economic interests, Western powers were cautious and less interested in causing tensions with regional powers in remote areas; therefore, democracy promotion was extended only after small states made solid first moves toward democracy. In fact, the promotion of democracy and a free market economy globally had been a key geopolitical interest of Western powers (Baker, 1991; Lake, 1994; Rossabi, 2005). At the same time, political leaders of small states also avoided pursuing any policies to threaten geopolitical interests of regional great powers. The absence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers is the most vital. As shown in the chart below, Sino-Russian geopolitical interests were satisfied if Mongolia remained geostrategically neutral while US geopolitical interest in Mongolia was satisfied if Mongolia committed to no reversal of the political-economic liberalization (see Table 3).

Table 3. Interests of Great Powers

Great Powers	Priority of Interests	Content of Interests	Satisfied (if)
Russia	Security*	Neutrality	No security presence/alliance
China	Security	Neutrality	No security presence/alliance
	Political	Respect for Core Interests	Non-interference in domestic matters
United States	Political/Ideological	Electoral Democracy	No reversal

The dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers are also important in democratic consolidation, but they could have mixed effects. First, unlike the Cold War period, explicit military interventions by neighbouring great powers are rare and constrained by international norms, organizations, and regional powers. Second, effects of political and economic interventions depend on a variety of factors, including size of the ethnic diaspora community, degree of economic dependency, and links to other regional powers. Third, any intervention or exertion of influence could intensify domestic political competitions and/or increase resentment, based on recent imperial history. Finally, any attempts of increasing political, economic, and even security influence in peripheral states could trigger geopolitical competition, which could destabilize the

small state. Therefore, explicit and implicit agreements of avoiding direct geopolitical competition among great powers in small, peripheral states are important for the consolidation of electoral democracy.

In regards to the consolidation stage, the overall external environment for Mongolia has remained favourable although Western economic interests surged during the mining boom and security interactions expanded in relation to Mongolia’s contribution to the Global War on Terrorism (La Porta, personal interview, 2016; Wachman, 2009, 2010). However, Western economic and security interests were not strong enough to override its ideological commitment of supporting the democratic consolidation (Wachman, 2010). The resurgence of Russian economic interests was constrained by its limited geostrategic interests, reduced social and cultural links, and avoidance of triggering a security dilemma with China (Batbayar, 2003; Radchenko, 2018). Mongolia’s neutrality and acceptance of Chinese core interests (i.e., One China policy) were a priority for Chinese interests in Mongolia (Indra, personal interview, 2016; Gao Shumao, 2010). In sum, Mongolia’s commitment to democratization was one of the United States’s most important geopolitical interests whereas Mongolia’s commitment to neutrality and the consequent avoidance of direct geopolitical competition could be considered the Sino-Russian’s chief geopolitical priority towards Mongolia. In contrast, the US security interest in maintaining a logistical base and surging Russian interests undermined the credibility of Western democracy promotion efforts and neutralized the international pressures on Kyrgyz presidents (Cooley, 2009, 2012; Olcott, 2007). This also triggered Chinese interest in increasing its interactions and presence in Kyrgyzstan (Zhao, 2007). The chart below shows the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers in Mongolia (Table 4).

Table 4. Interests of Great Powers in Mongolia

Great Powers	1981 - 1990	1991 – 2000	2001 - 2010
Russia	Security Interests - From Military Buffer to Neutral State	Security Interests - Neutrality (Neutral State) (Abandonment)*	Security Interests - Neutrality
China	Security Interests - From Hostile State to Neutral State (Soviet Ally)	Security Interests - Absence of Russian Security Presence Political Interests - Respect for Core Interests	Security Interests - Neutrality Political Interests - Respect for Core Interests
United States	Security Interests - From Hostile State to Neutral State (Soviet Ally)	Political/Ideological Interests - Democratization	Political/Ideological Interests - Democratization

In brief, the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers is an important factor in democratization. Only in the absence of direct geopolitical competition of great powers, the

democratic transition in small, peripheral states is possible while effects of geopolitical dynamics are mixed in the consolidation stages. The absence of direct geopolitical competition increases domestic and international pressures on the consolidation process whereas the presence of direct geopolitical competitions neutralizes the international pressures.

The Absence or Presence of a Strong Political Party and Party Systems

I define a strong political party as a well-institutionalized political organization, which has routinized formal decision-making procedures and established infrastructures to reach, mobilize, and represent society. In this regard, institutionalization, as argued by Katz and Crotty, refers to “a process by which a practice or organization becomes well established and widely known, if not universally accepted” (2006, p. 4).²⁶ This basically means, “political actors have clear and stable expectations about the behaviour of other actors” (Katz and Crotty, 2006, p. 4). In the case of the ruling party, clear decision-making procedures could facilitate the leadership transitions whereas the established party infrastructure provides a broader platform for more sustainable changes.

Here two aspects seem to be more crucial: one is stability and the other is adaptability. In Huntington’s logic,

“institutionalization is an ongoing capacity to remain stable, which inherently involves the ability to adapt to changing challenges of modernization. Thus, stability is maintained through the ability to continuously adapt” (Rodriguez & Rosenblatt, 2018, p. 3).

Borrowing Huntington’s line, my work argues that the ruling communist party in Mongolia had been more stable and survived successfully by adapting in a new political system – an electoral democracy. But, one could also contend that the more institutionalized party could remain stable while remaining resilient to any changes. If the party is dominated by hard-core authoritarian leaders, the ruling party would remain stable and resilient against changes. In contrast, when the ruling party is dominated by pro-reform leaders, it can play a constructive role for transition by providing political stability and making reform sustainable. Then, a successor party is necessary for the development of the party system, which is the essence of the electoral democracy. In the absence of a strong ruling party, the transition process will be easily hijacked by populist leaders

²⁶ This definition is similar to Huntington’s definition of institutionalization. He defined institutionalization as “...the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability. The level of institutionalization of any political system can be defined by the adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence of its organizations and procedures” (1968, p. 12). Building on Huntington’s work, Panebianco (1988) defines institutionalization as the way the organization solidifies and expands the notion of complexity by stressing the ‘systemness’ (1988, p. 49). Later, in 2002, Randall and Svasand suggest that “institutionalization should be understood as the process by which the party becomes established in terms both of integrated patterns of behavior and of attitudes, or culture” (2002, p. 12).

and interest groups; this makes the transition unsustainable. Similarly, in the absence of a strong successor party, the development of a strong party system is complicated. Therefore, I argue that the ruling party can play a constructive role for the transition and the successor party is a key element for the consolidation process.

Although the democratization literature stresses the importance of the political party and party system, it has some type stereotypical views of the ruling communist party, its successor parties, and affiliated leaders. In general, many scholars highlight the importance of new democratic institutions such as civil society (Almond & Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993; Warren, 2001; Armony 2004), pro-liberal leaders (Bernhard, 1993; Wesolowski, 1997; Higley & Burton, 2006), and new political movements and parties (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; Diamond et al., 1997; Diamond & Gunther 2001; Randall & Svasand, 2002; Bielassiak, 1997; Kopecký, 1995) while considering old regime institutions and actors a threat to democracy (Crawford & Lijphart, 1995; Geddes, 1995, Bunce, 2000). Despite popular expectations of the gradual disappearance of communist parties in the democratization literature in early 90s, communist successor parties began to draw interest of the post-communist studies (Kopecký, 1995; Mainwaring, 1998; Kitschelt, 1992, 1999, 2000; Lewis, 2000, 2001) as well as authoritarian resilience works focusing on the strength of ruling parties (Geddes, 2003; Smith, 2005; Brownlee, 2007; Magaloni et al., 2006; Pei, 2012; Shambaugh, 2008). But, very few stress the positive role of ruling parties, their successor parties, and their leaders (Huntington, 1968; Ishiyama, 1995; Kovacs, 1995; Grzymala-Busse, 2002, 2006). In fact, ruling parties led the transition process not only in Mongolia, but also in Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania whereas reformed successor parties have regained political power in Czech, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Moldova, and Ukraine through competitive elections.

Despite enormous differences among ruling parties, the communist party is a real party with a long political tradition, organizational history, and internal structure, and institutionalized according to Huntington's criteria (Huntington, 1968, pp. 12-24; Bozoki & Ishiyama, 2002). These parties were remarkably resilient similar to other single-party regimes (Geddes, 1999, pp. 134-135). Unlike traditional institutions (e.g., religious, tribal and local) or personalistic institutions, the communist ruling party is a more advanced institution with broader strategies, bureaucratized organizations, and resources. By 1989, depending on their institutional development stages, some

communist parties were heavily bureaucratized and under the collective bureaucratic leaders, others were still dominated by revolutionary, hard-core leaders, and a few were under dictators.²⁷ However, all communist parties had institutionalized a single-party system with centralized bureaucracy and nation-wide party infrastructure (e.g., party branches, public organizations, and members) (Waller, 1995; Bozoki & Ishiyama, 2002; Kitschelt, 2002).

I argue that a ruling party, which is dominated by pro-reform, bureaucratic leaders, can lead to a successful transition. First, because of clear mechanisms for leadership change, the ruling party, in this case the communist party, provides institutional certainty for ruling leaders to transfer power to reform-minded ones. This is a key element for the political stability. The party decision-making structure and bureaucracy (e.g., Politburo along with a well-institutionalized Central Committee) prevents state institutions from being hijacked by populist leaders or interest groups such as the intelligence services or military. In the absence of such institutions, ruling leaders are more reluctant to transfer power because of potential political instability and even personal revenges. Second, the political party-initiated or led reform is more sustainable than personalized reforms because the party's collective decision-making mechanisms provide institutional support for reform. The necessity of reform is more likely debated by party leaders and members at all level of the party organizations, circulated through party-affiliated media, schools, and public organizations, and communicated to the public through its members, anchoring reform deeply in society. In contrast, individually imposed, top-down reform lacks this type of institutional support and social rootedness; therefore, such reform has limited sustainability and is easily discredited along with individual leaders. Finally, as an influential and stable political force, the commitment and willingness of the party and party leaders to negotiate and uphold their promises during the first competitive elections is vital for successful democratic transition. That means ruling party leaders relinquish power if they lose in the election and then compete for power through the next regular elections. The lack of such commitment derails the transition and even consolidates autocracy.

This explains why Mongolia's transition to democracy was peaceful and sustainable while the Kyrgyz transition was short-lived despite its liberal president and vibrant civil society. Because of its collective decision-making tradition and presence of a strong ruling party, the Mongolian

²⁷ Levitsky and Way argue that revolutionary legacies help revolutionary regimes withstand authoritarian breakdown (Levitsky & Way, 2013).

communist party leaders were in favour of establishing the premier-presidential type of the semi-presidential institution, in which the parliament has more power than the directly - elected president. The Mongolian communist party adapted to new circumstances and contributed to political stability during the transition period. In contrast, following the Soviet-republic's legacy of a Kremlin-appointed General-Secretary and absence of the strong ruling party, the Kyrgyz president accumulated his political power through the establishment of the president-parliamentary type of semi-presidential institution, in which the president has more power over the legislative and executive branches. This argument also explains a larger case of Central and Eastern European and former Soviet republics.

For consolidation of democracy, the most important task has been the establishment of a competitive party system. Like the institutionalization of the party, scholars appear to be in general agreement on four dimensions of the party system institutionalization (Przeworski, 1975, Mainwaring, 1999, pp. 22-39; Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; and Katz & Crotty, 2006, p. 5). One is stability in patterns of party competition. Second, parties have strong connections with society and voters. Third, political actors accord legitimacy to political parties. Finally, parties should not be subordinated to the interests of populist leaders. The more of these dimensions parties exhibit, the more institutionalized the party system is. To develop a competitive party system, a key feature of the electoral democracy, I argue that the survival of the formal ruling party is a necessary, but not sufficient condition. Similar arguments are made by Lewis and Grzymala-Busse against the conventional wisdom that elements of the *ancien regime* often play negative roles towards democratic consolidation (Lewis, 2000, 2001; Grzymala-Busse, 2002). Lewis asserts that “competitive parties have been one of the primary organized agencies of political change and the main vehicle for the institutional development of post-communist democracy” in Central and Eastern Europe (Lewis, 2000, pp. xi). Grzymala-Busse contends that established political organizations (i.e., communist parties) could play a constructive role in electoral democracy by successful *regeneration* (2002, 2006). Based on studies of several post-communist parties in Central and Eastern Europe, she argues that some successor communist parties made positive contributions to democratic consolidation by exiting peacefully after recognizing their defeat and fighting back through elections. In agreement with these scholars, I contend that the survival of the formal ruling party has three positive implications for consolidation. First, if the ruling party remains centralized and intact, it provides an organizational and institutional model and an anti-incumbent impetus and platform for the emergence and unification of new political parties.

Second, similarly to the transition stage, the successor, strong party facilitates the leadership succession while preventing the take-over by populist leaders, factions, and interest groups. Finally, the existence of a strong ruling party, which is committed to the principles of electoral democracy, makes Western democracy promotion efforts most effective by clearly targeting opposition parties. In the absence of a clear division among political parties, Western democracy promotion has appeared to be less effective as these efforts target ad-hoc pro-liberal individuals, who are not constrained and supported by established political institutions, and civil society organizations, who are mostly diverse and institutionally weak.

This explains why political power has been regularly transferred between two major political parties through regular, peaceful elections in Mongolia whereas violent protests became the means for the political power transfer in the Kyrgyz Republic. In the Mongolian case, the survival and transformation of the former ruling party provided a model and an anti-incumbent platform for the opposition parties and contributed to political stability by facilitating the power transition within the party and respecting electoral results. At the same time, the existence of the clearly divided political parties made Western democracy promotion efforts, especially political party assistance programs, more effective. In contrast, the demise of the former ruling party helped populist leaders accumulate political powers and marginalize any efforts to establish a competitive party system in the Kyrgyz Republic. This led to the political power transition process through violent protests in the absence of political parties to facilitate leadership succession and provide institutionalized representations of the society. This logic could be extended to explain the successful consolidation of electoral democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, Baltic Republics and Taiwan, where the successor parties had played constructive roles and the unsuccessful ones (e.g., most of the former Soviet republics, sub-Saharan Africa, and Arab spring countries), where the consolidation processes de-railed and populist leaders strengthened the authoritarian regimes with a limited space for the opposition.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

The most compelling alternative explanation for different outcomes of Mongolian and Kyrgyz democratization is institutional choice and, to a lesser extent, Western democracy promotion.

The institutional choice approach stresses the consequences of the initial institutional preference, which is reflected in the constitution. Based on the earlier debate of presidentialism *versus* parliamentarism, some scholars argue that a strong parliament would result in democratic

consolidation while executive dominance would lead to backsliding (Linz, 1990, Stepan & Skach, 1993; Linz & Valenzuela, 1994). However, in the post-Cold War period, mixed forms (i.e., semi-presidential and semi-parliamentarian) became more popular rather than strict parliamentary or presidential arrangements (Elgie & Moestrup, 2007; Elgie et al., 2011). Fish identifies Mongolia as a French-style semi-presidential system, where the political power is well dispersed between the parliament and the president; therefore, in Fish's words: "Mongolia's choice of semi-presidentialism has been a boon to democratization" (Fish, 2001, p. 331). Because there is a real division of power between the president and the legislature, Fish argues, the semi-presidential regimes have provided "reasonably sturdy foundations for democratization" (Fish, 2001, p. 331). Grouping Kyrgyzstan along with Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, Fish explains backsliding from initial democratic achievements in these countries as related to the superpresidentialism. According to Fish, superpresidentialism is defined as a constitutional arrangement that provides greater power to the presidency than the legislature (Fish, 2001, p. 55). In the absence of effective constraints on executive powers and strong domestic opposition along with a powerful external patron, presidents increase their powers through plebiscitary moments (Fish, 2001, p. 75). Therefore, the Kyrgyz failure of democratization could be explained by the initial institutional choice of superpresidentialism and Mongolia's success would be a result of the power dispersal between the president and parliament in the semipresidential arrangement.

I find the institutional choice to be of limited utility in explaining the diverging outcome of Mongolian and Kyrgyz democratization cases. First, the institutional path-dependent explanations give excessive emphasis to formal institutions in small states, where formal institutions are unstable and vulnerable to changes. The Kyrgyz constitution was changed multiple times through referendum while the Mongolian constitution was also changed as the balance of power in parliament shifted in 2000. As highlighted by Levitsky and Way, political leaders circumvent, manipulate, and even dismantle formal rules and agencies (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 79). Second, there is a conceptual difficulty when attempting to apply the concept of semipresidentialism and superpresidentialism to other empirical cases. The main empirical base for Duverger's semi-presidentialism was six West European semipresidential regimes (Austria, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland and Portugal) of 1970s, while Fish's superpresidentialism was based on former Soviet republics, especially Russia in the late 90s. For example, Munkh-Erdene argues against the utility of semipresidentialism for Mongolia's case by examining the authority to form and dismiss cabinet (Munkh-Erdene, 2010, 329-334). Huskey demonstrated that both semipresidentialism and

superpresidentialism are not capturing the political arrangements of Kyrgyzstan (Huskey, 2007, 162). Finally, the institutional choice approach does not take external factors into account (i.e., geopolitical setting) or internal ones like the strength of political parties. Perceptions of geopolitical surroundings could play an important role during the institutional design and choice – for example, political leaders under constant fear of neighbours’ interference would prefer a parliamentary constitution, which would disperse the power. And, a strong political party could also provide an institutional check on and assurances for political leaders. Formal institutions do matter, but do not carry independent causal power.

Western scholars and policy practitioners also contend that Western democracy promotion either through contagion, diffusion, and demonstration effects from Central and Eastern Europe, or direct assistance from Western donors resulted in the successful democratization of Mongolia and the struggling, but still hopeful one in Kyrgyzstan (Fritz, 2002, 2008; Rossabi, 2000; Schatz, 2006; Stewart, 2009). Although I agree on the importance of Western democracy promotion and extensive assistance for Mongolian and Kyrgyz democratization in the early 1990s, the Western democracy promotion approach fails to take into account three key elements of the democratization process of these small states. First, my fieldwork demonstrates a limited impact from the democratization process in Central and Eastern Europe. As several of my interviewees argue, the democratization process of Mongolia was triggered and influenced by Gorbachev’s reform policies and dynamics of Soviet politics rather than Central and Eastern European ones, in which the Western democracy promotion had played a crucial role.²⁸ Second, the Western democracy promotion literature, especially more recent examples, blamed the autocracy promotion efforts of authoritarian powers like Russia, China, and Saudi Arabia for non-transition or authoritarian reversals (Gilley and Holbig, 2009; Schlumberger, 2010; Babayan, 2015). But, the Kyrgyz and Mongolian cases challenge this line of argument. The commitment to the small buffer state’s neutrality by either China or Russia unintentionally opened up routes or conditions for Western democracy promotion efforts. More importantly, the geopolitical loosening up by China and Russia was a necessary precondition for democracy promotion to occur in peripheral states in the Sino-Russian spheres of influence. Finally, the role of pro-liberal domestic actors and political parties was not fully appreciated by the Western democracy promotion literature. Particularly, in

²⁸ Personal Interviews: Bayarkhuu, D (2016, June 16); Bold, Lu (2015, November 20); Byambasuren, Ya (2015, November 18); Gombosuren, Ts (2015, December 15); and Sumati, L (2015, 3 December).

places which are far away and geostrategically insignificant, Western democracy promotion efforts would definitely need the self-motivation from local leaders and possibly the former ruling party.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

I use the most similar system design, which is one of the oldest qualitative analysis techniques, going back to J. S. Mill's (1872) study *System of Logic* (Lijphart 1971, 1975; Meckstroth, 1975; Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Skocpol & Somers, 1980, Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Sometimes known as the method of difference, it employs a minimum of two cases. According to Seawright & Gerring, "in its purest form, the chosen pair of cases is similar on all the measured independent variables, *except*, the independent variable of interest" (2008, 304). Moreover, despite sharing many similarities, two cases present distinct outcomes in regards with the dependent variables (King, Keohane & Verba, 1994, p. 168; Ankar, 2008).

For my research, the two key independent variables are the geopolitical interests of Western and neighbouring great powers, and the presence or absence of a strong political party; one is external and the other is internal. As geopolitical interests of great powers declined, Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan liberalized their political systems by developing electoral democracy. However, after two decades, electoral democracy is consolidated in Mongolia while failing in Kyrgyzstan. The presence of a strong political party in Mongolia explains the distinct outcomes.

Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan represent two different sets of countries.²⁹ Mongolia, like Central and Eastern European as well as non-European socialist states, has maintained independent statehood and reacted to the systemic collapse of the Soviet-led socialist bloc. Kyrgyzstan, a Soviet republic, reacted to the collapse of the Soviet Union like other fourteen Soviet republics. Although both states have operated in slightly different geopolitical settings, they share many similarities such as economic, demographic, geographic, and cultural heritage as explained in the previous chapter.

There are a number of major differences in my cases studies that I omitted for the sake of my theoretical framework and methodology, including the length of independent statehood (Mongolia in 1921 versus Kyrgyzstan in 1991), size of the economy, ethnic composition, and colonial legacy (satellite state versus Soviet republic). I accept that these variables may work in ways that I have not observed. For example, the ethnic composition of the population is major

²⁹ Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan are both considered outlier and deviant cases (Carothers, 1999, 2002, Huntington, 1991; Geddes, 1999; Doorenspleet & Mudde, 2008; Seeberg, 2014; Pryde, 1994; Anderson, 1999; Davar & Chukaev, 2012; Fish, 2001).

difference between these two cases. Kyrgyzstan has a multiethnic society, which includes substantial Uzbek and Slavic ethnic minorities, whereas Mongolia is ethnically homogenous despite the well-integrated Muslim minority. Therefore, ethnic homogeneity might have played an important role for the political and social stability in Mongolia. In the Kyrgyz case, the relationship between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks has been historically complicated, but scholars rarely consider ethnic tension as a troubling factor for democratization (Pryde, 1994; Anderson, 1999; Fish, 2001; Collins, 2006; Temirkulov, 2010). Scholars (Collins, 2006; Seeberg, 2018) make arguments based on clan politics in Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia. I do not dismiss the role of clans in post-socialist period politics in both states, but these studies have not provided satisfactory explanations and evidence so far.

METHODS

This work utilizes a qualitative process-tracing approach based on in-depth interviews and documentary data, including historical archival research, which has been the main weakness of scholarly works on Mongolia's democratization process. Any attempt to assess external and internal factors on democratization in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan via quantitative methods would not be productive given the limited availability of quantitative data, except public opinion polls. Qualitative methods are the best suited to examine the complex interactions between external and internal factors for democratization. I conducted over 50 interviews with Mongolian academics, politicians, bureaucrats, and civil society activists and about ten interviews with Kyrgyz experts during the five-month-fieldwork in Mongolia and a brief study trip to the Kyrgyz Republic in 2015-2016. Documentary data was the main source, especially to corroborate data that emerged from interviews. The official documents related to the periods from 1984 to 2000s were accessed through archives, including the Mongolian National Central Archive and the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Secondary sources like newspapers, books, memoirs, journals, and reports form the core of documentary data. Because of the limited availability of and accessibility to authoritative figures (high-ranking political leaders and foreign representatives), books, interviews, analytical reports, and websites (esp., of political parties) were also important for the triangulation of data. This work also used observation in the collection of data, especially during the parliamentary election observation mission of the OSCE in Mongolia from June to end of July 2016 as well as the presidential election observation in July 2017.

There are three major limitations for the research. For one, the research materials, especially those acquired from the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are affected by

pending changes of the State Secrecy Law and Information Accessibility Law. Second, because of the timing and political dynamics, many senior political leaders were not accessible during the fieldwork in Ulaanbaatar. Also, my fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan was not as extensive as in Mongolia. The fieldwork was also limited by timing and resource constraints and accessibility to key Kyrgyz experts, especially those serving in the government. Therefore, this work relies heavily on secondary sources in English. Third, this work has limited access to foreign experts, who were serving in Mongolia or their respective capitals on Mongolia issues. The initial wish list for interviews included ambassadors from major powers (PRC, Russian Federation, US, Germany, and Japan). See Appendix B for the list of interviewees and archival sites in Mongolia and Kyrgyz Republic.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter finds the geopolitical dynamics of the authoritarian neighbourhood and roles of the ruling and successor parties have not been sufficiently addressed in the democratization literature in general and works on Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan in particular. I introduced a theoretical framework to examine the effects and the interplay of two factors: the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers and the absence/presence of a strong political party. One is external and necessary, but not sufficient for the transition stage; the other is domestic and necessary, but not sufficient for the transition and consolidation of the electoral democracy. This framework will be employed in the empirical study of the democratic transition (Chapter 3) and consolidation (Chapter 4 and 5) of Mongolia and Kyrgyz democratization process (Chapter 6). The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the methodology, which primarily based on the qualitative analysis, and alternative explanations for the diverging outcomes of Mongolian and Kyrgyz democratization process.

Chapter Three: Mongolia – Democratic Transition, 1984 – 1990

Prior to the Democratic Revolution of 1990, the International Women’s Day of March 8th had been one of Mongolia’s most eventful celebrations, a day when men and boys eagerly expressed their respect, appreciation, and love towards women in a manner that went beyond the typical communist-style celebratory meetings and concerts. In 1990, this day of celebration was different. The whole country anxiously awaited the outcome to the first ever opposition hunger strike in Mongolia – a mass protest that called for the resignation of the Politburo of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), the ruling communist party. On this day, an emergency decree awaited final signature while the Public Security Ministry pre-positioned the country’s sizeable internal troops in the vicinity of the Government House and put its massive intelligence, police, and paramilitary units on high alert. In people’s minds, the shocking images of Tiananmen Square, where the Chinese Communist Party brutally suppressed hunger strikers, and the failed repression of Nicolae Ceaușescu, General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, stood out vividly as both events had happened only a few months earlier in 1989. By next evening, Batmunkh Jamba, General Secretary of the MPRP, surprisingly announced the collective resignation of the seven-member Politburo, which, to the great relief of many Mongolians, ended the hunger strike. Today many can still recall journalist Batbayar’s now well-known words of praise:

“With God’s help, we did not have a Mongol Ceaușescu. If someone like Ceaușescu was holding the power and did not reject two Politburo members’ proposal of armed repression, it would be a heartbreaking tragedy. Our leaders presented enormous political courage, tolerance and true respect for its people” (Enkhee, 1991, p. 24; Shirnen, 2010, p. 247).

Over a month later, newly elected leaders of the legislature, the People’s Great Hural (PGH), and communist party experienced another hunger strike in far northern province of Khuvsgul in April 28-30 and a wave of supporting protests arose to annul the newly issued restrictive decree on public demonstrations, and to pass laws enabling a multiparty election. Although political leaders had taken all necessary measures to impose martial law with security forces, they accepted the opposition’s demands. Because of this second hunger strike, Mongolia celebrated the May 1st, International Workers’ Day, without any official parade for the first time since 1924. Not longer after, the country had its first multiparty election in July 1990 without any instructions or other interferences from the Kremlin.

Unlike all other Asian communist parties, the Mongolian communist party managed to lead the democratic transition without either losing its political power or repressing the opposition. The Mongolian transition challenges dominant assumptions of democratic transition theories that stress Western democracy promotion, democratic neighbourhood diffusion, and elite-led pacts. Against these common assumptions, this chapter argues that the absence of direct geopolitical competitions of great powers and the presence of a highly institutionalized political party are necessary, but not sufficient factors for democratic transition in an authoritarian neighbourhood. The absence of direct geopolitical competitions, especially in terms of security interests, reduces the external interference in the domestic politics by either controlling or supporting the specific regime and leaders. The presence of the strong political party facilitates the leadership changes and provides the political stability to deal with the opposition. In other words, the external factor – the absence of direct geopolitical competitions – constrains political leaders from taking repressive measures whereas the internal factor – the strong, institutionalized party – provides personal comfort for the ruling elites to transfer power while providing stability.

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section analyzes the overarching geopolitical environment of Mongolia in 1984-1990, and specifically focuses on the impacts of Sino-Soviet rapprochement, the end of Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union, and Gorbachev's reformist policies on Mongolian politics. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev played a decisive role for all these changes. Section two examines the internal dynamics of the democratic transition process by unfolding events that led to the first multiparty election, which marked the end of the authoritarian regime. Here pro-reformist ruling elites, who were checked by the party and legislature, played crucial roles for the peaceful transition. The final section advances the explanation of *why* and *how* the absence of direct geopolitical competitions and the presence of the strong political party facilitate the peaceful transition to democracy.

FAVOURABLE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The decisive causes of Mongolian politics, as Barrington Moore or John Mearsheimer would argue, lie outside of its boundaries.³⁰ Any major changes in the overarching global and regional settings have strong implications for Mongolian political leaders. The 1980s were not an

³⁰ I agree with Barrington Moore's statement that "the smaller countries depend economically and politically on big and powerful ones means that the decisive causes of their politics lie outside their own boundaries" (Moore, 1966, pp. xii-xiii). Key structural realists like Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer also share similar views about small states while giving emphasis to the overarching structure and interactions of great powers.

exception. Chinese and Soviet leaders agreed to end decades of hostility; this provided a breathing space for Mongolian politics and freedom from the Soviet's control and removed justifications for Mongolian political purges. The end of the long-lasting geopolitical competition for supremacy between the United States and Soviet Union also facilitated the establishment of US-Mongolian bilateral relations, something Mongolians had sought for over seventy years. Gorbachev's 'new thinking' in foreign policy and his domestic reformist agendas of *perestroika* [restructuring] and *glasnost* [transparency] also had direct and indirect effects on Mongolia as they did in Central and Eastern Europe. These overarching changes created a permissible environment for the political and economic reform in Mongolia. Therefore, the absence of direct geopolitical competitions of great powers, namely the PRC, the Soviet Union, and the United States, was the necessary (external) condition for the peaceful transition from the communist regime to democracy. Gorbachev played the most decisive role for all of these external events, especially in his efforts to remove the longest-serving authoritarian leader, approve Mongolia's normalization of relations with the US and China, and encourage political reform in Mongolia.

The Sino-Soviet Rapprochement & Mongolia's Neutrality

The most critical external event for Mongolia's domestic politics in the 80s was the normalization of the Sino-Soviet relations, which resulted in the complete withdrawal of Soviet's political and military presence from Mongolia. This provided breathing space for Mongolia's domestic politics while restraining the geopolitical (esp., geostrategic and military) competition between China and Russia in their traditional sphere of influence. From 1921, the Soviet Union used Mongolia as a buffer state on three occasions – 1921-25, 1936-45, and 1961-89 – and put Mongolia under its complete control.

For centuries, geography has dictated Mongolia's fate to serve as a classic buffer state between two expansionist and rival great powers. Unlike other numerous and weaker states, Mongolia has limited balancing options – aligning against China, a former colonial power, or remaining neutral to its powerful neighbours. Following the collapse of the Great Mongolian Empire, Mongolia fell under the sphere of the Chinese Manchu-ruled Qing Dynasty's influence. For administrative purposes, the Manchus divided Mongolia into two parts: Inner Mongolia, which is now a part of the PRC, and Outer Mongolia, an independent state – Mongolia (Heuschert, 1998, pp. 312-320; Bulag, 2002). As the Chinese Xinhai Revolution begun in 1911, Outer Mongolia gained its full independence from China and sought out ways to gain international recognition whereas the new Chinese administration quickly restored its control over Inner Mongolia.

However, in 1915, Outer Mongolia lost its autonomy again to China under the tri-party treaty between Russia, Mongolia, and China.³¹ Four years later, the Chinese military occupied Outer Mongolia in a move that took advantage of a weak Russia, which was overwhelmed with its 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and civil war. Desperately wanting its independence from China, Mongolian religious and political leaders sought military assistance from all potential allies, including Japan, White Russian fleeing military generals, and particularly the newly established Bolshevik government in Russia. This recent memory of Chinese colonization and struggles for independence naturally pushed Mongolia to seek Russian protection and support to balance against China.

The Mongolian request for military and economic assistance also served the agenda of Bolshevik leaders, who sought to control Mongolia for its short-and-long-term geopolitical objectives. The Bolshevik's immediate objective consisted of destroying the fleeing White Army units, especially of Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg, before gaining strength in Mongolia. Their long-term aim was to establish a communist regime in Mongolia, which would then serve as a model and a base for spreading the communist internationalism into Tibet and China. For Mongolian leaders, obtaining Soviet aid was the only option to regain its full independence from China and to prevent from another Chinese takeover. However, this option came with cost for its domestic politics – with massive purges of religious leaders, nobles, and monks as well as the extradition of Chinese and non-Russian foreigners under extreme pressure from the Kremlin and Comintern (Morozova, 2009, pp. 26-62; Barany, 1995). Although the Soviet military withdraw in 1925 due to Chinese demands, Mongolia remained under the close control of the Kremlin as well as Comintern (Elleman, 1993, pp. 540-541). Under their direct influence and control, the communist regime was established and Mongolia gained its full independence from China between 1921 and 1932.

During the 1930s, Mongolia again attracted Russia's geopolitical interests – this time to secure its far eastern borders against Japanese expansion. This new threat led the Kremlin to reassert its control over Mongolia for a second time. After occupying the Korean Peninsula and establishing puppet states, *Manchukuo* in 1932 and *Mengkukuo*, which was Inner Mongolia, in 1936, Japan was readying to expand into Mongolia, a step they believed would not only disrupt Russian and Chinese cooperation but also provide Japanese forces with a staging area from which

³¹ During this treaty negotiation, China and Russia secretly settled a deal of Chinese suzerainty over Outer Mongolia. Thus means China should retain full control over Outer Mongolia's foreign policy while recognizing Outer Mongolia's independent control of domestic politics (Elleman, 1993, pp. 540-541).

they could expand into Siberia (Bold, 2014). To avoid engaging in a war with Japan and Germany on two fronts, Stalin hoped to fight against Japan first. Yet, Mongolian political leaders saw this threat as an opportunity. They specifically hoped that through pursuing a policy of neutrality and supporting the Japanese *Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere* initiative they could reduce Soviet's influence and control over Mongolia (Lebra, 1975; Narangoa, 2004). This stance against Soviet influence came in response to the general strengthening of the communist political and social institutions in Mongolia and the enactment of several heavy-handed, repressive measures – including the forced collectivization the Mongolian herders and the eradication the Buddhist religious institutions, which consisted of purging roughly 100,000 monks and destroying an untold number of monasteries (Kaplonski, 2014). As these events unfolded, Stalin also forced Mongolian leaders to conclude a mutual defense agreement, which would allow the stationing of the Soviet military and drag Mongolia into the Soviet-Japanese conflict along with Manchukuo.

Mongolian leaders opposed these actions, yet their attempt to gain neutrality from Russia led to even more horrifying impacts on the country's domestic politics. To reaffirm its control over Mongolia, Stalin personally ordered the executions of key Mongolian political leaders, including Prime Ministers Genden Peljid and Amar Anand along with Minister of War Demid Gelegdorj and many other Soviet-educated Mongolian intellectuals. In their place, Stalin gave political power and support to his handpicked leader, Choibalsan Khorloo, who stayed in power until 1952 (Sandag & Kendall, 2000; Baabar, 1999; Liu, 2006). Under the Soviet and Comintern directives, the Choibalsan's regime executed 30,000 – 35,000 people, including senior political leaders, monks, intellectuals, and even military officers, many of whom were educated in the Soviet Union (Kaplonski, 2008, 2014; Baabar, 1999; Sandag & Kendall, 2000). Afterwards, the Soviets concluded the 1936 mutual defense treaty, which allowed for the stationing of the Soviet military forces in Mongolia and then proceeded to defeat Japanese Kwantung Army in 1939 at the border of Mongolia and Manchukuo (Coox, 1985; Goldman, 2012; Bold, 2014). After this victory, the Soviets signed a nonaggression pact with Japan and restored their control over Mongolia, a key geostrategic buffer state. For Mongolia, this period helped consolidate the Soviet-style communist state institutions – mainly through the massacre of anti-communist forces – and also likely saved Mongolia from the Japanese occupation, which, in the long-term, has been a positive factor for Mongolian-Japanese relations unlike other East Asian states. In the short-term, Mongolians learned the consequences of leaning towards Japan and increasing the country's neutrality towards China and Russia.

In 1960s, the Soviets reasserted their influence again for the third time after a decade of amicable relations in the communist neighbourhood of China, Mongolia, and Russia. Despite Chinese leaders' constant irredentist claims on Mongolia, China concluded trade agreements and provided funds and labor for building factories, roads, and housing (Green, 1986, pp. 1345-1348). But, Sino-Soviet relations gradually deteriorated in early 1960s and Mongolia took the Kremlin's side for two reasons. First, Choibalsan's successor, Tsedenbal Yumjaa, who was also handpicked by the Kremlin, had strong anti-Chinese and pro-Soviet stances. He was educated in the Soviet Union and married to a Russian citizen, Anastasia Ivanova Filatova. Second, the majority of Mongolian political leaders were also educated in the Soviet Union and were wary of a variety of Chinese activities, ranging from the takeover of Tibet in 1950s, its demographic push – sinicization – into Inner Mongolia, the increase of Chinese workers in Mongolia, the advent of the Cultural Revolution, and increased tensions along Sino-Soviet borders. For their part, the Soviets were also concerned losing Mongolia, especially from the standpoint of security interests. In early 1960s, for example, the Soviets and Mongols discussed the possibility of Mongolia joining the Warsaw Pact and Mongolians requested ““an appropriate unit from the Soviet Armed Forces' to defend Mongolia from 'possible sudden attacks'” (Radchenko, 2012, p. 186). In addition, the Soviet Foreign Ministry stressed the importance of Soviet leadership's visit to Mongolia in their recommendations to the new leadership in Moscow to promote unity:

“at a time of sharp struggle for unity among the ranks in the international communist movement and at a time of powerful attacks, directed at pulling the MPR [Mongolian People's Republic] away from the Soviet influence” (Radchenko, 2003, p. 18).

In 1966, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev became the first Soviet leader to ever visit Ulaanbaatar and signed the *Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance*, which declared the formal Soviet-Mongolian alliance against Beijing and permitted the stationing of the Soviet military in Mongolia. This move boosted Russian geopolitical interests in Mongolia, which, in turn, had three major impacts on Mongolia. First, it brought Mongolia under the close watch of Soviet leaders, including political and military advisors as well as the KGB and its Mongolian counterpart organization – the Ministry of Public Security. The Soviet embassy acted as the second government and Soviet advisory teams were embedded in all Mongolian ministries and security

organizations, the only exception being the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³² Second, the Soviets increased their developmental aid substantially and made major investments into geostrategically significant industries and infrastructure. For instance, two major urban centres – *Darkhan*, in the midway between the capital city and the Soviet city of Irkutsk, and *Choibalsan*, in the east bridging the Soviet city of Chita to Soviet military installations along the Sino-Mongolian borders – were built. Finally, this agreement provided justifications for Tsedenbal to dismiss his political opponents on pro-Chinese allegations and for the communist party to impose a militarized, communist type control over society. In 1962 and 1964, Tsedenbal purged a number of senior party officials who had criticized the corruption and incompetency of the Mongolian leadership, claiming they were apart of an anti-party group with Chinese connections even though none of these challengers touched the matters of foreign policy (Radchenko, 2006; Purevdorj, 2001, pp. 243-251, MPRP, 1995, pp. 123-126). As late as 1984, Tsedenbal removed Jalan-Ajav Sampil, a senior and respected Politburo member, on similar accusations (Sanders, 2010, p. 705; Batbayar, 2001, pp. 124-128, MPRP, 1995, pp. 125-127). During this period, Mongolia effectively became a garrison state, which imposed three-years of mandatory conscription services and military reserve duties for all males under the age of 45, established military and civil defense training programs for all government and educational organizations, especially secondary and post-secondary schools, and strengthened the intelligence and informants' network. By the early 1980s, Mongolia was under the close control of its pro-Soviet leader and – just like in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, and Poland – hosted large Soviet military forces for the Soviet's geopolitical objectives.

Soviet geopolitical interests began to decline in 1985 after Soviet leaders, particularly Gorbachev, accepted China's demand to remove the so-called "three obstacles" in order to improve the Sino-Soviet relations. These three obstacles included the Soviet army's presence along the Sino-Soviet borders and in Mongolia, the Soviet's support for the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, as well as the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.³³ Despite strong resistance from the

³² Personal Interviews: Choinkhor, J (2015, November 11); Gombosuren, Ts (2015, December 15); Orgil, L (2015, November 17); and Bayarkhuu, D (2016, June 16).

³³ "Deng Xiaoping identified three issues as "major obstacles" to the normalization of the Sino-Soviet relations, namely the Soviet military presence along its borders with Soviet Union and in Mongolia, Soviet assistance for Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Garver, 1989; Vamos, 2010, p. 82; Rozman 2007, p. 373). According to these sources, there were multiple rounds of consultations held by the two governments regarding these issues between October 1982 and June 1988. That means the talks started as Brezhnev was removed from the power in Moscow and reached in agreement before the Gorbachev's historic visit to Beijing amidst of the Tiananmen incident.

Soviet military and foreign ministry leaders, Gorbachev quickly decided to withdraw from Mongolia during a Soviet Politburo discussion just before his famous Vladivostok speech on 28 July 1986 (Gombosuren, personal interview, 2015). Mongolian leaders were caught by surprise and rushed to meet Gorbachev a few days later in Moscow, but the decision of the withdrawal had already been made. This withdrawal had a number of significant implications for Mongolian politics. *First*, it removed the Chinese military threat, which not only provided justifications for the Soviet military presence, but also for the militarization of Mongolian society. *Second*, it facilitated the normalization of the Sino-Mongolian relations, which had been frozen for over two decades. This normalization lessened the pro-Chinese, Chinese spy, and Chinese-conspirator allegations from Mongolia's domestic political discourses, which had often helped leaders like Tsedenbal and others get rid of their opponents and silence critical intellectuals. *Third*, and the most importantly, it marked the beginning of a stable, non-threatening, and non-competitive regional order between China and Russia. In this order, both great powers avoided asserting their geopolitical interests, especially those from the military, in Mongolia and intervening in the country's domestic politics. Any such interventions could easily trigger anti-sentiments against either great power, and not only cause a security dilemma between two traditionally rival, expansionist great powers, but also push Mongolia to align with its traditional ally, Russia. In other words, Sino-Russian geopolitical interests were satisfied by not engaging in direct geopolitical competition and committing to their explicit agreements of reducing the military posture along the borders, ranging from the Russian Far East through Mongolia to Central Asia.

To sum up, the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations and the Soviet military withdrawal reduced the Kremlin's control over Mongolian domestic politics while decreasing the likelihood for the Kremlin's support for the ruling leaders and regime. This also reduced the legitimacy for controlling Mongolian society through militarization (e.g., conscriptions, mass mobilization for the civil defense, and high defence and security spending) and the intelligence surveillance in connection with the Chinese threat. Thereupon, the Sino-Soviet normalization was the most important external factor for creating a favourable external environment for the democratic transition in Mongolia.

Soviet – American normalization & US – Mongolia Relations

The end of Cold War between the Soviet Union and United States had little direct impact on Mongolian domestic politics. The United States neither pressured Mongolian leaders nor invested into pro-democracy activities in Mongolia as the US administration did in former

European communist states. Rather, the Soviet – American normalization facilitated the long-awaited bilateral US-Mongolian relations, which granted the US the opportunity to observe Sino-Soviet geopolitical dynamics from Mongolia amidst of the Soviet military withdrawal. For Mongolia, the end of the Cold War brought political recognition from the most powerful state outside of its bipolar geopolitical setting. Even though the establishment of direct political links between Ulaanbaatar and Washington played an important factor during the early stage of Mongolia's democratic consolidation, evidence suggests that there was no US involvement in the Mongolian politics until after the first multi-party election in June 1990.

Mongolian leaders sought ways to establish bilateral relations with the United States, immediately after its independence in 1911 when they secretly sent senior officials to Saint Petersburg to reach out Western embassies as well as letters to the US administration. But all Great Powers, even Tsarist Russia, had been reluctant to endorse Mongolia's independence and, as recorded in several historical studies, refused to receive any documents from Mongolian leaders (Bold, 2008; Batbayar, 2011). At this time, American President Woodrow Wilson and his ambassador to China, Paul Reinsch, regretted the disintegration of China along regional lines (i.e., north and south), supported the restoration of the Chinese Kingdom, and refused to recognize any secessionist movements in China. At a press conference on April 7, 1913, for example, President Wilson insisted that Russia's recognition of Mongolia's independence was a mistake and the his administration would not repeat such a mistake (Link, 1985, pp. 10-11). A month later, the Wilson administration recognized the new Republic of China, under President Yuan Shikai, who advanced the concept of the Republic of Five Nationalities to unite the Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, and Tibetan regions under one state (Bold, 2008, p. 185; Cameron, 1933, pp. 214-230). Yuan Shikai's policy was continued by his successor Chiang Kai-shek, who became the most influential Chinese leader in the US foreign policy, especially on East Asia and Russia. At the same time, Mongolia came under the Soviet and Comintern control in 1920s and 30s; this completely cut off Mongolia's attempt to reach out to the US until Vice President Henry Wallace's 1944 visit to Mongolia.

In July 1944, the US Vice President Henry Wallace met Mongolian leaders during his 25-day trip to investigate the real situation between Sino-Soviet relations as President Roosevelt was readying for the Yalta Conference, at which, Stalin demanded the recognition of Mongolia as one of the conditions for the Soviet's entry into war against Japan (Briggs, 1946, pp. 376-383; Wang, 1997, pp. 91-95). At the same time, Chiang Kai-Shek also drew attention to the Xinjiang Uyghur border conflicts and requested US assistance in stopping Soviet and Mongolian military incursions

and their assistance to the Muslim secessionists (Benson, 1990; Wang, 1997, pp. 83-105). Therefore, part of Wallace's mission was to assess the Soviet and Mongolian explanations about the Xinjiang conflict before the US administration made any commitment. During talks, Mongolian leader Choibalsan made it clear that Mongolia had interests in establishing diplomatic relation with the United States (Bold, 2008). The American vice president's visit certainly produced positive results on these different demands. In February 1945, at the Yalta Conference, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill agreed to the Stalin's condition of recognizing Mongolia's independent status (Pan, 1952, pp. 42-59; Rupen, 1955, pp. 71-79). With pressure from the United States and especially from the Soviet Union, the Chiang Kai-Shek government finally agreed in August 1945 to recognize the independence of Mongolia if a plebiscite indicated Mongolian people's desire for independence. Also, according the *Ivanov and Prikhodov report on the Mongolian Referendum*, Mongolians claimed a 100 percent vote for independence; therefore, as agreed in the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, the nationalist Republic of China recognized the MPR (Mongolia) in exchange for control of the province of Inner Mongolia, which had been occupied by Soviet and Mongolian troops during Second World War (Wilson Center, Digital Archive, 1945).³⁴ Although the Chiang Kai-Shek government recognized Mongolia in 1946 after the plebiscite, it reversed its decision immediately and began to claim that Mongolia was a part of China and lobbied against any attempts of the US administrations to recognize Mongolia.³⁵ Chiang Kai-Shek and the Kremlin successfully interrupted two notable efforts of the Kennedy and Nixon administrations.

In 1961, the Kennedy administration decided to establish diplomatic relations with Mongolia and to support its application for membership in the United Nations for, as outlined in the Congressional Research Service background document, several reasons, including: *first*, the growing recognition and support from the US allies and other UN members for Mongolia; *second*, the establishment of a diplomatic mission in Mongolia "to collect intelligence, to exploit internal rifts within the communist bloc, exercise persuasion, and strengthen the growth of nationalism and a spirit of independence in countries within the Communist orbit;" and *third*, to assist in dealing with the US's future interests in respect to communist China (Legislative Reference Service,

³⁴ See also Lattimore, 1946; Wang, 1997; and Atwood, 1999 on the plebiscite.

³⁵ The PRC established relations with Mongolia in October 1949 and in the 1950 Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with the Soviet Union, Beijing agreed to a "complete guarantee of the independent status of the Mongolian People's Republic" (Judge & Langdon, 2018, p. 78).

1961). The State Department engaged in discussions with Mongolians and started to train the first batch of diplomats for handling US-Mongolia relations, including Ambassador Stapleton Roy (Addleton, 2013, p. 31).³⁶ But, this effort encountered serious opposition from the Congress. The Joint Senate House Republican Leadership sent a letter, on July 27 1961, stating that “the U.S. recognition of, and a seat in the United Nations for, Communist Mongolia” would be a grave error under the following rationales:

“We are mindful that some State Department officials have talked of the so-called benefits of recognition of Outer Mongolia, i.e., (a) an upper Asia ‘listening post,’ (b) a ‘package deal’ for simultaneous U.N. admission of Outer Mongolia and the African state of Mauritania, thereby winning us more friends and U.N. votes in the African bloc”³⁷

On August 8, another letter stated “[w]e and many other members of Congress are deeply disturbed by the persistent evidence of an intention on the part of our Government to extend official recognition to Outer Mongolia” and urged

“that efforts toward establishing diplomatic relation with Outer Mongolia should be suspended, especially at this time when you, Mr. President, are properly exercising United States leadership to strengthen the will and the unity of the free world against the Khrushchev threats to West Berlin” (Bold, 2008, p. 405).

However, on October 25, 1961, the United States, for the first time, abstained in the UN Security Council voting on the Mongolian membership while only Chiang Kai-Shek’s representative refused to attend; thus resulting in the Mongolia’s membership of the United Nations.

During the Nixon administration, the interests of establishing bilateral relations with Mongolia resurged due to several reasons, including the Sino-Soviet hostility, the Soviet military deployment to Mongolia, Mongolian leaders’ repeated interests in establishing relations with the United States, and, of course, the dominance of the realpolitik in US foreign policy.

In response to the Soviet military deployments into Mongolia, the PRC increased the number of its military divisions along the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian borders from 15 to 27 and engaged in military conflicts near the Ussuri River in the East as well as in Xinjiang in the

³⁶ Ambassador Stapleton Roy was one of the first US diplomats to have studied Mongolian language and history and could have been the first US diplomat in Mongolia, if the bilateral relationship was established. Later, in 1987, many of my sources confirmed that he played a crucial role in establishing bilateral relations with Mongolia when he was serving as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the State Department.

³⁷ For the copy of the letter, see Bold, 2008, p. 404 and Legislative Reference Service Report dated on August 1, 1961 (Legislative Reference Service, 1961).

West (Bold, 2008, p. 301; IDS, 1996). This situation, again, gave further support to the idea for a US embassy in Ulaanbaatar to “provide Washington with a listening post, a window in the heart of Asia to give more complete picture of interaction between the Soviet Union and Communist China” (Haggard, 1968, p. 10). Meantime in 1969, Mongolian diplomats in Delhi and New York emphasized Mongolia’s interests in establishing bilateral relations while Mongolian leader Tsedenbal also reinforced these interests in an interview published in the *New York Times* on May 21, 1969 (Bold, 2008, p. 303). Even though the initial decision of the Nixon administration in 1969 was frozen because of the Chiang Kai-Shek administration and also Nixon’s visits to Beijing and Moscow in 1972, the State Department decided to finalize the recognition on March 14, 1973 while the Politburo of the MPRP made a same decision on April 3, 1973. But, around this same time, the Kremlin pressured Mongolia to freeze the process. Although the Mongolian government constantly brought up the issue, in March 16, 1976, as recalled by Mongolian Foreign Minister Yondon, the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko told:

“We discussed this issue a year ago. During the Brezhnev and Tsedenbal meeting, we [the Soviet Foreign Ministry] expressed our position. That was not changed. Establishing the bilateral relation with the United States is a complicated matter. Were you thinking to develop cooperation with the US in the specific sector? In my thinking, their intention is totally different. They were striving to have an intelligence post in your [country]. If the relations were established with the US, you would not gain any benefit, but rather enter into a very difficult situation. Therefore, there is no need to rush to establish the bilateral relations” (Yondon, 2016, p. 196).

As explained by Mongolian diplomats and also Embassy cables, the main Soviet concerns was the risk of providing access to the US intelligence activities in Siberia and Mongolia as well as the US having direct interactions with Mongolian leaders.

This stance changed with Gorbachev’s foreign policy of improving US-Soviet relations following the first summit between Reagan and Gorbachev in November 1985. As a result, the Soviet sanction on the establishment of bilateral relations with the United States was lifted in January 1986, when the Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze met Mongolian leaders in Ulaanbaatar, mostly to explain the Soviet foreign policy changes toward Asia. His remark on the issue, as recorded by Deputy Foreign Minister Yondon, is worthwhile to consider:

“[I] think it is a time to reconsider the stance regarding the Mongolian and American relations. This issue, which was worrying our Mongolian colleagues, is not unreasonable.

Our stance up to now was right. But, this stance was no longer suitable for the current situation. The Politburo of the Central Committee of Communist Party of the Soviet Union discussed this issue and decided to reconsider. The establishment of the diplomatic relations with the United States would complement our common interests. You could and should establish the relations with the United States” (Yondon, 2016, p. 222).³⁸

The Politburo of the MPRP discussed the results of the Soviet Foreign Minister’s visit on January 28, 1986, but decided to wait for the US initiatives to renew discussions and also see how the Soviet-American relations would evolve (Yondon, 2016; Gombosuren, personal interview, 2015). Soon, renewed discussions began through the American and Mongolian Embassies in Tokyo, where Ambassador Michael Mansfield provided the necessary support as well as protection from the State Department bureaucracy (Addleton, 2013; Campi, personal interview, 2016). Interestingly, earlier in the 1960s, Mansfield had encouraged President Kennedy to establish bilateral relations with Mongolia while he was a senator (Bold, 2008).

Later, two missions in New York handled the finalization in January 1987. In 1960s and 70s, the State Department had prepared personnel for running the diplomatic post in Mongolia, yet, by the time such a post was established, they were caught unprepared despite their high interests in observing the changing Sino-Soviet relations amidst of the Soviet military withdrawal. The US’s first ambassador to Mongolia, Ambassador Richard Williams, was appointed in 1988. While this post was based in Washington, DC, US officials were careful to avoid “giving the Mongolians impression that it considered them an adjunct of either Moscow or Beijing” (Asia Society, 2008). Two permanent diplomats started operating at the US’s first embassy in the spring of 1989, but they were mostly charged with the task of finding the permanent location for the embassy and reporting this situation (for first embassy location, see Figure 2).

³⁸ Personal Interviews: Bayarkhuu, D (2016, June 16); Choinkhor, J (2010, November 11); Jambaldorj, Ts (2016, 20 June) and Gombosuren, Ts (2015, December 15).

Figure 2. The US Embassy in 1989



Note: The US Embassy was operating from a two-bedroom in this apartment complex. Photos taken by author on October 10, 2016.

Initially, the US interests in Mongolia was limited, as expressed by Ambassador Williams in an interview after meeting with Mongolian leaders:

“the embassy will promote friendly relations and trade and will serve American citizens traveling in Mongolia. Trade between the two countries averages about \$3 million a year, mostly in cashmere and camel's hair exported to the United States. Growing numbers of tourists have begun to visit the country. Beyond that, I think it can provide us with an interesting additional view of the state of Mongolian-Soviet, Mongolian-Chinese and Sino-Soviet relations” (*LA Times*, 1988).

Even if the end of Cold War facilitated the establishment of bilateral relations, it did not have any impact on Mongolian politics. Mongolian leaders perceived the political recognition of the United States as a major step for strengthening its independence from neighbouring great powers;

therefore, Mongolia was constantly seeking opportunities to reach out to the US. Clearly, there were no direct geopolitical interests, particularly in terms of military and economic interests of the United States in Mongolia except valuing its location to observe the Sino-Soviet dynamics. The democracy promotion agenda did not exist at this time for Asian communist states, including Mongolia.

Gorbachev Policies & Mongolia's Political Opening

Mongolia was not insulated from any of the major policy reforms occurring in the Soviet Union; therefore, any Soviet policy changes demonstrated direct and indirect impacts on the Mongolian domestic politics for two obvious reasons. First, Mongolia was under the close watch of the Kremlin, especially given its geostrategic importance for dealing with China and promotion of a communist developmental model in 70s and early 80s. Second, Mongolia was politically, economically, and culturally integrated with the Soviet Union through the education and training of Mongolian leaders, intellectuals, and professionals as well as from hosting a large Soviet community, including advisors, specialists, military and their families.³⁹ Evidence suggests that the Soviet policy changes under Gorbachev's leadership had more direct impacts on Mongolian leaders and society than events occurring in Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, there is less basis to argue that events in Central and Eastern Europe impacted the transition process in Mongolia. Rather the same external factor – Gorbachev – triggered both Mongolian and European communist countries' transitions during the same time frame; this means that, as argued by Munkh-Ochir Dorjjugder, Mongolia's transition should be understood as just part of the series of events that contributed to the collapse of the communist bloc (2016).

Direct Effects – The Removal of Tsedenbal

The most clear example of the direct impact of Soviet policy changes was the Kremlin-orchestrated removal of Mongolia's longest-serving leader Tsedenbal his politically influential Russian spouse, Anastasia Ivanova Filatova, in August 1984. Tsedenbal arrived in Moscow for a holiday at the invitation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and had his regular medical check up. After his medical exam, on August 9, 1984, Mikhail Gorbachev, who was then an influential full member of the Soviet Politburo and in charge of foreign policy, Dmitry Ustinov, Minister of Defence, and Viktor Chebrikov, Chairman of the

³⁹ By 1985, there were 80 thousand military personnel, 19 thousand professionals, and a large political (including intelligence) community from the Soviet Union in Mongolia (IDS, 1996; Bayarkhuu, 2004, pp. 108, 114-115). For more detailed counts of the Soviet military and specialists, see Radchenko, 2012, p. 197; Bayarkhuu 2004, pp. 104-116.

Committee for State Security, received two senior members of the Mongolian Politburo – Batmunkh Jamba, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and Molomjamts Demchig, Secretary of the MPRP Central Committee - who were also vacationing separately in Crimea. Gorbachev introduced the medical results of Tsedenbal and ordered Yevgeniy Chazov, Chief of the Fourth Directorate of the Soviet Ministry of Health, in charge of medical care for Soviet and allied leaders, to present the medical results, including the CT scan, at the Mongolian Politburo meeting in Ulaanbaatar on August 17, 1984 (MPRP, 1995). Even though Tsedenbal wanted to return to Mongolia, Mongolian and Soviet leaders agreed to keep him in Moscow for medical treatment. They also forced his spouse to stay with him, as they were wary of the possibility that she would try to make moves with her influential political allies at the Mongolian Politburo and Central Committee to complicate Mongolia's political situations.

There are two strong explanations for Tsedenbal's removal. First was his worsening health condition. In the late 1970s, as reported repeatedly by visiting communist dignitaries, Soviet ambassadors, KGB representatives, and even Mongolian officials, Tsedenbal began to show symptoms of dementia, including absent-mindedness, sudden losses of situational awareness, and repetitiveness of the same facts. For example, on March 23, 1979, the Soviet ambassador warned the Kremlin about how Tsedenbal's worsening health condition would likely have significant consequences (Choinkhor, personal interview, 2015; Shinkarev, 2006; Baabar, 2006, pp. 796-797). As her husband's health declined, Filatova took a more active role. Her interferences in Mongolian politics became unbearable for Mongolian ruling elites and Soviet advisors, as she kept raising issues with visiting Soviet dignitaries as if she represented the Mongolian government, became involved in matters of political appointments, misused state funds, and even personally directed cultural matters (Bayarkhuu, 2015, pp. 107-126). This situation also created opportunities for some senior Mongolian politicians to use Filatova's influence for their own objectives. The other reason for the Soviet's changing geopolitics was due to how Tsedenbal's hardened anti-Chinese stance had become a major hurdle for the Sino-Soviet rapprochement. During the 1960s, Tsedenbal's anti-Chinese sentiment was exactly what Brezhnev needed to justify deploying Soviet military forces into Mongolian territory. Yet, by the 1980s such stances were no longer helpful, especially Andropov and Gorbachev began to take steps to end Soviet hostility against China in the years following Brezhnev's death in 1982. Soviet military leaders, on the other hand, were keen to keep Soviet military infrastructure in Mongolia. Together Tsedenbal and these leaders formed a strong coalition against both the withdrawal of the Soviet military and the normalization of relations with

China. For his part, Tsedenbal acted against the Kremlin's will and continued his anti-Chinese campaigns, going as far as directing the deportation and relocation of Chinese nationals, strengthening anti-Chinese propaganda, and purging his opponents on pro-Chinese allegations between 1980-1983 (Weidlich, 1981, p. 68; Heaton, 1983, pp. 48-49; 1984, pp. 128-130). This made Tsedenbal one of the first victims of Gorbachev's campaign to get rid of Brezhnev-era leaders – Erich Honecker of East Germany, Bulgaria's Todor Zhivkov, and Czechoslovakia's Gustav Husak. In terms of age, Tsedenbal was the oldest communist leader, next to Kim Il Sung, but much closer to Brezhnev than any other Asian communist leaders in regards to personal relations.

The removal of Tsedenbal and his spouse was another important factor for the predominance of reform-oriented, moderate leaders in the Mongolian domestic politics. If Tsedenbal and his spouse had remained in power, they could have easily delayed the political reform process by purging moderate leaders, strengthening the political and intelligence control over society, or increasing political indoctrination as occurred in many other Asian communist states. For instance, evidence suggests, that, prior to her removal, Filatova was conspiring to remove several Politburo members, including Batmunkh, Molomjamts, Dejid and Sodnom after their return from a holiday in Moscow in 1984 (Bayarkhuu, 2015, pp. 83-89; Batbayar, 2001, pp. 115-117; Baabar, 2006, pp. 778-812). Filatova likely targeted these members due to Sodnom's proposals to change the investment agreement of the Erdenet copper factory, re-evaluate copper ore prices, and impose a new royalty based on the recommendations of a Mongolian study (Bayarkhuu, 2015, pp. 83-85; Ligden, 1996). These reformist proposals were strongly supported by Batmunkh and Molomjamts, but not Tsedenbal. Since Tsedenbal had worked so hard to secure Soviet investments in the Erdenet copper factory in 1960s, he would have had strong basis to remove these members from the Politburo. Therefore, the Kremlin's orchestrated removal of Tsedenbal and his wife contributed for politically reform-minded officials operate.

Indirect Effects – Moscow Coughs, Ulaanbaatar Sneezes

Indisputably, Moscow held significant influence over Mongolian politics through both official and unofficial channels; however, it would require much in-depth process-tracing to fully ascertain the impact of this indirect Soviet influence. Mongolian political leaders observed and discussed the results of the meetings, plenum, and congress of the CPSU and had a strong tendency to reflect policy changes occurring in Moscow. The Mongolian communist party congress and plenum were often scheduled immediately after the CPSU congress, plenum, and

meetings for two reasons: (1) Mongolia was more closely tied to Soviet politics than other Asian communist state; and (2) Mongolia's socio-economic developmental plan, known as the Five Year Plan, was integrated with the plans of the Soviet Union and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the communist economic bloc. For instance, Mongolia's new leader Batmunkh could not introduce new economic changes in 1985, even though it was desired by senior party officials and the public, as he needed to wait until after the CPSU's 27th party congress in 1986, when new Secretary General Gorbachev's team was expected to approve the 12th five-year plans for the development of the national economy of the Soviet Union. In the following year, Mongolian leaders critically reviewed their 7th five-year plan, in which one could easily spot the Mongolian equivalent for the newly introduced Soviet slogan of *uskoreniye*, the acceleration of economic development, in the materials of the 19th party congress of the MPRP. Similarly, after Gorbachev introduced slogans of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in 1985 and 1986, Mongolian leaders also used Mongolian equivalents 'uurchlun baiguulalt' meaning restructuring and 'il tod baidal' meaning transparency popularly. The Mongolian party documents also demonstrated such repetitions or similar policy objectives as their Soviet counterparts – such as democratizing the party, separating the party from the state institutions, especially from the legislature, and openly criticizing past leaders for their wrongdoings and purges.

Another indirect effect, as argued by many of my interviewers, came from the Soviet media. For one, Mongolia was heavily dependent on Soviet media sources, including Soviet television, which was the country's only foreign broadcasting service, Soviet television and radio programs tailored for Mongolian audiences in Mongolian language, as well as the Soviet-style Mongolian television and radio (Munkhmandakh, personal interview, December 3, 2015). Second, Mongolian news media outlets had a strong presence in Moscow, which allowed Mongolian audiences to learn of any new political, economic and social developments immediately. At the same time, Mongolian media was also heavily dependent on the Soviet media for news coverage on global and communist blocs. This means that news events in Central and Eastern Europe were sourced from Soviet broadcasting, which had been under the CPSU's tight censorship. Third, Mongolians also received Soviet print journals and newspapers on a daily basis. Many of my sources argued the strong influence of the investigative articles from the Soviet newspapers like *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, *Komsolskaia Pravda*, *Moskovskie Novostie* and journals, especially *Ogonek*, which were all widely read and distributed. For example, Byambasuren, a student at the Mongolian State University in 1980s (personal interview, November 18, 2015), Dari Sukhbaatar, founding

member of democratic movement and publisher of the first unofficial newspaper in Ulaanbaatar (personal interview, November 10, 2015), and Battuvshin, an organizer of the democratic movement in Erdenet City, highlighted the importance of these journals for spurring club debates and also encouraging critical approaches to communist ideology and socialist developments (personal interview, December 25, 2015). For instance, Tsembel, a reporter for the Mongolian *Zaluuchuudyn Unen* (the Youth Truth Newspaper) in Moscow, explained how, in following the critical and investigative journalism of the Soviets, Mongolian newspapers in 1980s also began publishing investigative articles about the communist party purges, corruptions, and legal violations (personal interview, November 15, 2016). One example includes journalist Baldorj's article, "Dalai Eej Tsaazyn Tavstsand" (1985), which criticized and disclosed the fact of the potential phosphorus-mining project near the Khuvsgul Lake, triggering a series of related investigative articles not only about the environment, but also the party bureaucracy.⁴⁰

Following the new trends of political and economic debates and investigative programs on the Soviet television, Mongolian national television and radio encouraged its own version of debates and programs. A well-known and quite effective one was the "Tsag Ue, Zaluuchud" [Time and Youth], which provided a forum for youth to engage in critical discussions and debates with leading party officials, bureaucrats, and intellectuals in the mid 1980s from March 11, 1986. This was the first ever show in which participants did not need pre-approved talking points and/or censored transmission. In addition to the influence of medias, many Mongolians – political leaders, party bureaucrats, intellectuals, military officers, and other professionals and specialists – had also studied and lived the Soviet Union. Obviously, this had indirect effects on the Mongolian politics, especially spurring critical views by those who had directly witnessed and experienced the many changes taking places in the Soviet Union. Evidence suggests that Gorbachev's new policies had contributed to creating a reformist political atmosphere in Mongolia rather than political developments in Central and Eastern Europe because of Mongolia's the limited, but tightly controlled linkages with Central and Eastern Europe.

Like the Sino-Soviet rapprochement, Gorbachev's proposed policy changes in the framework of 'new thinking', *perestroika*, and *glasnost* had direct and indirect impacts on the Mongolian politics. Even though the US became an important factor for the consolidation of the

⁴⁰ Students were planning to rally in order to challenge the party's decision for the mining project; the party sent a high-ranking member from the Central Committee to talk with students; at the university, the students challenged the party member – faculty members protected him (Lamjav, 2016; Byambasuren, personal interview, November 18, 2015).

democratic institutions later on, the US had neither geostrategic nor political interests of promoting the political and economic reform in Mongolia. The US interests was limited to observe the changes in the geopolitical dynamics between China and Soviet Union. Therefore, all three external events created a permissive environment for the domestic politics free from the direct geopolitical competitions and interferences of great powers. All three events occurred under Gorbachev's leadership. It is also important to highlight the positive role of Chinese leaders in pressuring the Kremlin to completely withdraw the Soviet military from Mongolia.

DOMESTIC POLITICAL DYNAMICS

The Mongolian communist party did not lose its power to the opposition. In the logic of Huntington's categories, Mongolia's transition was a successful transformation.⁴¹ The party controlled the situation, permitted opposition parties, accommodated to their demands, and empowered the legislature while openly refusing to take any repressive measures against the opposition, create any ad-hoc institutions, or trigger violent conflicts. As a result, the Mongolian communist party successfully adapted into new political circumstances, provided political stability at a time of crisis, and led the transition to democracy. A few specific features of the Mongolian communist party need to be stressed before unfolding the political dynamics of the late 80s.

First, the MPRP was the second oldest ruling communist party after the CPSU. Comparing the communist parties, Dimitrov argues that communist party regimes go through three stages of development: *establishment*, which requires several months to several years, *consolidation*, which is about a decade long, and *maturation*, which may span several decades (2013, p. 13). In Dimitrov's comparative scale, the Mongolian party had an earlier and longer institutionalization – the establishment stage in 1921-1928, consolidation in 1928-1952, and maturation in 1956-1989 – than all other Asian and European communist parties.⁴² The party was heavily institutionalized in terms of the decision-making process and staffed with the party bureaucrats, who attended the communist party professional development training programs in the Soviet Union and/or Mongolia, and also possessed the effective infrastructure to represent and mobilize society (Bat-Ochir, 1983; MPRP, 1985; MPRP, 1995). Even during the period of Tsedenbal, the party had a functional collective decision-making process through the Politburo Meetings, Central Committee

⁴¹ According to Huntington's formulation, the transformation occurs "when the elites in power took the lead in bringing about democracy" (Huntington, 1991, p. 114). However, it was the case in Mongolia since both groups (ruling and opposition) played equal roles in the transition process.

⁴² The Soviet communist regime started in 1917, European communist regimes between 1943 and 1948, North Korean and Chinese in 1948-1949, Vietnam and Cuba in 1954-1959, and Laos in 1975 (Dimitrov, 2013, p. 14).

Plenums, and the once-in-five-year Congress. This process was routinized and known to its members whilst used by leaders for the legitimization of political decisions. Party members used the formal procedures, especially the Central Party plenums to criticize personality cults and the lack of party democracy in 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (MPRP, 1995, pp. 116-121). Second, like the CPSU, the MPRP maintained full control over society for purposes of indoctrination, political control, mobilization, and representation through centralized organizations and dominated the legislature, bureaucracies, educational organizations, all state enterprises and agricultural collectives (Dash-Yondon, personal interview, 2016; MPRP, 1995, pp. 94-101). In other words, the party was deeply entrenched in society through party-controlled governmental and public organizations, including labour, veteran, women, youth, pioneer, and professional unions. This also meant that the party has been closely linked to the society. People did express their views and criticisms using this network (MPRP, 1995). Third, like the Soviet, Chinese, Cuban, Vietnamese, Albanian, and North Korean communist parties, the Mongolian communist party gained power through a national revolution and portrayed itself as a political force that brought national independence and socio-economic development to Mongolia. Therefore, the public perception of the Mongolian communist party was different than ones in Central and Eastern Europe, where the communist rule was imposed by the Soviet Union and their communist parties. Finally, there was no previous history of opposition parties and movements, diaspora community in the West, or links to the international organizations like the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in Mongolia. But, there are numerous accounts of the existence of the dissenting and critical views against ‘personality cults’ of Choibalsan in 1920s-30s, Tsendenbal in 1950s-60s, and against the latter’s spouse in 1970s-80s (MPRP, 1995, pp. 70-78, 121-126).

In brief, the Mongolian communist party was one of the oldest institutionalized parties in the communist bloc and domestically perceived as the political force brought the national sovereignty and development to Mongolia while encountering no institutionalized opposition in the country and abroad.

Batmunkh’s Reform & Fifth Plenum

After assuming all top posts of the communist party (i.e., General Secretary of the MPRP), the legislature (i.e., Chairman of the Presidium of the PGH) and the commander-in-chief (i.e., Chairman of the Defense Council) in December 1984, Batmunkh began reshuffling the top leadership posts, prioritizing economic reform, and relaxing the ideological control and party propaganda. He relieved Maidar and Adiya, two strong supporters of Tsendenbal and his spouse,

from the Politburo and replaced them with two technocrats: Sodnom Dumaa (51 year old), who previously headed the Ministry of Finance from 1963-69 and the State Planning Commission from 1974, as Premier, and Namsrai Tserendash (45) as Secretary of the Central Committee. Another critical move was Tudev Lodon's (49) – a well-known writer and critical intellectual – appointment as the Editor-in-Chief of the party's principal newspaper - *Unen*. With the appointment of Tudev, the party's media, including journals, newspapers, and broadcasting, began to provide a more attractive forum for public criticism and investigative journalism.⁴³ Party intellectuals and journalists began to criticize openly the party policies, revealing facts about mismanagement, disclosing suppressed evidence about purges of Choibalsan and Tsendenbal, and questioning certain aspects of Soviet-Mongolian relations (Tsembel, personal interview, November 15, 2016; Byambasuren, personal interview, November 18, 2015). Even though, in general, Batmunkh encouraged reform-minded leaders, he was still keen to introduce socio-economic reform while considering gradual political reform. At all major party platforms such as the 19th Congress in 1986, Central Committee plenum in 1987, and the 13th Congress of the Mongolian Trade Union, Batmunkh's main focus was on the economic reform, including agricultural reform plan, restructuring the socio-economic policies, and encouraging business entrepreneurship (MPRP, 1995). In regards to the political reform, he made three major contributions. First, he dismantled the media and arts censorship department, a powerful party organization that had held controlled over all media broadcasts and publications, including textbooks. Second, in contrast to his predecessor, Batmunkh relaxed the general atmosphere of the communist party. For instance, he allowed party members and the public to openly criticize the party bureaucracy, mismanagement, and ideological dogmatism at the party congress, plenums, and in the media. Finally, he directed the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Public Security to maintain neutrality to any political matters and restrain any type of harassment regarding dissenting and critical voices (Khureljantsan, 2004).

Yet, in retrospect, many Mongolian scholars and senior bureaucrats argue that the Batmunkh's slow approach in addressing political reform at the Fifth Plenum of the MPRP Central Committee in December 1988 prompted the rise of the opposition and the public support for the reform (Bayarkhuu, 2015; Khureljantsan, 2004; Dash-Yondon, personal interview, October 15,

⁴³ As the Editor-in-Chief, Tudev oversaw the publication policies for the principal party newspaper, *Unen* [Truth], and academic journal, *Namyn Amidral* [Party Life] and also other widely distributed newspapers: *Zaluuchuudyn Unen* [Youth Truth] for the youth, *Ulaan Od* [Red Star] for the military, and *Khudulmur* [Labour] for the trade union members.

2015). In 1988, for the first time, a month before the Central Committee Plenum, party leaders disclosed all plenum agenda, key themes, and the Politburo's political reform proposal to the Central Committee and also tasked three Central Committee departments to receive public comments and to introduce their analysis of public comments at the Fifth Plenum.⁴⁴ Also, a day before the plenum, the party newspaper published letters and op-eds, which criticized four politburo members by name - something that was highly unusual for the party newspaper to publish. This created expectations among party members and the public that Batmunkh would remove these senior party officials and launch a rapid political reform. However, Batmunkh did not remove them at the Fifth Plenum. Later, in his interview, Batmunkh explained that he did not want to mix two issues – (1) the principles and scopes for the political reform and (2) personnel changes – at that plenum. In his logic, he needed to have broad consensus and understanding from party members and the public on principles of the political change before introducing personnel changes. In reality, the key reason was that Batmunkh was constrained by the party's influential Central Committee, whose endorsement was required to remove members of the politburo and senior leaders of other party organizations, even if Batmunkh accumulated all political powers.

Although Batmunkh did not remove the most-criticized politburo members, the plenum made several key decisions such as separating roles of the party and the state (esp., legislature), downsizing of the party bureaucracies, formally renouncing the ideological control, and revising the constitution and the electoral system. The Central Committee approved, as proposed in the Batmunkh's speech, all these decisions and agreed on proposals of the constitutional and electoral system revisions. The new electoral system would permit a competitive election, prohibit public officials from running, and encourage the independent candidacy while the proposed revisions to the constitution empowered roles of the legislature delegates, set up an independent constitutional commission, and increased the power of the people's assembly (legislature) at all levels of the government. The plenum also established two commissions: one to study past mistakes of the communist party, especially the Tsedenbal period, and the other to draft the constitution. While Batmunkh himself was satisfied with the open constructive debates and support for his plan for the

⁴⁴ Batmunkh's speech, the political reform proposal, consisted of five main parts: (1) Objectives to democratize within the communist party, (2) New objectives for propaganda work, (3) Objectives to democratize the state institutions, (4) Objectives to democratize the non-governmental organizations, and (5) Economic policies. See MPRP, 1988 and *Unen Newspaper*, December 22, 1988, No. 275 (17178). Noticeably, this speech had two purposes: *first*, acknowledge the mistakes of the communist party and *second*, seek to gain popular support on principles of the political reform.

gradual political reform at the plenum, the public was not happy with these results, especially for not removing the most-criticized Politburo members.

The First Hunger Strike & Resignation of the Politburo

As the party ideological control loosened, the political atmosphere began to thaw. Political debate clubs were organized without any official sanctions while prohibited ‘literature’ and writings began to be circulated and discussed.⁴⁵ But the Ministry of Public Security was still in control. For instance, as the first street posters posted along major roads at night, the Ministry of Public Security interrogated all members of the suspected *Shine Ue* club and then intelligence personnel removed posters before dawn.⁴⁶

The most catalytic event was the Second National Symposium of Young Artists in June 1989, which brought together 200 artists representing all cities and provinces.⁴⁷ The symposium preceded by a 5-day gatherings of diverse art associations and unions in Ulaanbaatar; thus facilitating intense debates among writers, journalists, artists, actors, and film-makers, many of whom had been critical about the ideological control, socio-economic situations, and the suppression of Mongolian cultural heritage and history. Since the event was organized with the approval of the communist party leaders, three influential party officials, including Namsrai, second-ranking Politburo Member, attended the symposium and ended up receiving intense criticisms from the young artists. Dari Sukhbaatar, founding member of the *Shine Ue*, argued in his interview that the communist party leaders wanted to learn about the perspectives of young artists, but they did not realize this event could instigate nationwide calls for the political reform (Sukhbaatar, personal interview, November 10, 2015).

Inspired by these brave criticisms and debates at the Second National Symposium of Young Artists, sporadic, albeit uncoordinated, demonstrations started from Erdenet, the second largest city, extended to Khovd, far western province, and eventually arose in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city.

⁴⁵ For example, Baabar’s “Never Forget” and “Letters to His Brother” and poet Choinyam’s poems were widely circulated in secret mostly in hand-written forms.

⁴⁶ Posters were posted by midnight of January 2, 1989. The poster called for the direct election of the Chairman of the People’s Great Hural, official permission of the ideological pluralism, and the publicization of the UN Human Rights Declaration of 1948 (Sukhbaatar, personal interview, November 10, 2015).

⁴⁷ The first symposium was in 1975, but the communist leaders had never approved the second symposium.

On December 3, 1989, about sixty people made the first-ever peaceful, unofficial demonstration in Erdenet city demanding to increase the Mongolian share of the factory, positions at the senior management and salary for Mongolian workers and also to relocate the Soviet military units from the city (Battuvshin, personal interview, December 25, 2015; Suvdaa, 2011). Two aspects are important to highlight in regards to Erdenet City: first its residents were highly educated due to how the new copper and molybdenum factory, its infrastructure, and all supporting facilities required skilled professionals and workers, most of whom had been educated and trained in the Soviet Union. The other was the past experience of the public demonstrations. In November 1988, the country's first-ever labour strike happened in Erdenet, where 400 Mongolian truck drivers protested to raise their salaries (Battuvshin, personal interview, December 25, 2015; Suvdaa, 2011).

On December 7, over 200 students and teachers at the Khovd Pedagogical University carried multiple hand-drawn portraits of Chinggis Khaan, whom was still banned to talk about and display publicly, and protested at the main square Ard Ayush (Byambasuren, personal interview, November 18, 2015; Il Tod Baidal San, 2015, pp. 29-33; Khureljantsan, 2004, pp. 103-105). Interestingly, organizers demanded the collective resignation of the Politburo and Central Committee members for the first time. Because this was the only university in the far western province, young faculty members and most students from nearby provinces lived on the campus; this apparently provided opportunities to discuss reform topics openly and to prepare for the protest. However, all media remained silent about these two events.

Figure 3. Khovd Pedagogical University and Ard Ayush Square





Note: Khovd Pedagogical University (top) & Ard Auysh Square. Photos taken by author on August 28, 2018

On December 10, a newly established Mongolian Democratic Union (MDU) organized its first demonstration, involving around 200-300 people, on the UN Human Rights Day and submitted a letter with 13 demands to the Seventh Plenum of the party Central Committee and the People's Great Hural (Shirnen, 2010, pp. 97-103; Jijgee, 2015, pp. 22-25). The letter called for the multiparty system, a new election of the legislature before its regular schedule, legal guarantee for press freedom, investigations of wrongdoings and personality cults of Choibalsan and Tsedenbal, and a formal apology as well as compensations for victims of political purges. The letter also required the party leaders to re-evaluate "the party's [past] statements for supporting the armed interventions of internal affairs of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968" (Jijgee, 2015, pp. 24-25; Shirnen, 2010, pp. 98-99; Khureljantsan, 2004, pp. 42-43).

Despite the Siberian type of frigid cold winter, demonstrations became frequent and attracted more people than previous ones (see Table 5). On December 17, about 2,000 people attended the second demonstration in the capital city demanding freedom of the press, the abolishment of the Stalinist type of socialism, and the removal from the constitutional of the statement about "the MPRP as the guiding force of the society" whilst expressing their support for the friendship with the Soviet people. The third demonstration on January 14, 1990 involved approximately 10 thousand people and organizers again demanded to limit the power and authority of the MPRP. On January 21, the fourth demonstration protested against the city's decisions of prohibiting public demonstrations in the main streets and squares and, interestingly, protestors took a moment to commemorate the anniversary of Lenin's death at the beginning of the demonstration. Starting from the fifth demonstration, on February 11, organizers demanded establishing the

People’s Interim Hural to draft the constitutional changes and election laws, which would allow equal political participation and uphold human rights.

Table 5. List of Demonstrations in 1989 - 1990

Location	Date	Number (approx.)
Erdenet City	1989/12/03	60
Khovd Province	1989/12/07	200-300
Ulaanbaatar	1989/12/10	200-300
Ulaanbaatar	1989/12/17	2000
Ulaanbaatar	1990/01/14	10000
Ulaanbaatar	1990/01/21	15000
Ulaanbaatar	1990/02/11	20000

Sources: Shirnen, 2010; Khureljantsan, 2004; Jijgee, 2015; Bayarkhuu, 2015.

After the fifth demonstrations, new political forces began to institutionalize. The MDU held its first congress and announced the establishment of the first opposition party, the Mongolian Democratic Party (MDP). The communist party leaders did not obstruct this formalization process of new political forces. Instead they provided one of the largest conference facilities (i.e., The Cultural Palace of the Mongolian Trade Union) and allowed for nationwide live broadcasting. Within a couple of weeks, other new political forces announced the establishment of new parties. The New Progressive Movement (NPM) established the Mongolian National Progressive Party (MNPP) and the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) announced the Mongolian Social Democratic Party (MSDP). Also, the Mongolian Students’ Union (MSU) declared itself as an independent political organization for promoting and protecting the interests of students, those both studying in Mongolia and abroad. There is no evidence that communist party authorities attempted to hinder or block this formalization process.

On March 4, the MDU, DSM, NPM, and MSU – popularly-known as the four forces – organized the country’s largest demonstration, involving up to 100 thousand people. Organizers first issued a statement requesting that uniformed personnel of the Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of Defense refrain from using force against the people under any circumstances.⁴⁸ They

⁴⁸ The MDU leaders signed a memorandum of understanding with key organizers of the Officers’ Movement, a reformist non-governmental organization within the Mongolian People’s Army. (Sukhbaatar, personal interview, November 10, 2015; Batsaikhan, Chairman of the Officers’ Movement, personal interview, November 20, 2015; Colonel Myagmarjav, personal interview, November 28, 2015).

then presented a letter of demand to the MPRP Central Committee and the People's Great Hural with a specific deadline along with a threat of hunger strike. Their demands included:

- Convening the special congress of the MPRP in March 1990 to change the composition of the MPRP Central Committee and to separate the party from the state affairs;
- Establishing the People's Interim Hural [legislature] in March 1990 with equal participation from all political forces; The People's Interim Hural would draft and pass the constitution and election law and dissolve after forming the new government through democratic election;
- In implementing these measures, the state sovereignty, national unity, and people's safety must not be threatened; and,
- Providing a response to this demand by radio and television by March 7, 1990 and to publicly announce the schedule of the broadcast ahead of time (Jijgee, 2015, p. 124; *Unen Newspaper*, March 8, 1990; Shirnen, 2010, pp. 238-245).

Lastly, organizers carefully coordinated the demonstration and were cautious about not permitting any violent behaviour of demonstrators against the police. As stressed by many sources, some cadets of the Mongolian Military Academy and former military and police officers were put in charge of the security and discipline of the demonstrators.

After the MPRP officially refused to change the dates of the MPRP Congress or establish the People's Interim Hural on March 6, ten members of the MDU staged the first-ever hunger strike at the Sukhbaatar Square in front of the government house on the following day (Shirnen, 2010, pp. 247; Enkhee, 1991). Upon the request of the MDU, Premier Sodnom and Deputy Premier Byambasuren talked with leaders of four forces during a nation-wide televised roundtable on the evening of March 8, which happened to be on International Women's Day, one of Mongolia's most popular holidays. (Khureljantsan, 2004, pp. 58-59). By March 9, the number of hunger strikers reached 33, the Mongolian Students' Union established the "Student Strike Committee" in support of the hunger strike, and the number of demonstrators and bystanders was on the rise despite the cold weather (Khureljantsan, 2004, pp. 58-60; *Il Tod Baidal San*, 2015, pp. 62-65).⁴⁹ At the same time, the Ministry of Public Security alerted its personnel and repositioned units of the internal troops in the vicinity of the Government House by dawn (Sukhbaatar, personal interview, 2015). For example, the Pioneer Palace, which was a few hundred meters away from the Government House, was used as one of the assembly areas for the internal troops (Sukhbaatar, personal interview, 2015).

⁴⁹ Interestingly, the main cue for the hunger strike discourses in Mongolia was Dr. Charles Hyder's 218 day hunger strike in front of the White House.

On March 9, the hunger strike ended at 2300 following General Secretary Batmunkh's address informing the nation that he would submit the collective resignation decision of the Politburo to the party's Central Committee plenum (Bayarkhuu, 2015, p. 340; Khureljantsan, 2004, p. 60). At this critical moment, the draft of the partial emergency plan was introduced to Batmunkh, but he refused to even discuss this repressive option and, as recalled by many witnesses, claimed that "he would never sign this and we few Mongols had not yet arrived at the moment in which we would make each other's nose bleed" (Khureljantsan, 2004, pp. 57-61; Bayarkhuu, 2015, pp. 338-343). Rather, after intense discussions, he convinced all Politburo members and Senior Central Committee officials to accept his decision to ease the political tensions and pave a way for the political transition.⁵⁰

The Second Hunger Strike & Passage of the Multi-Party Election Law

The Central Committee plenum, which was held in March 12-14, 1990, discussed Batmunkh's assessment of the political situation and proposals for future actions, including the collective resignation of the Politburo. In his speech, Batmunkh stressed three important points: (1) that political reform was inevitable and the party needed to be reformed; however, the MDU's suggestion to dismantle the state institution and political system was not acceptable; (2) at the moment, Mongolia was not in a deep crisis, but if they failed to find ways to overcome the current challenges, the situation would worsen; and (3) the top priority was to not lose the national unity; this required them to make compromises (Bayarkhuu, 2015; Purevdorj, 2001, pp. 137-144). Also, he stressed that his Politburo, Central Committee, and the Government (i.e., Council of Ministers) work within the constitutional framework and show tolerance for the newly emerged political forces. Namsrai, the second-ranking Politburo member, was highly critical about the Central Committee and other party organizations for delaying a number of important decisions and proposals of the Politburo on the political reform, and stated:

'I am not trying to escape from the responsibility.... But, I would not allow if some wanted to stay in their positions by sacrificing the Politburo.... Party members could not act

⁵⁰ In addition to two strong supporters of Batmunkh's reform in the Politburo, there were two important persons who might have had influence on Batmunkh's non-violent resolutions. One is Public Security Minister Jamsranjav and the other is Foreign Minister Gombosuren. Both received their education in the Soviet Union and were career professionals and the most-informed officials on the situations in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and other communist states. General Jamsranjav worked at the Central Committee in 1979-1981, First Deputy Minister at the Public Security Ministry 1981-1984, and Public Security Ministry in 1984-1990. Mr Gombosuren worked as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Mongolian Embassy in Moscow in 1984-87, Central Committee in 1987-1988, and Foreign Minister in 1988-1996. Although there are contradicting facts, these experienced ministers were advising the potential negative impacts of the violent resolutions.

innovatively and decisively. In general, all system became dysfunctional. I am not trying to say that the Politburo worked hard. Even though we're resigning, there are works completed and directions are set. But, there was a tendency to expect the Politburo to deal with all issues.... There were more complainers and criticizers than dedicated, innovative doers" (Purevdorj, 2001, p. 163).

After intense debate over these proposed measures, the plenum reached several important decisions (Bayarkhuu, 2015, pp. 356-365; Khureljantsan, 2001, p. 67; Shirnen, 2001, pp. 258-259). First, the plenum supported the decision of the collective resignation of the Politburo and all secretaries of the Central Committee. Second, the plenum expelled Tsedenbal from the party and invalidated its previous plenum (1984) assessment and praises for Tsedenbal. Third, the plenum exonerated and renewed the party membership of Tumur-Ochir, Lookhuuz, Nyambu, and Surmaajav, who had been purged by Tsedenbal during the Central Party plenum in 1962 and 1964. In 1962, Tumur-Ochir, Central Committee Secretary and Head of the MPRP ideological department, had been ousted for a manifestation of 'unhealthy nationalism' after he initiated a celebration of the 800th anniversary of the birth of Chinggis Khaan (Radchenko, 2006, p. 96; MPRP, 1995). The other three, also known the "anti-party group," were senior party officials who had openly criticized Tsedenbal, claiming:

"The Mongolian leader had usurped power from the people and cared little for the fate of Mongolia, that he had engaged in drinking and debauchery, that he had brought incompetent flatterers and liars into his entourage, and that his leadership methods contradicted principles of party democracy" (Radchenko, 2006, p. 97; MPRP, 1995).

Tsedenbal purged them on the account "of anti-party affair as an attempted coup against Soviet-Mongolian friendship, undoubtedly inspired by the Chinese" in 1964 (Radchenko, 2006, p. 97). Finally, the plenum decided to organize the communist party's special (extraordinary) congress with 927 delegates representing its 93 thousand party members on April 20, 1990 (Khureljantsan, 2001, p. 67).

The most critical achievement of the plenum was furthering the separation of the communist party leadership and positions from the state institutions, especially the legislature – the People's Great Hural. Plenum members basically begged Ochirbat Gombojav, who was once demoted by Tsedenbal from the presidency of the Mongolian Trade Union for his criticism in 1982, to serve as the party's new secretary general along with other reformist members. Following the party's plenum, the People's Great Hural Congress, which was convened in March 21-23,

1990, accepted the resignation proposal of Batmunkh from the Chairman of the People's Great Hural, removed article 82, which constitutionally mandated the 'leading role' to the communist party, and elected Ochirbat Punsalmaa (not confused with Ochirbat Gombojav, the communist party general secretary) as the Chairman of the People's Great Hural and Gungaadorj Sharav as the Premier.⁵¹ Appreciating Batmunkh's decision to not repress the opposition, all opposition forces asked Batmunkh to remain as Chairman of the People's Great Hural, but he declined all of their requests especially during the transition period. This was the first step to separate the three main governing institutions – the communist party Politburo and Central Committee, the legislature, and government cabinet – by appointing different individuals, especially technocrats known for their political neutrality.

As the MPRP converted into one of the country's political parties, newly elected leaders of the legislature and government began to distance themselves from all political parties, but remained concerned with increasing politicization and public protests – which began to hinder the normal operations of the government organizations, schools, and major state enterprises. As this political situation worsened, on April 7, the Presidium of the People's Great Hural issued a new decree, known as the 86th decree, to regulate demonstrations in urban centres. Under this decree, organizers were required to submit a written request a week prior to the demonstration with information about the duration, equipment, and number of participants to the municipal Presidium of the People's Great Hural, which then had the right to postpone the demonstration for up to a week or impose charges on organizers. The main purpose, as expressed by the legislature and government, was to prioritize economic matters and to maintain the law and order in major cities. The opposition parties and movements were not happy with these restrictions and also complained for not providing equal opportunities to contribute to the revision of the election law and the slow process of passing laws on political parties.

On April 24, 1990, the MDU and MDP submitted a letter of ultimatum to the People's Great Hural Presidium and MPRP Central Committee demanding (1) to establish the People's Interim Assembly and People's Special/Emergency Commission, (2) to move the MPRP out from the Government House, (3) to provide office space for the MDU and MDP, and (4) to give an

⁵¹ Mr. Ochirbat worked in the government from 1972, mostly in areas of geology, mining, energy and foreign economic relations. He was perceived as more pragmatic than ideologically hardcore leaders. He wrote a highly critical article in the Soviet journal *Eko Planyetu* [Echo of the Planet] – criticizing the unbalanced trade between the Soviet Union and Mongolia in 1989. Mr. Gungaadorj was the prominent bureaucrat and agricultural expert. He worked as Minister of the Agriculture from 1986 and Deputy Premier from 1987.

official response at 1200 pm on April 27 at the Sukhbaatar Square (Khureljantsan, 2001, pp. 80-83; Purev, 2015). A day before the deadline, Ochirbat, Chairman of the People's Great Hural responded publicly to the MDU/MDP ultimatum and explained his reasons for not accepting their demands. This caused a massive opposition demonstration at the Sukhbaatar Square in April 27-28. The police provided three circles of unarmed personnel in the protection of the government house, the internal troops strengthened the security of critical facilities, including governmental buildings, communication, bank, power plants, and so forth, and, for the first time, the Ulaanbaatar military garrison was put at high alert (Khureljantsan, 2001, pp. 80-83; Purev, 2015).

This situation was exacerbated by another hunger strike in the centre of northern province of Khuvsgul on April 28. Here nine people, including four women, started a hunger strike after the police detained eight people for violating the 86th decree by organizing an unauthorized demonstration at the central square of the provincial capital. After these events, capital city demonstrators added a new demand of changing the 86th decree to their previous demands for the law on election and parties whilst 3 people in eastern province of Dornod began a sit-in strike, two other hunger strikes in Darkhan City and Selenge Province arose, and student strikes in Khovd province and Ulaanbaatar city formed in support of the Khuvsgul hunger strike. Along with these hunger strikes, a multiparty consultation began from April 24 on the initiative of the MSDP and with support from the People's Great Hural Presidium (Ochirbat, 1996, pp. 148-151). Chimed Byaraa, who would later be regarded as the godfather' of the Mongolian Constitution, played a critical role in bringing together all parties to the table to reach a consensus. At that time, Chimed was the Chief of the Department of the Presidium of the PGH. After a long consultation led by Chimid, on April 30, all convening parties reached a major consensus concerning changes to the election law. On May 4, the Khuvsgul hunger strike stopped as the provincial authorities cancelled their decisions (Shirnen, 2010, p. 371; Khureljantsan, 2001, pp. 86-89; Ochirbat, 1996, pp. 150-152). Although not intentionally planned, the Khuvsgul hunger strike strengthened the opposition parties' bargaining power as it found it had supporters from different corners of Mongolia.

Besides the controversial decree (86th), the Presidium of the PGH responded to other demands from the opposition parties and movements. For instance, it dismantled the Soviet KGB style Ministry of Public Security, by separating the police from the secret service and dismantling the political surveillance branch of the intelligence; thus ending the heavily institutionalized informant system (Mendee & Tuvshintugs, 2013, p. 245). Also, it dissolved the largest political party organizations in the security forces and government bureaucracy in order to keep security

forces and government bureaucracy neutral from the politics (Myagmarjav, personal interview, 2015; Batsaikhan, personal interview, 2016). As a result, and as also confirmed by the evidence, the government under Premier Gungaadorj had not only managed to maintain its neutrality throughout these ongoing political processes, but also focused its efforts on maintaining the law and order, especially during the massive protests of April. In fact, the government had been ready to impose martial law if the situation grew out of control (Khureljantsan, 2001). Overall, during this period, the legislature, PGH, especially its Presidium, had been in charge of the political reform process rather than the communist party.

The First Multi-Party Election

As agreed on April 30, 1990, political parties, including the communist party endorsed the current Presidium and members of the People’s Great Hural, with 358 representatives, revising the 1960 constitution to change the electoral procedure and to provide the legal basis for political parties. The constitutional revision also included the creation of the 50-member permanent legislative body, State Small Hural, in addition to the existing PGH; the posts of president and vice-president, who would be elected from the PGH; and the adoption of the Westminster type cabinet system that would replace the communist-style, Premier and the Council of Ministers.⁵² On May 10, the People’s Great Hural made all these revisions and subsequently established the General Election Commission. Gurragchaa Jugderdemid, the country’s first astronaut and a well-respected public figure, headed the commission, which consisted of politically neutral bureaucrats along with representatives from the political parties.

Subsequently, the country’s new political parties were expected to complete their registration at the Supreme Court (see Table 6).⁵³ However, everything did not proceed smoothly. Two examples would be sufficient to demonstrate the complicated nature of the political process.

Table 6. List of Registered Political Parties by June 1990

Name	Est. Date	Registration Date	Members	Organizational reach	Supporting Movements
Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party	21/03/01	90/05/16	90000	National	Youth organization Trade Union

⁵² Under these revisions, Ochirbat, who was Chairman of the People’s Great Hural, became the President and Gungaadorj, Chairman of the Council of Ministers began titled as the Prime Minister. Parties agreed the bicameral legislature would be established after the election as well as new president and cabinet.

⁵³ The new law on political parties set a key criterion for the political party to have at least 451 members to register and prohibited political parties from conducting economic and financial activities as well as the state organizations from providing funds and support to a political party (PGH, 1990; Gerelt-Od, 2009).

Mongolian Democratic Party	90/02/18	90/05/24	7200	Urban and Rural	Mongolian Democratic Union
Mongolian Social Democratic Party	90/03/31	90/05/25	2900	Capital City	Democratic Socialist Movement
Mongolian National Progressive Party	90/03/11	90/05/22	1800	Urban	New Progressive Movement
Mongolian Green Party	90/03/09	90/05/26	800	Capital City	
Mongolian Free Labour Party	90/03/	90/05/22	800	Capital City	

Source: Barkmann, 2006, p. 156; Gerelt-Od, 2009, p. 84; Shirnen, 2010, pp. 414-418.

On June 30, the MSDP threatened to boycott the election until the Presidium of the PGH and communist party Central Committee, first, stopped the flow of state funding to the communist party under the new law on political parties; second, allocated funding to all political parties; third, refrained from making any changes to the revised constitution and subsequent laws (i.e., election and political parties); and, fourth, invited foreign observers. In response, two days before the MSDP's deadline of the July 6th, the Presidium promised that it would not make any legislative changes, stopped the state funding of the MPRP, and decided to appropriate the remaining communist party funds to all registered political parties.⁵⁴ With these positive, quick responses, the MSDP agreed to participate in the election.

Soon after, the MNPP and its NPM movement demanded that both the Presidium and the MPRP Central Committee (1) provide equal and free access to the national radio and television for the new political parties and (2) organize a live-broadcasted debate among all party leaders. As other demands and threats of boycotts increased, President Ochirbat (i.e., Chairman of the PGH) invited leaders of all political parties for the roundtable meeting. At this meeting, President Ochirbat stressed the importance of the national unity and the potential negative impacts of some discussions in the foreign policy arena. He asked all parties to participate in the election and warned that:

“To strengthen our unity and resolving our difference internally will inevitably impact our foreign relations in the future. We have policies to broaden our relations with other countries, especially the Western countries and international organizations. There are some

⁵⁴ The state funding for the communist party for 1990 was 30 million tugrugs. The Presidium allocated the 10 percent of the remaining communist party funds (i.e., 17 million tugrugs out of 30 million) to six registered political parties, including the communist party, based on their membership numbers. The General Election Commission also appropriated additional funding to all parties (Jijgee, 2015, pp. 205-220; Shirnen, 2010, pp. 524-528).

potential steps to implement the Foreign Investment Law. But, there are tendencies that foreigners would make more observation before expanding the diplomatic activities” (Minutes of the Meeting, in Ochirbat, 1996, p. 344).

At that meeting, opposition leaders concurred the importance of the national unity and international images whilst pushing their demands for equal opportunities. After a long, open discussion, the President resolved several key demands by including more representatives to the General Election Commission, changing the election date from the July 8th to July 22nd, and providing access to national broadcasting and also telecommunications. As a result, the MDP and MNPP, two of the leading political oppositions, agreed to participate in the election.

A key event factoring in the election date was a national independence festival, Naadam, July 11-12. Instead of earlier intentions of having new political leaders at the Naadam ceremonies, political leaders agreed to give more emphasis to Naadam, which was celebrated in more nationalistic way than ever by reviving the symbols of the Great Mongolian Empire (e.g., Chinggis Khaan, nine-white horse banners and traditional costumes) than the usual portraits of Lenin and politburo members, Soviet-style state symbols, and party slogans. Although the postponement of the election after the Naadam festival gave a bit more time to prepare, plenty of evidence suggests that political leaders and the public were more enthusiastic about the revival of nationalism than the election itself.

The first multi-party election used a mix of electoral methods from the majoritarian and proportional systems and organized it into two phases: the first round on July 22 with 92.5 percent voter turnout and the final round on July 29 with 98 percent voter turnout. Overall, 61.7 percent voted for the MPRP, 24.3 percent for the MDP, 5.9 percent for MNPP, and 5.5 percent for the MSDP in the proportional elections (General Election Commission of Mongolia, 2008; Heaton, 1991) (see Table 7). All political parties and foreign observers accepted the election results as fair and free. In addition to the country’s first-ever fair and free election, the revival of nationalism also brought considerable joy to Mongols. For the first time, in August during the election, Mongolians celebrated the 750th anniversary of the *Secret History of Mongolia*, the oldest literary account of Chinggis Khaan, at his birthplace in Khentii province. Unlike the communist period, when a senior party official and his colleagues were purged because of their initiative of celebrating the 800th anniversary of the Great Khaan, both ruling and opposition political leaders proudly celebrated this event even more so than the annual Naadam festival. On the other hand, it was, indeed, a celebration of Mongolia’s full attainment of political freedom from the Kremlin’s running its

domestic politics. For the first time of its 70 years of sovereignty, Mongolians elected their political leaders without any directives or interference from the Kremlin.

Table 7. Result of the People's Great Hural Election

Parties	Number of Seats in the People's Great Hural (430)*	Number of Seats in the State Small Hural (50)**
MPRP	343	31
MDP	23	13
MNPP	7	3
MSDP	4	3
Mongolian Free Labor Party (MFLP)	1	0
Independent	51	-

Source: The General Election Commission of Mongolia (January 1, 2017). Retrieved from <http://www.gec.gov.mn/details/1093>

*Majoritarian principle used for the big chamber (People's Great Hural); members represent their own local constituencies.

** Proportional principle used for the small chamber (State Small Hural) permanent legislative body

After resolving a number of disputed districts, on September 3, members of the PGH elected the President, vice President, and the Small Hural, the first permanent legislative body, thorough very intense, open debates. From these debates, it was a clear that all parties respected the national unity and were committed to upholding a peaceful, inclusive, and consensus based decision-making democratic process. First, the MPRP, despite their sufficient majority to establish a majority government, decided to provide more opportunities to the opposition parties both in the legislature as well as in the cabinet by sharing key posts (Table 8). Second, Lookhuuz, who was purged in 1964 as leader of the anti-party group and exonerated in March 1990, was nominated to the President. A newly elected member of the PGH, Lookhuuz, declined the offer because of his age and endorsed the incumbent President Ochirbat to continue. Finally, new cabinet members were selected on the basis of their professional expertise and political neutrality rather than the party affiliations.

Table 8. Allocation of Key Positions

Presidency and State Small Hural	People's Great Hural (legislature)	Government (cabinet)
President Ochirbat (MPRP)	Speaker Gombojav (MPRP)	Prime Minister Byambasuren (MPRP)
Vice President Speaker of the State Small Hural Gonchigdorj (MSDP)	Deputy Speaker Dashnyam (MNPP)	Deputy PM Da Ganbold (MNPP)

Deputy Speaker of the State Small Hural Zardykhan (MPRP)	Deputy Speaker Adiyasuren (MSDP)	Deputy PM Dorligjav (MDP)
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Sources: Khureljantsan, 2004, pp. 90-101; Chuluun, 2015;

ANALYSIS

A small buffer state, which had been caught up in decades-long direct geopolitical competitions between two rival, authoritarian great powers, made a peaceful transition to electoral democracy. With the lack of Western geostrategic interests and links to developed democracies, Mongolian political leaders sought ways for political and economic liberalization, encouraged pluralism and criticisms, and accommodated the opposition. This constructive process resulted in the first multiparty elections – marking the end of the single-party state and showing a divergent journey than other Asian communist party states in the immediate neighbourhood of China and also Cuba. Therefore, the Mongolian transition case reveals hidden dynamics of the democratization in authoritarian neighbourhoods, where the Western democracy promotion efforts and democratic neighbourhood effects were weak, if not absent. This section will first discuss the external factors and then look at the internal dynamics.

External Factors – Absence of the Direct Geopolitical Competition

The Mongolian case confirms the importance of external factors on democratic transition of the third wave democratization. The end of the Cold War, especially the geopolitical competition between the United States and USSR, opened a breathing space for the domestic politics of (satellite) small states by removing aids and protections for authoritarian regimes (Boix, 2003, 29-30; Levitsky & Way, 2005; Geddes, 2009; Bunce, McFaul & Stoner-Weiss, 2010). As Huntington (1991), Przeworski (1991), and Linz & Stepan (1996) contend, the changing foreign policies of the United States and Soviet Union also created a favourable geopolitical setting for European communist states as well as Mongolia. However, in the Mongolian case, the Soviet-American normalization had minimum impact on its domestic politics because US policies toward East Asia did not experience any major shifts. Rather, the normalization of the Sino-Soviet relations had the most direct effects on Mongolia's domestic politics.

The Sino-Soviet rapprochement reduced the Kremlin's control over Mongolia and created a zone of peace between the two rival great powers. One of the key conditions for the normalization of the Sino-Soviet relation was the withdrawal of the Soviet military forces from Mongolia. But, to

accept this condition, the Kremlin first needed to remove Brezhnev-era leader Tsedenbal, who was extremely loyal to the Soviet Union and had strong anti-Chinese views.⁵⁵ Tsedenbal became the first communist bloc leader to be removed by Gorbachev. The removal of Tsedenbal brought more soft-liner and reformist leaders – Batmunkh and Sodnom – into Mongolian politics. Consequently, the Soviet withdrawal from Mongolia resulted in the gradual decline of the Kremlin’s interference in domestic politics as well as economic assistance to Mongolia. Most importantly, the Sino-Soviet rapprochement removed the external threat of China, which had not only provided justifications for the Soviet deployment and control, but also for Mongolia’s control of the society through militarization.

The overall normalization of Sino and Soviet/Russia has locked both sides into respecting Mongolia’s neutrality, or otherwise face the possibility of triggering a ‘security dilemma’ between traditionally rival great powers. Therefore, geopolitical interests, especially the geostrategic ones of China and Russia, were satisfied by not acting directly through Mongolia to compete for geopolitical advantages. In other words, by removing the external threat and also preventing potential military deployments from Soviet Union as had happened in the past, Sino-Soviet rapprochement created a favourable geopolitical setting for Mongolia.

Historically, the Soviet Union/Russia deployed its military and political presence three times (1920s, 1930s, and 1960s) when it had perceived its geostrategic interests as being threatened. On each occasion, the Kremlin installed a loyal leader, imposed a tight control over the domestic politics, provided economic assistance, and purged opposing nationalist leaders. The external threat also provided justifications for Mongolian leaders to militarize society and marginalize their political opponents. Therefore, the absence of direct geopolitical competition of neighbouring great powers is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the democratic transition.

Theories like the Western democracy promotion, linkages and leverages, and regional organizations have little value in explaining Mongolia’s democratic transition. First, Mongolia sits between two rival, authoritarian great powers. European communist states, Taiwan, South Korea, Philippines, and Nepal made democratic transitions in a similar period, but all were in the sphere of influence between a democratic great power (the US and India) on one side and a non-democratic great power (China and Russia) on the other side. Second, Mongolia was not a part of

⁵⁵ On several occasions, Tsedenbal officially requested to make Mongolia as the 16th republic of the Soviet Union (Baabar, 2006, pp. 682-691).

or desired to be a part of international organizations run by the Western powers. For example, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (i.e., Helsinki Accord) provided major institutional pressure on the Soviet Union while opening opportunities for more interactions with Western powers. Finally, the US influence on Mongolian democratic transition was basically non-existent up to the first election. There were no effective links and leverages with the United States and its allies, except Japan. However, starting from 1987, Japan was more interested in Mongolia's economic liberalization like in China than its political reform (Namjim, 2004; Dashpurev, personal interview, 2015; Batjargal, 2013; Sanders, 1990, pp. 64-65).

Although asserted in several studies on Mongolia's democratization, this research found little evidence confirming diffusion effects from Central and Eastern Europe on the democratic transition. In contrast, there was plenty of evidence confirming the overwhelming effects of political and economic reforms from the Soviet Union, especially from the Gorbachev factor. It was Gorbachev who decisively changed the course of the Soviet foreign policy in regards to major strategic challengers like the United States and China, initiated political and economic reforms, and pressured old guards from the Brezhnev era. In the Mongolian case, Gorbachev removed the old guard and even encouraged Batmunkh's move for reform during his meeting in 1986 and 1989 (Tsembel, personal interview, 2016). In brief, Mongolia and European transitions had been caused by the same external factor; they therefore experienced similar developments within the same timeframe of the actual change, 1989-1991.

There are two idiosyncrasies in regards to Mongolia's external settings. For one, the timing was important concerning great power interactions. Experiencing the great power retrenchment, the Soviet Union was interested in normalizing relations with the United States and China in order to fix its deepening socio-economic problems. A long-term relationship with the US and China would provide the Kremlin with a stable security environment. Therefore, Mongolia's normalization with China and outreach to Japan and the US did not threaten the Soviet interests. Similarly, China, albeit a rising Great Power, was caught up its internal challenges; therefore, Beijing also demonstrated interests of normalizing relations with the Soviet Union and the United States, especially after the Tiananmen incident. In addition, the Mongolian democratization process served Beijing's interests of removing Soviet influence from Mongolia. Because of distance and its limited geopolitical interests, the United States recognized Mongolia, but appeared more interested in observing the Sino-Soviet geopolitical dynamics rather than promoting democracy. US and Soviet leaders were also more focused on events in Central and Eastern

Europe. Therefore, the timing was favourable for Mongolia – all great powers were seeking ways to normalize their relations and were also distracted by events elsewhere or were, especially China and Soviet Union, caught up with domestic problems.

The other idiosyncrasy is the prevalence of anti-Chinese sentiments in Mongolia. In the aftermath of the suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests (June, 1989), leaders of Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Romania supported the Chinese government's responses while Mongolia remained silent and even did not follow the neutral statements of the Kremlin or Budapest. In fact, no statement was issued by Mongolia. All other non-European communist states, even including Vietnam, expressed their sympathy and pledged ideological unity with Beijing. But, for Mongolian leaders, appraisal of China or attempts of deepening relations with Beijing would be quite suicidal given the country's cautious relations and recent memories of the colonization. This explains why Mongolian political leaders were eager to reach out to the United States, Japan, and Germany rather than shifting to Beijing's orbit in the late 1980s.

In sum, the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers have a direct impact on the domestic politics of small states. In the Mongolian case, the democratic transition was only possible in the absence of direct geopolitical competitions of neighbouring great powers. The presence of direct geopolitical competitions increases the likelihood of the external interventions in the domestic politics and provides political and economic support to authoritarian leaders and regimes. The hostile relations between great powers also trigger military deployments into geostrategically significant small states; as a result, external threat justifies the control of the great power over the small state and also of local leaders over the society.

Domestic Factors – A Strong Political Party

The Mongolian case confirms the dominance of the soft-liner or reformist political leaders and the emergence of strong opposition movements for the successful democratic transition (Rustow, 1970; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Huntington, 1991, pp. 111-115; Przeworski, 1991, pp. 97-98). This case study also reveals the importance of the strong political institution (i.e., political party) for providing political stability and leading the transition process. In other words, the more institutionalized the party is, the more it's adaptable to new circumstances. Against the stereotypical view of the communist party and leaders, the Mongolian communist party played constructive roles like its counterparts in Hungary, Bulgaria, and, to lesser extent, Albania (Bozoki & Ishiyama, 2002; Grzymala-Busse, 2002). The political reform, which was channelled through

existing political organizations, appears to be rooted in society in contrast to reforms imposed by populist, populist leaders or weakly institutionalized social movements. Therefore, the Mongolian case contributes to the study of ‘single-party regime’ (Geddes, 1999) or ‘one-party regime’ (Huntington, 1991). The Mongolian transition easily falls between categories of the ‘transformation,’ in which the elites in power bring democracy, and ‘transplacement,’ in which the democratic transition resulted from joint action by government and opposition groups (Huntington, 1991, p. 114). Also, it confirms the claim that single-party regimes are more resilient (Dimitrov, 2013; Geddes, 1996). Geddes convincingly argues that when single-party regimes are “under the pressure from donors and popular opposition are more inclined to negotiation than are personalist regimes” (1996, p. 141). The Mongolian case stresses the importance of the strong institutionalization of the ruling party and its leaders’ insistence on empowering the formal institutions for the peaceful transition to democracy.

The Mongolian communist party had a long tradition of the collective decision making process, which was institutionalized through the Politburo, Central Committee, and Party Congress. This decision-making process was routinized and known by all leaders, members, and the public. Although, in the past, populist leaders like Choibalsan and Tsedenbal, as well as the Soviet advisors, used the party decision-making processes to legitimize their decisions (MPRP, 1983; 1985; 1995), Batmunkh and Sodnom heavily relied on party’s collective decision-making process to reform the political party in the emerging domestic context of the late 1980s. Instead of refusing to discuss political and economic reform issues like some of their communist counterparts in Europe, they created a favourable atmosphere for open debates, criticisms, and reached out to the public through party organizations. All decisions such as the collective resignation of the Politburo and de-partization of the legislature and government were intensely debated at meetings of Politburo, plenums of the Central Committee, and finally at the party’s Congress and then at the People’s Great Hural. The reliance of the party’s collective decision-making process was an important aspect for reforming the political party and increasing the legitimacy of their decisions.

The party accommodated the development of the opposition even though it had the capacity to take pre-emptive measures against them such as restricting debates on the political reform, co-opting dissenting youths or critical intellectuals, and intimidating a few youth leaders.

The majority of my sources confirmed and many were fearful about the repression.⁵⁶ Yet, instead of taking violent measures, the party, first, removed the ideological censorship, which was a critical step towards pluralism. Second, the party leaders directed the Ministry of Public Security to abstain from any intimidation and surveillance against critical voices and dissenting individuals. Although the Ministry of Public Security controlled the situation for the justification of public safety, it did not penalize any members of the opposition. Third, party leaders rejected proposals for imposing the martial law twice in March and April even though the security forces were prepared to carry out nation-wide or partial emergency orders and curfews. Finally, the party leaders did not delay or restrict the opposition's institutionalization process, starting from the political debate clubs, to movements, and to political parties. The party leaders permitted demonstrations, provided facilities for their congresses and meetings of the movements, and maintained open channels with opposition leaders. As Dierkes rightly argues, "by allowing the organization of political parties and putting some younger, reform-minded MPRP officials in prominent positions, the ruling party managed a relatively peaceful transition" (Dierkes, 2012, p. 7).

The party also transferred powers to the legislature, the PGH, and later to the government. The party leaders empowered the PGH, which was similarly structured as the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, particularly after the collective resignation of the Politburo. In the communist system, the legislature was considered to have broader representational power than the communist party because its representation included all types of segments of the society. Its presidium served as a permanent legislative body and the key state institutions in charge of foreign policy, defense, judiciary, and local governance. In the Mongolian case, the separate party and state structure was further blurred when the party General Secretary Tsedenbal succeeded to Chairman of the Presidium of the PGH after a well-respected politician, diplomat Sambuu Jamsran, who was holding the post from 1952 to 1972, died (Bacon et al., 2002). In April 1989, following the resignation of Batmunkh, who had held powers over the party and state (legislature), party leaders decided to separate the party from the legislature and also the government cabinet by appointing politically neutral technocrats. This was a key decision to isolate the communist party from the state and economic matters while increasing the public trust. After this move, the legislature, not

⁵⁶ Key opposition leaders always came with winter clothes (sheepskin deels and felt boots) for meetings (Personal Interviews: Byambasuren, Ya (2015, November 18); Sukhbaatar, Dari (2015, November 10); Battuvshin, B (2015, December 25)).

the communist party, was in charge of the transition process.⁵⁷ Notably, the new appointment of Mr. Ochirbat to the role of Chairman was not due to the request of outgoing Batmunkh, but the result of being nominated and elected at the PGH. As Ochirbat recalled during his conversation with Batmunkh during the transfer of power, Batmunkh asked him to (1) strengthen the organizational capacity of the Presidium since it had basically become a ceremonial organization after Sambuu, (2) work as independently as possible from the party to gain the public trust, and (3) respect democracy and human rights (Ochirbat, 1996, pp. 329-330). In fact, Mr. Ochirbat and his staff became the key mediators between the communist party and opposition parties until the new government was established after the first multiparty election.

For the Mongolian case, the communist party and its leaders accepted the inevitability of the political and economic reform and relied on formal institutions rather than new or interim institutions to resolve the conflicts. Despite the Kremlin's involvement, the leadership succession from Tsedenbal to Batmunkh was decided through the party and state institutions. Batmunkh and Sodnom both had clean track records of leadership and relied on the collective decision-making process of the party and the state. Instead of agreeing with the opposition demands of establishing a new type of people's interim assembly, the party leaders decided to separate the party from the legislature and government bureaucracy by appointing politically neutral technocrats like mining engineer Ochirbat to the Chairman of the legislature, and agricultural specialist Gungaadorj to the Prime Minister while removing the party's control over the human resources for these state institutions. The empowerment of the legislature was also a critical factor for resolving political conflicts, especially during the second hunger strike.

In addition, two aspects – corruption and ideology – are worthwhile to discuss briefly. Corruption was not a major theme in the 80s for two reasons. For one, some of the key driving forces for political change included reducing the authoritarian control of the communist party, increasing Mongolia's autonomy and sovereignty in bilateral relations with the Soviet Union, and changing inefficient economic policies and structures. In regards to corruption, the party possessed strong institutional entities to investigate and to hold accountable for any corrupt

⁵⁷ In April 1990, the powers over security, judiciary, and foreign policies were transferred to the Presidium of the People's Great Hural. All key ministries, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Public Security, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported to the Chairman of the Presidium of the People's Great Hural. Also, powers of the provincial authorities shifted to the legislature as well as to the government, which was led by Prime Minister Gungaadorj.

practices.⁵⁸ In addition to the communist party investigation commission, there was also the People's Committee for Control and Investigation, which reported to the Presidium of the PGH and transferred the corruption cases (mostly misuse of the public office and state property) to law enforcement organizations and judiciary. Under the Law on People's Control and Investigation (1980), the People's Committee for Control and Investigation had the main office (50 permanent staff), branches in all provinces, major cities and its districts (90 permanent staff), and the additional supported of 1027-2683 control groups in state industries and organizations as well as 1930-2487 control posts in agricultural units. Up to 36 thousand people were also elected to these control groups and posts (MPRP, 1995; Dash-Yondon, personal interview, 2016). Although it would be hard to argue that they were efficient without supporting evidence, they were functional and institutionalized.⁵⁹

Obviously, the communist party had to abandon its Marxist-Leninist ideological orientation in 1989-1990. However, scholars argue that Mongolia's communist party was ideologically tilted toward more national-democratic tendencies, especially due to the party's role of leading the liberation movement from Chinese rule in the early 1920s (Boldbaatar, 1991; Bold-Erdene, 2008, p. 75). Yet, due to the Kremlin's and Comintern's direct interferences, this national-democratic element of the party ideology was weakened and even eradicated during the purges of 1930s. Later in the 1960 Constitution, the party accepted the Marxist-Leninist ideology as a guiding ideology until its renouncement in 1990 (Article 82, Constitution, 1960). Bold-Erdene, an expert on political parties, argues the waning of the Marxist-Leninist ideology provided an opportunity for the revival of the nationalist democratic aspects, which was interrupted during the socialist period, rather than the classic political ideology in Mongolia (2008, p. 75).

In a nutshell, I contend that the presence of strong political party institutions provided political stability and assurances for political leaders like Batmunkh and Sodnom to resign without making any personal deals with new leaders of the party and state or the opposition. Their

⁵⁸ The People's Committee for Control and Investigation was established in 1957 by expanding the previous organization, which used to operate under the Council of Ministers. The commission directly reported to the People's Great Hural (Sanjdorj & Bavuu, 1982; Boldbaatar & Lundeejantsan, 2011). The other control and investigation body was the Investigation Commission of the communist party. The party commission oversees all other departments of the party Central Committee in areas of the investigation and reports directly to the Politburo and Central Committee Presidium (MPRP, 1995; Sanjdorj & Bavuu, 1982; Dash-Yondon, personal interview, 2016; MPRP, 1983).

⁵⁹ The governing body of People's Committee for Control and Investigation included senior officials from mostly the Mongolian Revolutionary Youth League, Mongolian Trade Union, media, and state entities (Sanjdorj & Bavuu, 1982; MPRP, 1983; People's Committee for Control and Investigation, 1983).

persistence in using the formal state and party organizations and procedures helped institutionalize the political and economic reform discourses.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter argues that the absence of direct geopolitical competitions of great powers was a necessary external condition for the Mongolia's democratic transition. The Sino-Soviet rapprochement removed the external threat, which was used to justify the Soviet's close control of the Mongolian domestic politics and the communist party's control over the society via militarization. To normalize the Sino-Soviet relations, the Kremlin needed to depose the Brezhnev-era hardliner Tsedenbal along with his spouse. This move facilitated the dominance of reformist leaders. The other key external factor was Gorbachev's initiatives of political and economic reform, which had strong demonstration effects in Mongolian politics because of the country's high political, economic, and cultural links to the Soviet Union. Within this favourable geopolitical setting for democratization, the presence of the highly institutionalized political party, dominated by reformist and collective leaders, provided political stability for facilitating the leadership changes and peaceful political transition through elections. The uniqueness of the Mongolian transition is evident in the empowerment of the formal institutions, especially the People's Great Hural, the acting legislature, to pass new laws and organize the first multiparty election instead of creating a new institution, as demanded by the opposition. Therefore, the highly institutionalized political party could also play a constructive role for transition because it provides assurances and institutional certainty for outgoing political leaders while addressing and channelling public concerns.

Chapter Four: Mongolia – Democratic Consolidation, 1991 – 1999

A couple of days after Mongolia's first election in 1990, the country's new leaders welcomed American Secretary of State James Baker, who came to not only congratulate Mongolia for choosing a different path from all other Asian communist states, but also pledge US support, as a newly declared *third neighbour*, for the country's political and economic reforms.⁶⁰ Even though Baker repeatedly emphasized the lack of American geopolitical interests in Mongolia to compete against China or Russia, the coinage of the third neighbour term touched many Mongolian leaders and became an attractive foreign policy strategy to develop close ties with Western democracies.

Around this same time, the Kremlin began to sever its ties with Ulaanbaatar not only due to the Soviet geopolitical retrenchment, but also in response to the sudden rise of nationalism in Mongolia. On the grounds of Mongolia's desire to join the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and normalize relations with China, Mongolian leaders rejected the Kremlin's plan to postpone the Soviet troop withdrawals and maintain a nuclear test monitoring facility (Radchenko, 2012, pp. 198-199; Gombosuren, personal interview, 2016). In the aftermath of Mongolia's first election, the Soviet Union ended its barter trading, cut its fuel supply by 50 percent, and stopped supplying explosives for coalmines unless Mongolia purchased them in hard currency (Byambasuren, 2012; Purevdorj et al., 2001, p. 157). This created extreme challenges for the new leaders to prepare for the frigid winter, especially running coal-powered thermal plants. Soon after, in December 1990, the Kremlin ended the preferential tax regime and economic assistance not only for Mongolia but all other satellite states.

By contrast, Beijing provided preferential access to its infrastructure and market, visa-free-travel arrangements, and economic assistance despite Mongolia's shifts into democracy unlike all of China's other communist neighbours. Beijing's utmost concerns were Mongolia's geopolitical neutrality, or independence from the Soviet military, and its assurances for respecting China's internal matters, ranging from Inner Mongolia and Taiwan to the Dalai Lama.

In the 1990s, Soviet Union/Russia and the United States lacked direct geostrategic interests in Mongolia; this created a favourable external setting for the country's domestic politics. For the first time, without any external interference, Mongolians chose their political leaders and passed

⁶⁰ State Secretary James Baker explained that Mongolia has two good neighbours but if needed a third, the US would be happy to be it (See *The Minutes of the US State Secretary James Baker's Visit*, July 31 – August 5, 1990, Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Archive).

the 1992 constitution, which enshrined key principles of the liberal democracy and laid the foundations for electoral democracy. As a result, political powers have transferred between two major political parties through regular parliamentary and presidential elections. This chapter makes two arguments. First, the absence of direct geopolitical competitions of great powers provides a favourable external setting for democratic consolidation. It makes the Western democracy promotion efforts credible and the international leverages over political leaders of a small state effective, and, at the same time, ameliorates geostrategic concerns of authoritarian great powers. In the absence of Western geostrategic and economic interests, influential individuals also play a more significant role in establishing connections and initiating policies. This, moreover, has long-term impacts for the small state democratization.

Second, the presence of a strong political party is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for establishing a competitive party system. The presence of a strong party prevents the possibility of take-overs by populist leaders and provides an organizational model and anti-incumbent motives for opposition parties. With a favourable external setting or in the zone of peace (i.e., neutrality), consolidation of electoral democracy is more likely to occur with the presence of strong parties.

This chapter is structured in the following way. The first section explains *how* the geopolitical setting, which was conditioned by the normalization of the Sino-Soviet/Russian relations and their subsequent commitments for Mongolia's neutrality, has become a geopolitical blessing for Mongolia. The next section examines *how* Western democracies, especially the United States, responded to Mongolia's requests and imposed conditionality while providing assistance for simultaneous political and economic transitions. It also traces agency (i.e., influential individuals), particularly of James Baker, as a critical factor for making connections and initiating policies, which have long-term impacts for the small state democratization in the absence of vested Western interests. The third section investigates the internal dynamics of democratic consolidation. After providing a quick analysis of the constitution-making process, I will examine the results of parliamentary and presidential elections and explain the successes and failures of the successor ruling (communist) party and opposition parties. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the interplay between external factors – the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers – and internal factors – the presence of a strong political party, from 1991 to 1999.

THE GEOPOLITICAL BLESSING – A FAVOURABLE EXTERNAL SETTING

The decade of the 1990s presented an opportunity for Mongolians to manage their domestic and foreign policies without any meddling from its powerful neighbours. A rising China and retrenching USSR/Russia were busy with domestic challenges and settling relations with newly independent states and Eastern Europe while securing their global standing in the unipolar international system. Due to the Sino-Soviet rapprochement at the end of the 1980s, Mongolia no longer represented a geopolitical, especially security, concern for Beijing and the Kremlin as long as it remained neutral and stable. The most pressing tasks for Mongolia's new leaders was to (1) restructure its political and economic institutions while securing Chinese endorsements for its sovereignty; (2) figure out its relations with the Soviet successor state; and (3) obtain assistance from the United States and its allies. With their encouragement for political and economic liberalization, Western states displayed strong political/ideological interests in Mongolia rather than geostrategic ones. Therefore, the 1990s presented a geopolitical blessing for Mongolia's democratic consolidation.

China – Favouring Neutrality & Stability in the North

The 1989 Tiananmen Square incident left Chinese leaders in a precarious situation despite the country's successful economic reforms. The communist party diverted its resources to strengthen the party and security institutions, stabilize the domestic politics, and preempt protests and regime challengers, especially in restive regions and crowded cities (Dittmer, 1990, pp. 26-37). On the foreign policy front, Beijing needed to normalize its relations with the West and, at the same time, prepare for potential conflicts over Taiwan and disputed maritime territories in South China Sea (Lampton, 2001, p. 64-76; Wang, 2003). To the north, Beijing pressed for the complete withdrawal of the Soviet military from Mongolia and was ready to normalize relations with Mongolia. For their part, Mongolian leaders were wary of a rise of China while the Mongolian public still had high-degree of anti-Chinese sentiments; only long-term relations could ease these lingering negative attitudes towards China (Mendee, 2012).

By contrast, Chinese leaders had two major concerns in regards to Mongolia. The first was Mongolia's commitment to geopolitical neutrality. Chinese leaders insisted on the complete withdrawal of the Soviet military from Mongolia and advised Mongolian leaders to not seek out or encourage any Western powers, particularly the United States, Japan, or regional competitors like Russia and India to use Mongolian territory militarily against China (Gombosuren, personal interview, 2015; Nurzed, personal interview, 2016; Haisandai, 2012, pp. 302-305). As discussed in

the previous chapter, Chinese leaders imposed the conditionality of the complete withdrawal of the Soviet military from Mongolia for the normalization of Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian relations.

It was only after the Kremlin accepted Chinese demand that China agreed to exchange foreign ministerial visits with Mongolia and conclude a series of agreements for setting up an intergovernmental commissions on economic, trade, scientific, and technical cooperation in 1989. After almost three decades of non-cooperation, the two countries resumed a direct Beijing-Ulaanbaatar air service and allowed the free flow of people and goods starting from 1990. In the following year, Chinese President Yang Shangkun reciprocated the Mongolian presidential visit and “reaffirmed the Chinese leadership’s pledge to respect the independence and sovereignty of Mongolia” (Batbayar, 2002, p. 127). The timing of the Chinese presidential visit occurred immediately after US State Secretary James Baker’s second visit in late July and before the Japanese Prime Minister’s visit in the middle of August (Heaton, 1992, pp. 54-55). It was clear from the minutes of these high-ranking meetings that the Mongolian side reassured Chinese President Yang Shangkun that Mongolia was not seeking to develop any security collaborations with the United States and Japan.⁶¹ Over the next couple years, Mongolian leaders appear to have followed through in addressing China’s concerns for Mongolia’s neutrality. First, Mongolian leaders rejected the Kremlin’s proposal to delay their military withdrawal and maintain a nuclear test monitoring facility in Mongolia (Byambasuren, 2012; Enkhsaikhan, personal interview, 2016). Second, the 1992 Constitution and subsequent national security and foreign policy concepts restricted the provision of any access to foreign military forces and also prohibited joining military alliances.⁶² Third, Mongolia and Russia annulled the mutual defence article from the bilateral treaty. Finally, Mongolia became a single-state nuclear weapon free zone, which was ratified by permanent members of the UN Security Council (Enkhsaikhan, 2000, 342-359). Incidentally, China’s concern over geopolitical neutrality also complemented Mongolia’s desire to reduce the Kremlin’s influence and secure Beijing’s endorsement of its sovereignty. The other major concern, especially on the Chinese side, was the potential spillover effects of Mongolian democratization into Chinese autonomous regions (Sanders, 1996, pp. 222-223). Despite a break from Sino-Soviet tensions, Mongolia had long-lasting ethnic and religious ties with Chinese three

⁶¹ See *The Minutes of Meetings of Chinese President Yang Shangkun, August 26-27, 1991* (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Archive).

⁶² The 1992 Constitution legalized the policy of not allowing foreign troops to enter, be stationed in or transit Mongolian territory unless the Mongolian parliament passes a special legislation allowing such activities (See Article 4.3., the Constitution of Mongolia, 1992; Batbayar, 2002).

restive autonomous regions – Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet. For one, Mongolia's democratization process instigated nationalism and religious freedom in Mongolia that could also spill over into Inner Mongolia. For China, the revival of nationalism in Mongolia served as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it bolstered anti-Soviet sentiment and reduced Russian influence as the Kremlin had suppressed nationalism for decades. On the other hand, it could also instigate nationalism and secessionist movements in Inner Mongolia, where twice as many Mongolian co-ethnics live than in Mongolia. For example, in 1991, Inner Mongolian dissidents were arrested after distributing a document calling for establishing a Greater Mongolia, which would unify Mongolia, the Russian Buryat Republic, and Chinese Inner Mongolia. Chinese officials accused these dissidents of being exposed to literature smuggled from Mongolia (Heaton, 1992, p. 55; Batbayar, 2002, p. 128). Such cases show how cross-border relations with neighbouring Chinese autonomous regions of Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia could potentially contribute to the rise of nationalism and diffusion of democracy into volatile regions where China had regularly experienced secessionist movements (Teufel, 2005, p. 72). On a similar note, the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia enhanced its traditional ties with the Dalai Lama. Over this decade, the Dalai Lama's visits to Mongolia always raised concerns in Beijing. In spite of Beijing's resistance, the Dalai Lama visited Mongolia in 1991, 1994, and 1995 upon the invitation of Mongolian Buddhists.⁶³ Since he is considered as the spiritual leader of Mongolian Buddhism, the Mongolian government could not prevent the Dalai Lama's visits, but could deny any official involvement in the visits. Apparently, such explanations did not ameliorate Chinese concerns. Therefore, from the beginning of the normalization of bilateral relations, Chinese leaders required Mongolia to commit to the one-China policy and non-interference in Chinese internal matters. In the 1990s, Mongolian leaders refrained from making any statements regarding China's internal matters, including human and religious rights. But, Dalai Lama's visits would remain an unresolved matter for their bilateral relationship as Mongolians had regained their religious freedom after 70 years of Soviet-directed suppression (Radchenko, 2016; Mashbat, 2007).

As Mongolia adequately addressed China's concerns of geopolitical neutrality and the potential spillover effects of democracy, Beijing responded positively to Mongolia's requests. First, in 1994, during the visit of Chinese Premier Li Peng, a Treaty of Friendly Relations and Co-

⁶³ The Dalai Lama visited Mongolia in 1979, 1982, 1991, 1994 as well as 1995. For each visit of the Dalai Lama, Chinese government made strong protests and bilateral relations each time have been negatively affected. The Government of Mongolia also made statements denying any political linkages to the Dalai Lama's visits (Batbayar, 2002, p. 149; Mashbat, 2007)

operation was signed (Rossabi, 2005, p. 232). Also, Li Peng outlined China's five-point policy towards Mongolia:

- adherence to the five principles of peaceful coexistence;
- respect for Mongolia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, the choice of their own development;
- development of trade and economic cooperation on the basis of equality, mutual benefit;
- support for Mongolia's policy of nuclear-free territory; and
- willingness to see Mongolia develop relations with other countries (Batbayar, 2002, p. 130; Batchimeg, 2005).

Second, China removed trade barriers, granted preferential access to its market and infrastructure, provided economic assistance, and introduced visa-free travel arrangements (Nurzed, personal interview, 2016; Tsakhilgaan, 2011). Because of the political and economic turmoil in Russia, the removal of the Soviet-era preferential trade arrangements, and the end of its developmental assistance, China became the only other option for Mongolia, as a landlocked economy. Third, interestingly, Beijing made consistent efforts to develop relations with all new leaders of both major political parties following the presidential and parliamentary elections. Even when the Democratic coalition-led governments had pursued pro-Western policies in regards to foreign direct investments and political orientations, Chinese leaders were still eager to expand bilateral relations in all spheres of cooperation. Finally, from the mid-90s, the Chinese government began to encourage cultural exchanges, especially providing scholarships, exchanging cultural groups, athletes, and academics, and establishing direct links between local regions and the cities of two countries. This was, as argued by prominent scholar on Mongolia's foreign policy, Batbayar Tsedendamba, a way to fill "the so-called cultural vacuum of misunderstanding and mistrust between two peoples during the Soviet period" (Batbayar, 2002, p. 144).

Again, in July 1999, during his three-day visit, Chinese President Jiang Zemin re-affirmed the acknowledgement of the independence and sovereignty of Mongolia and pledged to support good-neighbourly relations based on the principles of peaceful coexistence. Interestingly, the Chinese president requested the Mongolian governments to improve the environment for foreign investment and to protect Chinese investors (Batbayar, 2002, p. 135; MOFA, 1999, pp. 3, 10).

Despite these positive efforts on both sides, Mongolian leaders were reluctant to make any positive remarks about China and even to advocate close collaboration with the Chinese government. Such action could be considered political suicide in the contested, anti-Chinese

domestic politics (Munkh-Ochir, 2003, p. 138).⁶⁴ During this period, China did not express strong geopolitical interests to pressure or to intervene in Mongolia's foreign and domestic politics, except in the case of the Dalai Lama's visits. Mongolia's relations with the United States and Japan also did not have any security elements. Since such relations did not threaten Chinese national security interests, China did not raise any concerns about the Western democracy promotion efforts and Mongolia's development of electoral democracy. It is safe to conclude that China's geopolitical concerns, especially geostrategic interests, were sufficiently addressed by the complete withdrawal of the Soviet/Russian political and military presence, Mongolia's commitment to neutrality, and the absence of the Western geostrategic interests in Mongolia.

Soviet Union/Russia – Retrenchment

In the early 1990s, the Soviet/Russian-Mongolian relation was still overwhelmed with the unexpected, unplanned decision to withdraw the Soviet military from the country. Mongolia's new political leaders, who emerged as a result of the 1990 election, began to pressure the Kremlin for the complete withdrawal by 1991. This not only made it possible for Mongolia to celebrate the 70th anniversary of its independence without any foreign military presence, but it also allowed it to join the NAM (Gombosuren, personal interview, 2015). Mostly due to the logistical capacity of the railroad and size of the Soviet contingent, the military withdrawal did not conclude until December 1992 (Radchenko, 2012; IDS, 1996).

Besides the military withdrawal, three major issues overwhelmed bilateral relations. For one, the Kremlin-directed purges against Mongolians in the 1930s and 40s became a major issue in domestic political debates with clear implications for bilateral relations. This pressured Mongolian leaders to initiate joint investigations with the Soviet/Russian leaders. Because of continuous demands from the Mongolian side, the Soviet communist party acknowledged the Kremlin-directed purges in the TASS news on July 7, 1990 (Ochirbat, 1996, p. 206). Later in 1993, Russian President Boris Yeltsin issued an official statement expressing the condolences and agreed to give Mongolians access to related Soviet archival materials.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ In Mongolia, the easiest and most effective political instrument is disclosing someone's Chineseness (Mendee, 2011). There are never ending examples of this political tactic. For example, the first President was attacked as being a Chinese hybrid in 1990s; Speaker of the Parliament, Nyamdorj Tsend has been accused of being a Chinese spy; opposition politician Elbegdorj, Ganbold Davaadorj, and Enkhsaikhan Mendsaikhan had been attacked as ethnically Chinese politicians.

⁶⁵ On January 20, 1990, Presidents of the Russian Federation and Mongolia issued the joint statement in Moscow (see the *Materials of the Presidential Visit to the Russian Federation, January 19-21, 1993*, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Archive; Ochirbat, 1996, pp. 207-209).

Second, Mongolia's debt issue, settlements of joint ventures, and abandoned military bases and infrastructure became another headache for Soviet/Russian leaders. There were several negotiations conducted in the 90s, none succeeded because each side had differing views on the amount of the debt and settlement payment (Choinkhor, personal interview, 2015; Gombosuren, personal interview, 2015; Batbayar, 2003).⁶⁶ Mongolian opposition leaders and intellectuals called for the "total cancellation of Mongolia's debt to the USSR" and "reparations" to cover "environmental damage caused by the Soviet military forces" in Mongolia (Batbayar, 2003, p. 96; Shirnen, 2010). Because of these failed negotiations over the transference of Soviet military bases and infrastructure, many of them ended up just being abandoned and later salvaged by locals. The settlement of the joint ventures (mining and processing factories, railways, and infrastructure) remained unresolved throughout 90s.

Third, the sudden end to the longstanding financing and developmental assistance from the Soviet Union, the collapse of the bilateral barter trading system, and the imposition of high customs tariffs put Mongolia in extremely difficult economic situation, one close to collapse.⁶⁷ As the USAID assessed,

"Previously, over 85% of Mongolia's external trade was with the USSR, and 41% of internal trade comprised goods of Soviet origin. The decline in this trade has resulted in a 61% drop in imports during the first half of this year, and a 53% drop in exports" (USAID, 1991, p. 6).

Although both sides reached agreement to preserve the bilateral trade and economic ties in early 1990s, these agreements were not implemented due to (1) the inability to bring payments in hard-currency and (2) the unstable political situation in the Soviet Union and later in Russia (Batbayar, 2002, p. 97). These issues were also effected by Mongolia's changing attitude toward its northern neighbour. Given the revival of nationalism, which was suppressed for over seven decades, there was a sudden rise of anti-Soviet sentiments, which even caused Mongolian leaders to approach bilateral relations from more critical standpoints than earlier periods of subordination.

⁶⁶ By 1990, a total debt of the Mongolian People's Republic to the USSR was estimated as 9.7 billion transferable rubles (Batbayar, 2002, p. 97).

⁶⁷ The Supreme Soviet decided to stop foreign assistance programs on September 30, 1990 and also, according to former Prime Minister Byambasuren, the CPSU Politburo addressed the Soviet-Mongolian relations on December 26, 1990 and directed to stop the barter trading and to increase the customs tariffs (See *Soviet-Mongolian Relations, 1990*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Archive; Byambasuren, 2012, p. 61).

Mongolian leaders' communications with Soviet/Russian leaders also experienced interesting dynamics. According to Foreign Minister Gombosuren Tserenpil, who served as Foreign Minister from 1988 to 1996, Mongolian leaders had very close interactions with Soviet leaders and Gorbachev's visit to Mongolia was agreed upon several occasions, but such a visit never took place due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.⁶⁸ After the Soviet Collapse, Mongolians had difficulties contacting Russian leaders, especially in the early 1990s. For example, on several occasions, the US State Secretary James Baker delivered messages from Mongolian leaders to Russian President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh about reviving the barter trade for necessary parts for power plants and fuel during winters of 1991 and 1992.⁶⁹ This highlights the difficulty of reaching the Kremlin and how both embassies were not able to get the attention of Russian leaders.

Unlike earlier periods of frequent consultation, the Kremlin received only two presidential visits from Mongolia during the 1990s. The first was in 1993, when two countries signed a new bilateral treaty, which removed the mutual defense obligation of the 1966 treaty. Article 4 of the treaty states that "the parties shall not enter into any military-political bloc directed against each other and are committed not to conclude with third parties any treaties and agreements contradicting the interests of sovereignty and independence of the other party"⁷⁰ The same article was reflected in a similar bilateral treaty concluded between Mongolia and China in 1994. These measures enhanced the country's geopolitical neutrality between two great powers and eased their geostrategic concerns over Mongolia.

The other visit happened in December 1999, shortly before Yeltsin's resignation. During both visits, the two presidents discussed all the main challenges for bilateral relations, including the supply of Russian oil and petroleum products, the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers against Mongolian products, the creation of a favourable environment for border economic cooperation, the resolution of the debt issue, the resumption of defense cooperation, and the revival of educational cooperation. (Batbayar, 2003; Severinghaus, 2000). While none of these issues were resolved in the 90s, these visits did lay down the groundwork for President Putin's more

⁶⁸ According to President Ochirbat and also his Foreign Minister Gombosuren, during the dinner at the Kremlin, Gorbachev tasked Eduard Shevardnadze to prepare his Mongolia visit since Brezhnev visited in 1974 (Ochirbat, 1996, p. 341; Gombosuren, personal interview, 2015).

⁶⁹ In the archive of the MOFA, there are ample evidence of letters, cables from Mongolian Embassies and minutes proving the important intermediary roles of State Secretary James Baker in communicating with the Kremlin.

⁷⁰ See Treaty of Friendly Relations and Cooperation between Mongolia and the Russian Federation (*Defense White Paper*, 1998).

productive visit to Mongolia the following year. According to Batbayar, a key diplomat and scholar, “Mongolia’s visit was a kind of unfinished business for former president Yeltsin because of his poor health and busy schedule” (Batbayar, 2002, p. 112).

Even though Mongolian leaders were constantly seeking ways to revive the bilateral relations, the Kremlin was not able to respond not only due to its own domestic problems, but also the lack of the geopolitical significance of Mongolia given its priority to the strategic partnership with China (Dittmer, 2001; Lo, 2004; Yeung & Bjelakovic, 2010).⁷¹ Following the withdrawal of the Soviet military, Mongolia settled a military-technical cooperation agreement with Russia in 1993, but little else was accomplished, except the Mongolian Defence Minister’s visit in 1997 (Mendee, 2012, pp. 313-315). This was a clear indication that Russia had neither the incentives nor the resources to resume its security interests in Mongolia. As in the case of China, Russian leaders did not make any explicit efforts to react to Western democracy promotion efforts in Mongolia and/or to influence Mongolian domestic politics because Western democracy promotion efforts did not threaten Russian interests. Mongolia’s neutrality was the Russian geopolitical interests in regards with Mongolia.

The United States: Right Person, Right Time

The overarching geopolitical setting, shaped by a declining Russia and rising China, presented interesting, but complicated conditions for Mongolian leaders. First, the sudden abandonment by its protector, Russia, forced Mongolia to directly deal with and become more dependent on China. This situation intensified the country’s long-standing concern over being annexed or demographically absorbed into China (Mendee, 2011). Second, as the Kremlin withdrew its control over Mongolia, new opportunities arose for Mongolia to reach out to Western powers, especially the United States, Japan, and Germany. But, Mongolia was not well-known in Western capitals; this made it hard to expect any Western powers to offer immediate supports to Mongolia, a geopolitically insignificant, isolated, and small state. Yet time was on the Mongolia’s side. First, both of Mongolia’s more powerful neighbours launched reforms, which required the support from the US, its allies, and their leading international financial institutions. China was in the middle of economic reform and seeking ways to reduce Western sanctions following the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 whereas Russia started simultaneous political and economic reforms, which also required US support. Therefore, all three neighbours, large and small alike,

⁷¹ Chinese and Russian leaders declared “strategic partnership” between China and Russia in the late 1990s.

longed to be part of a Western-led economic order while dealing with international pressures for increased freedom and democracy. Second, the United States administration was a supportive and enthusiastic promoter of democracy not only in Central and Eastern Europe, but also in some parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. In the case of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, “democracy,” as Carothers puts, “was clearly part of U.S. policy because it meant finishing the Cold War” (2011). Here, Mongolia could mark the end of the Cold War in the Sino-Soviet strategic (rear) backyard. In spite of this favourable timing, my findings have led me to make a case for the importance of agency (i.e., influential individuals) in introducing Mongolia to the policy maps in Western capitals, where Mongolia was unknown and neglected.

Despite a lack of resources and enthusiasm for Mongolia in Washington, D.C., US Secretary of State James Baker paid great interest to the country and was personally involved during three key visits, frequently received senior Mongolian leaders in the US, and urged Japan, Australia, and South Korea to support Mongolia’s simultaneous political and economic reform efforts. As the US Ambassador Joseph Lake explained,

“Secretary Baker came to believe that we should support the Mongolian people in their efforts... In the course of FY’91 [Fiscal Year of 1991], we went from zero planned aid at the beginning of the year to over thirty million dollars in assistance by the end of the year. Anyone who has worked in the bureaucracy, particularly with AID [Agency for International Development] bureaucracy, knows what an incredible task this became” (Lake, 1994).

Baker’s First Visit – Gauging Seriousness

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mongolia and the United States finally established bilateral relations in January 1987 as Taiwan’s lobbying power weakened in Washington, D.C. and the Kremlin changed its foreign policies towards the United States. The establishment of bilateral relations opened up opportunities for Mongolian political leaders to directly seek ways to develop bilateral relations with the United States, a distant powerful state to balance against its two powerful neighbours. Mongolian Foreign Minister Gombosuren discussed geopolitical changes following the Soviet military withdrawal with State Secretary James Baker for the first time at the United Nations in October 1989, and invited Baker to visit Mongolia while drawing attention to Baker’s hunting and travel interests in the Gobi Desert (Orgil, personal interview, 2015; Gombosuren, personal interview, 2015). During the meeting, Baker recalled his previous failed attempt to take a trip to Mongolia from Malaysia in 1988 and mentioned that he was strongly

considering a visit.⁷² The changing geopolitics, domestic reforms, and the Gobi Desert might have been the most fascinating topics for the Texan, who was leading the US foreign policies at the end of Cold War.

In the following year, as Mongolia was preparing for the first elections, State Secretary Baker's team began to plan its first official visit.⁷³ His advance team, along with newly-arrived, first resident Ambassador Joseph Lake, was already in Mongolia to observe the preparations for the multiparty election. On 13 July 1990, Secretary Baker assured Mongolia's first Ambassador to the United States, Nyamdoo Genden, that he was ready to visit only if the election ran smoothly, without any signs of fraud. Baker also signaled that he was ready to discuss any matter during this visit.⁷⁴ The Ambassador's message was well received and widely circulated in policy circles in Ulaanbaatar since the visit of the American State Secretary would carry a strong message to international community and allow Mongolia to seek US support in overcoming its geographic isolation and economic crisis.

After a successful and fraud free elections, James Baker arrived in Ulaanbaatar on August 2, 1990 and met with President Ochirbat, Prime Minister Gungaadorj, and his counterpart Gombosuren to express the United States' support for political and economic reform as long as Mongolia's political leaders stayed on the course. All high-ranking Mongolian leaders repeatedly stressed the country's interests in developing a long-term partnership with the United States, as the Foreign Minister emphasized,

“Our sovereignty was not fully respected in our past relationship with the Soviet Union, [we have been] facing obstacles to strengthen our foreign policy and independence; [therefore give] importance to relations with the United States” (MOFA, Minutes, 1990).

During these discussions, and despite his coinage of the term ‘third neighbour,’ Baker clarified that the United States had no intentions of either influencing Mongolia's relations with its neighbours or filling the vacuum of power left after the Soviet Union's withdrawal (MOFA, Minutes, 1990). Interestingly, Baker talked with Mr. Ochirbat, General Secretary of the MPRP, and had a two-hour

⁷² The Mongolian minute of the meeting between State Secretary James Baker and Foreign Minister Gombosuren also indicated strong enthusiasm from both sides to have State Secretary's visit to Mongolia (Minutes of Foreign Minister's working visit in New York, October, 1989, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Archive; Orgil, personal interview, 2015).

⁷³ It was clear that Mongolians were also knowing about the visit and preparing for it. For example, Mongolian Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy in Moscow reported his meetings with the staff of the US and Canada Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, which was about hobbies, stances, and interests of James Baker as well as gift ideas. See The Meeting Report of the Mongolian Embassy in Moscow, June 28, 1990 (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Archive).

⁷⁴ See The Meeting Report of the Mongolian Embassy in Washington, DC., July 13, 1990 (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Archive).

closed meeting with leaders of opposition parties. For instance, opposition leader Zorig Sanjaasuren assured Baker that the opposition had 40% of the State Little Hural, a new permanent legislature, and contended that this gave them the potential to influence new political and economic policies. Another key opposition leader, Ganbold Davaadorj, stressed the importance of the US's involvement because it would serve as a guarantee for the Mongolia's democracy (Bayaraa, personal interview, 2015; Orgil, personal interview, 2015; MOFA, 1990). The minutes of these meetings demonstrate that one of Baker's chief goals was to gauge the seriousness of the leaders from both the ruling party as well as opposition parties toward political and economic reform. After long meetings with the Mongolian president, prime minister, and leaders of the former communist party, opposition leaders, as well as briefings from his election observers, Baker, as recalled by Mongolian and US diplomats, noted how he was impressed with the progress of political reform (Gombosuren, personal interview, 2015; Bayaraa, personal interview, 2015; Orgil, personal interview, 2015).

At the dinner on the third day of the visit, Baker informed President Ochirbat that President Bush had agreed to accept the first-ever visit from a Mongolian president to the United States.⁷⁵ Regrettably, Baker's first visit, especially his trip to the Gobi, was cut short by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This added more surprise for the Mongolians and more workload for Baker's team. For instance, on his arrival, Baker received the news about the Iraqi invasion during his flight, which required him to circle the Ulaanbaatar airport to finish telephone communications. While fully engaged with Mongolian leaders during his stay in Ulaanbaatar, Secretary Baker and his staff were also busy with managing the Gulf crisis day and night. Among things other, this situation resulted in the first-ever US-Mongolian joint statement condemning Iraq's invasion of its small neighbour. In looking back it is clear that the US administration, especially the State Department, had tried to discourage Baker from visiting Mongolia by laying out a series of potential excuses – ranging from the limited airport capacity to Mongolia's insignificance in the US policies or the emerging crisis in the Persian Gulf (Lake, 1994; Orgil, personal interview, 2015). It is worthwhile to fully cite Baker's own recollection of his first trip to Mongolia:

“It was apparent that my trip to Ulan Bator would have to be truncated, but it was important not to cancel altogether. Mongolia was a small, ethnically homogenous country of two million with an uncomplicated economy, that had been dominated for decades by its

⁷⁵ Mongolians asked for the FDI, support for the IMF, WB, and GATT (WTO) membership, and Mongolian president's visit to the United States while all explained that the country was on irreversible route for the political and economic reform (Choinkhor, personal interview, 2015; Orgil, personal interview, 2015).

giant communist neighbours, the Soviet Union and China. Yet it was newly independent and democratic, the first Communist nation in Asia commits itself to reform. Only days before, Mongolia had completed its first multiparty elections in nearly seventy years, with a voter turnout of more than 90 percent. The revolution in Eastern Europe was slow spreading across the Urals, but Mongolian democracy had a real chance to flourish, and I wanted to lend the moral encouragement of the United States to their efforts at self-determination. By fortuitous circumstances, Dennis Ross and Bob Zoellick, my top policy advisers, had arranged to bypass the Mongolia trip and fly directly to Moscow for joint policy-planning sessions with [Sergei] Tarasenko. It was a worthy impulse, but Zoellick and Ross also harbored a secret agenda: by skipping Mongolia, they'd get back home to their families two days before the rest of us" (Baker, 1995, p. 6).

As Baker recalled here and others also confirmed, many factors could have led Baker to bypass his trip to Mongolia. If this had actually happened, Mongolia could have taken a slightly different path and, one could suspect, that democracy could have possibly lost its momentum.

Baker's Second Visit – Making Sure about Conditionality

As promised during the initial visit, James Baker returned to Mongolia in July 1991. By this time, he was highly regarded by Mongolian leaders due to the fulfillment of the promises he made during his brief initial visit in 1990. First, Mongolian President Ochirbat Punsalmaa made the first-ever official visit to the United States in January 1991. In addition to lengthy discussions with President George Bush, Ochirbat had lengthy meetings with senior officials of the Bush administration, Congress, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB), and also reached out to representatives from the private sector. During his visit, President Bush issued a waiver to the Jackson-Vanik provisions to the US Trade Act on January 23, 1991, which had restricted the trade relations with non-market (i.e., communist) economies; this cleared the way for Mongolia to receive the most-favoured nation (MFN) status. Second, Mongolia joined of the IMF, WB, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) in February 1991 and soon started negotiations over the structural adjustment programs. Third, as a response to Mongolia's request, Mongolia's commitment toward democracy and a market economy was endorsed at the G7 summits in 1990 and 1991. Finally, a number of US government programs were in development, for example, the USAID, The Asia Foundation, and Peace Corps. In addition, Baker presented another assistance package to Mongolia. He highlighted how the United States would provide 22-24 million USD, IFIs (IMF: 20 million, WB: 20-25 million, ADB : 20 million) as well as G7 members, excluding Japan, 22-33 million USD for Mongolia to overcome transitional difficulties and restructuring its

economy.⁷⁶ Moreover, he announced that the United States was also encouraging Japan to take a lead in forming a donor group to assist Mongolia and advised Mongolian political leaders to openly discuss this plan with Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu, who would visit Mongolia the following month (August 13-14).⁷⁷ President P. Ochirbat, Prime Minister Byambasuren, and Mongolian and American diplomats also all recall the State Secretary's efforts to put Mongolian leaders in touch with right contacts. For instance, in June, 1991, Baker advised Mongolian Prime Minister D. Byambasuren to discuss the donor group issue with William Draper, a close friend of Baker, at the UNDP, who played an influential role in setting up Mongolia's supporters group. Also, the US State Department official made it known that if Japan would not take of the donor group responsibility, the US and South Korea would lead instead (Orgil, personal interview, 2015, MOFA Archive).

From minutes of his discussions with the Mongolian President, the Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister, it was obvious that Baker wanted to make two points clear: (1) the United States had *no intention* of competing with Mongolia's neighbours and (2) all assistance from the United States and international community was conditioned upon Mongolia following through with its simultaneous political and economic reforms. For example, on July 26, during his meeting with President Ochirbat, Baker stressed that Mongolia must continue to have good relations with the Soviet Union and the PRC. Along similar lines, he told Prime Minister Byambasuren "we have no intentions to compete with the USSR or the PRC" and the United States only wanted to help in Mongolia's political and economic reform. Furthermore, Baker explained that the US's pledge to be Mongolia's third neighbour did not mean that the US would resolve any problems related to Mongolian bilateral relations with either China or the Soviet Union.⁷⁸ This was also expressed in

⁷⁶ The US assistance, according to Baker's explanation, would consist of 2.4 million USD for training and technical assistance for privatization and economic reform, 8-9 million USD food, 10 million USD as Economic Support Fund to purchase necessary products, 250 thousand to 1.5 million USD medicine, 250 thousand USD for Peace Corps, and 1-2 million USD for the trade development. In regards to G7 assistance, Germany would provide 12 million DM, OECD 1 million USD, South Korea 10-20 million USD, and Australia 250 thousand USD. (See The Minutes of Meeting with Prime Minister Byambasuren, Materials of the State Secretary Baker's visit, August 25-29, 1991, the Ministry of Foreign Ministry's Archive).

⁷⁷ At the same time, donor community, which led by Japan, played crucial role of alleviating the transitional challenges and stabilized the economy. Japan co-chaired with the World Bank the first Mongolia support group meeting, involving the IMF, ADB, and fourteen countries in Tokyo in September 1991 (Batbayar, 2010, pp. 45-59). The IMF, ADB and World Bank began the macroeconomic stabilization and reform programs and worked closely with the Mongolian government. The donor group, the Mongolia Assistance Group, held seven meetings, under the joint chairmanship of Japan and the World Bank between 1991 and 1999 (Dashpurev, personal interview, 2015; Batjargal, 2013; Rossabi, 2005, pp. 215-217).

⁷⁸ Baker explained that we did not have any intentions to compete with the Soviet Union, to increase our influence in Mongolia, or to strengthen our positions vis-à-vis the Soviet Union using the current situations (Olzvoi, 2002; Gombosuren, personal interview, 2015; The Meeting Minutes, Materials of the State Secretary Baker's visit, August 25-29, 1991, the Ministry of Foreign Ministry's Archive).

his speech to members of the interim legislature, “on behalf of President Bush and the American people, I come here today to lend our support and to work with you for the success of political and economic freedom here in Mongolia” (*New York Times*, July 27, 1991). All through his dialogues, especially with President Ochirbat, Baker asked Ochirbat to convey to the Mongolian people that international community’s willingness to provide assistance was entirely predicated upon the country’s commitment to political and economic reform.⁷⁹ In 1991, in *Foreign Affairs*, Baker highlighted Mongolia as one of the successful US-led global efforts to promote economic integration and democratization,

“Perhaps most remarkably, the powerful appeal of the democratic ideal is evident in Mongolia's rejection of its Leninist past and its turn to political pluralism and economic reform. Once the oldest communist government in Asia, Mongolia is the first Asian communist state to purposefully undertake the challenge of a democratic transition (p. 8)

By the time of his retirement from the administration in 1992, Secretary Baker had played decisive roles in laying out a strong foundation for the US assistance and bilateral relations with Mongolia, support from the programs of international financial institutions, especially of the IMF, and economic assistance from the Japanese-led international donor group. Despite administration changes in Washington, D.C., all of these Mongolian programs did not experience any major challenges or cuts during the Clinton administration, which also bolstered the democracy promotion agenda, except in 1996 (see Table 9). The military component of US assistance was small, and mostly used to organize civil-military relations workshops on the democratic civilian control of the military and to provide a few training slots, mostly in English language, for Mongolian officers in the United States.

Table 9. The US Assistance to Mongolia from 1990 to 2000

Fiscal Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
USD (million)	0	27	25	45	20	18	7	19	25	21	35

Source: U.S. Foreign Assistance, Fiscal Years 1946 – 2016 (<https://explorer.usaid.gov/reports.html>)

Baker’s Third Visit – Making Sure about Transfer of Power

Baker made his third visit during the parliamentary election of 1996. This time, he led a team of the US election observers, which consisted of the congressional members, and observed the entire election process while ensuring that a peaceful transition in power occurred between the

⁷⁹ See The Minutes of Meeting with President Ochirbat, Materials of the State Secretary Baker’s visit, August 25-29, 1991, the Ministry of Foreign Ministry’s Archive.

ruling communist successor party and the opposition parties. Sheldon Severinghaus, a former country representative of the Asia Foundation in 1990-1993, recalled that Baker was thrilled when Mongolian Prime Minister Jasray Puntsag assured that his party would transfer power to the opposition following their loss in the 1996 parliamentary election.⁸⁰ Due to limited economic and security interests in Mongolia, only two high profile visitors made trips to Mongolia following Baker's visits - First Lady Hillary Clinton visited in 1995 while State Secretary Madeleine Albright made a trip in 1998. Both applauded the country's progress in establishing a democracy as exemplary next to the authoritarian regime in China and Secretary Albright "took a special interest in the challenges facing women in Mongolia" (*Washington Post*, May 3, 1998). Historical records from the 1990s do not show evidence of there being any major over-riding security and economic interests expressed from the US side. The US Defense Department provided a few training slots for Mongolian military personnel in English language, civil-military relations, and peacekeeping training programs (Mendee, 2012, pp. 11-14). Mongolia was not attractive for the US businesses; even some government-encouraged investors were discouraged by Mongolia's poor investment environment, underdeveloped infrastructure, and harsh climate (Rossabi, 2005, p. 210; Wachman, 2009, 2010). Therefore, the US interest in Mongolia was limited to democracy.

Conditioned by this favourable geopolitical setting, the foundation for this quick-forming partnership was "a philosophical one," as Ambassador Lake put it, "if we as Americans believe in the democratic process, if we believe in the concepts of a free market economy as we say we do, Mongolia is a place we can make a difference" (Lake, 1994). From the Mongolian perspective, as Prime Minister Byambasuren noted, the development of close relations with the United States was not the result of temporary interests, but rather a long-anticipated partnership and, from 1990, based on the principles of democracy and free market economy (Byambasuren, 2012). The geopolitical opening in the early 1990s provided the opportunity for Mongolian political leaders to reach out to the United States, where Secretary of State James Baker envisioned Mongolia as the first Asian communist state transitioning to a democracy because it had no ethnic conflicts, a small economy, and only 2 million people who appeared to have a strong commitment towards democracy. Many of my interviewers, Mongolians and Americans alike, endorsed Ambassador Lake's conclusion that "without [Baker's] interests in and commitment to Mongolia, there would

⁸⁰ "Gol Buhen Dalaid Tsutgana" [Every River Flows Into the Ocean], documentary, 2010, (posted on 11 April 2013) Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSmDyEjVXN4>.

be no U.S. – Mongolia relationship” (Lake, 1996; also Campi, personal interview, 2015; Gombosuren, personal interview, 2015; Choinkhor, personal interview, 2015). While it might be easy to downplay the role of agency in the Western democracy promotion, it is also not hard to imagine how, without Baker’s dedicated support, Mongolia’s democratization process could have taken a different trajectory, including a potential reversal if the momentum got lost or a crisis arose. Even if it sounded as an exaggeration of the role of agency in the Western democracy promotion, it is not difficult to expect other factors could have pushed the Mongolia’s democratization process into different routes, including a potential reversal, if the momentum got lost, or crisis. In sum, the United States geopolitical interests in Mongolia were purely ideological of assisting Mongolia’s political and economic transition rather than geostrategic for using Mongolia as a strategic outpost.

DOMESTIC POLITICAL DYNAMICS

Mongolian domestic politics enjoyed a favourable external environment, in which all great powers lacked clear geostrategic interests in the country. The Soviet Union/Russia simply abandoned Mongolia whereas China adhered to its principles of non-interference. In the absence of vested geostrategic interests, the United States and its allies became the sole saviors of Mongolia. Yet their support was predicated upon Mongolia’s new political leaders remaining committed to simultaneous political and economic reforms. In other words, while China and Russia backed a neutral and stable Mongolia, western powers pushed for a democratic Mongolia. With such a favourable environment, Mongolian leaders *first* passed the 1992 constitution, which endorsed the principles of neutrality in foreign policies and electoral democracy, and *secondly*, established major political parties that adhered to the principles of electoral democracy. The existence of a strong ruling party with collective decision-making capabilities contributed to the empowerment of political parties and the choice for a semi-parliamentary system. Because the party was under the control of moderate political leaders who favoured collective decision-making, they did not end up supporting any type of authoritarian institutions as expected in the democratization literature. After the implementation of these key measures, political power has been transferred only through regular, competitive, free, and peaceful elections in Mongolia during the 1990s. The successor ruling party won the 1992 parliamentary and 1997 presidential elections while the opposition parties won 1993 presidential and 1996 parliamentary elections.

The 1992 Constitution

After two years of intense, inclusive debates, the People's Great Hural passed the constitution on January 13, 1992. One of the most contentious issues had been the institutional choice between parliamentary versus presidential systems. In the end, the parliamentary system that provided unlimited legislative power to a unicameral legislature prevailed. Known as the State Great Hural (SGH), this legislative body became the "supreme organ of state power" and also the constitution created a popularly elected, fixed-term presidential post to appease supporters of the presidential system.⁸¹ Because of the complicated trade-off between supporters of these two different institutions, a number of mechanisms of checks and balances between the parliament and presidency were included in the constitution (Chimid, 2002; 2006). According to these protocols, the parliament, in consultation with the president, appoints the prime minister and cabinet members. The president also shares prerogatives with the parliament and prime minister over the judiciary, foreign policy, and security institutions. In addition, the president is also entitled with veto-power over the parliament. This institutional choice was apparently affected, firstly, by geopolitical constraints and, secondly, the earlier empowerment of the legislature and multiparty system during transitions from 1989 and 1990. Archival documents and other evidence suggested the constitution-making process was exclusively domestic, without any traces of external pressures or directives unlike the previous constitutions of 1940 and 1960 (Tsudev, personal interview, 2015; Mashbat, 2015; Chimid, 2006).

The State Little Hural versus The Group of 281

The 1992 constitution-making process began immediately after the first multiparty election, which elected a bi-cameral legislature: the People's Great Hural and the State Little Hural. The People's Great Hural consisted of 430 members representing all segments of the society, including local constituencies, and elected through a majoritarian electoral system. The People's Great Hural approved the general procedures for drafting a constitution during its first session in September 1990, and then debated the constitutional draft from November 1991 and finally approved it in January 1992.

⁸¹ According to scholars of semi-presidentialism, the Mongolian version of the institutional setting is premier-presidentialism (Munkh-Erdene, 2010; Moestrup & Ganzorig, 2007). As Shugart and Carey (1992) identified there are "two basic forms of semi-presidentialism: president-parliamentarism, where the president can dismiss the Prime Minister and cabinet on his or her own initiative, and premier-presidentialism, where the Prime Minister and cabinet are responsible only to the legislature" Elgie and Moestrup (2016, p. 11).

The State Little Hural, a fifty-member permanent legislative body, whose members were nominated by their respective political parties based on the proportional voting results.⁸² Following the general procedures, approved by the People's Great Hural, the State Little Hural established the constitutional commission on October 1990, debated over the draft from April 1991 until its public release and the submission to the People's Great Hural in November 1991.

This arrangement created the conflict between two major voting blocs during the final debates of the constitution at the People's Great Hural. The first is known as the "Group of the State Little Hural," whose members consisted of MPRP members, Democratic Forces Coalition (i.e., opposition parties) members, and core members of the constitutional commission. This group, which was the most knowledgeable because of their active, insightful participation in the constitutional drafting processes from the beginning, managed to reconcile their differences on major contentious issues such as presidential versus parliamentary system before submitting the draft for public release and the final debates at the People's Great Hural. Most of the members of this group supported the parliamentary setting. The other influential group was the "Group of 281," which consisted of the People's Great Hural members. They unanimously approved the general procedures for drafting the constitution during its first session in September 1990, but were not involved in the drafting process until the constitutional draft became public. Interestingly, the Group of 281 consisted of two distinct, but loosely organized factions: one faction included independent members, who were mostly senior officials of provinces and soums (i.e., counties); while the other consisted of "members of cooperatives" representing businesses, mostly oriented toward agricultural cooperatives. According to Mashbat and other scholars, members of the Group of 281 were not fully aware of the constitutional drafting process and geared toward ad-hoc, populist, and more traditional perspectives (Mashbat, 2007; Tsedev, personal interview, 2015). The most influential person of this group was well-known nationalist poet Dashbalbar Ochirbat, who was also a leader of the faction of independent members. On the institutional choice debate, the group of 281 strongly supported the presidential institution on the grounds of the glorious history of Chinggis Khaan, the Great Mongolian Emperor, and the need for a *strong hand* argument (Rossabi, 1992; Mashbat, 2007, pp. 113-114). Due to frequent protests and the

⁸² A $\frac{3}{4}$ of 50 members of the State Little Hural must be nominated from the People's Great Hural members (Article 7) and Speaker of the State Little Hural, who would serve as the Vice-President, Deputy Speaker and Secretary of the State Little Hural must be appointed among members of the People's Great Hural (Article 6). However, all members of the State Little Hural were also members of the People's Great Hural (Amarsanaa et al., 2009).

deterioration of the rule of law and public order between 1990-1992, the atmosphere for having a strong leader prevailed among the public during the constitutional debate. People became concerned about the coalition government's inability to restore the rule of law and make the necessary decisions to impose a strict public order. The public widely believed that the permanent parliament, the State Little Hural, had failed at achieving this crucial task. Therefore, the Mongolian constitution making process – particularly the institutional choice – was marked by the intense compromises between political parties, who were represented at the State Little Hural, and independent members of the People's Great Hural.

Factors for Prevalence of the Parliamentary System

The evidence suggests that two important factors apparently contributed to the prevalence of the parliamentary system with a symbolic, directly elected presidential institution. The first was the country's vulnerability to the influence of more powerful neighbours and the other was the gradual empowerment of the legislature from 1989, which had actually started under communist leadership.

The avoidance of the presidential system was related to the country's vulnerability to pressures of powerful neighbours. Many assumed that the presidential choice would increase the probability for an authoritarian regime and even a dictatorship to re-emerge, which could easily fall into either China's or Russia's sphere of influence (Tsedev, personal interview, 2015). It would be easier for neighbouring great powers to assert their influence through the presidential system than the parliamentary system, where political power is more dispersed. On several occasions, supporters of the parliamentary system made strong arguments referring to Mongolia's recent history. The Kremlin, for example, had handpicked the two longest-serving leaders of the communist-era: Choibalsan, who was in power from 1939 to 1952 and Tsedenbal, 1952-1984. Both leaders, with the support from the Kremlin, established their personality cults, punished their opponents, installed authoritarian regimes, and then both were ultimately removed by the Kremlin. Fish succinctly captures this Mongolian logic when he argues that "rather than seeking concentration of power, however, Mongolia's leaders thought that dispersing power as widely as possible would provide the best protection against foreign manipulation" (Fish, 2001, p. 91; 2001, p. 333). Due to related concerns, the 1992 constitution prohibited the basing and transiting of the foreign troops in Mongolian territory (Article 4.3., Constitution, 1992). Constitutional drafters, politicians, and the public unanimously supported this constitutional declaration of neutrality (Choinkhor, personal interview, 2015; Sanders, 1992; Batbayar, 1998). Multiple sources have

drawn attention to the impact of the Russian August Coup (1991), which happened at the exact same time as the constitutional debates in Mongolia. Opposition leaders made statements about the potential intentions of the conservative members of the ruling party and how the military may have been preparing to takeover the government. This triggered official denials from the ruling party and the General Staff of the Armed Forces (*Ardyn Erkh Newspaper*, 1991). This situation also indicated that there was widespread concern over the possibility of falling under the influence of foreign powers again; therefore, the constitutional declaration *first* provided assurances to Mongolia's neighbours, especially China, that Mongolia would not welcome the security interests of any third party; and *secondly*, it established that only the parliament, as a key institutional constraint and diffuser of political power, could change the country's neutrality status and policies if this ever became necessary.

Another reason for favouring a parliamentary system was due to the gradual empowerment of the legislature and political parties during the transition. The People's Great Hural became the most influential institution after, as discussed in Chapter 3, the communist party relinquished its "leading role" and separated from the state institution (i.e., legislature and government bureaucracy) following the collective resignation of the communist party Politburo in March 1990. The Presidium of the People's Great Hural acted as a key mediator among political parties, including the ruling party. Hural's secretariat, for example, provided professional and administrative support for all members of the People's Great Hural; while members of the People's Great Hural passed all the key legislation that led to the first multi-party elections and establishment of the government. As described earlier, the newly formed State Little Hural had become the key legislative body in the period of 1990 – 1992. Similarly, a number of political parties were already formed and four parties were present at the State Little Hural. They strongly advocated for the parliamentary system. Unlike the Soviet Union, the Mongolian communist party successfully adapted into the new political situation while pursuing inclusive negotiations with opposition parties. The ruling party also did not constrain the institutionalization of new parties. I argue that the party's willingness to make compromises with the opposition leaders while committing to strengthening the collective decision-making bodies as the People's Great Hural was primarily due to the crucial role played by party leaders. Although the party secured enough votes to establish the majority government, its leaders decided to share political powers with opposition parties. This was not the case in the majority of the Soviet republics, where all communist parties were marginalized first by populist leaders like Gorbachev and Yeltsin and then

eventually banned in the aftermath of the August coup in 1991. In contrast, political parties became critical players for the political and economic reforms of Mongolia. Following the first multi-party elections, the State Little Hural consisted of only members of four political parties: the communist successor party – 33 seats; the Democratic Party – 13; the Mongolian Social Democratic Party – 4; and the Mongolian National Progressive Party – 3 (General Election Commission, 2008). Members of opposition parties then formed a strong Democratic Forces Coalition within the State Little Hural. Therefore, the gradual empowerment of the legislature, the successful regeneration of the ruling party, as well as the active participation of opposition parties all contributed to establishment of a parliamentary system in Mongolia.

The Political Party & Elections – Route to Power

Political parties became the most important element of the new political order under the 1992 constitution, which also stipulated elections as the only mechanism to accede and transfer political powers between political parties.⁸³ The article 16 of the 1992 constitution granted freedom of association while strictly drawing lines for political parties:

“The right to freedom of association in political parties or other public organizations on the basis of social and personal interests and conviction. The political parties and other mass organizations shall uphold the public order and State security, and respect and enforce the law. Discrimination and persecution of a person for joining a political party or other associations or for being their member shall be prohibited. Party membership of some categories of state employees may be suspended (Constitution, 1992).

Although the constitution does not restrict independent candidates, political parties are entitled to establish the executive government and to nominate candidates for the presidential post. Under the constitution, there would be three elections: parliamentary, presidential, and local (i.e., provincial and counties) elections. At the level of provinces and counties (same in the capital city and districts), Hural of the Citizens Representative serves as a local council, which elects the governor or mayor (in case of the capital city).⁸⁴ The dominance in the parliamentary election provides the authority to the majority party or coalition parties to exercise the legislative power, establish the government, and access state resources. As a result, only parties with parliamentary seats are

⁸³ The 1992 constitution did not specify the electoral system, whether it would be majoritarian or proportional methods. For the multiparty election, a mix of majoritarian and proportional representative methods were used. Then, from 1992, majoritarian methods were used in all consecutive elections.

⁸⁴ Even though local councils elect governors and mayor, all need to be approved by the Prime Minister (Article 60, 1992 Constitution).

entitled to nominate their candidates to the presidency, which is endowed with power and authority over foreign policies, security organizations, and even the judiciary to a certain extent. The president has the power to check the legislature through veto and the executive through the endorsement or rejection of nominations. Upon election, presidents are expected to become neutral political figures and officially disconnect from the party that nominated them. However, presidents could still renew their party affiliations upon deciding to run for a second term. Furthermore, the dominance in the local elections would also provide power for parties to regulate policies and to consolidate their bases at the capital city and its districts as well as in the provinces and counties. Therefore, the 1992 constitution constructed a political system in which political parties and elections became instrumental to obtaining political power.

Transparency and Inclusiveness of the Constitution Drafting Process

Unlike with the 1940 or 1960 Constitutions, the constitution-making process during the early 1990s was an exclusively domestic, transparent, and nation-wide deliberative process. Constitutional drafts were circulated openly in the media and discussed at all levels. A prominent lawyer, Chimid Byaraa, who is also known as the godfather of the 1992 constitution, stated that the commission received over nine thousand opinions and suggestions (2000, p. 3). After the circulation of the first draft in May, two public opinion polls were conducted by the Social History Institute (30,000 respondents) and jointly by Science Academy and the Mongolian National University (10,000 respondents) (*Unen*, July 30, 1991). All media outlets covered the parliamentary debates of the constitution and key sessions were broadcasted live to public. Similarly, among many other issues, the institutional choice represented one of the most contentious themes of public debate. Apart from the study tours organized by the US Asia Foundation for the constitutional framers like Chimid and members of the State Little Hural and a roundtable with the UN experts, there was no evidence to demonstrate external influences or recommendations during the constitutional debates or approval process (Tsedev, personal interview, 2015; TAF, 2000). Therefore, the constitution represented an exclusively domestic process of institutionalizing new political order, and not only reflected the principles of electoral democracy but also established political parties as key political organizations for political competition.

Former Ruling Party – Winning Parliamentary, Losing Presidential Elections

The Parliamentary Election in 1992

The first parliamentary election under the new constitution and subsequent election law was held in June 1992. In this election, the MPRP won a landslide victory with 57 percent of votes (through majoritarian system), which equaled 70 out of 76 seats in the unicameral legislature, now called the State Ikh Hural (General Election Commission, 2008). The coalition of three major opposition parties, Mongolian Democratic Party, Mongolian United Party (MUP), and Mongolian National Progressive Party, won only four seats while the Mongolian Social Democratic Party secured one seat (General Election Commission, 2008). A former MPRP member, Zuunai Gendensambuu, became the only independent winner. As a result, the MPRP maintained its control over the legislature, the executive branch, and also seats at the provincial level. Because all parties were exclusively concerned with the parliamentary election, opposition parties had neither interests nor resources to compete in local elections, even for elections of the capital city and provinces.

Four major reasons explain the lopsided victory for the former ruling party. First, the choice of the majoritarian electoral system contributed to the MPRP victory because the opposition parties, including the coalition and MSDP, received 42.9 percent of votes while receiving only five seats, which is not enough to form a parliamentary group (Prohl & Sumati, 2008, p. 42).⁸⁵ Second, the MPRP became a successfully-reformed communist party in the new political situation. The party denounced Marxist-Leninist ideology, brought in reformist leaders, relinquished its leading role, denounced the party's past mistakes, and separated itself from state institutions, especially the legislature and bureaucracy (MPRP, 1995). Unlike other non-European communist parties, party leaders provided space for the opposition, empowered the legislature, and insisted on inclusive, constructive collaboration with the opposition. In comparison with successor communist parties in Central and Eastern Europe, as Gerelt-Od argues, the MPRP was the only successor party, whose membership increased during the transition period (2009). Out of twelve registered political parties, the MPRP alone nominated 76 well-known candidates for all 76 districts; this indicates its strong pool of candidates, who are known to electoral constituencies. Third, the major opposition parties were not ready for the election even though leaders of the MDP, MUP, and MNPP coalesced two months before the election while the MSDP decided to run independently. The coalition nominated 48 candidates and the MSDP 28 for the 76 electoral districts (seats). Since opposition parties lacked a nation-wide infrastructure (e.g., branches, members, supporters, and

⁸⁵ According to the Law on Parliament, the party must have 8 seats to establish the parliamentary group.

finance), the majority of candidates competed against each other in the same electoral districts in mostly urban areas (Gerelt-Od, personal interview, 2015; Bold-Erdene, 2008, Fritz, 2002, p. 61).⁸⁶ Finally, all other small parties were too weak to compete against the former ruling party and the above-mentioned opposition parties. They could be classified as special interest parties, for example, religious parties (Mongolian Worshippers Democratic Party, Mongolian People's Party), business owners (Mongolian United Party of Private Owners, Mongolian Bourgeois Party), and/or a small breakaway party (Mongolian Renaissance Party (MRP)). These parties lacked resources and supporters, except one or two popular politicians, which could also make them personalistic parties.

The Presidential Election in 1993

In the 1993 presidential election, the MPRP candidate, Tudev Lodon, a well-known intellectual and the reformist editor of the party newspaper, *Unen*, lost to the opposition parties' candidate, Ochirbat Punsalmaa, an incumbent president, who received 57 percent of votes. This was the most competitive presidential election between the ruling party and opposition with extensive mass media campaigns and public polling. For instance, just one week before the election, Batbayar noted that "as the campaign gained momentum, the difference between two candidates had narrowed and even favoured Tudev" (Batbayar, 1994, p. 42).

Several factors contributed to the victory of the opposition parties. First, the opposition parties' unification played a key role. After their loss in the parliamentary election as well as local elections, four small parties – MDP, MNPP, MUP, MRP – established the Mongolian National Democratic Party (MNDP) in October 1992. For the presidential election, the MSDP agreed to nominate one candidate together with the MNDP. Another important factor was the minimum 45-year age limit for a presidential candidate, as popular leaders of the opposition parties were all under that age. This led opposition parties' leaders to nominate incumbent president Ochirbat, who not only became the Chairman of the People's Great Hural in April 1990, but also led the first multiparty elections, chaired the constitutional drafting and passing process, and served as the first president under the 1990 constitutional revision and 1992 constitution. Since Ochirbat demonstrated a strong record of political neutrality, especially from his own MPRP party during these turbulent years (1990-1992), the opposition parties unified behind his campaign. Finally, the

⁸⁶ Opposition parties received the most support in Ulaanbaatar, Erdenet, Darkhan and a few provinces – Bayankhongor, Khuvsgul, Dornod, and Dundgobi (Barkmann, 2006).

MPRP's disunity contributed to its loss in the presidential election (Dash-Yondon, personal interview, 2015). With a voter turnout of 92.7 percent election, the opposition parties' candidate won in all districts of the capital city and 14 out of 18 provinces (General Election Commission, 2008). As a result, the presidential election provided a valuable opportunity for opposition parties to strengthen their electoral bases, gain influence in the legislative and executive branches through the presidential office, and promote its members to official posts of the presidential and affiliated offices. Prior to the presidential election, opposition parties began to receive party development assistance from international organizations, especially the Christian Democratic Party-sponsored Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS) of Germany as well as the International Republican Institute (IRI), a US-sponsored organization.⁸⁷ Based on interviews of the IRI consultant, it was unlikely that donors played a significant role in helping opposition parties win in the 1993 presidential elections because all donor programs (the party development) were at the initial stage of opening their offices and discussing their plans for the next round of parliamentary election in 1996 (Mitchell, personal interview, 2015).⁸⁸

Opposition Parties – Winning Parliamentary, Losing Presidential Elections

The Parliamentary Election in 1996

In the 1996 parliamentary election, the Democratic Union coalition of the MNDP and MSDP, both major opposition parties, won 50 out of the 76 seats in parliament with 47.7 percent votes in comparison to the former ruling party, MPRP, with 40.6 percent (General Election Commission, 2008). A small third party, Mongolian United Traditional Party (MUTP), won one seat.⁸⁹ The MPRP received 25 seats forming a strong parliamentary opposition, which could easily block a quorum. Later in October, the MPRP still dominated in local elections by maintaining the majority in provincial and capital city councils; this enabled them to nominate MPRP governors. However, this time, opposition parties had more success in all provincial elections and even gained sizeable minorities in most provincial and municipal councils. For the first time, interestingly,

⁸⁷ The Konrad Adenauer Foundation established the initial contact through a Mongolian student of the Leipzig University, Davkharbayar, who was attending the demonstration in the fall of 1989. He facilitated the visit of the opposition leaders to the KAS headquarter in spring of 1990. In regards to the IRI, US State Secretary James Baker personally encouraged the IRI to help the Mongolian opposition parties immediately after his first visit to Mongolia (Battuvshin, personal interview, 2015; Ganbat, personal interview, 2015).

⁸⁸ Mike Mitchell was the first non-resident program manager of the IRI.

⁸⁹ The Mongolian Traditional United Party was established in December 5, 1993, by merging the Mongolian United Party of Private Owners, Mongolian United Party of Peasants and Herders, and Mongolian Independence Party. A well-known patriotic poet Dashbalbar Ochirbat, who was a leader of the group 281 at the People's Great Hural, became a member of parliament in the 1992 parliamentary election.

opposition parties' candidate, Narantsatsralt Janlav, received the slim majority vote (18 out of 35 votes of the capital city council) in the MPRP-dominated council and became the first opposition mayor of the capital city (UB City Source). After the local election, the capital city council, officially known as the Hural of Citizens' Representatives, was composed of 22 members from the former ruling party, MPRP; nine from MNPP, six from MSDP, one from the Mongolian Green Party, and one independent member (UB City Source).

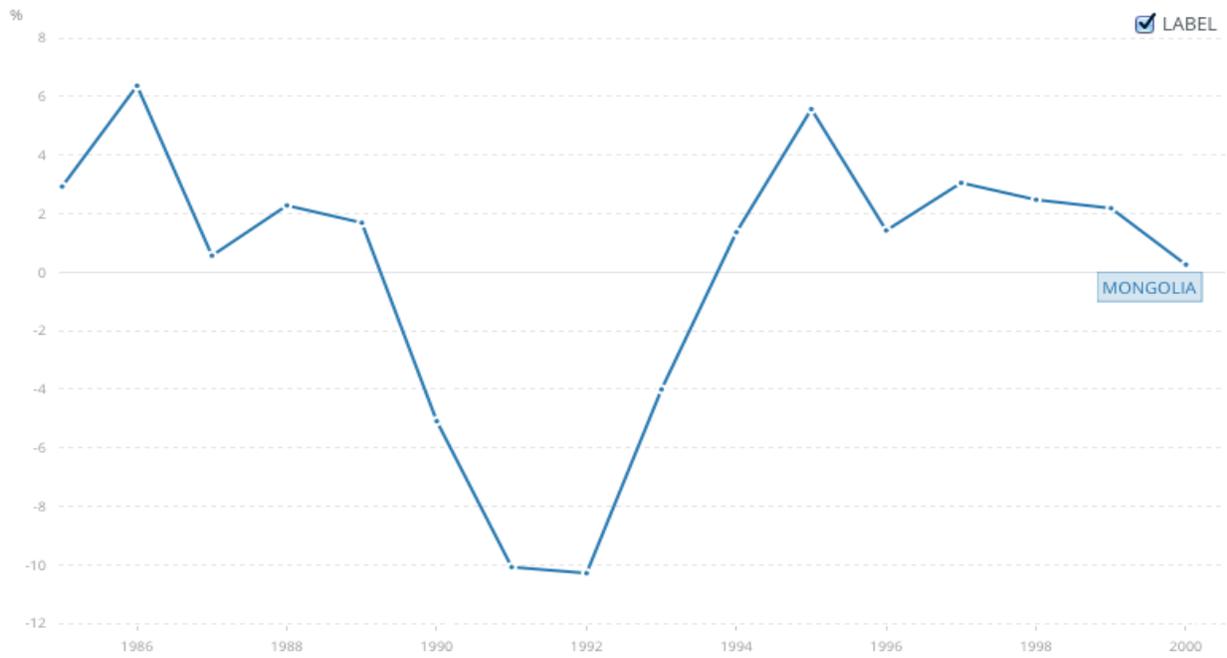
Several factors contributed to the victory of opposition parties, all competing as a Democratic Union coalition. First, opposition parties received extensive assistance from the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS) and International Republican Institute (IRI). From 1993, KAS established and fully funded the Political Education Academy for the Mongolian Democratic Union. The academy trained over 600 party bureaucrats through its short courses, established five regional centers to provide training for rural voters, published academic journals and newspapers, and conducted public opinion surveys (Schmueking, personal interview, 2015; Battuvshin, personal interview, 2015). Within two years, the Political Education Academy mobile training teams along with senior party officials reached out to all voters explaining opposition parties' policies and introducing candidates (Ganbat, personal interview, 2015). Similarly, starting in 1992 the IRI worked with leaders of the MNDP and MSDP opposition parties. With IRI's assistance, the Democratic Union Coalition literally localized the 1994 Republican Party platform, known as the "Contract with America," into the Mongolian context. Authors of the "Contract with America" spent days with their Mongolian counterparts to design the Mongolian version – the "Contract with the Mongolian Voter," which was printed in 350,000 copies with IRI support several months ahead of the election (Mitchell, personal interview, 2015; Bayaraa, personal interview, 2016). As a result of these efforts, the election campaign platforms and candidates of the Democratic Union Coalition became known and distributed in advance to voters. Second, reflecting from their previous experience of parliamentary and especially presidential elections, opposition parties were united and well organized. The MNDP organized its internal competition for the party chairmanship in a relatively transparent and competitive manner. For instance, five candidates rallied nationwide to explain their platforms for over two years prior to the elections and then competed for the party chairmanship at the party's second congress in February 1996. Like the presidential election, the MNDP and MSDP declared their alliance for the election, appointed Mr. Enkhsaikhan, who was a

campaign manager for the 1993 presidential election, and introduced their candidates almost three months before the election.⁹⁰ Finally, opposition parties also recruited more business entrepreneurs as either candidates or supporters for the parliamentary and local elections than previous elections. This related to the scarcity of the funding for the Democratic Union Coalition to run successful campaigns due mainly to the lack of resources from the state, supporters, or the nation-wide network.

In contrast to the Democratic Union Coalition, the MPRP was slow moving and poorly prepared for the parliamentary election. Several factors contributed to this. First, the MPRP was over-confident because of its success in stabilizing the economy, which was applauded by the international financial institutions and donors. The GDP growth began to show positive growth, inflation was lowered for the first time (see Figure 4 and 5).

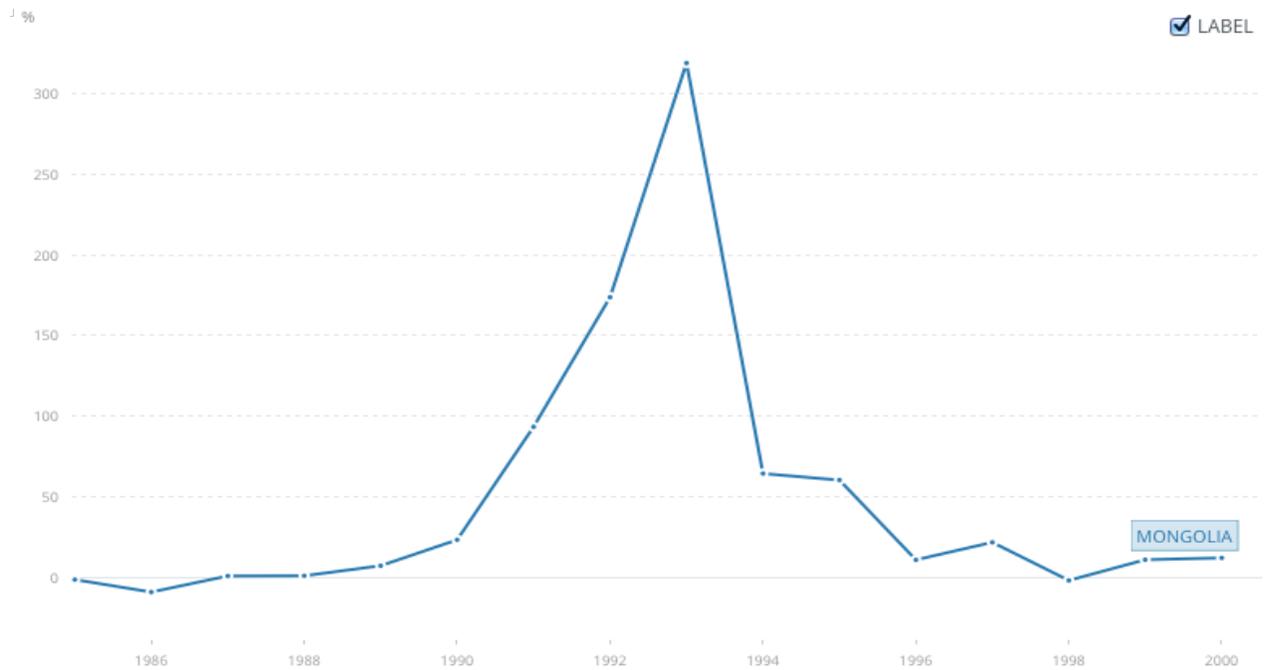
⁹⁰ Mr. Enkhsaikhan Mendsaikhan was a rising member of the MPRP and became one of the fifteen MPRP scientists who wrote an open letter to the communist politburo in 1989. He was a member of the People's Great Hural and State Little Hural of 1990-1992 representing the democratic coalition. After running a successful presidential campaign, he served as the Chief of Staff for President Ochirbat from 1993 until 1996.

Figure 4. GDP per capita growth (annual %)



Source: World Bank, June 15, 2017. Retrieved from data.worldbank.org

Figure 5. Inflation (annual %)



Source: World Bank, June 15, 2017. Retrieved from data.worldbank.org

Second, because of its supreme majority, the legislature delayed the passage of the election law amendments from spring of 1994 to January 1996 to provide “the shortest possible time” to opposition parties (Severinghaus, 1996, p. 96). The amended election law legalized the state funding for political parties based on the number of parliamentary seats and empowered governors of the capital city, provinces, districts and soum to approve where campaign materials could be publicly displayed (Gerelt-Od, personal interview, 2016). Having 70 parliamentary seats and MPRP governors in all provinces and municipalities, these amendments provided more funds and advantages to the ruling party (Barkmann, 2006, p. 174). Finally, the ruling party announced their candidates only six weeks prior to the election because of the internal conflicts between incumbent parliament members who wanted to re-run and factions that wanted to nominate new candidates. After these prolonged intra-party contests, the party placed 39 new candidates and 37 incumbent members up for the election. Together, these different factors contributed to the loss of the ruling party in the 1996 parliamentary election.

The Presidential Election in 1997

In the 1997 presidential election, the MPRP candidate, Bagabandi Natsag, won with 60.8 percent of the vote over the Democratic Union Coalition candidate, incumbent president Ochirbat (29.8 percent) and third party (MTUP) candidate Gombojav Jamba (6.6 percent). Mr. Bagabandi was a career party bureaucrat and elected to parliament twice, serving as Speaker of the parliament (1992-1996) and Chairman of the MPRP Parliamentary Group in the 1996 parliament. “Notably silent after the MPRP victory,” as Ginsburg notes, “were foreign donor organizations who had claimed credit for the 1996 parliamentary victory of the Democrats and their allies” (1998, p. 64). International observers and Mongolia’s democracy watchers found the election to be free, fair, and competitive.

Similar to the 1993 presidential elections, none of the popular leaders of opposition parties, especially the MNPP and MSDP, had reached the minimum age limit for presidential candidates; consequently, the MNPP and MSDP agreed to nominate incumbent president Ochirbat, who had served in the presidency from 1990 to 1992. Since his presidency occurred before the approval of the 1992 constitution, it did not count as an actual term. This allowed the Constitutional Court to decide in favour of Ochirbat’s nomination for another term (Batbayar, 1994, pp. 41-42). Immediately after its unexpected loss in the 1996 parliamentary election, the MPRP appointed new leaders (i.e., general secretary, secretary, and its governing board) and began to prepare for the local elections in fall of 1996 and the presidential election in 1997. The party also rejected the

‘centrist philosophy,’ which was adopted in 1992, and shifted toward a social-democratic ideological orientation to reach out to younger voters (Enkhmandakh, 2006, pp. 97-102; Bayar, 2006, pp. 39-44).⁹¹ In its new party platform, the party also rebranded itself as a national democratic party devoted to national unity and social progress, which was more in line with social-democratic (leftist) policies (Ochirbat, 2006, pp. 19-29). Moreover, the party revoked its previous decisions of expelling Tsedenbal from the party in order to gain support from elder generations, who were already nostalgic about the communist period. The various shifts all contributed to the victory of the MPRP. As prominent leader of the MPRP Bayar stated, the party’s acceptance of the Buddhist centrist ideology could not appeal to its members, supporters, and the public because it lacked appeal and only a few people understood its concepts (Bayar, 2006, pp. 41-42). At the same time, the Democratic Union Coalition still became the majority in parliament and established its own government. Yet its popularity started to decline with the appointments of inexperienced politicians and affiliated business entrepreneurs to senior posts, the firing a large number of public servants, and the infighting among coalition parties – MNPP and MSDP and even within the MNPP itself. Also, unlike with previous governments, the Democratic Union Coalition government introduced more drastic economic liberalization policies such as price deregulation, cash privatization of state-owned enterprises, and the reduction of the social welfare programs in 1996-1997. Last but not least, the popularity of President Ochirbat declined as society began to desire a more critical and strong president, one who could check the legislature and government and demand more effective, efficient policies. In contrast to the contentious periods between the former ruling party and opposition parties during the early stages of transition, citizens no longer prioritized the neutrality of the president.⁹²

ANALYSIS

External Factors – Geopolitical Opening

The geopolitical opening created a favourable environment for Mongolian democratic consolidation. In the absence of the geopolitical interests of Western powers, particularly in terms

⁹¹ At the MPRP congress in February 25-28, 1991, the party adopted the centrist philosophy, which was based on Nagurjuna philosophy. This was argued by Dash-Yondon, general secretary of the party and leading philosopher, that Nagurjuna has a strong traditional roots and purely Mongolian ideology. This was the attempt to disconnect its Marxist and Leninist ideology and also to appeal voters by promoting uniquely Mongolian version of philosophy. The other reason for the acceptance of the Nagurjuna was the establishment of the Mongolian Social Democratic Party; therefore, the MPRP could not make a similar claim (Dash-Yondon, personal interview, 2015; Byambasuren, personal interview, 2015).

⁹² President Ochirbat successfully mitigated the conflicts between the ruling party and oppositions – notably, before the first multiparty election in 1991, in 1992 elections, and also during the hunger strike of the 1995.

of security and economy, neighbouring great powers remained neutral to Mongolia's domestic and foreign politics and did not interfere with either its constitution-making process or subsequent parliamentary and presidential elections. Chinese and Russian geopolitical interests were apparently satisfied by not asserting their geostrategic interests in Mongolia and also Mongolia's policies of neutrality and not welcoming any security interests from Western powers, especially the United States. It is also important to note that Mongolia's giant neighbours were already preoccupied with maintaining their internal matters and also coping with security concerns elsewhere.

The Soviet Union/Russia geostrategic interests in Mongolia declined for three reasons: firstly, Chinese leaders imposed the complete withdrawal of the Soviet military as conditionality for the normalization of the Sino-Soviet/Russian relations; secondly, the Soviet Union and its successor state, the Russian Federation experienced its own domestic political and economic crises (esp., the collapse of the Soviet Union and adaptation/settlement of the post-Soviet period); and thirdly, Mongolian leaders took opportunities to reduce the Kremlin's control and reached out to distant great powers to soft balance against Russian and Chinese influence.

Leaders in Beijing were similarly consumed with their internal challenges along with security tensions with Western powers over Taiwan and Southeast Asia. China's main goal in Central Asia and Mongolia was to secure their geopolitical neutrality vis-à-vis Russia, and gain assurances for non-interference in domestic matters (e.g., one-China policies and minority issues) while maintaining control over the secessionist movements. Beijing's long-term policy in Mongolia was aimed at building up the trust and confidence in the country's overtly anti-Chinese society. As long as Mongolia did not welcome the security interests from any of Chinese strategic competitors – Russia, India, Japan, and the United States – then Mongolia would not trigger any direct geopolitical competitions with China vis-à-vis Russia.

As with China and Russia, the United States did not have or express any geostrategic interests in Mongolia because they and other Western governments were more interested in democratizing Central and Eastern Europe whilst maintaining the Cold War status quo in East Asia (Wachman, 2009; Lake, 1994). In fact, Mongolia did not appear in Washington's foreign policy map at all. Even though it had its first multiparty elections, many academics and practitioners in Western capitals still believed that Mongolia, was still under the control of the communist party; at least until 1996, when the opposition took over the parliament and cabinet. But, Mongolia's desire to gain sovereignty vis-à-vis two powerful, expansionist neighbours and the American interests of

promoting democracy and free market appear to have coincided. Apparently, neither US nor Mongolian leaders wanted to see Mongolia return to Beijing's orbit of resilient communist states in Asia (and Cuba). Therefore, all three great powers did not have any direct competing security and economic interests in Mongolia. The Mongolian case confirms the conventional wisdom of the third-wave democratization literature that the absence of great powers' security interests provides the breathing space for the domestic politics and also lessens the support for authoritarian leaders and regimes.

The Mongolian case also raises interesting findings for the Western democracy promotion literature. Despite the overt enthusiasm in the 1990s, Carothers and many others have asked whether Western democracy promotion actually works (Carothers, 1999). Burnell responds, "Yes. No. We really do not know." Siding with a 'yes' response, Schlumberger argues:

“[D]emocracy promotion can therefore only succeed if it is embedded within the overall set of foreign policies of the promoting country and if the promoting country itself adheres to the rules, norms and values it claims to want to become widespread” (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010, p. 8).⁹³

In the case of Mongolia, democracy promotion worked due to several factors. First, the absence of any over-arching or hidden security and economic interests from Western powers lent greater credibility to their democracy promotion efforts. Also, Mongolian leaders perceived Western governments, especially the United States and donor countries, as their saviors after being abandoned by the Kremlin to face China alone without any protectors. Second, agency was a critical factor for Mongolia, a country without any linkages or leverage with the United States, and whose government lacked knowledge about Mongolia. State Secretary James Baker visited Mongolia three times. During the course of these visits, he (1) met all political leaders to gauge the seriousness of the country's political reform; (2) diverted unilateral and multilateral resources to Mongolia and made sure that Mongolian leaders understood the no-reversal conditionality; and (3) personally observed the power transfer process during the 1996 parliamentary election. Similar to Gorbachev's roles in Mongolian politics in the late 1980s, James Baker's direct involvement was one of the key elements of the Western democracy promotion efforts for Mongolia.⁹⁴ Although it

⁹³ They further argue that democracy promotion would work depending on the context and degree of consistency and credibility (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010, p. 8).

⁹⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, Gorbachev made several decisions; some had a direct impact. He accepted the Chinese demand of the complete military withdrawal from Mongolia, permitted Mongolia to establish relations with the US, removed a long-serving authoritarian leader in 1984, and encouraged Batmunkh to reform. However, it is important to point out the striking

is beyond the scope of this work, my fieldwork has revealed that Germany's political involvement and Japanese support were also driven by key agents, who were influential in their respective capitals.⁹⁵ Therefore, the Mongolian case indicates that influential external agency can play an important role for democratization. Third, the US interests were purely ideological; therefore, the US democracy promotion and economic assistance did not threaten China's or Russia's overall geopolitical interests and regime survivability (Lake, 1994; La Porta, 2004; Wachman, 2009, 2010). During this period, China was also keen to normalize its relations with the US whereas Russia was mostly interested in receiving financial support to overcome its deep economic crisis. This period represented, as McFaul argues, an ideologically united international system; one that had played especially positive roles for democratization.⁹⁶ Lastly, the IFI's economic stabilization program and the donor's financial assistance also played an important factor in stabilizing the overall macro economy in the absence of Soviet subsidies. In this regard, Mongolia would be one of the few countries to not hold many regrets over the IMF and donors. Unlike with the EU and NATO conditionality for Central and Eastern European states, Mongolia came under the conditionality of the United State, International Financial Institutions, and donors.

Domestic Factors – The Adaptable, Regenerated Ruling Party

Within this favourable external context for democratization, the survival and regeneration of the ruling (communist) party played constructive roles for the transition to and consolidation of electoral democracy.

First, the ruling party elites stayed with the communist successor party. In the line with Grzymala-Busse's argument, this made the political power competition clear and also "easier for the voters to distinguish parties from each other and rely on political pedigrees as informational shortcuts" (Grzymala-Busse, 2006, p. 417). Second, relatedly, the existence of a strong political party provided an anti-incumbent impetus for opposition parties. All of the new parties may have lacked comprehensive election platforms and could not widely publicize their political agendas,

difference between Gorbachev and Baker. Gorbachev had more direct controlling influence given Mongolia's close and longstanding on the Soviet Union whereas Baker was merely expressing his own desire to see the democracy succeed in Mongolia.

⁹⁵ Battuvshin and Ganbat, both worked with the KAS from the beginning, along with Ambassador Udval highlighted the role of Mongolian students in Germany and Germans who worked or were interested in Mongolia during socialist period for including Mongolia in Germany's democracy promotion projects (Battuvshin, Ganbat, and Udval, personal interviews in 2015). Similar arguments were made by former Mongolian ambassadors to Japan about the important roles played by the Japanese who worked and lived in Inner Mongolia and Manchuria in 1930s for lobbying the Japanese government (Batjargal, 2013; Dashpurev, personal interview, 2015).

⁹⁶ McFaul argues that the international system should be considered as a hidden variable for the democratization wave in 1990s because the system was not divided by ideological divisions (McFaul, 2010, pp. 3-29).

but, due to the existence of a strong ruling party, they had increased incentives to collaborate and challenge incumbents. In addition, the new parties could also simply adopt the organizational model of the ruling party as they began their institutionalization process. Thirdly, the successful regeneration of the ruling party also made Western party development assistance (i.e., KAS and IRI) efforts more effective. If the ruling party was diffused into multiple small parties, there would have been too many leaders to work with and this would have been too challenging and costly for the international party assistance programs of either KAS or IRI (Mendelson, 2001; Bader, 2010; Kumar, 2005; Caton, 2007). Fourthly, the existence of a well-institutionalized party made the power (leadership) transition process easier than countries without strong political parties. Since the power transition procedure had been clear for party elites and the strong party institution reduced the uncertainty, Mongolian political elites set the precedent of exiting and transferring power not only during crisis (i.e., first hunger strike in 1990), but also after regular elections. Finally, ruling party elites also sought out ways to collaborate with and accommodate opposition parties. Despite opposition from some conservative members and populist political forces, party leaders managed to work together with opposition leaders in the constitution-making process and jointly relied on the professional expertise of the non-partisan, constitutional drafters.⁹⁷ Also, after winning in the first multiparty election, the new leaders of the ruling party welcomed opposition leaders in sharing key positions at the bi-cameral legislature and established the coalition government even though they had held enough seats to establish a single-party cabinet. Therefore, the ruling party was successfully re-generated (i.e., transformed its organizations and moderated its appeals) and became an indispensable part of the new political system. In the end, the 1992 constitution made political parties the only vehicle to gain political power through competitive parliamentary, presidential and local elections. The former ruling party and opposition parties were engaged in systematic competitions to control the legislative and executive powers. These competitive elections have contributed to the development of new parliamentary parties and party systems.

Levitsky and Way (2013) argue that strong (revolutionary) party organizations lead to competitive authoritarianism when leverage and linkages are low; yet the Mongolian case shows that *ancien regime* or the revolutionary party can also play positive roles in bringing about and

⁹⁷ Chimid, the prominent legal expert on the constitution, was respected by all leaders. Under Chimid's supervision, the constitution-drafting team members were carefully selected based on professional expertise (not of their political affiliation) and insulated from the politics (Tsedev, personal interview, 2015; Ochirbat, 1996).

consolidating electoral democracy (Dierkes, 2012, pp. 6-7). The Mongolian case also presents an interesting combination of both ‘transformation’ – where authoritarian regime leaders take the lead and play decisive roles – and ‘transplacement,’ – where democratization was produced by the combined actions of governmental and opposition forces (Huntington, 1991, pp. 124-141, 151-162). Even though Mongolian communist party leaders began the reform process in the late 1980s, they were overwhelmed with the dynamics of the political and economic development, which were exacerbated by systemic factors originating in the Soviet Union and communist bloc countries. As a result, ruling party elites collaborated with opposition leaders to conduct the first multi-party election, draft and enact the 1992 constitution, and participate in subsequent elections. The ruling party shared legislative and executive powers with the opposition in the interim period (1990-1992) and rotated the power in following elections: the ruling party won in the 1992 parliamentary election, lost in the 1993 presidential as well as 1996 parliamentary elections, and won in the 1997 presidential election. This shows how the former communist party has survived due to its high-degree of institutionalization.

While ideology and corruption are beyond the scope of this study, they still have implications for political parties that are worth briefly touching upon before closing this analysis section. Clear ideological orientation and policy preferences can strengthen political parties’ connections with their members and voters by presenting ideologically coherent policies, which uphold values, unite leaders, members, and supporters, and also serve as a guide to their actions. In contrast, ideological dis-orientation along with the prevalence of corruption would likely weaken the parties’ ties with voters by promoting clientelistic and patronage-based relations among party leaders and supporters (Porta, 2004, pp. 35-42). In this period (1990-2000), as Dierkes rightly describes,

“Although the election results and transfers of executive power from the MPRP to the Democratic Party (DP) back, as well as the continuing presence of smaller parties, suggests a competitive party structure, this party structure does not seem to be defined by ideological or policy preferences” (Dierkes, 2012, p. 9).

While Bold-Erdene (2008), a key Mongolian scholar of the party politics, agrees with this observation, he also makes interesting observations about the ideological orientations of political parties. First, he notes that instead of classic political party ideological orientations, features of the nationalist-democratic ideologies, which had their roots in early 1920s, were reflected in political parties’ conceptual documents. Secondly, he points out that party leaders, especially of democratic

oppositions, had more pragmatic views and were cautious toward holding purely ideological orientations. Finally, he along with other scholars conclude that Mongolian political parties are still undergoing the early stage of ideological development (Bold-Erdene, 2008; Gerelt-Od, 2009).

In my view, the ideological shift of the MPRP successor party played the most important role and even helped with their success in the 1997 presidential and later in the parliamentary elections. Only one year after the MPRP leaders abandoned the Marxist – Leninist ideology in 1990, the party adopted a centrist philosophy of Nagarjuna as the party’s ideological basis, arguing that this philosophy had strong, traditional roots and represented a purely Mongolian ideology. Upon realizing the lack of popular appeal toward this philosophy after losing in the 1996 parliamentary election, the party re-branded itself as a nationalist-democratic party devoted to upholding national unity and social progress, which was more in line with the social-democratic (leftist) policies. In 1999, the party joined in the Socialist International as an observer member. This decision of adopting the social-democratic ideology strengthened the successor party’s image vis-à-vis the opposition parties, who failed to run the government smoothly from 1996 – 2000 and lost their ideological orientations.

Corruption arose as a major challenge in this period (Severinghaus, 2000; Sneath, 2002; Rossabi, 2005; Tuya, 2005). Although the issue of corruption is beyond the scope of this work, there are several reasons behind the widespread prevalence of corruption. First, the institutionalized mechanisms for controlling and investigating corruption had been dismantled and the entire judicial system became ineffective because of the change of the political system. In September 1990, for instance, the People’s Great Hural and State Small Hural decided to dismantle the People’s Committee for Control and Investigation, which had a wide range of networks and resources to assist in combating corruption (MPRP, 1995; Boldbaatar & Lundeejantsan, 2011). Until the passage of the Law on the State Control and Investigation in June of 1995, there was no organization to receive public complaints about the corruption and to conduct procedural auditing and control of the government and state organizations. During this same period, judiciary and law enforcement organizations were also in transition, and police forces were also overwhelmed with street protests and increased crime rates (Purev, 2015). In addition, the effects of the IMF-led structural adjustment programs led to fierce competition among political parties, factions, and interest groups for the state resources, which worsened the situation. Like many other states who had underwent the ‘shock therapy,’ government services were reduced, state-owned properties, including the herds and agricultural centres were privatized, and employees were laid off. The

period between 1992-1996 (known as the ‘shock therapy’ period) forced all people to find ways to deal with the extreme poverty situation and lack of goods and services (Rossabi, 2005; Pompret, 2000). This certainly gave rise to corruption, ranging from the distribution of rations or medical services to the acquisition of permits and licenses. Furthermore, politicians, especially those in advantageous positions, acted in the manner of ‘Winners Take All’ (Hellman, 1998) in regards to the use of foreign aid, state resources, and the privatization of industries and agricultural collectives. Despite the lack of any thorough analysis of the privatization process in Mongolia in the 1990s, the process played out in a quite similar fashion as in former Soviet republics and European post-socialist states (Stiglitz, 1999; Denisova (eds), 2015). Many still question the legitimacy of this process. As Sneath rightly concludes,

“[i]n Mongolia that experience is of little corruption during the state socialist period, but its massive growth since ‘rolling back’ the state in the age of reform... [during the socialist period, there] was a lot to lose if one was dismissed from an official position, and cash incentives were not necessarily tempting. In addition, in the state socialist period this bureaucracy was relatively heavily policed and controlled” (2002, p. 94-95).

In summary, corruption prevailed in Mongolia because of the lack of control mechanisms and the uncontrolled competition among politicians, factions, and parties over the state resource (e.g., foreign aid and state-owned enterprises) during the difficult economic transitional period.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In the aftermath of the first multi-party election in 1990, Mongolia entered into new geopolitical settings, in which all great powers lacked security interests and avoided engaging in a direct geopolitical competition. China, arising great power, wanted a neutral Mongolia free from the Soviet/Russian military presence and influence. It was also concerned with the potential spillover effects of Mongolian democratization and the rise of nationalism. The Kremlin simply abandoned Mongolia at the expense of normalizing its relations with China and the West. To put it another ways, the geopolitical interests of great powers were satisfied by their explicit agreement to keep Mongolia neutral from each other’s respective influence. Within this context, Mongolians, for the first time, removed and elected their new leaders without any interference from either the Kremlin or Beijing. This not only marked the complete independence of Mongolia from its powerful neighbours, but also attracted the purely ideologically-driven interests from the United States. Like Gorbachev’s role in Mongolia’s political liberalization process, US State Secretary

James Baker played the most critical role in institutionalizing Western support for Mongolia's democratic consolidation process despite the US's lack of geostrategic interests in the country.

Mongolia's democratization process succeeded within this favourable external condition. Without any foreign interference, Mongolians drafted and passed their first constitution and, since its enactment, the country's political power has been transferred between two major political parties through regular parliamentary and presidential elections. The existence and survival of the strong ruling party has not only contributed to the political stability, but also to the development of the competitive party system by providing an anti-incumbent impetus as well as a model for opposition parties. Importantly, leaders of the successor ruling party and opposition parties agreed upon and then adhered to rules of the electoral democracy.

Chapter Five: Mongolia – Democratic Consolidation, 2000 – 2010

A day after the fifth parliamentary election in 2008, peaceful protests over the contested election results gradually turned into mob violence. The headquarter of the former ruling communist party was set on fire by Molotov cocktails, the mob and police engaged in brutal fighting, and the crowd delayed emergency responders. A shocked president declared the country's first-ever state of emergency. Security forces were soon deployed, media and communication networks were tightly censored, and about 700 people were arrested (Mendee & Last, 2008). During the implementation of this presidential decree, five people were killed and twenty were injured by firearms, even though police authorities denied any use of lethal weapons. The next morning, images of the completely burnt MPRP headquarters, fully armored security patrols, and interrogations of rounded up protestors circulated in the global media challenging the country's previous 'democratic outpost' headlines (*BBC News*, 2008). About 270 people were sentenced to 6 months to 5 years imprisonment for "instigating, participating, looting and setting fire during post-election protests" (NGO Coalitions, 2008).⁹⁸ Amidst this turbulence and instability, Prime Minister Bayar Sanj, Chairman of the MPRP, successfully convinced his party, which already had enough seats to establish its own cabinet, and the leaders of opposition parties to establish a coalition government to ameliorate the political situation and also to overcome the political gridlock concerning the investment agreements of large mining projects in the South Gobi.

A year later, during a press conference following the presidential election, Mongolians across the country waited anxiously for the statement of the incumbent president Enkhbayar after his contender Elbegdorj from the Democratic Party quickly declared the victory before the official result was announced. A similar situation had occurred during the contested parliamentary election the previous year in 2008, when the MPRP declared its "apparent win" and prepared a victory celebration on the central square before the General Election Commission had announced the official results. This time, mainly because of the pressure from his party leaders, Enkhbayar admitted a narrow defeat and honored the results; this response relieved everyone, especially the security personnel, who were now well prepared and equipped to deal with mob and

⁹⁸ "July 1" and Human Rights Violation Mongolia – Stakeholders Submission to OHCHR for UPR, June 15, 2017. Retrieved from lib.ohchr.org.

demonstrations.⁹⁹ If Enkhbayar had not accepted the election results, it would have launched protests, as frustrations in Mongolian society had reach a boiling point after years of enduring widespread corruption, injustice, and poverty. With the successful conduct of the presidential election, not only did Mongolian electoral democracy prove its resilience but it also showed how external factors continued to have minimal effects on the domestic politics.

In the second decade, 2001-2010, the international setting had not dramatically changed for Mongolia. All great powers did not engage in direct geopolitical competition and remained supportive of Mongolia's neutrality; thus continuing to provide a favourable external environment for Mongolian democratic development even though it directly sat between two so-called autocracy promoters – China and Russia. The United States also remained committed to Mongolia's democratic consolidation and readily promoted Mongolia as an exemplary case for other emerging democracies. Neither the mining boom nor Mongolia's military contributions to Iraq and Afghanistan have undermined US democracy promotion efforts; rather they both actually enhanced bilateral relations in the absence of larger geostrategic interests. As the first sitting American president to visit Mongolia in November 2005, George W. Bush reconfirmed that "America is proud to be called your third neighbour" while praising its commitment to democracy (*New York Times*, November 21, 2005). At the same time, Washington's ideological commitment did not elicit negative reactions from Mongolia's powerful authoritarian neighbours, as might be expected according to studies on autocracy promotion. Surprisingly, Beijing and Moscow did not intervene in Mongolia's domestic politics. Against the conventional claim of autocracy promotion, they neither promoted autocracy nor pressured Mongolia to join in the so-called authoritarian club, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Rather, leaders in both capitals consistently extended their recognition to new leaders immediately after regular parliamentary and presidential elections of Mongolia.

This chapter argues that the absence of direct geopolitical competition between great powers is a necessary, but not sufficient condition, for the consolidation of electoral democracy. Mongolia's democracy and Western support has not threatened the core geopolitical interests of China and Russia; as a result, neither authoritarian neighbour has intervened in Mongolian politics nor opposed Western democracy promotion efforts in Mongolia. By utilizing its new identity as an

⁹⁹ This was the first time an incumbent president lost in a re-election bid. Although Enkhbayar accused his party members conspired with the opposition party, Enkhbayar accepted the election results. Later, he became a strong contender against his own party as well as the opposition party by taking lead of the breakaway party.

electoral democracy, promoting the country's mining boom, and sending military deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, Mongolian political leaders also strengthened its relations with Western powers while *soft balancing* against its two powerful neighbours. Within this favourable external environment, political parties and civil society organizations have taken on a vital role in consolidating electoral democracy in Mongolia. Yet, in the absence of an ideological orientation in both major parties, clientelism arose and began to serve as the governing principle for the party politics, especially after political-economic factions became rampant within the two major parties.

This chapter is structured in the following way. The first section explains *how* the geopolitical setting, in which all great powers lacked geostrategic interests and avoided engaging in a direct geopolitical competition, has continued to provide a favourable external environment. China continues to respect Mongolia's foreign policy choices and internal affairs, Russia reacts to protect its economic interests, and the US adheres to an ideological link with Mongolia for maintaining itself as a democratic outpost. The chapter will also explain how Mongolia's military deployment played a crucial role in deepening Mongolia's political ties with the United States. The second section examines the power transfer process between the two major political parties and discusses the development of the competitive party systems. The final section analyzes the interplay between external and internal factors and concludes with some explanations for Mongolia's deviancy toward autocracy promotion and resource curse assumptions.

THE CHANGING GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT – CONTINUED BLESSING

In the first decade of 2000, the geopolitical setting of Mongolia began to change, but not in a way that harmed the country's consolidation of electoral democracy. Despite common economic interests in exploiting Mongolia's mineral wealth, great powers continue to avoid engaging in direct geopolitical competitions in Mongolia. All powers respected the country's domestic politics and extended their recognition for a succession of leaders and governments following regular parliamentary and presidential elections. Because of these limited geostrategic interests, Mongolia's steadfast contribution to the US-led coalition operations in Iraq/Afghanistan and Western mining interests enhanced Mongolia's outreach to developed democracies and projection of its democratic identity in contrast to its neighbours and regional autocracies, namely North Korea and Central Asian republics. Russian interests in Mongolia had revived due to several factors, including Mongolia's consistent requests for resuming close relations, the Kremlin's broader strategy of maintaining its influence in the former Soviet sphere of influence, as well as the emergence of economic interests from state-affiliated businesses. However, Chinese traditional

security objectives, Russia's economic difficulties, and Mongolia's concern over its sovereignty all helped to constrain Russia's influence on Mongolia's domestic politics. Within this context, China, a rising power, did not express any aggressive geopolitical interests, but instead acted as a benign great power as long as Mongolia continued to not cross Beijing's 'thin red lines' concerning the country's geopolitical neutrality, non-interference, and stability. Like previous periods, the geopolitical interests of the great powers were satisfied by not taking any direct actions that might provoke a 'security dilemma' between not only Russia and China but also the Sino-Russian interests *versus* the United States and Japan.

Russia – Assertive, But Constrained

In 2000, Russian president Vladimir Putin signed a 25-point memorandum of cooperation during his visit during the country's first presidential visit since Brezhnev in 1974. The memorandum was titled "Ulaanbaatar Declaration" reminiscent of the "Beijing Declaration" signed by Putin in July 2000. Moscow made a point to include numerous international issues in the Beijing and Ulaanbaatar declarations in order to emphasize the overlapping positions of the respective countries on global and regional issues, particularly with recognizing Russia's revival as a great power and welcoming its engagements in East Asia (Batbayar, 2002, pp. 115-119). In contrast, the Mongolian side saw this visit as an opportunity to revive its bilateral relations to provide a balance, at least economically, against China; therefore they mostly focused on issues regarding bilateral relations. Russian commentators wrote "that President Putin's visit was planned to put an effective end to last ten years downfall in bilateral relations and bring a fresh impetus to trade and economic relations" (Batbayar, 2002, p. 114). Following the visit, not only did inter-governmental meetings resume at the senior levels in all sectors, but inter-regional exchanges also became more intense, with governors and business entrepreneurs showing especially high interests in reviving economic and trade ties (Bayarkhuu, personal interview, 2015).¹⁰⁰

Then, three years later, the Kremlin wrote off 98 percent of the Soviet-era debt of \$11.4 billion removing the major obstacle for the bilateral relations as well as a crippling burden for Mongolia's economy (Wachman, 2009, p. 16). By 2009, bilateral relations revived in all sectors, but mostly through meetings with little real-world actions. Upon Mongolia's request, Russia

¹⁰⁰ According the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, Governors of Irkutsk oblast, Kemerovo oblast, and Republic of Buryatia as well as "Siberian Agreement," inter-regional association of the Russian Far East and Siberia, were the most interested in developing close links with Mongolia. For most of these regions, Mongolia could serve as an economic crossroad to China and also a trading partner given the commodity boom.

resumed its defense cooperation, including regular high-level exchanges, annual military exercises, provisions of military weaponry, and training of Mongolian military personnel in Russia. At the same time, the Kremlin advocated its interests in major economic projects while marginalizing Western and Chinese economic interests in Mongolia. On a number of occasions, both Mongolian and foreign analysts pointed out Russia's assertiveness in settling major economic projects. For instance, many suspected that Putin's second visit, which happened two weeks before the presidential election in 2009, was part of a Russian effort to support the incumbent MPRP president, Enkhbayar Nambar; even though Putin avoided openly endorsing Enkhbayar during his short stay in Ulaanbaatar (Radchenko, 2018, p. 115).¹⁰¹ Instead, both Prime Minister Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev, who came after the presidential election, pressured Mongolian leaders to accommodate Russian economic interests rather than advocate for autocracy (Hynes, 2016; WikiLeaks, 2013). After discussing a nuclear deal with Japan, Prime Minister Putin pushed to oversee the signing of a joint natural resource mining venture between the state-run Russian Railways and the Mongolian Railway and also lobbied for state-affiliated entrepreneurs – Oleg Deripaska's Basic Element and Viktor Vekselberg's Renova Group – participation in large mining and related infrastructure development projects (Medetsky, 2009; *Mongolian Mining Journal*, 2009). Then, a few months later, President Medvedev proposed that the Russian-Mongolian trade volume should expand beyond petroleum products and also include substantial involvement in new large-scale developments such as nuclear projects or the Tavan Tolgoi, coking coal deposit (WikiLeaks, 2013). So while Russia may have been assertive, they did not become involved in the country's elections. Instead they focused on ensuring that both incumbent and new leaders accommodate Russia's growing economic interests.

There were three major reasons for Russia's emerging interests in Mongolia. For one, Mongolian leaders had constantly sought ways to renew its relations with the Russian Federation since the early 1990s. Presidents, prime ministers, and other political leaders had reached out to the Kremlin, but there was a little response from the Russian side until its Foreign Minister's visit and Mongolian President's visit in 1999. During this period, the Kremlin had neither interests nor the resources for bi-lateral relations. Second, Mongolia's sustained requests for close bilateral relations coincided with President Putin's foreign policy for reviving the country's status as a great power

¹⁰¹ For instance, see the transcripts released by the Russian government. Retrieved November 10, 2017 from <http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/4144/>

(Lo, 2003; Mankoff, 2009). Thus, Putin made his first-ever presidential visits to Cuba, Mongolia, and North Korea in 2000 – states that had all been important for Soviet foreign policy. Meanwhile, the Kremlin had engaged in discussing the settlement of the Soviet-era debts with all three countries not only as a measure of goodwill, but also to advance its economic interests in major mining and infrastructure development projects. Third, and relatedly, Russia’s emerging interests in Mongolia were clearly economic driven, especially as the state-affiliated businesses wanted to benefit from major mining and related infrastructure projects. In 2005, for example, the Kremlin stopped the Mongolian government’s decision to use \$185 million of US developmental aid to improve the transit capacity of the trans-Mongolian railroad, which was jointly owned by Russia, (Radchenko, 2018, pp. 112-115, Wachman, 2010).¹⁰² Instead, the Russian government promised to set up a joint fund for the railroad development, provide new locomotives and cargo trains, and establish a joint venture to carry out mining-related infrastructure development projects. Later, Russia’s railroad authority explicitly sided with Mongolia’s political-business factions, which refused to introduce the Chinese standard gauge to connect major mining deposits with Chinese rail networks.¹⁰³ With the support of Russian and domestic lobbying efforts, domestic companies (e.g., MCS) abandoned this economically significant project to link Mongolia’s largest coal deposits with the Chinese railroad networks. After Russia became involved in railroad discussions in 2008, geopolitical rationales have dominated railroad debates in Ulaanbaatar, including rumors of a potential Chinese take-over.¹⁰⁴ During this same timeframe, the Kremlin pressured the Mongolian government to revoke the uranium mining licenses of Canadian company, Khan Resources Inc., and reward the operating licenses of the largest coking coal deposit – where Western and Chinese major transnational mining companies (e.g., American Peabody, Japanese Sumimoto, and Chinese Shenghua and Chalco) were in competition – to Russian businesses (US State Department, 2014; Bulag, 2010, pp. 99-101; Narangoa, 2012, pp. 82-85; WikiLeaks, 2008).

¹⁰² After the delicate process of applying for the developmental grant from the newly established Millennium Development Fund of the United States, the US awarded the most wanted grant to Mongolia to improve the transit capacity of the trans-Mongolian railroad. But, the Russian side, which owned 49 percent of the Trans-Mongolian Railroad, rejected the US assistance (Wachman, 2010, p. 599).

¹⁰³ A Mongolian “athlete-turned-businessman-turned-politician ‘Genko’ Battulga Khaltmaa” collaborated with Vladimir Yakunin, President of Russian Railways, when Battulga was the Minister of Road, Transportation, Construction and Urban Development (Radchenko & Mendee, 2018, p. 1039). More on the railroad problems and Russian involvement, see Radchenko, 2018, pp. 127-140.

¹⁰⁴ Genko Battulga succeeded in convincing the parliament to approve the State Policy of Railway Transportation of Mongolia (2010), which approves the Russian standard gauge (1520 mm) over the Chinese gauge (1435 mm) for any new railway extensions. In fact, Genko used his news production company and media outlets to explain how Chinese standard rail gauge would allow the Chinese expansion and potential takeover.

In the former case, Khan Resources had obtained the mining license and been involved in the development of a uranium mine that the Soviets had abandoned in the 1990s. In July 2009, after the Mongolian Prime Minister's visit to Moscow, parliament quickly passed the Nuclear Energy Law, which revoked Khan Resources' mining license and stipulated the establishment of the joint uranium venture with Russia. Khan Resources began an international arbitration action against Mongolia for the illegal expropriation of its asset (WikiLeaks, 2010; Bulag, 2009; Wachman, 2010). Both the railroad extension and the revocation of the mining license demonstrated that Russia still has the ability to influence Mongolia's domestic politics if it wishes – a situation that often triggers backlashes from Mongolian society and political leaders. During this mining boom, which started in 2005, Russia also acted similarly in Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, to secure its privileges in uranium mining and refusing to introduce the Chinese narrow gauge for extending Eurasian railways.

In regards to defense, many Western observers highlight the revival of the Russian military-to-military relations with Mongolia during this period (Reeves, 2015, p. 3; Campi, 2018). But, according to Mongolian experts, Russia was extremely cautious (anonymous, personal interview, 2016). First, Russia was simply responding to Mongolia's continued requests to upgrade Soviet-military equipment and resume the education and training of military personnel in Russian military schools. All military-to-military engagements ended in 1989. Second, Russia was reacting to Mongolian military deployments to Iraq and Lebanon, both of which were strongly opposed by the Kremlin. To dissuade Mongolia's military deployments to Iraq, the Kremlin immediately provided \$5 million worth of military equipment in 2004 and responded positively to all of Mongolia's earlier military requests. Third, as Mongolian military counterparts explain, Russia was very careful in crafting the annual bilateral military exercise, which focused on the maintenance of the Mongolian military equipment, and kept the scale of the exercise small while avoiding exercises near Sino-Mongolian borders (Enkhjargal, personal interview, 2015). This small-scale exercise kept bilateral military exchanges alive and responded to the US-sponsored multinational exercise, but not at the level of triggering security concerns in Beijing. This suggests that observers may have exaggerated the importance of the revival of the Russian military-to-military relations and that, in fact, Russia did not have strong geostrategic interests in Mongolia.

Besides its economic interests, the Kremlin appeared to have limited interest in interfering in Mongolia's domestic politics even though it possessed the strongest leverage via its control over 90 percent of fuel exports and transit routes. Although all political leaders have attempted to

promote closer relations with Russia rather than China, the Kremlin perceives Mongolian parties differently. As prominent Mongolian foreign policy expert Batbayar (2002) noted, “Moscow saw the MPRP [a former ruling party] government is more credible and more enthusiastic partner for improved Russo-Mongolian relations” (p. 119). Opposition parties have been perceived as a somewhat pro-Western, anti-Russian political force mostly because of Western governments’ explicit endorsements, their own pro-Western rhetoric, and the instability of opposition parties’ governments. In the 1990s, opposition leaders made some of the strongest accusations about Soviet policies in Mongolia, demanded the complete withdrawal of the Soviet military, and later (during the democratic coalition-led government) contended with the Russian government over the privatization of the state-owned companies, including Erdenet copper mining company, a joint venture with the Soviet Union and now Russia.¹⁰⁵

In contrast, the former ruling party had invested intensively and strategically into their relations with Russia. After losing in the 1996 parliamentary election, leaders of the MPRP quickly disconnected their formal ties with Russian communist parties and developed cooperation with the Unity party and United Russia. While the opposition parties’ governments struggled to reach out to the Kremlin between 1996 and 2000, President Bagabandi of the MPRP already established good relations with Putin’s emerging team, especially Foreign Minister Sergey Ivanov (Gerelt-Od, personal interview, 2015; Dash-Yondon, personal interview, 2015; Batbayar, 2002, pp. 111-117). As a result, the MPRP-dominated parliament and its governments had more advantages in reaching out to the Russian leaders, Putin and Medvedev, than opposition parties’ leaders. Over time, the MPRP became the only party, which institutionalized its interactions with United Russia by sending its senior leaders to the party’s congresses, exchanging campaign experts and observers around the elections, and even holding annual meetings between the party’s youth organization “Molodaya Gvardiya” and the MPRP’s youth organizations (Gerelt-Od, personal interview, 2015). Therefore, the emergence of Russian political interests could also be understood as a result of the MPRP’s sustained, exclusive interactions with political parties related to the Russian presidency. Overall, Russia lacked geostrategic interests in Mongolia, but still sought to defend its economic interests (i.e., uranium and railroad) and advance new interests in exploiting Mongolia’s large

¹⁰⁵ The Democratic Union Coalition government ousted a long-time manager of the Erdenet joint venture, Otgonbileg, in 1998 and installed the party politician Dorligjav, who reported the serious debt problem of the factory and conflicted with Russian ownership. According to Batbayar, “Moscow, probably, became convinced that the final purpose of [the Democratic Coalition government] campaign was to make Erdenet mine more convenient for future privatization” (Batbayar, 2002, p. 110).

mining projects like the Tavan Tolgoi coking coal. Like China, Russian geopolitical interests in Mongolia was satisfied by not directly engaging in geopolitical competitions with China and Mongolia's commitment for geostrategic neutrality.

USA – Third Neighbour, Democratic Outpost

The second period enhanced the US commitment to Mongolian democracy, as an exemplary case of democratization, even though the overall US democracy promotion agenda weakened globally. By 2000, the US interest in Mongolia declined significantly mostly because of the drastic funding cuts for global democracy promotion efforts (*Washington Post*, July 28, 1996) as well as the absence of geopolitical interests in Mongolia. As a result, USAID was planning to close its Mongolia office, the Asia Foundation suspended some of its major programs devoted to the strengthening the parliament and deepening the legal reform, and the IRI ceased its operation in Ulaanbaatar.¹⁰⁶ The US government maintained a small embassy with a few small-scale projects in Mongolia. But things changed because of two important factors: Mongolia's military deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan and the mining boom. Both factors – one security and the other economic – were not significant enough to affect US foreign policy objectives in Mongolia, and may have even assisted Mongolia's efforts to promote its democratic identity while bolstering the US objective of projecting Mongolia as a successful model of democracy. In fact, officials in both Ulaanbaatar and Washington had sought to avoid having their bilateral relations being misperceived by Beijing as a 'security encirclement' or by the Kremlin as an 'extending NATO's outpost' (Wachman, 2009, 2010). Therefore, as well-known expert of East Asian politics Alan Wachman describes, the US-Mongolian relationship remained 'ideological' as it evolved since the 1990s, when the US extended its political and economic support with the conditionality of "no reversal."¹⁰⁷

The September 11th attack and later the US military operations in Iraq also made an important contribution to US-Mongolia relations. By 2000, the US inspiration for Mongolia's democracy had waned as the country's much-applauded opposition parties failed to run the government effectively while the former ruling party returned to power. Unlike with elections in the 1990s, the George W. Bush administration did not exchange any senior level delegates and

¹⁰⁶ Personal Interviews: Meyanathan, November 7, 2015; Infante, November 16, 2015; Mitchell, November 7, 2015; Richmond, December 2, 2015; Badamdash, November 29, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Late professor Alan Wachman (Tufts University) was a scholar of East Asian politics, Sino-American relations; in his last years, he worked on a book about Mongolia's national security within the Sino-American relations (Wachman, 2009).

Congress did not make any official statements about the results even though foreign experts acknowledged the conduct of free and fair elections.¹⁰⁸ This frosty relations changed after September 11th. Mongolians reacted very sympathetically to the US tragedy with newly elected leaders offering cooperation, including the usage of airspace and military bases, whilst thousands of Mongolians expressed their condolences at the US embassy.¹⁰⁹ A year later, the US administration reached out to all governments, including Mongolia, for support for the GWOT (Global War On Terrorism). Upon the receipt of the US request, the issue was discussed at the parliamentary standing committee and National Security Council over a month period (IDS, 2009, pp. 13-16). Mongolian leaders unanimously agreed to deploy a 170-man contingent to Iraq even though its neighbours openly opposed the US military operation (IDS, 2009, pp. 40-45). There was not any public discussion; except a single op-ed (i.e., D. Gankhuyag's "Who Will Pay If Lives of Soldiers Lost"); the public, especially the media didn't pay attention to this. Later, Mongolia expanded its military deployments to Afghanistan (Dashjivaa, 2012; Plutz, 2014). This provided justifications for NATO and OSCE to extend their cooperation with Mongolia, leading Mongolia to become officially regarded as a troop-contributing country for NATO-led operations. Within seven years, over 5,000 military personnel of the Mongolian Armed Forces served in Iraq and Afghanistan. These troop deployments increased the US government and military's interest in develop stronger ties with Mongolia.¹¹⁰ Since the Bush administration placed such a high priority on the global war on terrorism, Mongolia's collaborations, which ranged from political support to military deployments, were perceived positively in Washington. First, the State and Defense Departments increased their funding, especially in terms of democracy promotion and peacekeeping capabilities (see Table 10). Starting in 2003, official statements from the US State and Defense Departments and the Pacific Command drew special attention to US's growing partnership with Mongolia's military forces. The US Pacific Commander Admiral William Fallon, for example, highlighted in his statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee how the

¹⁰⁸ In 1996, following the victory of the opposition parties, the congress was congratulated for the successful parliamentary elections and also efforts of the International Republican Institutes for helping opposition parties win in the parliamentary election (S. Res. 276, 104th Congress, September 6, 1996).

¹⁰⁹ Prime Minister offered to provide limited humanitarian aid, a military training base, and airspace for the US military operations in Afghanistan; a small US embassy was crowded with people who were expressing their condolences.

¹¹⁰ The number was given by the Peacekeeping Department of the Mongolian Armed Forces on September 21, 2016.

Command's "relationship with the Mongolian Armed Forces is stronger than ever and they are eager to contribute even more to supporting [US] regional and global security efforts."¹¹¹

Table 10. The US Assistance to Mongolia from 2001 to 2010

Fiscal Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
USD (million)	23	32	28	38	23	26	15	372	33	42

Note: The Millennium Challenge Account funding started in 2008.

Source: U.S. Foreign Assistance, Fiscal Years 1946 – 2016 (<https://explorer.usaid.gov/reports.html>)

Second, Mongolia was included in the Bush administration's new developmental aid project – the Millennium Challenge Account, which, indeed, had strict pre-requisites of democratic governance. After assessing Mongolia's democratic governance, the US Congress approved approximately \$285 million of funding to implement four projects: improving the rail system, upgrading vocational teaching standards and facilities, improving property registration and land management, and improving the identification and treatment of non-contagious diseases.¹¹² Finally, Mongolia became an important stopover for senior government officials, including the first-ever visit of US president George W. Bush in 2005.¹¹³ However, officials of both governments were careful to make clear that the countries' increased military cooperation was solely aimed at developing the peacekeeping capabilities of the Mongolian military, and not for building a military base, transit facility, listening post, and/or special forces training operations. (DoD, 2005; Wachman, 2010; Mendee, 2012). When US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was asked whether the US was interested in setting up listening posts or accessing bases during his visit to Mongolia, he answered that "we have had no discussions along that line and I know of no interests in that" (Press Conference, October 22, 2005). Unlike military bases or transit facilities, Mongolian

¹¹¹ Testimony of Admiral William J. Fallon, United States Navy, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, before the Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Pacific Command Posture, 8 March 2005. The US recognition of Mongolia has appeared in foreign assistance justification documents (statements, reports, funding requests) of the US Department of Defense as well as State Department in 2003 – 2010.

¹¹² After President Bush's initiative of the Millennium Challenge Account (a new type of developmental aid) was authorized in 2004 with bipartisan support, Mongolia was one of the countries considered because of its democratic development and its support for the US operations in Iraq. Following Mongolia's request, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (i.e., implementing agency) conducted 3-4 years of assessment. By 2009, Mongolia passed the most of the democratic governance requirements (esp., controlling corruption and providing democratic rights). For Mongolia's score card, see <https://www.mcc.gov/who-we-fund/scorecard/fy-2018/MN>; for the Fund allocation, see <https://assets.mcc.gov/content/uploads/2017/05/cn-121109-mongolia-amendment.pdf>

¹¹³ The US dignitary list includes Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Speaker of the House of Representatives Dennis Hart, Agriculture Secretary Johanns, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage as well as military dignitaries, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Richard Myers, Commander of the US Pacific Command Admiral Thomas Fargo in 2005 and his successor Admiral William Fallon in 2006. Also, in 2007, Vice President Dick Cheney was considering to stop by in Mongolia; however, the visit was cancelled as the Mongolian government delayed the decision to send the 7th rotation of troops to Iraq.

military deployments neither triggered a 'security dilemma' for China and Russia nor generated 'rents' for Mongolian leaders; rather they increased communications with the US government and gave the US with additional justifications for providing political and economic support.

The other important factor at this time was the mining boom, which began roughly around 2005. Western investors saw Mongolia as a potential investment frontier because of its rich mineral deposits, its proximity to Chinese markets, and its preference for Western investors over Chinese or Russian ones. Two major mineral deposits contributed to the sudden rise of Western business interests. First was the world's second-largest copper deposit, Oyu Tolgoi, which was discovered by the Canadian Ivanhoe Mines. After a series of failed negotiations, an investment agreement (for 30 years) was signed with the Ivanhoe Mines and mining giant Rio Tinto, a British-Australian multinational corporation, on October 6, 2009 (Jackson, 2014, pp. 10 – 14). The conclusion of this investment agreement for Oyu Tolgoi attracted renewed interests from foreign investors and even gave rise to the nick-name 'Mine-golia' (Jackson, 2014, pp. 14-15; Dierkes eds, 2012, pp. 7-8). Following the Oyu Tolgoi deal, the Mongolian government declared its interests in developing the country's other major mining deposit – Tavan Tolgoi, a large coking coal deposit. Tavan Tolgoi not only drew domestic interest, but also the interests of American Peabody Energy as well as British, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, and South Korean corporations and consortiums. As mentioned above, Russia has asserted the most influence over Tavan Tolgoi bidding process, especially when it established a joint Mongolia-Russian Railway Company (Radchenko, 2018, pp. 115-119). In addition, these two large as well as other smaller deposits naturally attracted interests from international financial institutions, construction companies, and even mining-supply companies, such as American Caterpillar Corporation (Algae, personal interview, 2015; Sunjidmaa, personal interview, 2015). Even though the US government had advocated for the interests of Western investors, these projects and mining multinationals were not powerful enough to change the key principles that guided US government's relations with Mongolia. Rather, these emerging business interests added another stream to bilateral relations, increased the Western presence (e.g., embassies, representative offices, media, and expatriates) in Mongolia, and also facilitated additional political, economic, and cultural interactions with Western powers. As a result, it also increased Mongolia's visibility in Western media outlets and in the respective governments' (e.g., US, Japan, Germany) observations of Mongolia's domestic and foreign politics.

In the absence of overriding geostrategic interests, US policies became complementary to Mongolia's foreign policy interests. For one, Mongolian leaders began to use democracy as an instrument to deepen its relations with so-called third neighbours – a set of developed democracies supporting the country's political and economic reform – in order to potentially 'soft-balance' against potential Chinese and Russian influences.¹¹⁴ Second, the ideological connections with the US facilitated Mongolia's outreach to international and regional organizations to help consolidate its democratic identity vis-à-vis the dominating authoritarian identity in the region. By 2010, Mongolia's democracy, its military deployments, and mining boom contributed to the institutionalization of its relations with the EU, OSCE, and NATO (Mendee, 2012).¹¹⁵ For Western powers, Mongolia was perceived as a like-minded, democratic state in contrast to its immediate neighbours, Central Asian states, and East Asian states (e.g., North Korea). In using a similar logic, the US government has held up Mongolia as an exemplary case and even as, on some occasions, a provocative signal for East Asian and Eurasian autocracies. President Bush's remarks during his 2005 visit, for example, were geared toward such a purpose:

“Mongolia has made the transition from communism to freedom, and in just 15 years, you've established a vibrant democracy and opened up your economy. You're an example of success for this region and for the world. I know the transition to liberty has not always been easy and Americans admire your patience and your determination. By your daily efforts, you're building a better life for your children and your grandchildren. And I've come to tell you, as you build a free society in the heart of Central Asia, the American people stand with you.”¹¹⁶

China – A Benign Neighbour

Unlike Russia and the United States, China had not explicitly involved itself in Mongolia's domestic politics either by advocating its economic interests like the Kremlin or assisting political

¹¹⁴ The third neighbour policy was further elaborated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, especially around 2003-2005, and became a key strategy. However, Mongolian officials and their Western counterparts continued to avoid stressing or investing into the security and military cooperation; but rather prioritized the political, economic and cultural collaborations (Bekhat, personal interview, 2015; Bayarkhuu, personal interview 2016; Udval, personal interview, 2016; Dashpurev, personal interview, 2016).

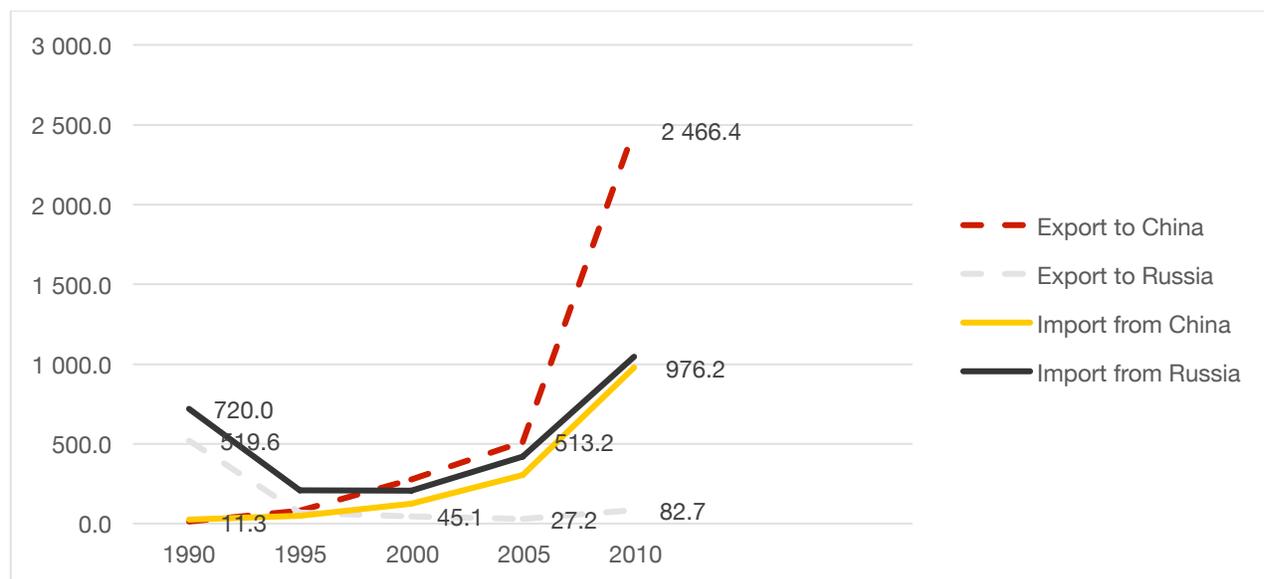
¹¹⁵ Mongolia established a partnership with the EU, observer and later membership status in the OSCE, and Global Partner of the NATO (similar to Japan and South Korea). See *Mongolia and the EU* (2016, December 5) Retrieved from https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mongolia_en/1548/Mongolia%20and%20the%20EU; *Mongolia Joins OSCE* (2012, November 21) Retrieved from <https://www.osce.org/cio/106302>;

¹¹⁶ See the transcript of the address by President Bush on November 21, 2005 (the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and also Office of the Press Secretary, White House, November 21, 2005. Retrieved www.whitehouse.gov). With the US support and other developed democracies, Mongolia hosted the 5th International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on 10-12 September 2003 and has become active member of the Community of Democracies since its launch in 2000.

parties in national elections like the US and Germany. Rather Beijing treated all political forces in Ulaanbaatar indifferently after their respective elections and institutionalized regular interactions with the two major political parties as well as small, third parties like the Civil Will (Gerelt-Od, personal interview, 2015; Indra, personal interview, 2015). Chinese main concerns in Mongolia continue to focus on Russia's geopolitical neutrality and non-interference in internal matters while deploying its soft powers to reduce Mongolians long-lasting anti-Chinese sentiments.

With the exception of the Dalai Lama's visit, all major issues were successfully resolved during the first period; therefore, the second period provided opportunities to focus on the institutionalization of political, economic, and cultural interactions. High-level exchanges and ministerial-level meetings became a regular occurrence and bilateral relations expanded into all spheres of cooperation, excluding security (Mendee, 2012, pp. 319-321). Between 2002 and 2003, Mongolia fit nicely into China's new foreign policy formulation for peripheral states. Under the "Good, Secure, and Wealthy Neighbour" framework, China sought to develop mutually beneficial bilateral relations with Mongolia and avoid triggering long-standing concerns over the threat of a so-called rising China (Wang, 2011, p. 51; Indra, personal interview, 2015). As a result, Mongolia became the only state without any major security concerns for leaders in Beijing. Due to the absence of overriding security issues, especially in terms of China's so-called 'three evils' (i.e., forces of terrorism, separatism, and extremism), the Chinese government continued to provide preferential access to its infrastructure, encouraged border trade, and supported Mongolia's desire to increase its transit capacity.

Figure 6. Mongolia's Trade with China and Russia (million USD)



Source: National Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2017

During the two decades, China becomes the most important trade partner (see Figure 6). Mongolia's reliance on Chinese investment, infrastructure, markets, and labor increased significantly; this strengthened China's economic leverage over Mongolia, yet the only time China employed this leverage was during the Dalai Lama's visits. For their part, Mongolia's leaders remained committed to the country's geopolitical neutrality vis-à-vis Russia and other strategic competitors of China like the US, India, or Japan. They were also committed to the 'one-China policy' in regards to Taiwan and other Chinese autonomous regions. Mongolia only developed economic and cultural ties with Taiwan, remained reluctant to grant asylum to Inner Mongolian activists or encourage domestic demonstrations in support of Inner Mongolian activists, and avoided conducting military, more specifically combat and intelligence cooperation with China's strategic competitors. To overcome Chinese suspicions over the multilateral peacekeeping exercises, especially with the United States, Mongolia welcomed PLA participation in such exercises and strived to gain Chinese support to establish a regional Center of Excellence in peacekeeping and disaster-relief. Besides their involvement in multinational peacekeeping exercises, both sides had restricted the military cooperation to symbolic confidence-building activities rather than the full scale of military-technical cooperation, including the provision of weaponry, professional military training, and staff and field exercises.¹¹⁷ However, two issues still

¹¹⁷ This reluctance, according to interviewees, was related to the lack of Chinese security interests in Mongolia and also the avoidance of triggering security concerns with Russia (Davaadorj, personal interview, 2015). At the same time, the Mongolian

required delicate handling. One was Chinese pressure for Mongolia to join in the SCO and the other was frequent visits of the Dalai Lama.

Because Mongolia solved its border issues in 1962 and de-militarized its border areas in the early 1990s, Beijing did not invite or pressure Mongolia to join in the Shanghai Five Dialogue in the 1990s. As Beijing promoted the SCO as an instrument to institutionalize its relations with Central Asian states along with Russia, Mongolia refused to join in the SCO because of the uncertainty of Sino-Russian collaboration and avoidance of being identified with the authoritarian states. However, as Moscow joined Beijing momentarily to advance the SCO as a tool to reduce Western influence in Sino-Russian periphery, pressure on Mongolia increased; as a result, Mongolia reluctantly became the first observer of the organization in 2004. This occurred at a time when Russia was re-asserting its influence on Central Asian states from 2001 and persuaded China and other Central Asian states to remove the Western military presence. On July 5, 2005, the SCO jointly issued a declaration demanding the United States “set a timeline for its withdrawal of military forces from the region” (*The New York Times*, 2005). Therefore, Mongolia’s choice to join the SCO was done in order to reduce pressure from its neighbours to endorse regional cooperation initiatives. In reality, Beijing had more interest in having Mongolia as a member of its key regional initiative than the Kremlin, who wanted Mongolia to be a part of its regional development projects and accommodate its special economic interests (e.g., railways, energy grids, and key mining) rather than Beijing’s ones (Mendee, 2012).

The Dalai Lama has remained the only unresolved issue in Sino-Mongolian relations since 1990. Because of close religious and cultural connections with Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama is regarded the religious leader for Mongolian Buddhist worshippers. Despite Chinese objections, the Dalai Lama made six private visits to Mongolia at the request of the Mongolian monasteries and worshippers, as discussed in the previous chapter. Each visit caused explicit warnings from the Chinese government and often resulted in some type of economic punishment. For example, in November 2002, China closed its rail border for 36 hours to delay all trans-Mongolian rail transports and Mongolia’s trade, which heavily relies on Chinese rail and ports.¹¹⁸ The main concern on both sides has been China’s intentions of controlling the reincarnation process of the next Dalai Lama. Beijing does not want the next Dalai Lama to be reincarnated in Mongolia

military was also reluctant to engage deeply in the security field with China, rather preferring Russia and NATO members (Mendee, 2012, pp. 309-321).

¹¹⁸ Dalai Lama first visited Mongolia in 1979, and made seven visits in 1991, 1994, 1995, 2002, 2006, 2008, and 2011.

whereas Mongolian religious leaders reject Beijing's influence to select religious leaders (Mashbat, 2007). This issue will remain the most delicate matter for the bilateral relations between Beijing and Ulaanbaatar. The Dalai Lama issue has often triggered India's involvement. For Mongolia, India has been a strong political and religious link since 1973, yet for China it's been a key strategic competitor; therefore, the Dalai Lama might have been considered as an important card for Delhi. The Dalai Lama's first visit occurred in the 1970s during the contentious period for Sino-Soviet and Sino-Indian relations. For Mongolians, the Dalai Lama's visits have had two major implications: first being respect for the religious freedom and the other the issue of sovereignty (i.e., handling its foreign and domestic affairs without any foreign interventions).

Besides these two issues, Chinese authorities did not interfere in domestic politics, react to Mongolia's cozy relations with Western powers, or complain about its explicit protectionist policies against Chinese investments. Although Chinese state-owned enterprises had more advantages than Western and Russian companies in terms of proximity, efficiency, infrastructure, and financing, Mongolian leaders have been reluctant to welcome any major Chinese companies such as the Shenghua Group or Chalco, who had both expressed interests in investing in infrastructure and mining projects (Indra, personal interview, 2015; Shurkhuu, personal interview, 2015). Instead, Mongolian leaders explicitly welcomed investments from the so-called third neighbours (the US, Germany, Japan, Canada, and Australia) to generate their economic interests in order to diversify Mongolia's economic dependency. In addition, Mongolian authorities had been consistently worried about a potential demographic push from China. The desire to prevent a massive influx of Chinese immigrants was reflected in both the 1992 Constitution (i.e., prohibition of land ownership by foreigners) and the 1993 Immigration Law (i.e., imposing restrictions on the number of permanent foreign residents and immigrants). The 1994 National Security Concept also securitized the "Mongolian culture and way of life" and "protection of genetic pools of the population" as a preventive measure against the increase of Chinese influence (Mendee, 2011, p. 18). Beijing did not directly complain or pressure Mongolia over these discriminatory stances on Chinese investors and citizens. Instead the Chinese government increased its 'soft powers' through humanitarian assistance, educational scholarships, and cultural exchanges intensively in the second period. Beijing, for example, increased the number of government scholarships to up 1,000 students per year while organizing official tours for Mongolian youths and journalists. The number

of Mongolian students in China reached 6,200 in 2010, compared to only 170 students a decade before.¹¹⁹ China also provided over 1.8 billion yuan worth of funding for developmental and humanitarian assistance, including major construction projects (Dagiisuren, 2014, pp. 88-99). In addition to the Mongolian former ruling party's regular exchanges as a successor communist party, Chinese authorities institutionalized regular exchanges and tours for opposition parties' leaders as well as popular third party leaders on an annual basis.¹²⁰ By 2010, the Mongolian – Chinese Parliamentary Group had not only become the largest parliamentary organizations, but also one of the most attractive groups for Mongolian parliament members (Mendee, 2018, p. 18). The economic reality of Chinese trade and investment along with sustained interactions with China for over two decades helps explain the increased interests among lawmakers to China. By 2010, 80 percent of Mongolian exports, mostly copper, coal, and other natural resources, went into the Chinese market while about 30 percent of Mongolia's imports and over half of its foreign investment came from China (Indra, personal interview, 2015; Shurkhuu, personal interview, 2015). Despite these facts, the Mongolian government did not change any of the restrictive laws and regulations restricting investments from China. Chinese authorities and government officials also did not make any statements regarding domestic politics (including the election) or organize any high-level visits around the time of elections. Rather, one of the main concerns continues to be the lingering anti-Chinese sentiments, which usually contributes to restrictive policies against Chinese investments, business, and people in Mongolia.

In a nutshell, despite having powerful economic leverages, China has avoided interfering in Mongolia's domestic politics as long as Mongolia pursues its policies of geopolitical neutrality vis-à-vis Russia, Japan, and India, and non-interference in Chinese internal matters. Mongolian scholar Indra B as well as China's leading Mongolia expert and former ambassador to Mongolia, Gao Shumao, rightly pointed out that Sino-Mongolian interests coincided in the last two decades to bolster friendly and peaceful relations.¹²¹ Therefore, Chinese authorities have been more concerned

¹¹⁹ See Interview of Chinese Ambassador to Mongolia, *Uls Turiin Toim (Political Digest Newspaper)*, (March 25, 2011), retrieved at <http://economy.news.mn/content/59951.shtml>.

¹²⁰ Interestingly, the former ruling party reached out the Chinese communist party, Vietnamese, Cuban, North Korean and other communist parties as an inheritor of the communist party and common legacy.

¹²¹ Both scholars tend to agree that Sino-Mongolian relations have been free from any security concerns such as Taiwan or American military encirclement or the 'three evils' (Indra, personal interview, 2015; Gao Shumao, 2011). Ambassador Gao Shumao served as the Chinese Ambassador to Mongolia in 2003-2007 and has remained as a key Chinese academic on Sino-Mongolian relations in Beijing.

with Mongolia's geopolitical neutrality towards China vis-à-vis Russia and its domestic stability, which could affect stability of Chinese autonomous regions.

DOMESTIC POLITICAL DYNAMICS

In the second period, Mongolian leaders did not encounter any major geopolitical challenges like their counterparts in Central Asia, the Caucasus, or Eastern Europe. All relevant great powers lacked geostrategic interests in Mongolia even though Mongolian leaders reached out to the Kremlin to revive traditional defence ties and NATO members to expand its security cooperation. Against emerging Western and Chinese economic interests, Russia attempted to re-assert its interests in major mining and infrastructure projects, but its attempts were constrained by Mongolian domestic politics (Radchenko, 2018, pp. 121-123). Despite its powerful economic leverage, Beijing pursued its principles of non-interference, except when it came to the frequent visits of the Dalai Lama (Soni, 2009). Building on its new ideological ties with the United States, Mongolian leaders used both its military deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan and mining boom to welcome Western security and economic interests, strengthen its democratic identity, and *soft balance* against its two more powerful neighbours.¹²² Within this favourable external context, electoral democracy with a two-party system was irreversibly consolidated after undergoing all kinds of possible tests such as a supermajority in 2000, grand-coalitions in 2004, and post-election rioting in 2008 (Croissant, A., & Vo'ikel, 2012; Reilly, 2011; Maškarinec, 2017). Electoral democracy has become “the only game in town” because the two major political parties have been committed to transferring political power only through parliamentary, provincial, and presidential elections (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 5).

The Former Ruling Party – Winning Parliamentary and Presidential Elections

The Parliamentary Election in 2000

As Sheldon Severinghaus, a long-time observer of Mongolian politics, regretfully wrote in 2000, “the pendulum of power swung back again to the MPRP.... creating another one-party government, similar in numbers to that in 1992” (2001, p. 62). The MPRP won 72 seats of the 76-member legislature and collected 51.7 percent of votes thorough the majoritarian electoral system. The two main opposition parties, the Democratic Union Coalition and the newly-established Civil Will Party, only won one seat each. The Mongolian Democratic New Socialist Party, which was

¹²² On ‘soft-balancing,’ see Pape, 2005; Paul, 2005; Brooks & Wohlforth, 2005; He & Keng, 2008. The overarching international and regional (bi-polar) system will not allow either Mongolia or the US and Japan to hard balance against China or Russia.

founded by a wealthy entrepreneur, Erdenebat Badarch, also won a seat while an independent runner, Gundalai Lamjav, took the remaining seat.¹²³ In this election, 13 parties and three coalitions nominated their candidates; however, only the MPRP, the Democratic Union Coalition, and the Civil Will Party in coalition with another other small party, the Mongolian Green Party, were able to place candidates in all electoral districts. The other parties nominated a handful candidates while a total of 29 candidates ran independently. Later in the year, the MPRP also won in the provincial elections obtaining 569 seats out of 690 seats of the provincial and capital city councils; this allowed the MPRP to maintain the majority in all local councils and to elect MPRP members to city mayor and provincial governor posts (Tamir, 2004).

Three major factors contributed to the MPRP's supermajority in the parliamentary and local elections: the first was due to the opposition parties' failure of running the government in 1996 – 2000, the second to the MPRP's successful reforms and campaigns for the elections, and the last to the choice for majoritarian electoral system.

Following its victory, the Democratic Union coalition, as succinctly described by Severinghaus, “seemed to do everything it could to shoot itself in the foot” (Severinghaus, 2001, p. 62; and also, Finch, 2002; Rossabi, 2005). Firstly, the Democratic Union was overridden by office-seeking behaviors of its popular leaders because the coalition was a merger of the three opposition parties. Instead of ideological coherence and guiding principles, these parties allied around an anti-incumbent election strategy. Leaders engaged in internal power struggle. In April 1998, the governing body of the Democratic Union Coalition agreed that the leader of the party should serve as the prime minister; thus caused removing its first Prime Minister Enkhsaikhan Mendsaikhan, who was the campaign manager for the 1996 election and became the first prime minister from opposition parties. Then, the coalition's second Prime Minister Elbegdorj Tsakhia was defeated by a vote of no confidence (Rossabi, 2005, p. 95). This triggered competition between the two other coalition parties – the MNPP and the MSDP – to have their leaders elected as the next prime minister. In the end, the MNPP succeeded in having two of its leaders – Narantsatsralt Janlav, city mayor, and Amarjargal Richinnyam, party chairman, - serve as the third and fourth prime ministers in the final years of the coalition government (Rossabi, 2005).¹²⁴ Secondly, the Democratic Union

¹²³ Erdenebat Badarch is the owner of the Erel LLC, which operates the gold mine and construction company; he successfully recruited well-known politicians and technocrats for his own party.

¹²⁴ Parliament members of opposition parties revealed Prime Minister Narantsatsralt's letter approving Russian stakeholders to sell off the Russian ownership to private companies without introducing to the Mongolian State Hural (Batbayar, 2003, p. 963).

government lost the public's trust during its government by politicizing public service and exacerbating the corruption problem (Prohl & Sumati, 2007, pp. 117-129). The coalition appointed party-affiliated, inexperienced politicians to senior and mid-level posts at all ministries, agencies, and state-owned enterprises. The politicization of public service had become a 'frequent, expected' phenomenon, in which senior public servants were replaced following each change of the coalition prime minister and/or cabinet members. Another aspect that undermined the opposition parties' image was the 'winner takes all' approach to the privatization of state enterprises, including banking and industrial firms. For example, the highly contested take-over of the Russian-Mongolian joint copper factory, Erdenet, represented the apex of the opposition parties' desire to control all key economic assets.¹²⁵ Thirdly, on 2 October 1998, Zorig Sanjaasuren, a prominent leader of democratic revolution celebrated for his contribution to the peaceful transition in 1990, was murdered. His murder occurred while he was a Member of Parliament and Minister of Infrastructure Development and rumored to be the next candidate to the post of prime minister. Notably, Zorig had been extremely critical of his colleagues for advancing their parochial interests over national and coalition priorities. Lastly, opposition parties had difficulties preparing for the upcoming elections due to their continued infighting and office-seeking competition. Due to their internal political crisis and failed governance, parties and prominent politicians distanced from the discredited Democratic Union Coalition prior to the 2000 parliamentary election by establishing new parties, joining in others, or running independently. Particularly, the MSDP decided to run separately. MP Oyun Sanjaasuren, who had taken her murdered brother Zorig's parliamentary seat, decided to establish a separate party – the Civil Will Party – and then formed a coalition with another small party, the Mongolian Green Party. The majority of sources also agree that opposition parties lost a number of potential parliamentary seats because of how many of their most popular politicians competed against each other in the same electoral district (Dorligjav, personal interview, 2016; Bold personal interview, 2015; Amarjargal, personal interview, 2015).

Narantsatsralt was immediately ousted by non-confidence votes (Munkh-Erdene, 2010, pp. 320-321). More discussions on Erdenet, see Rossabi, 2005, p. 204.

¹²⁵ The Erdenet take-over was the most contested, widely known case. The long-time director of the Erdenet factory, Otgonbileg Shagdar, who had closer ties with the MPP and its affiliated present Bagabandi Bandi, refused to accept the DP-led government's decision to transfer the authority to the DP-affiliated new director Dorligjav Damba; that caused the DP officials to break into the director's office while Mr. Otgonbileg fled with the stamp (Batbayar, 2002, pp. 109-110; 2003, p. 963). In the communist and now post-communist bureaucracy, the stamp is a key element of authority. Without an official stamp, documents are not considered official. Therefore, withholding the organization's stamp would delay any documents since documents not bearing stamps would be considered incomplete.

The MPRP was different. For one, it was a strong opposition party that had held 25 seats in the 1996 parliament, the presidency in 1997, and also had control over local governments. In parliament, the MPRP was able to challenge any legislative initiatives of the Democratic Union and even to win no-confidence votes when coalition members were divided. Despite the constitutional requirement to become non-partisan after assuming the presidency, the MPRP-nominated president Bagabandi Natsag still effectively exercised his power of ‘endorsement’ against the opposition party’s nominees for the post of prime minister. Bagabandi, for example, turned down the Democratic Union’s nominee Ganbold Davaadorj seven times, Gankhuyag Galsanpuntsag thrice, and Bat-Uul Erdene once. This intensified the internal conflicts within the Democratic Union and consequently weakened its majority parliament. After appointing its member as the city mayor in the 1998 by-election, the MPRP had total control over all provincial councils and governor’s offices.¹²⁶ This also weakened the Democratic Union coalition’s policy implementation and influence at the local level. Secondly, the MPRP firmly adapted the social democratic ideology in its party charters and election platforms. With the weakening of the MSDP and its joining in the Democratic Coalition Union, the MPRP reached out to the Socialist International as many other former communist successor parties of Central and Eastern European post-communist states had done and officially became an observer in 1999. However, the MSDP still remained as the MPRP’s main obstacle. In 1990, the MSDP, a party established mostly by science lecturers and researchers at the Mongolian National University and Academy of Science, declared their ideological orientation as social-democratic, joined in the Socialist International as a consultative member in 1992, and then became a full member in 1996. After the MSDP joined the Democratic Union coalition and was absorbed in the office-seeking struggles in the government, the MPRP succeeded in demonstrating its ideological coherence and consolidated its stance within the Socialist International. Finally, MPRP leaders made major reforms to increase its social bases, especially membership and supporters, and conducted systematic studies to prepare for the elections (with regular polls, interviews, and voter-related data). To institutionalize its supporters and reach out to specific segments of the society, the MPRP established the Mongolian Women’s Union – Social Democracy in 1994, the Mongolian Youth Union - Social Democracy in 1997, the Mongolian Student Union – Social Democracy in 1998, and the Veteran’s Union. All of these

¹²⁶ When the Democratic Union Coalition nominated Mayor Narantsatsralt for the third Prime Minister, the MPRP-dominated council of the capital city voted in favour of Enkhbold Miyegombo as a mayor of the capital city. As a result, the MPP took the leadership of the city, which became the most important base for the resource and elections.

public organizations were highly institutionalized with their own charters, chain of commands, and nation-wide organizations. In 1999, the MPRP absorbed its breakaway party, the Mongolian Traditional United Party, with its 8,300 members and also entered into collaboration with another strong public organization, the Mongolian Trade Union. Prior to the 2000 parliamentary election, the MPRP recruited business entrepreneurs with promises of public posts. Immediately after the election, vice ministerial posts were created at all ministries and agencies. These new posts were all awarded to the MPRP-affiliated business entrepreneurs in return for their financial support during the election (Amarjargal, personal interview, 2015; Dash-Yondon, personal interview, 2015). Opposition parties used this approach for the first time in 1996 elections, but now the MPRP deliberately created and implemented this method for the 2000 parliamentary and local elections. Beyond these types of organizational reforms, the MPRP leaders exonerated and renewed the party membership of Tsedenbal, and capitalized on the MPRP-led governments' efforts to restore the religious traditions and artifacts, including the re-creation of the 86-foot standing Megjid Janraisag Buddha statue in 1996. These were tactical efforts to win votes of elder generations, who became critical of the Democratic Union coalition and also of the MPRP leaders of 1990s.

According to Geddes, Nohlen, and Siavelis & Valenzuela, the majoritarian electoral system also potentially contributed to the MPRP's victory (Geddes, 1996, pp. 15-25; Nohlen, 1996, pp. 43-50; Siavelis & Valenzuela, 1996, pp. 77-89). These claims may have merit, but more research is required to fully ascertain the direct link between the choice of the electoral system and survivability of the former ruling party. The majoritarian electoral system does provide more opportunities for large political parties such as MPRP and DP than smaller ones or independent runners. However, a similar argument could also be made for the opposition party's victory in the 1996 parliamentary election, in which the opposition party gained a highly disproportionate total of seats. This suggests that the choice of the electoral system may not be a key factor for the ruling party's dominance in the parliamentary election.

The Presidential Election in 2001

A similar dynamic played out in the 2001 presidential election. The MPRP's candidate, incumbent president Bagabandi, won 59 percent with over a 50 percent majority in all electoral districts, except in the home province of his competitor Gonchigdorj Radnaasumberel, a nominee of the newly established Democratic Party. The third party (Civil Will Party) candidate, Dashnyam received 3.5 percent of the vote (General Election Commission, 2008).

For the MPRP, this was an expected victory given its recent success in the parliamentary and local elections as well as the high rating of president Bagabandi versus the unstable Democratic Union coalition-led parliament and cabinet. But, for opposition parties, this was still an important election. Most importantly, this was the first election in which the opposition parties had popular leaders, who now met the constitutional minimum age (45 years) requirement for presidential candidates. Because of this requirement, the opposition parties had to nominate the first president Ochirbat twice in the 1993 and 1997 elections. In addition, the opposition parties also agreed to establish one party after the devastating parliamentary and local elections. In December 2000, two major opposition parties - Mongolian National Democratic Party and Mongolian Social Democratic Party and three small parties merged into one political party, the Democratic Party, and agreed to prepare first for the 2001 presidential election and then for the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in 2004 and 2005. Despite these efforts, the Democratic Party lost in the 2005 presidential election. The absence of unifying ideological principles, except the anti-incumbent premise, remained as their main weakness in addition to factional infighting and office-seeking behaviors after elections.

The Grand Coalition and Power-Sharing

The 2004 Parliamentary Election

The result of the 2004 parliamentary election in June shocked the leaders of the ruling party, whose party won 36 seats with 48.2 percent of the votes while the opposition, the “Motherland-Democracy” coalition, obtained 34 seats with 44.2 percent of the votes (General Election Commission, 2008). Three independent candidates and a small party won the remaining four seats. In total, three coalitions, seven parties, and a few independent candidates competed in the parliamentary election, which was organized again through the majoritarian system. Since neither the ruling party, the MPRP, nor the Motherland-Democracy coalition received 39 seats – the constitutional requirement to establish their own cabinet – they agreed to form a coalition government in which government would be run by the Motherland-Democracy coalition Prime Minister in the first half of the term and by an MPRP one in the second half. In October of that same year, the MPRP again dominated in the local elections for councils of the capital city/districts and provinces/soums; however, the Motherland-Democracy coalition gained more seats (235 out of 690) than in previous elections. For the first time, opposition parties won three provinces,

Khuvsgul, Khentii, and Sukhbaatar; this enabled them to elect their members as provincial governors and have influence over local governments.¹²⁷ But, in the capital city council, the MPRP won 37 of 40 seats, leaving only two seats for the opposition parties and one for an independent candidate.¹²⁸ Unlike earlier elections with lopsided victories, the 2004 parliamentary elections forced the two parties to collaborate in order to prevent political instability and to repeat costly elections. This election also raised the importance of small parties and independent members for the two major parties in establishing coalition governments.

Prior to the 2004 elections, leaders of the ruling party were extremely confident due to a four-year period of political stability, significant economic growth, and, more importantly, the party's control over the parliament, presidency, and executive offices at the central and local governments. Just before the election, the ruling party leaders, General Secretary Idevkhten and Byambadorj, explained that the likelihood of getting elected was the main selection criteria for the MPRP's candidates.¹²⁹ At the same time, the MPRP-led government systematically raised salaries of local government officials, including judiciary and law enforcement personnel, a few months before the elections (Barkmann, 2006, p. 189). MPRP members, including many of those serving at political and government posts, were required to conclude the 'batlamj' [pledge/contract] not to compete with the party's candidates either independently or from other parties, but only work for their own party's candidates (Barkmann, 2006, p. 188). Unlike the 1996 elections, the MPRP was well prepared. It was accepted as a member of the Socialist International in 2003; this enhanced the party's ideological basis as a socialist, leftist party and served as a strong ideological foundation for the party's election platform. The party introduced its election platform and candidates well before the deadline despite intense internal competitions among candidates for electoral districts. Nevertheless, the ruling party did not succeed in its plan to obtain a majority.

In spite of the lack of a unifying ideology, except the anti-incumbent impetus, opposition parties prepared and campaigned well. First, following their dramatic defeat in previous elections, the Democratic Party appointed former Prime Minister Enkhsaikhan as a party chairman to lead the party into parliamentary and provincial elections. Enkhsaikhan was known as a skilled

¹²⁷ See Local Elections 2004, Open Society Forum, Retrieved October 18, 2004 from http://www.forum.mn/index.php?sel=news&obj_id=610

¹²⁸ See Local Elections 2004, Open Society Forum, Retrieved October 18, 2004 from http://www.forum.mn/index.php?sel=news&obj_id=611

¹²⁹ See "Who Said What?" Parliamentary Election 2004, Open Society Forum, Retrieved April 19, 2004 from http://www.forum.mn/index.php?sel=news&obj_id=231

campaign manager, who brought the victory for opposition parties in 1993 presidential and 1996 parliamentary elections. Second, under Enkhsaikhan's leadership, the Democratic Party leaders agreed to merge into an electoral coalition with three small parties, two of which were led by wealthy entrepreneurs. The Motherland – Mongolian Democratic New Socialist Party was established and funded by 'Erel' Erdenebat and 'Buyan' Jargalsaikhan who controlled the Republican Party. The third party was the Civil Will Party, which was run by Oyun, murdered democratic leader Zorig's sister, who had been in the parliament since 1998. On February 2004, these parties came together to declare themselves as the 'Motherland-Democracy' coalition. Third, all four parties divided up their electoral districts based on the careful studies of candidates who had high-probabilities of winning in respective districts. Since the three small parties did not have a nation-wide party infrastructure, the Democratic Party provided such a national infrastructure and placed 51 candidates. The Motherland – Mongolian Democratic New Socialist Party received a quota of 20 candidates while leaving five quota spaces for the Civil Will Party and the Republican Party.¹³⁰ The coalition also allocated electoral districts for the local elections and campaigned together. Finally, the Democratic Party allowed a number of its popular politicians to run independently and then welcomed successful ones back to the coalition immediately after their victories.¹³¹ Instead of nominating popular politicians, senior bureaucrats and/or technocrats, the Democratic Party chose wealthy business entrepreneurs, who could rely on their own funding and resources (Gerelt-Od, personal interview, 2016; Barkmann, 2006, p. 198). According to MPRP secretary Enkhmandakh, by spending less on the nationwide campaigns and capitalizing on the local needs and demands of voters, the coalition devised campaign tactics that contrasted sharply with the predominate tactics of the ruling party (Enkhmandakh, 2006, p. 97). All these activities required Enkhsaikhan and other leaders to make a series of bargains with their own party factions, three small parties, as well as independent runners.

Four interesting developments happened during this election. First, like the ruling MPRP party did during its opposition years 1996 - 2000, the Democratic Party, a core and largest party in the Motherland-Democracy coalition, also took measures to formalize its different affiliated organizations such as youth, student, women, and veteran groups, especially those that took part in

¹³⁰ See "Who Said What?" Parliamentary Election 2004, Open Society Forum, Retrieved April 19, 2004 from http://www.forum.mn/index.php?sel=news&obj_id=231

¹³¹ For example, the MPRP expelled MP Oyunkhorol when she was decided to run independently whereas the Motherland Democracy Coalition did not restrict its members to run independently (*Unen Newspaper*, May 22, 2003).

the 1989-1990 democratic movements. Second, the MPRP and Motherland Democracy coalition recruited successful business entrepreneurs, many of whom had already identified with these two major parties, while many businesses started to work with and support politicians from both parties. This certainly created tensions between the party's career politicians and financially powerful business entrepreneurs over the allocation of electoral districts since the majority of career politicians needed to rely on the party's resources (financial and staff) while business entrepreneurs could fund and run their own campaigns. Third, political parties started to invest more into building relationships with the homeland councils (*nutagyn zuvlul*), which are influential local advocacy organizations. Because 56 out of 76 members of the parliament represented ridings outside of the capital city, political parties and politicians needed additional support from homeland councils. The role of homeland councils was even more critical for the local elections for positions at the provincial governance (i.e., governors and local legislative chambers of province and counties). Increasingly, especially from the 2000 and 2001 elections, homeland councils became Mongolia's most influential civil society organizations advocating local/regional interests in the national politics while bridging communications between populations in the rural provinces with natives who were currently residing in urban centres. Finally, two major parties began to make direct financial promises in their campaign platforms often publicized in quite competitive manners. For instance, the Motherland-Democracy coalition promised to distribute 10,000 tugrug for every child whilst the MPRP promised a one-time 100,000 tugrug per every newborn and 500,000 tugrug for newlyweds (*Mongolyn Medee Newspaper*, May 27, 2004).¹³²

The Presidential Election in 2005

The 2005 presidential election was organized around advanced electoral procedures. The two major parties conducted internal competitions for their candidates. Each candidate then submitted their election platforms and campaign funding data. The four selected presidential candidates also followed the guidelines of the General Election Commission and voluntarily endorsed a contract for fair competition, which called for participation in live debates and for all candidates to formally congratulate the winner immediately after the announcement of the official results. These different measures indicated the acceptance and compliance of a new political culture and electoral standards in Mongolia. In this election, MPRP nominee Enkhbayar Nambar won with 53.4 percent while the major opposition party candidate Enkhsaikhan obtained 20.2

¹³² See the campaign platforms and programs, available at the General Election Commission of Mongolia.

percent, Motherland Party's 'Erel' Erdenebat 11.3 percent, and Republican Party's 'Buyan' Jargalsaikhan 13.8 percent (General Election Commission, 2017). The MPRP had clear advantages in the presidential election. First, the party began to dominate in parliament after the coalition of opposition parties divided over cabinet posts and the selection candidates for the presidential election. All councils and governors of the capital city and provinces fell under the MPRP's control. For example, Enkhbayar won with over 51 percent in the capital city and most provinces. Even in the areas where he gathered below 51 percent, he still dominated over the other three candidates.¹³³ Second, the MPRP had a clear, uncontested candidate. Under the constitutional term limit, the MPRP-nominated president Bagabandi was not allowed to re-run for a third time. This made Enkhbayar – who had reformed the party in 1997, served as prime minister between 2000-2004, and was speaker of the parliament in 2004-2005 – the party's obvious candidate. Enkhbayar had accumulated considerable power and influence in the years leading up the election, not only holding the party's chairmanship but also heading the government. Third, the MPRP carried out a clear, attractive, and successful campaign by introducing Enkhbayar's campaign platform early on and reaching out to voters through a variety of party organizations and party-affiliated politicians at local levels. He had strongest foreign policy achievements – fearlessly supported the military's deployment to Iraq in order to develop a closer tie with the Bush administration, settled the Mongolian debt to Russia, and recharged relations with India. His photos with George Bush, Vladimir Putin, Kofi Annan, and the Dalai Lama carried influential messages to voters. Enkhbayar was also already known to rural voters due to initiating the 'Millennium Road' highway construction project that connected all of the isolated provinces during his 2000-2004 cabinet post. Such achievements were skillfully utilized during his campaign.

In contrast, opposition parties did not prepare well for the presidential election for two main reasons. First, personalized party leaders – 'Erel' Erdenebat and 'Buyan' Jargalsaikhan – left the Motherland-Democracy Coalition and Civil Will and Republican Party coalitions respectively in order to self-nominate themselves to the presidency. This divided votes for opposition parties and, provided a clear advantage to the MPRP. Second, members of the Motherland-Democracy Coalition were also divided and fought over cabinet posts (ministries, agencies, and state-owned enterprises) with the over-arching, as called, Grand Coalition government with the MPRP. Since

¹³³ According to the General Election Commission and Open Society Forum data, four provinces (Dornod, Khuvsgul, Zavkhan, and Orhon-Uul), where the Democratic Party had strong support, Enkhbayar received less than 51 percent of the votes. See Election 2005, Open Society Forum, Retrieved November 15 2017 from http://www.forum.mn/index.php?sel=news&menu_id=45

these slots were limited, factions and small parties engaged in intense competition while issuing threats of withdrawing from the coalition or joining the MPRP. In retrospect, opposition parties' leaders did not provide full support to Mr. Enkhsaikhan's campaign mostly due to their internal power struggles over the party's leadership.

Losing Trust in Parties: Post-Election Riots in 2008 & Opposition President in 2009

The Parliamentary Election in 2008

A day after the parliamentary election, leaders of opposition parties staged peaceful demonstrations, which gradually turned into violent mobs; this resulted in declaring the first-ever state of emergency in Mongolia.¹³⁴ On 14 July, the Chairman of the General Election Commission submitted the names of 66 new parliament members to the President in order to call for the first session of the new parliament.¹³⁵ Even though ten seats remained disputed, the law permits a first parliamentary session if the election passes the threshold of fifty-seven members. In total, 356 candidates, including 45 independent candidates, from eleven parties and one coalition of three small parties competed in the parliamentary elections. The MPRP, a former ruling party, won 39 seats, which enabled them to establish their own cabinet, the Democratic Party, as the main opposition party, won 25 seats, Oyun's Civil Will Party won a single seat, and one independent candidate was elected as well.¹³⁶ After two months of political crisis, a populist politician, Bayar Sanj, chairman of the MPRP and incumbent Prime Minister, convinced his party and leaders of the Democratic Party to establish a coalition government, by offering half of the cabinet posts. This was a so-called non-standard decision for both parties: one is giving away its constitutional right to form a single-party government whereas the other is leaving its role of the opposition behind.

Because of the disputed parliamentary elections, the enforcement of the state of emergency, and the delay in forming the parliament and government, all parties had limited time to prepare for the provincial elections on October 12. However, unlike earlier elections, political parties nominated their most popular candidates to provincial elections; this increased the competition of the local elections. Political party leaders began to realize the importance of winning in the local

¹³⁴ There were post-election demonstrations in Erdenet and Darkhan, second and third largest cities, and far western Uvs province. These demonstrations ended peacefully.

¹³⁵ Under the 1992 Constitution, both president and parliament are entitled to accept the election results and call for the inauguration ceremonies. After the parliamentary election, the President calls for the first session and directs the parliamentary sessions until the newly elected members elect the Speaker. Similarly, following the presidential election, the parliament votes of endorsing the election results whereas Speaker directs the presidential inauguration ceremony.

¹³⁶ See Election 2008, Open Society Forum, Retrieved October 15 2017 from http://www.forum.mn/index.php?sel=news&menu_id=44 and Election Results of 2008 Parliamentary Election, General Election Commission of Mongolia, Retrieved from http://gec.gov.mn/parliamentary_election/10

elections, including the capital city/provinces and capital city districts/provincial counties. The reasons for this are twofold. For one, having control over the local executive and legislative offices opens up opportunities to increase the visibility and resources of the controlling political parties.¹³⁷ The other reason appears to be connected to increasing significance of the local authority to approve and issue business permits, including ones for construction and mining. Even though the General Election Commission and relevant authorities prepared well for the provincial elections, the voter turnout ended up being the lowest since 1992.¹³⁸ The MPRP dominated in the majority of provincial elections whereas the Democratic Party gained sizable representations in the most of citizen's councils of the capital city/districts and provinces/counties.¹³⁹

The clearest indication for both the increased competition among political parties, especially the two major parties, and society's lack of trust and discontent was the July 1 event. A new generation of civil society leaders, including Batzandan, Magnai, and Republican Party Chairman Jargalsaikhan, who had all lost in the election, led the initial demonstration, but later that evening organizers lost control of the crowd, which turned into violent mob – clashing with the police and burning down the headquarter of the MPRP. According to the police and other accounts, there were about 8,000 protesters with many of them being intoxicated.¹⁴⁰ The police were reluctant to use force against the crowd, and instead took preventive measures (e.g. issuing warnings and demands), increased surveillance activities, and strengthened the protection of critical facilities (e.g., banking, courts, communication, government agencies). As the violence overwhelmed them, the Police Chief requested the President to declare a state of emergency; this prompted a National Security Council (NSC) meeting, involving the Prime Minister and Speaker. With unanimous agreement at the NSC, the President declared a 4-day state of emergency at midnight and established the National Security Emergency Staff, which was led by the Minister for Justice and Internal Affairs.¹⁴¹ This Presidential decree permitted the deployment of units from internal troops, border forces, and the military to support police personnel, who were dealing with the crowd and trying to contain the riot from further escalation and spillover.¹⁴² The police arrested

¹³⁷ The political party, which receives the majority of the seats in the provincial (also capital city) and counties' legislature, nominates the governor; thus providing opportunities for appointing party affiliated officials to the governor's office posts.

¹³⁸ Press release of the General Election Commission, September 26, 2008.

¹³⁹ See Election Results of 2008 Local Election, General Election Commission of Mongolia, Retrieved October 18 2017 from <http://www.gec.gov.mn/report/index.php?aimag=82>

¹⁴⁰ See the Working Group Report, Library of the Parliament (2008).

¹⁴¹ See the Presidential Decree #194, 1 July 2008 (Mendee & Last, 2009).

¹⁴² The Police Department deployed 3,000 personnel to increase the security of the surrounding area, cope with the crowd, and also conduct the evacuation from the burning headquarters building (The Press Release, Police Department, August 2, 2009).

998 people, of which 282 were intoxicated (Mendee & Last, 2009). According to the human rights groups, “of these 450 were investigated, of which around 300 were charged and 270 sentenced to 6 months to 5 years imprisonment for instigating, participating, looting and setting fire during post election protests” (NGO Coalition, 2008).¹⁴³ Several non-governmental organizations established the “Emergency Declaration – Human Rights Monitoring and Protection Coalition” and voiced their concerns of human rights’ violations over the arrest and detainment of protesters.¹⁴⁴ The decree also prohibited any types of public media (e.g., television, radio, newspaper, online media) except the Mongolian National Public Television and Radio, which worked under the National Security Emergency Staff. During the state of emergency, President Enkhbayar organized several roundtables with leaders of all political parties that had participated in the parliamentary elections, as well as the incumbent Prime Minister and Speaker, who were both from the ruling MPRP. The leaked minutes of these meetings demonstrated clear tensions between the two major political parties and all the other small third parties. The Democratic Party leaders demanded that the criminal investigations of protestors be stopped and all detainees be released while the third parties pushed for new elections in the disputed districts (Enkhbayar, 2012). As observed by Bulag, “curiously, no Western leaders have condemned the government’s handling of the riots, nor has the DP allegation of election fraud been supported by the international observers who insisted that the 2008 elections were largely fair and free” (2009, pp. 130-131).

There was no simple explanation or single cause for the July 1 protest. The parliamentary independent fact-finding mission, for example, concluded that the politicians who had lost in the elections instigated the protest and the police did not use enough force to contain the violence. Moreover, the report specifically blamed 91 protestors who had previous criminal records as well as the 282 intoxicated people, but the working group did not thoroughly investigate the usage of the lethal weapons during the implementation of the state emergency (Report of the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, 2009). The two major political parties engaged in a blame game: Prime Minister Bayar, who was also Chairman of the MPRP, blamed Elbegdorj, the

¹⁴³ See Open Society Forum Report, Retrieved September 18, 2016 https://www.forum.mn/p_pdf.php?obj_id=4795.

¹⁴⁴ Immediately after the declaration of the state of emergency, human right groups demanded access to detainees and voiced their concerns about violations of rights during the detention and interrogation process. As a result, the police provided access to concerned human rights and media groups. Human rights groups organized a number of forums in the aftermaths and provided their recommendations to the parliament, president and National Human Rights Commission. Under the pressure from several MPs and human rights groups, the judicial and police authorities provided reports and updates on handling the July 1 riots (Findings of the Parliamentary Subcommittee Hearing, June 22, 2010, retrieved June 10, 2017 from <https://news.mn/r/17993/>; The Report of the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, 2009).

opposition party leader who had organized the protests, whereas Elbegdorj blamed the ruling party for manipulating the election, starting from the registration to voting and counting processes.¹⁴⁵ Civil society groups and third party leaders blamed the two major parties for increasing the level of corruption, poverty, and irresponsible governance during the coalition government and also transforming political parties into clientelistic organizations, in which political-economic factions and business entrepreneurs gained influence and power. As succinctly argued by columnist Bolormaa,

“In fact, people showed up neither to defend “the Democratic Party” as Elbegdorj claimed nor “by the provocation of Elbegdorj” as asserted by Bayar [leader of the ruling party]. People, who had nothing to lose because they did not have jobs, future, and property, came to express their frustrations to “deaf” government and politicians, who had neglected human values and citizens’ rights” (Bolormaa, November 4, 2011).

Many scholars and influential politicians also have shared these views (Khajidmaa, 2009). The majority complained about how the degree of corruption, poverty, and deterioration of the public services contributed to the society’s declining trust in political parties, parliament, and the government. At the same time, Bat-Uul, one of the leaders of the democratic revolution, pointed out early signs of deterioration of the political culture of respecting the election results starting from the parliamentary and provincial elections in 2004. For example, immediately after the 2004 election, Bat-Uul himself led demonstrators to forcefully enter the National Broadcasting Building to express their discontent over the unequal use of the national radio and television for the elections and belittled the ruling party. In return, Khurelsukh, who was a leader of the youth organization of the ruling party, rallied against the opposition parties for belittling his party. Although both incidents ended at the edge of triggering a violent street clash between two parties, party leaders and the police managed to reach a political settlement. In Bat-Uul’s reasoning, politicians and parties were becoming less respectful for the rules of the game – the elections; therefore, all of the parties contributed to the escalation of the violence by not pursuing political and lawful settlements.

¹⁴⁵ Because the MPRP was in power in the parliament, cabinet as well local governance, the Democratic Party accused the MPRP – manipulated the voter and candidate registration process and exerted influence over the General Election Commission by delaying the counting and reporting the election results. Also, both parties accused each other of transporting voters to different electoral districts, which is known as the grasshopper scheme (Khajidmaa, 2009).

From 2004, as argued by several scholars and even politicians, the two main parties began to lose their political ideological orientations, and instead engaged in populist politics geared toward making monetary promises to the voters and acting ruthlessly to win the elections. Although it is difficult to demonstrate the direct causal relationship between the mining boom and increased competition among political parties in elections, the tendency of losing ideological orientation and making (social welfare-related monetary) promises did occur during the same timeframe. Bold Ts argues that political parties neglected their political orientations after the 2004 elections and even politicians were reluctant to express their views along political ideological lines. Party leaders and politicians were all interested in simply winning the elections – thus leading them to make unreasonable promises based mainly upon “what voters like to hear.” Starting during the 2004 elections, political parties began to introduce attractive monetary programs (promises) in the party’s election platforms. For example, according to economist Batsukh, political parties introduced 24 kinds of monetary programs in their election platforms (see Table 11), which would later serve as guiding documents for the 2009-2012 government’s action plan if these parties established a single-party or coalition government following the elections.

Table 11. List of Campaign Promises

No.	Types of Monetary Programs (Promises)
	Children’s Money
	To include citizens in free health examination
	To cover tuition
	To provide funding for housing
	To certify citizen’s loans
	To create funding for the loan at the soum (county) level
	To establish “Gratitude Fund” for elders
	To provide funding for employment, vocational training, small businesses
	To distribute “Erdene Share” and “Homeland’s Share”
	To provide secondary and high school textbooks free
	To provide scholarships to study in foreign university and colleges
	To fund people’s continuing education

- To provide salary for new mothers (maternity leave support)
- To increase pension and financial supports for elders
- To provide ger (dwelling) to vulnerable segments of the society
- To increase the salary of the public servants
- To provide monetary support for newly-weds
- To provide monetary support for newborns
- To give monetary support to the third baby of each family
- To provide monetary support for mothers with “Famous Mother – 2” award
- To provide monetary support for mothers with “Famous Mother – 1” award
- To implement free lunch program at the public schools
- To provide financial support people living in rural areas
- To make high education free

Note: Batsukh, Ts., “Analysis on the Social Welfare Programs in the Election Platforms of Parties and Coalition,” June 24, 2008. Retrieved from https://www.forum.mn/index.php?sel=news&obj_id=2168

12 out of 24 items were included in the election platform of the MPRP, five in the Democratic Party’s platform, and seven in the Civil Will Party’s platforms. To gain popular votes, political parties’ promises for social welfare programs grew increasingly extravagant and detached from economic studies or impact assessments on how such monetary promises would impact the overall economy. For example, early in the campaign period, the Democratic Party promised to distribute 1 million tugrugs for each citizen under the “Erdenyn Khuvi” [Share of Treasure]. In response, the MPRP pledged to establish the “Ekh Orony Khishig Fund” [Motherland Blessing Fund] to allocate 1.5 million tugrugs, including the share of the mining projects, to each citizen. At the same time, both parties promised to continue previous monetary programs such as the monthly children’s (10,000 tugrug) and newlyweds money (500,000 tugrug) – both the result of the election platforms of two political parties. Researchers warned that only these competitive programs of 1 million or 1.5 million tugrugs would require additional funding, which would cost 7 times higher than the annual state budget to implement.¹⁴⁶ In addition, the two major parties included many other promises such as a 3 times salary increase for public servants, teachers, and doctors, a 3 times increase to pensions, and so forth. The key justification for these competitive welfare programs

¹⁴⁶ See Byambajav, E., “Economic Analysis on the Political Parties’ Campaign Platforms” June 16, 2008. Retrieved October 20, 2016 from https://www.forum.mn/index.php?sel=news&obj_id=2149

was the expected revenues generated from the exploitation of major mineral deposits – copper (Oyu Tolgoi, Tsagaan Suvarga), coking coal (Tavan Tolgoi), silver (Asgat), and iron ore (Tumurtei).

These election promises were clear indicators of how the parties' the sole objective was to win the election. In December 2007, after skillfully obtaining the leadership of the MPRP as well as Prime Minister, Bayar declared, "Our party's main objective is to win in the 2008 parliamentary election" and actively engaged in aggressive political campaigning and strengthening the party's organizational capacity as well as funding.¹⁴⁷ Both parties – the MPRP and Democratic Party – required a 20-30 million tugrugs donation from potential candidates; this increased the number of candidates who had either their own business or relations to large businesses (Amarjargal, personal interview, 2015; Dash-Yondon, personal interview, 2015). This apparently reduced the public support for two dominant parties, and opened up space for third parties and independent runners. However, the two major parties, according to several insiders and observers, contended that they had been working together to marginalize third parties and emerging popular activists like Batzandan, Magnai, Uyanga, and Ganbaatar (Gerelt-Od, personal interview, 2015). Therefore, the MPRP's decision to establish a coalition government was likely done to 1) ease the political circumstances following the July 1st protest, 2) pass the large mining investment agreements on Oyu Tolgoi and Tavan Tolgoi deposits, 3) find ways to fulfill its election promises with the major opposition party, and 4) minimize the roles of third parties and civil society movements.

The Presidential Election in 2009

The presidential election was conducted amidst this reconciliation between the two major political parties as well as a series of investigations, parliamentary hearings, and conviction of senior police officers in connection with July 1 event.¹⁴⁸ The main concern for all actors – political leaders, parties, election authorities, and the public – was the prevention of further post-election violence. To achieve this, the General Election Commission was restructured – its political neutrality was increased and processes for the elections became clearer than previous elections. Police and security forces were trained and equipped to deal with the post-election riots and all the relevant laws, regulations, and procedures for inter-agency collaboration, especially between the

¹⁴⁷ See Bold, Ts., "Deviation Process from Parties," November 11, 2007. Retrieved November 11, 2016 from http://forum/mn/p_print.php?obj_id=4303

¹⁴⁸ The parliamentary working group and governmental inter-agency working groups were established. Several MPs along with parliamentary human rights groups conducted public hearings.

police, para-military and military units, were revised. It ended up being the most competitive presidential election in Mongolia's history, in which, for the first time, the incumbent president lost their bid for re-election.

The Democratic Party candidate, Elbegdorj, received 51.9 percent of the votes, whereas the incumbent, MPRP-candidate, Enkhbayar, had 48.7 percent of the votes. Enkhbayar had stronger support in rural provinces while Elbegdorj's popularity was higher in the capital city, his home province, as well as in DP-stronghold provinces like Khuvsgul, Selenge, and Dornod. As happened in the 2008 parliamentary elections, the Democratic Party declared Elbegdorj's victory based on the party's count before the official announcement by the General Election Commission. Although Enkhbayar expressed his concerns about disputed districts, he accepted a narrow defeat and said that he would respect the election results. However, MPRP insiders and later Enkhbayar himself admitted that he was pressured by party leaders to accept the defeat in order to avoid another round of post-election conflicts (Enkhbayar, 2012; Byambasuren, personal interview, 2015).

Indeed, Enkhbayar was a strong candidate, who had accumulated incredible power and influence within his party during his party leadership and when he served as Prime Minister as well as Speaker of the parliament. Then, he consolidated more influence over judiciary and security organizations while using foreign policy issues to build his international profile. With his adamant support for the military deployments to the US-led coalition operations, he welcomed the US President George Bush to Mongolia in 2005 and later signed onto a compact agreement for \$285 million developmental aid from the US Millennium Challenge Account during his visit to the United States later that year. At the same time, he was well regarded in Mongolia after he lead efforts to successfully settle the Soviet debt while he was Prime Minister. Because of the commodity boom period, Mongolia's foreign relations had been quite progressive in attracting economic interests from developed democracies. Yet there were several factors that played against President Enkhbayar in this regard.

Firstly, his popularity within the party declined, especially after he became president. Under the constitution, the president must become politically neutral by resigning from political party posts and suspending party membership. This reduced Enkhbayar's influence noticeably within the party's decision-making body and party members began to criticize Enkhbayar's authoritarian style. For example, a populist young influential politician, Khurelsukh Ukhnaa, wrote an open letter asserting that Enkhbayar and his spouse had misused their power and authority. In response, President Enkhbayar pressured the judiciary to charge Mr. Khurelsukh for mis-using

party funds.¹⁴⁹ This was just one example of contentious relations between the party leaders and the President Enkhbayar. It is quite likely that the new party leaders, as Enkhbayar repeatedly claimed in his interview, did not fully support his re-election campaign (Enkhbayar, 2011). However, Prime Minister Bayar, who was also the Party Chairman, denied such allegations (*Udryn Sonin*, October 18, 2011).¹⁵⁰

Secondly, the Democratic Party's campaign strategy and tactics were very effective. For one, the Democratic Party concluded agreements with Civil Will Party and Green Party to consolidate their support behind its candidate Elbegdorj. This precluded both parties from nominating their own candidates since each had one seat in the parliament. Importantly, it provided for voters a clear choice between the incumbent MPRP candidate and opposition parties' candidate. The Democratic Party campaign managers responded to the MPRP's negative campaign tactics – one related to a leaked video of Elbegdorj's fundraising in South Korea and there other an allegation about Elbegdorj's Chinese origins. The Democratic Party did not sufficiently explain Elbegdorj's fundraising activities in a foreign country, which were prohibited by law. Instead, they responded to the question of Elbegdorj's Chinese ethnicity. Five days before the Presidential Election, journalist Ariunaa's coverage of the alleged Chinese origins of Elbegdorj aired on TV5 channel, a Mongolian commercial news channel. According to her sources, candidate Elbegdorj's father was believed to have been a Chinese migrant from Xinjiang. In response, Elbegdorj flew from Ulaanbaatar to visit his mother in Khovd, a far western province, and asked her with tears in his eyes to speak on national television about his father's Mongolian origins.

Lastly, Elbegdorj's platform was to fight against corruption, which resonated with the society's widespread dissatisfaction over corruption, poverty, injustice, and the severe environmental degradation brought about by extensive mining operations. Yet, at the same time, Enkhbayar had been widely depicted as the 'godfather of corruption' in public discourse – when he led the government from 2000 to 2004 and exerted his influence over the judiciary. Although it was difficult to gauge the direct impact, it's notable that a poster describing Enkhbayar as a "Godfather of Corruption" had not been removed from the main street in Ulaanbaatar and a notorious "Spider Web" [*Aalzany Tor*] article about Enkhbayar's corruption networks circulated

¹⁴⁹ Immediately after Khurelsukh's critical letter, the court began a case and then dropped charges after Khurelsukh issued a formal apology from the president.

¹⁵⁰ After the presidential election, Enkhbayar was interested in running in the fall 2009 parliamentary by-election, but the party refused and nominated young politician Zorigt Dashdorj instead. After this, Enkhbayar began to openly fight against his party and took advantage of the name change of the MPRP in 2010 by establishing a breakaway party.

widely through social media.¹⁵¹ The image of Enkhbayar as a corrupted, authoritarian gave Elbegdorj's campaign a notable advantage, especially when it came to the key issue of fighting against corruption.

ANALYSIS

Clearly, the overarching external environment has remained favourable to Mongolia's democratization in the second period, 2001 – 2010. The evidence presented in this chapter has shown that Mongolia did not fall into the category of countries in the 'reversal wave' (Huntington, 1991), 'resurgence of the predatory state' (Diamond, 2008), or 'competitive authoritarianism' (Way and Levitsky, 2010). Its democratic development also did not yield to the influence of authoritarian great powers – China (Bader, 2015) and Russia (Tolstrup, 2015; Way, 2015) – as expected by the autocracy promotion literature. The evidence highlights that external factors or influential agents (e.g., George Bush, Vladimir Putin) became less relevant to the domestic politics after electoral democracy was firmly settled in the first decade of 2000. In other words, external factors and actors did not have similar effect like they did during the 1990s, when the international system was dominated by Western powers and regional major powers had been weak and caught up with domestic matters.

Two important factors contributed to the consolidation of electoral democracy in Mongolia: one is external, specifically the absence of direct geopolitical competitions among great powers; and the other is the development of the competitive party system due to the successful regeneration of the ruling party. However, it is important to highlight these are not an exclusive list of factors. The evidence also points to the institutional choice angle, which I consider as a strong alternative argument here.

First, the evidence highlights that Mongolia did not experience direct geopolitical competitions from neighbouring authoritarian great powers and/or distant great powers; this provided a favourable environment for Mongolia's domestic politics. Neither great power was interested in interfering in Mongolia's elections or using their strong political and economic leverages to support or undermine specific Mongolian leaders or political parties as long as

¹⁵¹ It was not clear why Enkhbayar did not direct the removal of that big poster or did not restrict the circulation of the 'spider web' article. However, there is an interesting relationship in regards with media and politicians. Most of the media was owned or sponsored by politicians; therefore, the media usage became the most complicated business for the election purposes. For example, Presidential candidates concluded a '*haaltyn geree*' [closing agreement] with major medias to pay the media entity in order to not publish any negative news about themselves.

Mongolia remained committed to its geopolitical neutrality and that all great powers explicitly and implicitly remained committed to not asserting geostrategic advantages.

It was clear that Mongolia's neutrality was the most important aspect for Chinese and Russian security as well as the stability in their bordering regions with Mongolia. Their security interests in Mongolia were satisfied by keeping Mongolia neutral and not directly interfering. Although exaggerated by some scholars and policy-makers, the resurgence of Russian interests was primarily triggered by Mongolia's continuous efforts to revive the traditional bilateral relations and also potentially driven by Russian state-affiliated business entrepreneurs. However, it is quite clear the Kremlin was cautious not to trigger a 'security dilemma' by investing into security and defence cooperation.

In contrast, Chinese interests were also mainly centered on Mongolia's geopolitical neutrality and adherence to the non-interference in three important domestic matters: (1) human right and religious activists of Inner Mongolia and Tibet, (2) Taiwan, and (3) the Dalai Lama. Despite these pressures, I have not found any indications of Sino-Russian pressures to reduce Mongolia's ties with Western powers. It is clear that leaders in Beijing and the Kremlin did not oppose or pressure Mongolia to reduce its ties with the United States and its allies as long as political leaders in Washington, DC and Ulaanbaatar restricted their collaboration to only political, economic, and cultural spheres. In light of these, Mongolian defence ties with Western democracies have been explicitly limited to security cooperation through peacekeeping and disaster relief efforts rather than the establishment of bases, military transit hubs, or Special Forces training and exercises. As a result, all powers did not have immediate geostrategic concerns, which could trigger interests and activities that interfere with Mongolia's domestic politics; thus providing a favourable external environment for the democratization.

Second, the development of a competitive party system was another key contributor to the consolidation of electoral democracy. Based on my research, I argue that the successful regeneration of the former ruling (communist) party was the primary factor for the development of the competitive party system. The survival of the communist party, as a strong political organization, not only provided an anti-incumbent platform, but also an institutional model for opposition parties. The evidence illustrates that the former ruling party was successfully regenerated as a parliamentary party, without disintegrating into multiple small parties and losing its popular elites. In order to win in the parliamentary, presidential, and local elections after its devastating loss in the 1996 parliamentary elections, the party re-created its party-affiliated public

organizations (e.g., youth, women, and seniors), revised its party platforms in line with social-democratic, leftist orientations, and maintained its dominance in local governments at the capital city/districts and provinces/soums. In following the models and reform efforts of the former ruling party, opposition parties invested efforts and resources into establishing their party infrastructure. The evidence shows that opposition parties became a powerful opposition to the former ruling party only when they successfully formed an anti-incumbent opposition. For this purpose, the anti-incumbent platform served their short-term objectives of winning elections in the absence of the ideological unity. Because political parties became the only routes to reaching political power, influence, and state resources, the two major parties attracted popular politicians, business entrepreneurs, and even youth. The main driving principles for members and supporters are not ideological orientations or values, but rather the likelihood of the winning in elections. This led to the decline in the popularity of the two major parties and opened up space for third parties and independent politicians around 2004. Yet the maintenance costs of political parties, the rise in election expenses, and the expanding power and influence of the two major political parties over state institutions have all constrained small parties and independent runners. As a result, small parties and independent runners have become more adept at trading electoral districts before elections or government posts after elections rather than evolving into strong third parties. Interestingly, all major political parties appeared in agreement to adhering to the principles of electoral democracy and to project Mongolia's image as a democracy while not hurting the country's relations with its authoritarian neighbours. Indeed, political leaders have avoided making any statements favouring either of its two neighbours – rather all of them have committed to maintaining equi-distance relations with China and Russia and close ties with developed democracies.

Besides the external factor and the development of the party system, another angle on this debate suggests that the institutional choice contributed to consolidation of the electoral democracy in Mongolia. Two types of institutional choices made in the 1990s are especially important to this debate. The first is Mongolia's choice of the premier-presidential type of semi-presidentialism and the empowerment of the parliament (Fritz, 2008; Fish, 2001; Moestrup & Ganzorig, 2007). This choice of legislative dominance shaped the political competitions along the principles of electoral democracy. The other is the choice of the majoritarian electoral system, which could be contributed to the democratic consolidation. Although my research also acknowledges the importance of the institutional choice, not all research supports this view. Actors can influence or

change any institution, especially during the transitional period. Mongolian political leaders, for example, have changed the constitution three times: (1) to introduce the multiparty elections in 1990, (2) to pass the 1992 constitution, and (3) to limit presidential authorities in 2000. Similarly, political leaders also changed the electoral system from the mixed (of majoritarian and proportional) to majoritarian ones in 1992, and later on the electoral system was adjusted according to the will of parliamentarians and due to pressures from political actors outside of the parliament. Therefore, I would partially agree with the institutional choice argument that the choice of premier-presidential type contributes to the consolidation of the electoral democracy. At the same time, the choice of the electoral system had little contribution to the democratic consolidation. However, the choice of the majoritarian system provides more opportunities for two major parties to dominate all elections than smaller parties with limited resources. At the moment, my evidence suggests the survival (regeneration) of the former ruling party has more explanatory power than the institutional choice argument for the consolidation of electoral democracy.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss the role of ideology and corruption. Although the former ruling party, the MPRP, continued to portray itself as a social-democratic, leftist party, in practice it acted more like a ‘catch-all’ party during the 2004-2005 election cycle.¹⁵² Being composed of two opposition parties with centre-right and centre-left leanings, the ideological orientation of Democratic Party was also blurred. As Undarya writes, the Democratic Party “united mainly on the anti-MPRP platform, has failed to produce viable policy alternatives to the MPRP” (Undarya, 2009, p. 17). Other observers agree that “there are no discernible principled differences between the parties” on any policy issues (Dierkes, 2012, p. 9; Bold-Erdene, 2008). At the same time, smaller parties did not present any clear ideological orientations, as they were more dependent on influential individuals. Therefore, parties have used populist messages to gain more votes instead of presenting and upholding ideology, values, and principles during this period. This trend was intensified with the prevalence of corruption even though there were calls for ideological clarity within and outside of the parties.

According to Prohl and Sumati, who ran the independent public opinion polling in 1995, “very few respondents mentioned corruption as a problem” and ranked it as a second issue until 1998 (2008, p. 226). But in 2005, “close 20 percent of all respondents mentioned corruption as a

¹⁵² ‘Catch-all party’ parties “can be identified by their size as larger mainstream parties, by their pursuit of votes at the expense of ideology, by their centrist and often inconsistent party platforms designed to appeal to ever wider audiences, and by their organizational style that is elite-driven” (Williams, 2009, p. 539).

problem and more than half of those gave it the first priority” (Prohl & Sumati, 2008, p. 148). Unlike the earlier decade, when foreign aid and privatization were the main source of corruption, mining and infrastructure projects (e.g., mining licenses and construction loans) emerged as the key areas for corruption in the second decade (Fritz, 2007; USAID, 2005). As the former US Ambassador to Mongolia, Pamela Slutz, rightly contended in 2006:

“I would argue that Mongolia’s democratic gains are now under pressure – if not threatened. The threat today to democracy in Mongolia comes not from political ideology or foreign policy orientation – Mongolia is not going to revert to communism or blindly follow the lead of its former colonizers, Russia or China – but from endemic corruption and the unequal distribution of the opportunity to succeed” (Prohl & Sumati, 2008, p. 148).

All major studies and opinion polls on corruption in Mongolia have emphasized the role of political parties and the parliament for the rise of corruption, especially through politicizing the bureaucracy, abusing authorities for the allocation of state resources, including foreign aid.¹⁵³ For example, Bold-Erdene concludes:

“In the survey piloting, that expansion of corruption in the targeted level has been shown that 58.4 percent of the respondents assumed by the political parties were more corrupted (2009), that regards to assessment of weaken corruption was 4.2 point (1-less corrupted, 5-most corrupted), in accordance with survey of 2010, the corruption was very high for the political parties” (2010, p. 48).

In a similar line, the USAID study notes that:

“With very few exceptions, politics in Mongolia is a domain for seeking economic advantage and accumulating wealth. For the most part, political parties are increasingly similar to one another in terms of platform or program, a hallmark of personalistic political systems, where distribution of state resources is the main basis for political loyalty. This patronage system typically reinforces patterns of party dominance. In Mongolia, despite alternation in power between the political parties since 1996, the dominant party is the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (MPRP). This seeming paradox is actually easily

¹⁵³ Earlier, there were some initiatives to fight against corruption, but all were weak. For example, the parliament passed the anti-corruption law in 1996, adopted the national program to fight corruption in 2002, and then established the anti-corruption council, which basically had no authority or resources to implement the national program. The US played an important role in intensifying the Mongolia’s anti-corruption efforts. As Fritz notes, “in mid-2005, USAID commissioned a major study about corruption in Mongolia and the US embassy took an active role in its dissemination, and in demanding the adoption of stronger anti-corruption and anti-money laundering legislation” (Fritz, 2007, p. 201). The Asia Foundation along with the newly-established anti-corruption agency have begun to conduct a series of corruption-perception studies and public polls since 2007.

explainable by the party's superior organizational structure and power inherited from the period of Communist rule. (USAID – 2005, p. 15)

As the result of international and domestic pressures to fight against corruption, the parliament ratified the UN's Anti-Corruption Convention in 2005, passed the anti-corruption law in 2006, and established the Independent Authority Against Corruption in 2007. Although many politicians took strong anti-corruption stance, the majority of them apparently used this as tactical tool to advance their political careers within the party and political landscape while only a very few maintained a principled stance against corruption. Fritz rightly highlights that “only one political party [Civil Will Party] has made anti-corruption efforts its main platform”(2007, p. 201). However, all other parties were more concerned with winning the parliamentary and provincial elections than clarifying their ideological orientations and/or getting rid of their corrupted members. If political parties could not fight against corruption and support the rule of law, parties will eventually lose the public trust and begin to increasingly rely on clientelistic networks or promote patronage politics. Although it is beyond the scope my dissertation, I argue corruption is an important test for institutional resilience and adaptability of political parties.

Finally, the examination of the Mongolian democratization process presents three interesting findings in regards to the resource curse, autocracy promotion, and security cooperation debates.

First, the electoral democracy did not stumble, but rather re-charged with the commodity boom. Starting from 2004, Mongolia experienced a commodity boom, which was mainly triggered by Chinese economic growth and massive developmental projects. The resource boom increased political competitions among major parties and political-business factions, intensified the civil society activism over corruption, irresponsible mining, and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor; but it did not cause the failure of electoral democracy. Although it is hard to establish or test the direct causal link between the mining boom and reversal of democracy this early on, there could be two possible explanations for why this has happened. First, the type of natural resource could matter. Mongolia did not have strategic or readily exploitable natural resources (e.g., oil, gas, or diamonds). Second, the political arrangement of electoral democracy came before the mining boom. If Mongolia did not have democratic institutions earlier, the autocratic regime could be established as expected by the ‘resource curse’ literature. Therefore, an electoral democracy with the presence of two competitive political parties and a vibrant civil society space might have prevented political leaders and factions from taking advantage of the natural resource rents. The

mining boom, instead, increased the political competition among parties and political-economic factions and, at the same time, provided leverage to civil society organizations to increase their pressure on political leaders.

Second, the Mongolian case challenges the expectations and findings in the literature on autocracy promotion. As the literature predicts, a country located next to an authoritarian great power or in the sphere of influence of authoritarian great powers, would be likely to have authoritarian regime and/or remain in the grey zone between democracy and autocracy. Mongolia operates in the middle of two authoritarian great powers and is extremely dependent on Sino-Russian relationship, markets, investment, and respective policies. In the absence of strong ties with developed democracies, Mongolia is the world's most vulnerable state to neighbouring authoritarian powers. The evidence highlights that Mongolia's democracy and Western democracy promotion efforts did not threaten the core geopolitical interests and regime security of China and Russia; therefore, Beijing and the Kremlin were not concerned with political developments in Mongolia. Even though Russia had a tendency to influence Mongolia's domestic politics, its actions were constrained by the Chinese concern for geopolitical neutrality of Mongolia and the absence of a visible Russian diaspora and links with Mongolia as in many former Soviet republics. Therefore, any actions of the Kremlin to influence Mongolia's domestic politics could have negative impacts (i.e., causing backlash from political leaders and voters) on the Kremlin's actions to interfere. In other words, any moves or involvement from the Kremlin could be easily perceived as an attempt to reassert its control; thus quickly raising concerns over Mongolia's sovereignty.

Lastly, security cooperation between Mongolia and the NATO members, particularly around the US-led military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo, contributed to democratic consolidation. Mongolia's troop contributions strengthened its political and military relations with the US and NATO members. This contribution justified the increase military assistance for Mongolia, stop-over visits of senior government officials, and the institutionalization of bilateral relations with the US and other NATO members (Mendee, 2012, pp. 11-14; Plutz, 2014). However, the troop contributions did not generate the 'rents' such as using the transit facilities and bases or the salaries of the military personnel. Unlike Central Asian states (Toktomushev, 2015; Cooley, 2008), for example, the Mongolian government did not gain any 'rents,' but this helped Mongolia to increase its political ties and international profile. Moreover, the troop contributions increased the amount of the military assistance (e.g., equipment, training, and education) for the Mongolian military and strengthened the democratic civil-military relations, in which the military

subordinates itself to the democratically elected officials. At the same time, the troop contributions diverted the military's interests from the domestic politics and expanded its peacekeeping roles. In other cases, especially in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, the Western military training and education programs also contributed to the domestic political instability – with Western-trained military officers leading coups and/or being caught up in corruptive practices of the governance. The evidence supports that Mongolia's military contribution to the US-led coalition operations strengthened its independent foreign policy, strengthened political-military ties with the NATO members, and diverted the military's attention to external affairs. Furthermore, the security cooperation between Mongolia and NATO members did not threaten China's and Russia's core geopolitical interests because it was clearly institutionalized around peacekeeping participation.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has shown that the main factors that have shaped Mongolia's democratization process in the second period, 2000-2010, including the absence of direct geopolitical competitions of great powers and the development of the competitive party system. The evidence presented in this chapter has shown that all great powers, including authoritarian neighbours and Western ones, did not have any strong geostrategic interests in Mongolia. All avoided engaging in direct geopolitical competition to gain geostrategic advantages over each other. Mongolia's security cooperation from China, Russia, and United States was explicitly limited not to trigger security dilemmas. Rather, keeping Mongolia geopolitically neutral has served the geopolitical interests of all three great powers. This resulted in a favourable geopolitical environment for the consolidation of electoral democracy. Although the commodity boom briefly attracted Western and Russian economic interests, neither powers interfered in the domestic political process. Moreover, the competitive party system was institutionalized and political power transferred between two major political parties following regular parliamentary and presidential elections. The most important factor for the development of the competitive party system was the successful regeneration of the former ruling party, which provided an anti-incumbent impetus and institutional model for opposition parties. Importantly, leaders of two major parties have adhered to the principles of electoral democracy; therefore, elections became the only game in town.

Chapter Six: Struggling Democratization, 1985 – 2010

“Our first [Kyrgyz] president trusted his family, the second president in his relative, and the third in his bodyguards.”¹⁵⁴

The first Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev, ousted during a violent protest in 2005, now resides in Moscow’s wealthy Barvikha Dacha district – home to a well-known health resort for the Russian President – and works at Moscow State University as well as the Russian Academy of Science. Akayev’s successor, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was similarly removed from power during another violent protest in 2010 and now lives in an expensive mansion in Minsk under the protection of long-time Belarus president Alexander Lukashenko. Although Akayev, Bakiyev, and their family members have been on the Kyrgyz Republic’s extradition list for several years, Presidents Putin and Lukashenko have refused to hand over either president or their collaborators to the authorities in Bishkek.

The Kyrgyz case presents an intriguing puzzle – *Why* were pro-democracy leaders ousted by violent protests rather than democratic elections? Both presidents followed the same pattern of initially promising to strengthen democratic institutions, especially the legislature, but then ended up orchestrating constitutional referendums to remain in power. These controversial referendums, in turn, triggered violent protests forcing them both to flee through Kazakhstan to safe havens in Russia and Belarus respectively. The president → referendum → protest → fleeing pattern signals a missing element in the Kyrgyz democratization process. In Kyrgyzstan, like Mongolia, all key elements for successful democratization were present in the 1990s, including a literate population, vibrant civil societies, extensive Western support for democracy, as well as favourable geopolitical environments. Unlike other Central Asian states, Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan also did not have significant oil and gas deposits, which could possibly trigger the “resource curse,” the construction of nuclear facilities to bargain with the West, or civil wars to justify Russian military interventions.

In this chapter, I argue that Kyrgyz democratization has faltered because of the absence of a strong political party during both the transition as well as the consolidation stages of electoral democracy. During the transition stage, the ruling (communist) party, which could provide

¹⁵⁴ A taxi driver also said a similar thing about the first and second Kyrgyz presidents. I was again told by Nazgul Akisheva, Project Management Specialist of the Office of Democracy and Governance at the USAID Mission in the Kyrgyz Republic (Nazgul, personal interview, 2016).

political stability and institutionalize political reform, was weak due to the nature of Soviet political control over the republic (Morozova, 2013, pp. 11-14), particularly Gorbachev's efforts to reduce the power of the communist party (Huskey, 2016, p. 162) and the subsequent banning of the communist party following the August coup in 1991 (Collins, 2006, pp. 178-179). During the consolidation stage, presidents Akayev and Bakiyev took all possible measures to delay the institutionalization of political party systems, including empowering traditional clan networks, exploiting the regional divide between the north and south, creating personalized parties, and preempting their political opponents from establishing parties and coalitions.

I further contend that the changing dynamics of the overarching geopolitical environment, especially the competing security interests of great powers, also contributed to the failure of democratization. In the 1990s, Kyrgyz democracy enjoyed a favourable external environment when all Great Powers, namely Russia, China, and the United States, lacked security and economic interests in the region. But, in the post 9/11 period, Kyrgyzstan experienced external pressures when conflicting geopolitical interests emerged between the United States, Russia, and, to lesser extent, China. The importance of the Manas Airport for the US military campaigns undermined its pro-democracy efforts in Kyrgyzstan whilst bringing Russia and China together to prevent the US from asserting its military interests in a key strategic zone in Central Asia.

This chapter consists of four sections. Section one analyzes the overarching geopolitical environment of Kyrgyzstan in two parts: the first part examines the period of the 1990s, when there were no direct geopolitical competitions amongst the Great Powers; while the second part looks at the post 9/11 period, when the US's deployment of forces to Kyrgyzstan affected Moscow's and Beijing's policies. Section two discusses the internal dynamics of the Kyrgyz democratization process and analyzes *how* two presidents ascended to and abused their political power and then were removed through violent protests. Section three explains *why* and *how* the changing geopolitical interests of the Great Powers and the absence of the strong political party and party system have complicated the democratization process. The final section concludes with analysis on the interplay between the external factor, namely the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers, and the internal factor, or the absence of a strong political party and party systems.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

To understand the role of the external factor on the democratization process, this section aims to provide the discussion of how the external environment of the Kyrgyz Republic has

changed. Like many other small states, Kyrgyz politics has been vulnerable to the dynamics of the overarching geopolitics shaped by interests and actions of its colonial power, Russia, neighbouring Great Power, China, as well as the United States. Kyrgyzstan has experienced two different geopolitical dynamics from 1980s to 2010, with September 11th, 2001 marking a divide between the two periods.

In the first period from roughly 1985 to 2000, the Great Powers lacked geostrategic interests in Kyrgyzstan and avoided engaging in direct geopolitical competitions. This created favourable external conditions for the democratic transition. In fact, Kyrgyz leaders did not experience any external pressures from Great Powers, but instead gained political endorsements and economic assistance not only from regional powers, such as China and India, but also Western powers, especially the US and its allies (Toktomushev, 2015, pp. 72-73). In the absence of direct geopolitical competitions, the US foreign policy to Kyrgyzstan focused on the normative objective of supporting the Kyrgyz commitments toward simultaneous political and economic reform, which was believed to act as a model for other Central Asian and former Soviet republics (Samanchina, 2004, pp. 28-33). Notably, Kyrgyz's first president, Askar Akayev, was supported by Soviet leader Gorbachev (Collins, 2006, pp. 126-127), US State Secretary James Baker (McWilliams, 2005-2006, p. 4), and Russian President Boris Yeltsin (Toktomushev, 2015, pp. 64-65).¹⁵⁵ Akayev's pro-democratic and pro-Russian stance helped him to accumulate political power.

However, during the second period, 2001-2010, new geopolitical dynamics provided bargaining opportunities for ruling elites, including increased justifications for taking authoritarian measures and a reduction in the credibility of the Western powers' normative persuasion or pressures for democratic consolidation (Olcott, 2007, pp. 337, 339). As the Manas Airport became a critical logistical hub for the US-led military operations in Afghanistan, the US and NATO members increased their political and economic ties with Kyrgyzstan whilst remaining increasingly silent over authoritarian behaviors of Kyrgyz presidents (Toktomushev, 2015, pp. 57-77). Apparently, during this period, US geostrategic interests raised concerns for Russia and China as well as other neighbouring authoritarian regimes of Central Asia (Cooley, 2009, pp. 325-332; Rumer eds., 2007).

¹⁵⁵ Gorbachev endorsed his appointment of the Kyrgyz President, Baker supported his call for political and economic reform, and Yeltsin appreciated his pro-Russia stance.

The next section seeks to illustrate the impact of the geopolitical dynamics in relation to the democratization process. The first period was extremely permissive for the democratization process while the second period created favourable conditions for authoritarian reversals.

The Collapse of the Soviet Union & Unwanted Independence

In the 1990s, Kyrgyz leaders faced an unexpected geopolitical environment. Against the wishes of Kyrgyz elites and much of the public (Collins, 2006, pp. 156-158, 160), the collapse of the Soviet Union granted independence whilst ending the century-long colonial arrangements and economic benefits for the republic. This created new opportunities for Kyrgyz leaders to reach out to the United States and its key allies for political and economic support and to gain political recognition from its powerful southern neighbour – China. Due to its low economic potential, the absence of security threats, and, more importantly, its limited geostrategic attractiveness to all Great Powers, there was no external control and pressures on Kyrgyz leaders; henceforth, the domestic politics enjoyed considerable breathing space relative to other Central Asian republics.

Soviet Rule

Kyrgyz's reliance on Russia was built over two centuries. Kyrgyz elites had sought Russian protection from neighbouring warring tribes and China as early as the mid-nineteenth century. In 1855, Kyrgyz tribes voluntarily joined the Russian Empire and the Russian military's first permanent settlement was established in 1863 (Gleason, 2001, pp. 110-111).¹⁵⁶ However, the Russian rapid demographic push and take-over of fertile land caused the 1916 rebellion, in which over 200 thousand Kyrgyz were massacred (Ibraimov, 1998). Later, because of its geostrategic significance to Soviet expansion into Central and South Asia, the Soviet leadership devoted enormous resources from 1919 onwards to suppress anti-Soviet resistance and to establish a military stronghold in Kyrgyzstan (Fierman, 1991, Christian, 2018). But, this expansion was costly. The Soviet-style party and state institutions were established and a series of purges were conducted until 1938. As recorded, "more than 40,000 people, regardless of their ethnicity, were repressed" and "all the leaders of the communist establishment in the 1920s-30s were tortured to death" (Tabyshalieva, 2005, p. 273). A recent discovery of a mass burial site near Bishkek, the capital city, demonstrates the nature of the Soviet brutality. Here 137 people, including the most well-known state and party officials of Kyrgyzstan, were executed during celebrations for the

¹⁵⁶ See Valentina Voropaeva, "Kyrgyzstan and Russia: Past and Present," *CA & CC Press*, 2000, Retrieved from https://www.ca-c.org/journal/2000/journal_eng/eng03_2000/04.vorop.shtml

twenty-first anniversary of the October revolution (Tabyshalieva, 2005, p. 273). After changing its name, administrative status, and demarcations of borders several times, Kyrgyzstan became a full-fledged republic of the Soviet Union on 5 December 1936, known as the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (Tchoroev, 2002, p. 357).

Since then, like all other Soviet republics, the Kremlin had strong political control over society. Until 1950, especially during Stalin's rule, non-Kyrgyz officials were sent from Moscow as First Secretaries of the Kyrgyz Communist Party, the post equivalent to a head of the republic. The first ethnic Kyrgyz First Secretary of the Kyrgyz Communist Party was Iskhak Razzakov, who was carefully selected by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) on the criterion of loyalty to Kremlin (Grybkauskas, 2014, p. 283). At the same time, the CPSU intentionally appointed ethnic Russians as the Second Secretary of the Kyrgyz Communist Party as well as other key posts like Chief of the KGB (Committee for State Security) branch of the Kyrgyz republic for close control (Grybkauskas, 2014, pp. 267-292; Gonchig, personal interview, 2016). If local officials made efforts to promote nationalism and challenged Kremlin policies, the CPSU had the ultimate power to remove those officials with minimal consultations with the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet, a unicameral legislature (Florin, 2016, pp. 165-189; Grybkauskas, 2014). The CPSU dismissed First Secretary Razzakov and his Premier for attempting to introduce the Kyrgyz language into the high school curricula and fight for more autonomy from Moscow in 1959 (Bataldan, 1997, p. 156; Florin, 2016, pp. 176-177). In 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev removed Razzakov's successor, Turdakun Usubaliev as part of his plan for replacing Brezhnev-era corrupt leaders of the Soviet republics (Fowkes, 1997; D'Agostino, 1998). Again, in 1990, Gorbachev removed Usubaliev's successor Absamat Masaliev for opposing Gorbachev's reform policies and endorsed his colleague, Askar Akayev's candidacy as head of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (Olcott, 1993, pp. 51-56). Until 1991 to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin had vested geopolitical interests in Kyrgyzstan; therefore, it imposed rigidly institutionalized control over Kyrgyz politics.

Independence

The Soviet/Russian geopolitical interests waned in the 90s despite the Kyrgyz leadership's affinity to maintain the Union, sustain the economic ties (esp., reforming the industrial bases), and keep the security alliance. Kyrgyz leaders and the public were particularly against the abolishment of the Soviet Union. For instance, 88.7 percent of Kyrgyz citizens voted in favour of retaining the USSR as a 'renewed federation' (Gleason, 1992; Nohlen et al., 2010, p. 443). There could many

different explanations for these overwhelming positive attitudes for the Soviet Union since the republic had been heavily dependent on the Soviet economy and benefitted from the Soviet military and industrial presence. Unlike other Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan quickly became a strong supporter of the political, economic, and military arrangements of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and advocated to renew all types of integrations within this newly established regional arrangement of the CIS. To attract Russian investments, Kyrgyz President Akayev offered to sell the shares of the 29 large industrial plants, including the Soviet-era defense industries, to Russian companies (Toktomushev, 2017, p. 65; Buyers, 2003, p. 169). At the same time, Kyrgyzstan became the founding member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-led military alliance, and even requested the Russian military to provide border security in late 1990s (Toktomushev, 2017, pp. 105-109; Frost, 2009). Notably, while all other former Soviet republics, including Central Asian ones, were cautious about the Russian interferences, Kyrgyzstan consistently sought ways to re-attract Russian geopolitical interests (Bugubaev, 2013; Toktomushev, 2017). A few reasons behind Kyrgyzstan's interests: *first*, Kyrgyzstan remained economically dependent on Russia, a principal market for its produce and migrant labor as well as a source of petroleum; and *second*, Moscow was the only reliable, traditional partner that could provide security and deal with its larger neighbours, especially Uzbekistan and China (Bugubaev, 2013; Paramonov & Stokov, 2008).

Yet leaders of the Soviet Union and later Russian Federation were less enthusiastic towards Kyrgyzstan (Paramonov & Stokov, 2008; Trenin, 2007, pp. 75- 128). First, they were preoccupied and unable to commit resources. Gorbachev, for example, had to cope with larger foreign policy issues with Great Powers, the disintegration of the communist bloc (i.e., economic and security alliance), and separatist and nationalist movements in most of the former Soviet republics while conducting simultaneous domestic political and economic reforms (Donaldson & Noguee, 2014, pp. 72-111). In regards to the Central Asian republics, the most acute problems occurred in Kazakhstan, which had two uprisings in 1986 and 1989, as well as ethnic violence in Uzbekistan in 1989 (McGlinchey, 2011; Asankanov, 1996, pp. 116-124). Later on, Yeltsin was similarly occupied with domestic challenges such as the economic depression, the 1993 constitutional crisis, the first Chechen war (1994-1997), and the 1998 financial crisis whilst entering into new type of relations with Great Powers, Central and Eastern European states, and especially former Soviet republics (Donaldson & Noguee, 2014). The major concerns in Central Asia included the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997) and the protection of Russian economic interests in the oil and gas sectors

of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan (Paramonov & Noguee, 2008). Second, Soviet and later Russian geostrategic interests waned due to its withdrawal from Afghanistan and its agreement with China to reduce military forces along borders of China and Central Asian states and establish a regional organization (i.e., Shanghai Five in 1996) to promote confidence building and multilateral cooperation (Rumer eds., 2002). Finally, policies and actions of Kyrgyz leaders, especially Akayev, who was the trusted colleague of both Gorbachev and Yeltsin from their interactions at the Congress of People's Deputies in 1990, did not cause any challenges to Kremlin leaders. Akayev stood in support of Gorbachev and Yeltsin during the Soviet political crises – as Akayev said, “I got to know [Yeltsin] much better during the time of my work in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.... I began to feel respect, sympathy towards him and supported him” (Spector, 2004, p. 11). Although there were close relations between Kyrgyz and Soviet/Russian leaders, the Kyrgyz Republic was not economically and geostrategically significant for Moscow (Jonson, 2006, pp. 43-59).¹⁵⁷

Moscow only raised concerns whenever Bishkek took nationalist measures, which would affect the Russian diaspora, such as favouring ethnic Kyrgyz in land ownership or restricting the usage of the Russian language. Akayev blocked both proposals, and went as far as declaring Russian as Kyrgyz's second official language while denying similar status to the Uzbek language (Huskey, 1995; Commercio, 2004; Bond & Koch, 2010). This type of pro-Russian policy certainly appeased leaders in Moscow, but it was not enough to attract Russian geostrategic interests during this period.

US Interests – A Democratic Model for Central Asia

In the 1990s, the United States had differing foreign policy objectives for former Soviet republics depending on their proximity to Western Europe, geopolitical (esp., security and economic) significance, and domestic politics. However, the overriding concerns included “the prevention of nuclear catastrophe, the curbing of ethnic violence, and the stable transition to new political orders” with the US providing extended political and economic support to all newly independent former Soviet republics as well (US State Department, n.d.). In the absence of immediate and long-term geostrategic interests, US actions toward Kyrgyzstan were similar to the US policies for other republics; however, there was still a strong normative commitment to support

¹⁵⁷ President Yeltsin's first official visit was to Bishkek, where he signed a *Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance* and *Treaty of Non-Aggression* with his counterpart, Askar Akayev in June 1992.

President Akayev's initiatives toward liberal democracy and a market economy (McWilliams, 2006). This made the US administration perceive Kyrgyzstan as a potentially successful model of simultaneous political and economic reforms for other Soviet republics.

Amidst political turmoil in the Soviet Union after the August Coup in 1991, Secretary of States James Baker announced five basic principles (Rumer, 2007, p. 20) that would guide the administration's policy toward the emerging independent republics:

“self-determination consistent with democratic principles, recognition of existing borders, support for democracy and rule of law, preservation of human rights and rights of national minorities, and respect for international law and obligation” (US State Department, n.d.)

Unlike the Baltic states, Armenia, Moldova, or Ukraine, the US administration had neither the links nor a clear strategy towards Central Asian states despite fears of state failure, the possible revival of Islamic fundamentalism, or the threat of falling under Iran's sphere of influence, a key US strategic competitor (Rumer, 2007, pp. 18-71). During his first meeting with Kazakh and Kyrgyz leaders in Almaty on 21 December 1991, James Baker reiterated that if new republics commit to the observance of human rights, transition to a market economy, and establish democratic institutions, the US would render political recognition and economic assistance (Samanchina, 2004, p. 28). Five days after this meeting, President Bush said:

“The United States will immediately accord full recognition of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan (formerly Kirghizia) and Armenia because they have made “specific commitments” to the United States on nuclear weapons and internal reforms (*New York Times*, December 26, 1991).”

The US opened its embassies and USAID offices in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan almost simultaneously while supporting their memberships in the UN, OSCE, WB, IMF, ADB, and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The US interests in Kazakhstan were more geopolitical than Kyrgyzstan due to a variety of factors (US State Department, 1992). First, it was one of the four former Soviet republics with nuclear capabilities such as nuclear enrichment, testing, and storage facilities as well as nuclear warheads, heavy bombers, and nuclear scientists. Therefore, the US assisted Kazakhstan in transferring Soviet nuclear weapons and dismantling nuclear facilities until May 1995, when Kazakhstan became a nuclear weapon-free state and acceded to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (CRS, 2012). Second, prominent US corporations such as Chevron also had strong interests in developing oil and gas resources as well as constructing pipelines and other related infrastructure (Peck, 2004, p. 61; Rumer, 2007). The

Clinton administration was heavily engaged in influencing Kazakh government's routing of new oil and gas pipelines to reduce the dependency on the Russian infrastructure and to weaken the Iran's influence on these new energy routes (Kalicki, 2001, p. 130). In contrast, the US interests in Kyrgyzstan was less geopolitical, and more normative or ideological (Yazdani, 2007).

There was no major security and economic attractions for Americans in Kyrgyzstan because of its distant location, small size, and lack of oil and gas resources. In addition, President Akayev's calls for simultaneous political and economic reform aligned the US interests of promoting liberal democracy and market economy globally (Hutson, 1999). Despite his communist party membership, Akayev was perceived as more of a reformist and scientist than all other Central Asian leaders, who were First Secretaries of the communist parties of their respective republics and career bureaucrats (Hurwitz, 1996). Notably, Akayev's initial measures were different than his counterparts: strengthening the legislature, empowering local elites, endorsing political rights – expressions, associations, and demonstrations – while pushing for rapid privatization (Radnitz, 2005, 2006, and 2010).¹⁵⁸ According to Huskey (1995) and Collins (2006), Akayev was the most active of the republican leaders in promoting *glasnost*, *perestroika*, and *demokratizatsiia*. Other scholars stress the importance of Akayev's personality. For example, Martha Olcott argues that “Akaev's reputation and personality were the main reasons the Western development economists and financiers became genuinely eager to assist this small nation” (1996, p. 89). Also, the Republic's first Foreign Minister and then Ambassador to the United States, Roza Otunbaeva, requested US assistance in building civil society and free media, which certainly contrasts with the typical image of other Soviet republics. Such factors created a hope in the US policy leaders as stated by first American Ambassador Hurwitz to Kyrgyzstan:

“We had considerable hopes for Kyrgyzstan because it was one of, perhaps the only, newly created ex-Soviet state that did not have the old ex-Party officials as the number one guy. The president was Askar Akayev, a scientist, a physicist, who before assuming the presidency was president of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences. We had some hopes that this would be a real new leaf and that you could have an actual democratic country arising from the ashes of the Soviet Union” (Hurwitz, 1996, p. 82).

¹⁵⁸ Collins writes

“[u]nlike Gorbachev, Akaev did not support the halfway house of “democratic socialism.” Instead, as early as mid-1991 he was advocating “full democracy” and integration with the West and capitalist economies” (2006, p. 177).

In December 1992, Secretary of State James Baker called the country “an island of democracy” in Central Asia during his first visit to Bishkek, and afterwards the US, in contrast to other Central Asian republics, endorsed extensive democracy promotion assistance to Kyrgyzstan and urged its allies, especially Germany, Japan, and Turkey, to support the Kyrgyz’s democratization process (Yazdani, 2007, p. 143). In 1994, Kyrgyzstan became one of the first countries to join the Partnership for Peace project of NATO and was included in US and NATO security assistance programs. At the same time, despite some authoritarian behaviors of President Akayev in the mid-1990s, the US continued to support economic reform and restructuring along with the international financial institutions (Anderson, 1999). For instance, with US support, Kyrgyzstan became the first former Soviet republic to join the WTO in 1998 and the IMF increased its aid in 1999 in the aftermath of the Russian financial crises (Samanchina, 2004; Marat, 2013, p. 3). Towards the end of the 1990s, the US’s overall interests in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan declined whilst the US administration’s geopolitical interests shifted to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan given the predominate security and economic rationales (Olcott, 2005; Cohen, 2006).

In the 1990s, the US had no geostrategic interests in Kyrgyzstan, but the administration supported President Akayev’s pro-democracy and free market economy reforms as they were aligned with America’s wider geopolitical interests. Although Akayev reversed his stance on democratization, his economic policies were applauded by the US administration; hence, the US continued its support to Kyrgyzstan, which was also the most-welcoming former Soviet republic for the US involvement (*Eurasian Daily Monitor*, April 20, 2000).

China – Concerns for Three Evils

Chinese interests in Kyrgyzstan were also limited in the 1990s even though the collapse of the Soviet Union and emergence of independent states presented opportunities to expand its influence to Central Asia. The Chinese government immediately recognized all Central Asian states, including – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan – all bordered with Xinjiang and ethnically connected to Chinese Muslim minorities. This quick recognition under the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” was important for reciprocal noninterference in internal affairs for both China and Central Asian states (Walsh, 1993, p. 274; Burles, 1999). As Walsh argued, in the early 1990s, “the Chinese leadership’s worst fear is that ethnic nationalism alone or in combination with resurgent Islam could destabilize China’s northwestern provinces (Gansu and Qinghai) and autonomous regions (Ningxia, Xinjiang, and Tibet)” (Walsh, 1993, p. 274). Both

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are home to Uyghurs and Dungans; the latter are ethnically connected to the Hui minority in the Ningxia autonomous regions while substantial number of Kazakh and Kyrgyz nationalities also reside in China.

In the early 90s, there were reports about arms smuggling for the April 1990 riots in Xinjiang across the border from Central Asia and the meeting of a political party in Bishkek to advocate for the formation of an independent Uyghur state in the Xinjiang territory (Walsh, 1993, p. 277). Therefore, the Chinese government had larger concerns about potential state failures, the spillover effects of ethnic nationalism, and the revival of Islamic fundamentalism throughout Central Asia since all Central Asian republics now dealt directly with Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey without Moscow's control (Lewis, 2008, p. 218). Within this context, China initiated the Shanghai Five mechanism in 1996, a predecessor of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. This initiative sought to, first, reduce military forces in border regions; second, to engage Russia as only Moscow had the ability to influence and act in the region; and third, to institutionalize confidence building activities with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. To promote these objectives, the presidents of the Shanghai Five signed the *Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions (1996)* and the *Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions (1997)* (Burles, 1999).

From Beijing's stance, the overall relations with Kyrgyzstan were managed with the China's overarching security objectives of obtaining official endorsement and collaboration with its policy dealing with the so-called three evils: terrorism, separatism, and extremism. In return, China began to provide access to its markets, investment, and loans for Kyrgyzstan, whose leadership had feared being economically subdued and absorbed into China's orbit (Toktomushev, 2017). Despite its lack of oil and gas reserves, Kyrgyzstan has also been considered economically important for China because of its location, which provides the shortest transit corridor to Eurasia. By the end of 1990s, for example, Kyrgyzstan became the largest shuttle trading routes for re-exporting Chinese goods to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. The Dordoï and Karasuu bazaars in Kyrgyzstan became the largest bazaars in the region, with both employing over 100,000 traders (Mogilevskii, 2012).

As with other Great Powers, China had little geostrategic interest in Kyrgyzstan in the 90s; therefore, it maintained high-level interactions, provided access to its market, infrastructure, and developmental aid while securing cooperation of the Kyrgyz authorities to prevent the 'three evils.' Because of traditional sensitivity to Chinese expansion and newly established relations,

China had little leverage over domestic politics of Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, as Oliker (et al., 2003) argues, Kyrgyzstan was far too weak to risk poor relations with any major power – Russia, the US, or China.

THE EVENTS OF 9/11 & EMERGENCE OF GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION

The evidence presented in the previous section has shown that the external environment in the first period (1985 – 2000) was favourable to the Kyrgyz democratization process. China and Russia were intertwined with their own domestic and foreign policy challenges while the United States was interested in advocating democracy and a global market economy along with its key allies. The second period (2001-2010) can be characterized by its challenging external environment for democratization: the US administration prioritized its security interests over political/ideological objectives, Russia re-asserted its influence in Kyrgyzstan mostly in response to growing geostrategic interests of the US and China. China, albeit with caution, has institutionalized its relations with Russia and Central Asian states through the regional organization, SCO, and bilateral ties. Unlike the first period, the second period created more opportunities for Kyrgyz leaders to access external resources and to pursue repressive measures in the domestic politics. Even though it is clear that Kyrgyz leaders were removed without any directives from the Kremlin, Kyrgyz opposition leaders first anti-Akayev and then anti-Bakiyev have met with Russian Presidents and Prime Ministers prior to and immediately after violent revolutions in 2005 and 2010. This fact indicates Kyrgyz elites' concerns and interests of seeking Russian support although it is hard to access the contents of their discussions at the Kremlin.

American Interests (only) in Manas Air Base

Despite frustration over regressing democratization in the late 1990s, US foreign policy toward Kyrgyzstan was overwhelmed with its security priority given the country's geostrategic location for the US military operations in Afghanistan (Oliker et al., 2003, pp. 5-32; Troitskiy, 2007, pp. 424-428). The geostrategic importance of Kyrgyzstan further grew significantly after Uzbekistan evicted the US from its military base in response to the US demand for an international investigation into the Andijan protest, which was brutally suppressed by the Uzbek government (Nichol, 2009 and 2010). Because of its temporary security interests, the US became tolerant of authoritarian tendencies of Presidents Akayev and Bakiyev whilst increasing US assistance to Kyrgyzstan (Olcott, 2007; Toktomushev, 2017, pp. 112-122).

By 2000, the US interests in Kyrgyzstan began to stress the security collaboration when a series of insurrections and terrorist attacks occurred in Central Asian states. In April 2000,

directors of CIA and FBI made visits to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan agreed to collaborate in areas of counter-terrorism prior to the visit of Secretary of State Madeline Albright, as the highest government officials after James Baker's 1992 visit (Cummings, 2001; Lefebvre & McDermott, 2008, p. 287; Troitskiy, 2007, pp. 422-423). Although expected, State Secretary Albright did not pressure President Akayev on his poor human rights record and authoritarian steps. Rather these visits indicated the reaction of the US administrations as China and Russia increased their attention to Central Asia as Troitskiy explains (2007). A year later, following the September 11th attack and the US decision to conduct the military mission known as Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), all Central Asian states expressed their genuine desire to assist the US in defeating the Taliban government in Afghanistan. "Overflight humanitarian missions to Afghanistan granted by all, only Kyrgyzstan made its willingness to allow overflight for combat missions in public" (Oliker & Shlapak, 2005, p. 12). These promises were made unilaterally with little consultations with Moscow; this indicated independent foreign policy moves of all Central Asian states, most of them saw the situation as an opportunity to get closer with the US. As the Rand study states, "the United States continued its long-term policy of avoiding security commitments in exchange for this assistance," although it did agree to "regards with grave concern any external threat" to Uzbekistan (Oliker & Shlapak, 2005, p. 12). Along with the military base at Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan, Manas International Airport of Kyrgyzstan began to serve as a transit hub for US and NATO military operations in Afghanistan from December 2001. This was a turning point for US and Kyrgyz bilateral relations and served as a justifiable cause for the US to increase its assistance, including democratization aid, but, for President Akayev to weaken the US pressure on his increasingly authoritarian behavior.

The permission of the US military to be based in Kyrgyzstan raised concerns in Beijing and Moscow. China began to see the US military deployment as an American 'circling' strategy and increased its interactions with Kyrgyzstan (Zhao, 2007, p. 149). To ameliorate Russian concerns, President Akayev agreed to extend the terms of the Russian military facilities and welcomed the Russian use of the Kant air base for the CSTO rapid reaction force in 2003 (Buszynski, 2005, pp. 554 – 558). But, after disputed elections in 2005, President Akayev was violently removed from power, which was unexpected for all Great Powers (Toktomushev, 2017, p. 122). The US immediately denied its involvement, since the violent protest occurred within the timeframe of the Colour Revolution, from Serbia to Ukraine and Georgia, and sent Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld twice (in April and July 2005) and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in October 2005

to get assurance from new President Bakiyev on the leasing of the air base while trying to assuage the Moscow (Nichol, 2007). As reported in the *Washington Post*:

During the first stop of her tour of Central Asia and Afghanistan, Rice has repeatedly tried to reassure Russia that the United States is not trying to supplant its presence. "We expect the Russians to have strong relations with these states. There are economic ties, there are political ties, there are linguistic ties that are very strong," she told reporters traveling with her en route to the region Monday (*Washington Post*, October 11, 2005).

However, in July 2005, China and Russia convinced all SCO members to join in a statement pressuring the US to withdraw its military from Central Asia (Olcott, 2005). Along similar lines, the new Kyrgyz President Bakiyev promised President Putin to end the Manas Airport leasing (Toktomushev, 2017; Sari, 2012, pp. 142-144). But, President Bakiyev used Russian pressure and closure of the Uzbek base as leverage on Washington to increase the US lease and other types of payments related to the Manas Transit Center (Toktomushev, 2015, pp. 57-77). In 2006, Bakiyev revised the base usage agreement with the United States, which also increased its assistance, including developmental aid through the Millennium Challenge Account (USAID, 2010; Toktomushev, 2015, pp. 68-71).

In 2009, both President Bakiyev and the Kyrgyz parliament demanded to either close the US military base or to increase rent and other payments (Nichol, 2009). The US Congress and administration, with strong advocacy from the Pentagon, revised the agreement to respond to Kyrgyz demands (Nichol, 2009). Soon after, President Bakiyev was removed through violent protest, which also instigated ethnic violence. The US quickly dispatched its officials – *first* – to secure its usage of the base from new authorities and – *second* – to provide humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan. It was also important to note, during Secretary State Hillary Clinton's visit to Bishkek, both sides agreed to investigate the fuel contracts at the Manas Airport (Nichol, 2013, pp. 26-27).

In retrospect, the foremost concern for the US government in Kyrgyzstan was a geopolitical one – the permission to use Manas Airport for the US coalition operations in Afghanistan. As argued by Olcott and others, the US was caught by surprise when both presidents were removed by violent protests, as US officials had hoped the Presidents, especially Akayev, could be removed through peaceful elections (2007, p. 337; Nichol, 2005, p. 9). Instead of waiting for the domestic settlements, the US recognized new political leaders as quickly as possible and promised the continued support for the political settlements and economic assistance. Even though

the US continued its democratization assistance, especially supporting civil society organizations, the US government was cautious of not hurting its relations with authoritarian presidents like Akayev and Bakiyev.

Russian Interests of Security and Stability

In the second period, Russia demonstrated strong geostrategic interests in Kyrgyzstan by operationalizing its regional security initiatives and pressuring Kyrgyz leaders to end the American military lease of the Manas Transit Centre (Buszynski, 2005, pp. 548-556;). Rather than interfering directly in Kyrgyz domestic politics, Moscow employed economic leverage in support of its renewed geopolitical interests; however, Russia has preferred stability and pro-Russian authoritarian leaders in Bishkek (Trenin, 2007, pp. 93-96; Jackson, 2010, pp. 108-109; Nichol, 2013, pp. 18-19).

Unlike previous Russian president and prime ministers, President Putin prioritized Central Asia as a critical region for his strategy of increasing Russian international status, as outlined in the new National Security Concept and Russian Military Doctrine in 2000 (Sally, 2001; Kazantsev, 2008, pp. 1075-1076). The idea of re-asserting the Russian influence in Central Asia in order to increase Russian “regional influence” was earlier introduced by Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov in 1998, but it was not implemented because of frequent changes of prime ministers (Jonson, 2006, pp. 43-59).¹⁵⁹ From 2000, Russia began to implement two major regional integration strategies: economic and security. Building on previous initiatives of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Russia concluded the treaty to establish the Eurasian Economic Community with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan for regional economic bloc (Buszynski, 2005, p. 551). On the security side, Russia operationalized the Collective Security Treaty (1992) of the Commonwealth Independent States by reviving the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which was non-operational in the most of 1990s (Kazantsev, 2008, pp. 1076-1078). Under the CSTO umbrella, Russia renewed the common air defense system and established the regional anti-terrorist centre for Central Asia in Bishkek.

Besides President Putin’s aspirations of raising the Russian international role, there were three major reasons for the increased geopolitical interests. First, Russian security was intimately linked to the stability of Central Asian states and also threats of Islamic extremism, narcotics, and

¹⁵⁹ Russian foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev termed its “near abroad” (*ближнее зарубежье*) in the early 1990s has been partially successful, especially in the energy sector.

refugees from Afghanistan (Jonson, 2006, pp. 142-165). Second, all Central Asian states, except Uzbekistan, were keen to maintain close ties with Russia because of their dependence on Russian market, infrastructure, military industry and security assurances (Bugubaev, 2013). Third, the US and its allies increased their security cooperation with all Central Asian states through the OSCE and NATO PfP, and even encouraged Uzbekistan's withdrawal from the CSTO to join in the countering regional organization – GUAM.¹⁶⁰ Also, the American military deployments throughout Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan added one more justification for the increased geostrategic interests of Russia into Central Asia, especially to Kyrgyzstan (Buszynski, 2005, p. 550). Starting in 2002, Moscow took a number of steps to further institutionalized the CSTO: it (1) established a joint command centre and collective rapid reaction force, especially building on the Russian 201st division in Tajikistan; (2) deployed the Russian military to Kant air base (Kyrgyzstan), which would serve for the rapid reaction force in 2003; (3) began annual exercises in 2004; (4) concluded agreements on the protection of Central Asian borders; and (5) resumed the military-technical cooperation to modernize weaponry and provide military training and education (Kazantsev, 2008; Buszynski, 2005). These measures clearly demonstrate Russia's strong security interests in Central Asia.

At the same time, Russia was successful in pressuring Central Asian states to undermine the US and NATO efforts in the region. For example, Russia along with China convinced SCO members issuing a communiqué (2005) calling for setting a deadline for the US withdrawal from Central Asian military bases.¹⁶¹ Immediately after the SCO communiqué, Uzbekistan issued an eviction notice while Kyrgyz President Bakiyev asked the US-led coalition to set a deadline for its pullout from Kyrgyzstan. Because of Western pressure on Uzbekistan following the violent repression of the Andijan protest, Uzbek leaders turned to Russia by renouncing its ties with the United States and GUAM members while renewing its membership in the CSTO (Fazendeiro, 2018). But, in the Kyrgyz case, President Bakiyev wanted to use the changing geopolitical context for rent-seeking purposes; this triggered Moscow's hostility and increased economic pressures on Kyrgyz leaders (Toktomushev, 2015, pp. 57-77). A number of sources indicated that the Kremlin

¹⁶⁰ Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova established the GUAM as a pro-Western and pro-NATO regional organization. More on GUAM, see Kuzio, 2007.

¹⁶¹ The Declaration of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on 5 July 2005 stated: "Considering the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization consider it necessary, that respective members of the antiterrorist coalition set a final timeline for their temporary use of the above-mentioned objects of infrastructure and stay of their military contingents on the territories of the SCO member states" (June 16, 2017), Retrieved from <http://www.sectsc.org>

turned against Bakiyev because he took “a large Russian loan in 2009 and defying the Kremlin’s agenda of evicting the United States from Kyrgyzstan’s Manas airbase” (Collins, 2011, p. 156). According to Cooley, the Kremlin employed two instruments to pressure President Bakiyev: Moscow-based media launched “an all-out assault on Bakiyev, accusing him of corruption, repression, and nepotism, and exposing a number of government scandals.” Moscow also removed a long-standing energy subsidy, and the resulting sudden increase in fuel and electricity prices triggered outbreaks of antigovernment protests (Cooley, 2010, p. 304). Interestingly, Russian leaders received the Kyrgyz opposition leaders during protests against President Bakiyev as a strong signal of supporting the opposition (Gorecki, 2010).

Despite numerous allegations about the Kremlin’s involvement in Kyrgyz politics in the Western media and especially by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili (Cooley, 2010, p. 304), Moscow’s chief interests in Kyrgyzstan have been almost exclusively driven by its geostrategic interests in marginalizing the influence of its competitors – the US and China (Jonson, 2006; Buszynski, 2005; Kazantsev, 2008). Moscow did choose President Akayev, but it did not become involved in the emergence of President Bakiyev and Interim President Otunbaeva. Russian leaders have been reluctant to directly interfere in the domestic politics – even when requested by Kyrgyz leaders, such as when Moscow refused to deploy the CSTO military during the ethnic violence in 2010 (Marat, 2013, p. 137; Melnykovska et al., 2012). But, apparently Russia still imposed one clear condition – to respect Russian geostrategic concerns – in order to extend their recognitions of Kyrgyz new leaders. As long as new leaders were willing to endorse Russian geopolitical interests in Kyrgyzstan, Moscow has been eager to render its support for new leaders after the violent protests in 2005 and 2010. When Kyrgyz leaders go rogue against the Kremlin’s will, Russia has shown its ability to use a series of punitive economic instruments to respond (Bugubaev, 2013; Jackson, 2010). If they cooperate on the other hand, the Kremlin has been willing to provide external political support, for example, through election observations. Since 2003, Russia also funded the CIS – Election Monitoring Mission (CIS-EMO) to observe elections and to provide international approval of elections in the CIS member states. In 2005, CIS observers deemed the Kyrgyz parliamentary elections as “well-organized, free and fair” whereas the OSCE mission and opposition parties disagreed (OSCE, 2005; Cooley, 2012).

China – Concerns for Long Term Impacts

Prominent Chinese scholar Zhao writes “China’s understanding of Central Asia, its interests in Central Asia, and its policy and strategy toward Central Asia have changed in the past

decade and are still in a process of evolution” (Zhao, 2007, p. 137). Until 1999, China’s main objectives in Central Asia were border security and the stability of neighbouring small states, especially following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Beyond this, China had no other strategic interests in Central Asia.

Since 2000, two major factors influenced Beijing’s strategy toward Central Asia. The growth Chinese economy required access to new energy sources in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan and also continental transit trade routes to reach Eurasian and European markets (Marketos, 2008, pp. 15-20). The events of September 11 also brought about additional changes in the regional situation. As Zhao notes:

“After 9/11, however, the geopolitical situation changed dramatically: the United States intervened directly and established military bases in the region. To be sure, these bases were to support antiterrorist operations in Afghanistan. The United States has also explicitly characterized this military presence as “temporary.” Nevertheless, China regards the American military bases in here [Kyrgyzstan] as an important geopolitical issue. The Manas air base in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, is in fact quite close to the Chinese border. No matter what the military functions of the U.S. bases might be, they are fraught with significant implications for China and require that it reassess its geopolitical security in Central Asia” (Zhao, 2007, p. 149).

Unlike Russia and United States, China avoided directly interfering in the domestic politics of any Central Asian states, but rather dealt with them through multilateral frameworks (i.e., the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and bilateral arrangements (Marketos, 2008, pp. 31-66; Sheives, 2006). Kyrgyzstan became one of the strong supporters of the SCO and Kyrgyz leaders attended all SCO meetings, hosted a number of SCO events in Bishkek, and even competed against Uzbekistan to host the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (Sumiya, personal interview, 2016; Toktomushev, 2017). Although Kyrgyzstan did not possess oil and gas reserves, it has still been important in regards to China’s strategy of accessing energy sources in Uzbekistan and providing a transit corridor to Eurasian markets (Raballand & Andresy, 2007). But, the Chinese plan of building railways connecting Xinjiang to Uzbekistan through Kyrgyzstan became a victim of Kyrgyz domestic politics divided along regional line (north-south) and Russian geopolitics of maintaining its control over the Eurasian railways as happened in Mongolia.¹⁶² This underdeveloped transportation connection has remained a key challenge for building strong

¹⁶² China wanted to build a Chinese-standard (narrow) rails whereas Kyrgyz politicians opposed to introduce another rail standard to the country. At the same, officials in Bishkek were worried the railway connection would push southern provinces (Uzbek-dominated) break away from the republic; therefore, they wanted to build a railway – connecting north and south. For more on railways, see *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, June 8, 2015.

economic ties between Kyrgyzstan and China.

Beijing's main concerns, in the second decade, continued to focus on ensuring border security, combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism, and the domestic stability of Kyrgyzstan (Guang, 2006, pp. 19-24; Chung, 2005). Since the 1990s, the East Turkestan movement, which aimed to establish an independent state, East Turkestan, in Xinjiang, had been quite active in Central Asia, especially in Kyrgyzstan (Guang, 2006). Although official Kyrgyz statistics note the country has about 50,000 Uyghurs, non-official sources claim that more than 200,000 Uyghurs live in Kyrgyzstan while maintaining close ties with their co-ethnics in Chinese Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.¹⁶³ At the request of the Chinese government, Kyrgyz Ministry of Interior and police have maintained close control over Uyghur nationals and deported several Uyghur nationals to Chinese authorities. This caused discontent from human rights organizations and Uyghur minorities. Even though the Kyrgyz government declared the East Turkestan movement a terrorist organization in response to Beijing's request, it has not fully succeeded in dismantling the movement (Huasheng, 2013, pp. 437-442). Chinese diplomats and nationals in Kyrgyzstan have also suffered from increasing numbers of attacks. For example, a Chinese diplomat was killed in 2002 and a Chinese bus was attacked in 2003.¹⁶⁴ This situation influenced Beijing's decision to establish the SCO anti-terrorist centre in Bishkek and to increase assistance to Kyrgyz law-enforcement organizations (Sumiya, personal interview, 2016). As long as Kyrgyz leaders respected Chinese core national interests, Beijing would immediately recognize Kyrgyz leaders and provide economic assistance. Presidents Akayev and Bakiyev encountered no major challenges from Beijing to secure political recognition, economic assistance, and financing for the major projects like energy production and power transmissions (*Aki Press*, January 13, 2010). Today, China is Kyrgyzstan's largest trading partner, investor, and market for consumer goods (Raballand & Andresy, 2007).

The American and Russian military deployments to Kyrgyzstan raised long-term concerns for China since Kyrgyzstan has become a key strategic area for China (Chung, 2004; Zhao, 2007, p. 149). Although Beijing did not oppose these military deployments directly, it supported the Kremlin and Uzbek's push for setting deadlines for the Western military withdrawals from the

¹⁶³ "Uyghurs in Kyrgyzstan under Careful Government Supervision," January 28, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/8747-field-reports-caci-analyst-2004-1-28-art-8747.html>

¹⁶⁴ "Bus Attack Highlights Problems in China-Kyrgyzstan Relations," April 23, 2003. Retrieved from <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/7987-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2003-4-23-art-7987.html>.

region in 2005 (Zhao, 2007). Also, China raised the possibility of deploying Chinese combat troops as a part of the SCO forces during the 2005 and 2010 violent protests in Kyrgyzstan (Aris, 2012, pp. 460-470). This certainly indicates Chinese interests *firstly* in taking part in the geopolitical competition amongst great powers and *secondly* preventing spillover effects by helping Kyrgyz authorities to restore law and order.

In a nutshell, China is mostly concerned with stability in Kyrgyzstan and control of Uyghur population and militants, but it lacks the immediate security interests to engage in direct competition with Russia and the United States. At the same time, Beijing did not have strong economic interests in Kyrgyzstan, which does not possess oil and gas deposits and is politically unstable because of the nature of its political arrangements. Therefore, the evidence presented here has shown that China's main concerns in Kyrgyzstan were the possible spillover effects of political instability and even potential state collapse.

Clearly, the entire section on the Kyrgyz external environment has shown that the overarching geopolitical setting has dramatically changed between 1985 to 2010. All great powers lacked geopolitical interests in Kyrgyzstan during the first period, 1985-1999; this created a favourable environment for the democratic transition – the Western Powers provided all necessary supports for Akayev's political and economic reforms while Chinese and Soviet/Russian leaders remained neutral to any political developments in Kyrgyzstan. However, the new geopolitical dynamics following the events of September 11th 2001 provided the bargaining opportunity for ruling elites to negotiate with the US and Russia regarding their security interests and justifications for taking authoritarian measures against opposition and dissenting elites. The re-emergence of Russian geostrategic interests and increased Chinese economic assistance neutralized the Western democracy promotion agenda. Lastly, the increased prioritization of the security interests also reduced the credibility of the overall Western democracy promotion efforts in Kyrgyzstan.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF KYRGYZ POLITICS

This section investigates the domestic political developments of Kyrgyzstan under two presidents and argues that the absence of strong political parties was a necessary, but not sufficient factor in explaining the failure of the democratization process. In the absence of strong political parties, populist leaders can hijack the political process to accumulate their power, marginalize their opponents, and manipulate the electoral mechanisms for their benefits. The lack of strong political parties increases the uncertainty for ruling elites; therefore, they are less likely to expect a

smooth, orderly power transition or succession. Even under favourable geopolitical conditions, where all great powers lack geostrategic interests and avoid engaging in direct geopolitical competitions, the democratization process can still easily be derailed without the presence of strong political parties.

Two presidents dominated Kyrgyz politics in the 90s and first decade of 2000s. President Askar Akayev ruled the country from 1990 to 2005 and then President Kurmanbek Bakiyev until 2010. In a similar pattern, they initially rallied for democratic governance, but they soon abused their political power to enrich their personal entourages, marginalize political opponents, and even suppress public protests with lethal force. Without any protections from great powers, they were ousted by violent domestic protests in 2005 and 2010 respectively. Both leaders fled to their current safe havens: Akayev in Moscow, Bakiyev in Minsk. Their authoritarian colleagues, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian Alexander Lukashenko, have continually refused to hand them over to Kyrgyz authorities. Therefore, the Kyrgyz political dynamics of these periods presents an interesting causal chain: president → referendum → protest → fleeing. If there were strong political parties like in Mongolia, we could expect the consolidation of electoral democracy in Kyrgyzstan. I will discuss *how* each president came into and abused political power and then was removed thorough violent protests rather than peaceful elections.

President Askar Akayev, 1990 - 2005

To further understand the political development of a small peripheral state, this section explores how a seemingly strong democratic leader, who called for civic rights and democratic governance, became a corrupt, authoritarian leader due to the absence of strong political parties. After claiming the presidency with pro-liberal reformist slogans, President Akayev strategically weakened the legislature and political parties and, in the very last moments prior to the 2005 protest, attempted to establish a personalist party, which would provide him immunity and protection. Notably, he did this even as he was operating under a favourable geopolitical context. Soviet leader Gorbachev endorsed his candidacy for the republic's first presidency (Collins, 2006, pp. 124-125) and US State Secretary James Baker supported his 'pro-democracy and market economy' reforms (McWilliams, 2005-2006, p. 4). While Russian Presidents Yeltsin and Putin supported Akayev's presidency, security imperatives of the US and China provided the bargaining power for Akayev to trade international legitimacy. At the same time, there was not a political party, which could either constrain his behaviors or provide assurance for the smooth transfer of political power.

Ascendance to Power

Askar Akayev was a physicist, who graduated from the Soviet Polytechnical University and spent about 15 years studying optics and computer science in Leningrad, the second-largest city of the USSR (Collins, 2006, p. 125). In 1977, he returned to Kyrgyzstan and began his academic career. Like all academics, Akayev joined the communist party in 1981 and worked as head of the Central Committee Department of Science and Higher Education and head of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences.¹⁶⁵ In the first-ever multi-candidate election for the newly created Soviet Congress of People's Deputies in 1989, Akayev was elected along with famous author Chingiz Aitmatov and other writers to represent Kyrgyz intellectuals in Moscow.¹⁶⁶ Here Akayev joined in a group with Andrei Sakharov, a famous nuclear physicist and advocate of civil liberties, to vote all in favour of Gorbachev's political and economic reformist policies, and also became acquainted with Russian delegate and future president Boris Yeltsin whilst disagreeing and criticizing Absamat Masaliev, head of the Communist party of the Soviet Kyrgyz republic. The Congress of People's Deputies introduced major structural changes in the Soviet political system, including: (1) reducing the communist party monopoly; (2) permitting multi-candidate, majoritarian system elections at all levels; and (3) creating a post of the presidency in order to separate the communist party from the state.¹⁶⁷ Following these changes, in all fifteen Soviet republics, at first, multi-candidate elections of the legislature, Supreme Soviet, were held and then new members of the Supreme Soviet elected presidents and vice presidents for their respective republics (Huskey, 1995, 813-830). New members of the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet, who were elected by Kyrgyz voters in the multi-candidate elections in April 1990, failed to elect the first president for the republic on 25 October 1990. Neither communist party candidate – General Secretary Masaliev nor Premier Jumagulov – received the majority of the votes in the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet. At this critical moment, Aitmatov, the father of Kyrgyz literature, convened the informal “council of elders” and consulted with Soviet President Gorbachev to nominate Akayev to the Kyrgyz president (Collins, 2006, pp. 126-127). Two days later, Akayev became the first

¹⁶⁵ He worked as vice-president from 1987 and then became president of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences in 1989 (Spector, 2004, p. 5).

¹⁶⁶ With Gorbachev's initiatives, the Soviet communist party agreed to establish a Congress of People's Deputies, which would serve as a legislature that is not only composed of communist party members, but also representatives of public organizations and intellectuals. The first election was held throughout the Soviet Union on 26 March 1989 (Collins, 2006; Huskey, 2002).

¹⁶⁷ Huskey argues that the party leader assuming the post of head of state under the Gorbachev's initiative was replicated in the majority of former Soviet republics. See Huskey, 2016, footnote 3, p. 180.

president of the Soviet Kyrgyz republic with a marginal victory of 179 votes versus 171 for communist party leader Masaliev (Collins, 2006; Connery, 2000; Morozova, 2013).

Several factors need to be highlighted. For one, in June 1990, the Kyrgyz republic experienced the Osh riots, a violent conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnic groups in the southern province (*oblast*) of Osh. These riots, which were caused by redistributive land policies favouring ethnic Kyrgyz, resulted in an estimated death toll of between 300 to 600 residents, prompting the deployment of the Soviet military to contain the violence (Asankanov, 1996). Amidst the handling of multiple ethnic conflicts during this period, Gorbachev removed Masaliev from the General Secretary of the Kyrgyz Communist Party. Despite the loss of the party leadership post, Masaliev remained as Head of the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet (the legislature), and an influential politician. Second, there were a number of protests against the communist party over the worsening housing and socio-economic conditions in the republic. In May 1990, anti-communist party movements such as *Ashar*, a student movement, *Asaba* (Banner), a movement for national revival, and the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DMK) were established and even staged a hunger strike during the presidential election (Collins, 2006, p. 142). Overall public attitudes in Kyrgyzstan were opposed to communist party officials while wanting to remove Masaliev from the top political posts. At the same time, like their communist party counterparts in Moscow, Masaliev and hardline party officials of Kyrgyzstan were against Gorbachev's *demokratizatsiia* and efforts to weaken the communist party roles in the Soviet Union. Apparently, it was easier for Gorbachev to support Akayev, whom he earlier invited Akayev to serve as his Vice President of the Soviet Union, and to remove Masaliev on the grounds of mishandling ethnic issues and losing the trust of the Kyrgyz people (McGlinchey, 2011, p. 76).

After assuming the presidency in October 1990, Akayev supported all reformist initiatives of President Gorbachev and declared more liberal stances than other Central Asian presidents, who were all First Secretaries of the respective branches of CPSU. He recognized newly formed civil society organizations – *Ashar* and Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan; introduced land reform policies to resolve the land-related ethnic disputes; and strengthened the executive branch under the newly established presidential institutions. Akayev appointed his reformist supporters to newly created state and administrative posts, separating the Cabinet of Ministers from the Kyrgyz Communist Party, and removed the communist party bureaucrats from the executive posts at the republic, provincial (*oblast*), and district (*raion*) level administrations. As Collins concludes,

“Akayev followed the path of Gorbachev: he relocated power from the Party to the government, and did so in the name of democratization and economic reform” (2006, p. 146).

Akayev accumulated all political power in 1991, during some of the most turbulent year for the Soviet Union – experiencing political crises, economic slowdown, separatist movements, and ethnic clashes. Refusing President Gorbachev’s reform programs, especially his attempts to undermine the role of the communist party, on August 19, leaders of the Soviet communist party Central Committee, intelligence (KGB), defense, and internal affairs established the State Committee, declared a state of emergency, and put President Gorbachev under house arrest during his holiday retreat in Crimea (Dunlop, 2003). The State Committee directed all Soviet republics to follow the state emergency orders. Akayev, joining Presidents Yeltsin and Nazarbayev of the Soviet republics of Russia and Kazakhstan, refused to follow these orders and expressed strong solidarity with Gorbachev. He also took control of all security organizations in the republic to prevent potential Soviet military and KGB takeovers.¹⁶⁸ The coup ended on August 21. President Gorbachev resigned from the General Secretary of the CPSU whilst the Supreme Soviet terminated all communist party activities immediately in Soviet territory (Dunlop, 2003). Accordingly, President Akayev banned all activities of the communist party, stripped the property of the Kyrgyz communist party, launched criminal investigations against communist party leaders, and dismantled the communist party organizations in all state organizations, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, KGB, and Ministry of Justice.

Although Akayev and the Kyrgyz public in general were against the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan declared its independence on August 31, making it the first independent Central Asian republic. In mid-October, Akayev was re-elected as President of the newly independent republic with 95.4 percent vote in comparison to his marginal victory in previous year (Collins, 2006, p. 178). The majoritarian system was used again for this election. By December, he created the National Guard for the defense of the president; centralized the control over the military, intelligence, police, and internal troops; appointed his reformist colleagues in charge of

¹⁶⁸ Akayev quickly asserted his control over the security forces, removed the commander of the KGB division, replaced the local cadre, reduced the KGB’s power, elevated the Ministry of Interior Affairs, and strengthened his power over the security forces. According to Collins, Akayev received a call from General Kruichkov, commander of the central USSR KGB, regional commander of the KGB special battalion, First Secretary of the Kyrgyz Communist Party, Jumagalbek Amanbaev urged “complete and comprehensive support to the State Committee on the State of Emergency and all its activities” and “to get back the power to rule, to appoint, and to distribute” (Collins, 2006, p. 160).

executive offices at the capital and provinces; and dismantled the communist party (Collins, 2006, pp. 158-162).

From this time, Akayev's political powers were not subject to either the Kremlin's supervision or a strong political institution like the communist party in the republic. Instead, Akayev enjoyed popular support from reformist intellectuals, newly recognized civil society organizations and movements, and local Kyrgyz elites and Russian diasporas.

Abuse of Power

By 1993, western scholars and policy practitioners widely deemed President Akayev as the 'founding father of Kyrgyz democracy' and Kyrgyzstan itself as an 'island of democracy in a Central Asian sea of authoritarianism' (Anderson, 1999). Unlike other presidents of former Soviet Central Asian republics, Akayev was not the first secretary of the communist party; rather he gained office through competitive elections in 1989, 1990, and 1991, and firmly supported Gorbachev's reformist policies of *perestroika*, *glasnost* and *demokratizatsiia*. Following independence, he attempted to consolidate democratic institutions and transition Kyrgyzstan into market economy. At this time, Kyrgyzstan ranked higher than all Central Asian republics with its human rights records, open media, and new constitution (1993), which enshrined the principles of human rights and separation of power.¹⁶⁹ The Kyrgyz Constitution was "in part modeled on the American system of checks and balances" leading Collins to conclude that "the American model, as opposed to European models, seemed both to reflect the desired distribution of power and to appeal to the United States and Western donors" (Collins, 2006, p. 184). The 1993 Constitution established a presidential system with strong checks from the legislature, *Jogorku Kenesh*, while leaving the judicial and electoral institutions untouched. As argued by Huskey (2002, 2007) and Fumagalli (2015), Kyrgyzstan chose president-parliamentarism, a subtype of the semi-presidentialism, "where the president can dismiss the Prime Minister on his or her own initiative" (Elgie & Moestrup, 2015, p. 11). This was, on the one hand, a compromise between constitutional framers, parliamentarians, and the president, and, on the other hand, a response to demonstrations in other former Soviet republics, especially Russian Federation. Soon, this new institutional setting would test the sincerity of Akayev's pro-democracy stance. From 1994 to 2005, Akayev revised

¹⁶⁹ The constitution-making process was regarded as more open, transparent, and inclusive than most of the Soviet republics. President Akayev did not direct the process, but it is hard to negate his influence in the institutional choice – a presidential system. He favoured the majoritarian system even after his support for the consociational models and proportional representative systems (Oraz, 2013, pp. 38-39; Huskey, 2016, pp. 164-170; Collins, 2006, p. 180).

the constitution in his favour multiple times through constitutional referendums, created a patronage network, and suppressed his opponents, media, and public protests.

When challenged by the legislature, Akayev quickly took the necessary measures to consolidate his power over the legislature and, consequently, the constitutional referendum became the most legitimate tool. For example, in October 1994, Akayev managed to secure overwhelming support to revise the 1993 constitution to establish a bicameral legislature, which consists of a 35-member permanent lower house Legislative Assembly, working as a permanent legislative body, and a 70-member upper house People's Assembly, which discussed major issues in periodic sessions (Huskey & Isakova, 2011, p. 6). A few days later, with pressures from regional elites and local community leaders, he issued a decree revising the electoral law (1994) to allow public associations and local communities to nominate their candidates to the legislature.¹⁷⁰ As observed by Huskey (2002, 2016) and Koldys (1997), this move gave the president the power to assign his colleagues to the upper house and to increase the number of independent members in order to prevent the emergence of strong parties and to keep the parliament weak and divided. Also, in 1994, Akayev and the majority of parliament members voted in favour of the majoritarian electoral system despite international consultants' recommendations to introduce the proportional representation to strengthen political parties (Collins, 2006, 180).

In addition, Akayev pushed another referendum (1996), which enhanced the president's right to nominate all top officials, including the Prime Minister (Oraz, 2013, p. 39). Interestingly, if the parliament failed to approve either of three presidentially-nominated candidates, the president could dissolve the parliament. At the same time, Akayev also controlled the Constitutional Court since all nine members had to be nominated by the president and approved by the parliament. In 1998, the Constitutional Court decided in favour of Akayev's desire to run in the presidential election for the third term, which was barred by the 1993 Constitution (Huskey, 2002, pp. 85-86). However, since the constitution was enacted in the middle of the sitting president's first term, the issue was whether the term should count toward to the two-term limit or not.¹⁷¹ Again, prior to the 2000 parliamentary election, Akayev introduced proportional representation for the first time. Under the revision, 90 members of the legislature (45 from each chamber) were elected by the

¹⁷⁰ Luong (2002) argues that Akayev made such decision because provincial and local elites do not want to give authority and power to nominate to political parties.

¹⁷¹ The Constitutional Court ruled that he was able to stand in 2000 only because his first term, under the old Soviet-era Constitution, did not count as part of the two-term limitation (Huskey, 2002, pp. 85-96).

majoritarian voting system and fifteen members of the permanent legislature were elected “in a single national proportional representation (PR) district on the basis of closed party lists with a threshold of 5 percent of actual voters” (Huskey & Iskakova, 2011, p. 6). The introduction of proportional representation was not made to strengthen political parties, but rather to reduce the probability of oppositional leaders winning in single-member districts and also to place Akayev’s relatives and close allies in the less visible party lists (Huskey & Iskakova, 2011, p. 6). At the same, Akayev could not increase the proportional representation quota because that would also increase the chance for strong opposition parties to emerge. Later, during Akayev’s third term of presidency, in 2003, another constitutional referendum was conducted to gauge the public’s support on whether to allow a major constitutional reform and permit Akayev to remain as President so that he could implement the approved constitutional amendments (OSCE, 2005). Prior to this referendum, in 2002, Akayev created the Constitutional Council of 40-45 members by his decree, which represented another interference in the constitutionally-mandated rights of the legislature.¹⁷²

In June 2003, the lower house of the Kyrgyz parliament passed a law providing lifelong immunity from prosecution for President Akayev. This law stipulated that Akayev would remain a member of the National Security Council for life, continue to receive 80 percent of his presidential salary, and be allowed to keep his houses in Bishkek and Lake Issyk-Kul, a tourist resort, as well as access to an official car and chauffeur (Analyst, 2003). Overall, these legal changes not only demonstrate Akayev’s control over the legislative institutions, but also how he aimed to empower the presidency and maintain his patronage network.

Whether intentionally or not, Akayev institutionalized a patronage network, which evolved through different phases until his ousting in 2005. During his initial presidency (1990 – 1993), he relied on his colleagues and reformist intellectuals whilst replacing all communist party officials from the state, provincial, and local administrations. Also, in order to increase his legitimacy and support, he began to transfer more power to local elites rather than emerging, weak political parties. As the legislature began to challenge Akayev and his appointees over the abuse of power, mostly in terms misappropriations and corruptions, he created a bicameral legislature. This served two purposes. For one, it reduced the size and influence of the opposition. Second, it provided

¹⁷² The main task of the council, which composed of Akayev-friendly government and civil society representatives propose amendments to the Expert Group of officials and scholars, and then to the abovementioned constitutional referendum.

Akayev with the advantage of having the broad presence of independent members, who were mostly concerned with their own regional/local constituency as opposed to the national issues. Also, members of the upper house now worked as part-time legislators; this enabled them to hold executive posts in the central and local administrations. With his increased power over the executive branch, President Akayev was able to reward members with executive posts such as governorships (Huskey, 2002, p. 84). For instance, by September 1994, Akayev managed to appoint half of the Soviet-era elected members of parliament to positions within the presidential administration. As McGlinchey described “indeed, reading the roster of the 1995 Assembly of People’s Representatives [upper house] is like reading a who’s who in the Kyrgyz state bureaucracy” (2011, p. 91). Even though Kyrgyzstan did not have many economic resources such as oil and gas, Akayev used the foreign aid, coming from the International Financial Institutions and UNDP, skillfully to feed this patronage network. As McGlinchey argues:

“key to the relative stability of the Kyrgyz politics between 1994 and 2000, this money was not stolen directly by Akayev; rather it was doled out to Akayev appointees and supporters within the Kyrgyz bureaucracy. These appointees did not use the bank aid for enterprise restructuring; they used the aid to rebuild and solidify networks of patronage politics” (2011, p. 92).

While building his patronage network, Akayev was clearly involved in major corruption to enrich his family and close friends. Three examples are sufficient. The first well-known corruption case was his linkage with a Swiss-based trading company Seabeco in 1992. Following the media reports, the Kyrgyz parliament discovered that Akayev had secured a \$13.8 million line of credit from a Swiss bank in return for a 1.6-ton collateral in Kyrgyz gold (McGlinchey, 2011, p. 85). After investigating all the expenses for the purchase of Volvos and state-of-the-art weapons for the presidential office, consultation fees, and corporate jet usage for the presidential tour to Europe; parliament found that \$4 million dollars remained unaccounted for (McGlinchey, 2011, p. 85). The second case has to do with the businesses directly owned by the presidential family. As the commission revealed, Akayev’s family directly owned more than 40 enterprises.¹⁷³ When the Akayev family left in 2005, its net wealth was estimated between \$500 million to \$1 billion (Aslund, 2010). Finally, the US FBI revealed that three private Kyrgyz companies – all controlled by Akayev’s son Aidar Akayev and son-in-law Adil Toyganbaev – had benefitted from fuel and

¹⁷³ The list later became 140 and then reduced to 73. See (Marat, 2015).

airport service contracts with the US government. According to the report, between 2002 and 2005, Akayev family collected an average of forty million dollars annually from the US's usage of the Manas Airport. In addition, the FBI also uncovered that the

“Manas International Airport (MIA), which Aidar Akayev controlled, collected an additional two million dollars a year in rent for the U.S. air base as well as seven thousand dollars every time a U.S. military plane took off from Manas – all payments that never passed through official Kyrgyz government accounts” (McGlenchey, 2011, p. 98).

Thus, Akayev institutionalized a patronage system, which excluded former communist party leaders, opposition leaders, southern elites (as he tended to appoint northerners to govern the complicated southern provinces), and obviously the public, who were undergoing extreme socio-economic difficulties during the transition. All in all, it was clear that by controlling most businesses and holding offshore accounts while maintaining large patronage networks, Akayev and his family managed to amass vast fortunes.¹⁷⁴

Starting from the mid-1990s, President Akayev had effectively marginalized his political opponents, silenced the media, and used security forces against public protests that challenged his power. In regards to his political opponents, he first prevented the emergence of strong coalition, movements, and parties. For example, prior to the parliamentary elections in 2000, opposition parties, including the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DMK), El Bei-Bechora (People's Party) and Ar-Namys (Dignity Party), were barred over minor technical issues by the electoral commission, which was under the pressure and influence of the President from its establishment (CSCE, 2000). President Akayev successfully marginalized his opponents by co-optation, intimidation and even prosecution. In 2000, he eliminated all potential candidates before the presidential election. In September, Topchubek Turgunaliyev, the former leader of the Erkin Kyrgyzstan (Free Kyrgyzstan) party, was sentenced to 16 years of imprisonment for an alleged plot to assassinate President Akayev (Temirkulov, 2010, p. 529). Felix Kulov, a once highly-trusted official who had served as provincial governor, the national security minister, the mayor of Bishkek, and as Akayev Vice President in 1990, was arrested before the election and prosecuted afterwards (BBC, 23 March 2000; McGlinchey, 2011, p. 95). Deputy Chairman of Ar-Namys party, Emil Aliyev, was arrested in July on embezzlement charges (Radio Free Europe, 8 August 2000). Akayev also promoted popular politicians who had been critical of him, such as Otunbaeva

¹⁷⁴ On corruption in Kyrgyzstan, see Collins & Gambrel, 2017; Cokgezen, 2004; Marat, 2015.

or Beshimov, to senior government positions and ambassadorial postings prior to parliamentary and presidential elections (McGlinchey, 2011, p. 94). With his control over the judiciary and electoral organizations, Akayev changed the rules to disadvantage his contenders. A vivid example is the constitutional revision that required all presidential candidates to pass a Kyrgyz language exam, which would be administered by a linguistic commission with strong ties to President Akayev (OSCE, 2000). This constitutional change was clearly directed against Kulov, a Russified Kyrgyz, who then refused to take the exam and supported an already registered Kyrgyz candidate.¹⁷⁵ These measures made most opposition leaders too weak to challenge Akayev's authority; the majority simply followed the steps of Omurbek Tekebayev, leader of the Ata-Meken socialist party, who conceded that his "party...is prepared to cooperate [with Akayev]; we have no choice. To be implacable in opposition, or even worse to resort radical measures, would be extremely dangerous" (Huskey, 2002, p. 87).

In 1999 independent watchdog organization Freedom House deemed Kyrgyzstan's political status as "NOT FREE," especially in regards with freedom of the press. According to the Freedom House reports, opposition newspapers in Kyrgyzstan were silenced as Akayev operatives forced changes in ownership or subjected editors and journalist to criminal investigations in connection with disclosing state secrecy, libeling, and tax violations (Freedom House Report, 2004). Pro-Akayev supporters changed the ownership of the *Vechernii Bishkek*.¹⁷⁶ Zamira Sydykova, an editor of Kyrgyzstan's *Res Publica* and vocal critic, was either jailed or fined for libel whenever he criticized the executives. The Ministry of National Security accused the newspaper *Delo No* (Dossier Number) of publishing national secrets (Temirkulov, 2010, p. 592). The Courts also closed investigative, critical newspapers like *Asaba* (Banner) and *Moya Stolitsa* (My City) in 2001 (Temirkulov, 2010, p. 592). As reported by the Freedom House:

The newspaper, which has been critical of the government and has conducted investigative reports on corruption, has been named as defendant in 34 lawsuits since November 2002. It had received judgments against it amounting to almost \$100,000, causing it to close in early summer of 2003 (Freedom House Report, 2004).

¹⁷⁵ Since Kulov was a popular politician, who was able to form a strong coalition against Akayev, President Akayev took aforementioned measures of prosecuting him on the corruption charges (McGlinchey, 2011, p. 95; OSCE, 2000).

¹⁷⁶ *Vecherniy Bishkek* belongs to the media holding allegedly owned by former President Akayev's son-in-law.

By 2000, President Akayev had a monopoly over media coverage; therefore, he could effectively silence the opposition media through judicial institutions and the broadcasting of counter media campaigns with his own media assets.

Prior to the Tulip Revolution, the largest public protest against President Akayev happened in the remote village of Aksy in Jalal-Abad province in western Kyrgyzstan in 2002 (Radnitz, 2005). The main cause of the protest was the arrest of Azimbek Beknazarov, who was a prominent opposition and parliamentary deputy (Lewis, 2008, p. 267). Before the arrest, Beknazarov criticized the Kyrgyz-Chinese border agreement, under which some 125,000 hectares of Kyrgyz territory was transferred to China with some land also ceded to Kazakhstan (McMillan, 2009, p. 98). As public support tilted towards Beknazarov, the Kyrgyz authorities arrested him for abuse of power charges during his work as an investigator at the district prosecutor's office in 1995 (McMillan, 2009, p. 98; Radnitz, 2005). But, the arrest and trial of Beknazarov triggered massive protests in his home region Aksy and over 400 protestors engaged in hunger strikes in Jalal-Abad region and also in Bishkek (OMCT, 2002). On March 17, under the directives of President Akayev, the local police used force against protestors killing seven unarmed civilians (Olcott, 2005). This increased public protests against President Akayev to a national scale, with protestors from provincial cities marching to the capital. In response, President Akayev quickly reached a deal with Beknazarov and fired his Prime Minister Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who would later be one of the key figures in Tulip Revolution (Radnitz, 2005, p. 414; Lewis, 2008, pp. 267-268).

Removal from Power

Akayev was removed from the presidency by violent protests, known as the Tulip Revolution, following a disputed parliamentary election in February and March 2005 (Temirkuolv, 2010, pp. 591- 594). Because of a growing legitimacy crisis, especially after the Aksy riots, Akayev attempted to place his people in control before the elections in October 2005, since he would not be allowed to run for presidency for a fourth time under the constitution. First, by the 2003 constitutional referendum, he directed the change from a bi-cameral parliament to a unicameral one, with a reduced number of members, from 105 to 75, whom would be elected by a majoritarian system (Huskey & Iskakova, 2011, p. 6). Second, also in 2003, Akayev's daughter, Bermet Akayev, established the Alga Kyrgyzstan (Forward Kyrgyzstan) Party by merging a number of small pro-president parties. The head of the Presidential Administration ran the other pro-president party, Adilet (OSCE, 2005, p. 6). On the Election Day, February 27, the 'presidential' party, Alga Kyrgyzstan, won 69 seats out of 75 parliamentary seats with the winners

including the president's daughter, son, and sister-in-law (Temirkulov, 2010, p. 593). The first protest, as recorded by Lewis, started before the election in Issyk-Kul province – a tourist resort area with no tradition of political opposition – because all the local candidates were disqualified while unknown candidates with strong ties with Akayev qualified (Lewis, 2008, p. 272).

After the election, larger protests began in southern cities of Jalal-Abad and Osh, where one of the opposition leaders, Bakiyev and his People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan took control of the process from the beginning (Radnitz, 2006; Juraev, 2008; Lewis, 2008). On March 20, protestors occupied government buildings in Jalal-Abad and Osh demanding Akayev's resignation. At the same time, protests were on the rise in Bishkek. Although President Akayev ordered the Central Election Committee and Supreme Court to investigate election fraud complaints of the oppositions on March 20, he dismissed the Minister of Interior and Chief Prosecutor for not taking strident measures against the protestors and directed the riot police to use force and arrest protestors who occupied government buildings. As the opposition strengthened, Akayev and his family fled while his Prime Minister Nikolai Tanayev resigned on March 24. Huskey and Iskakova argue,

“The president Akayev's reliance on fellow northerners to govern the country for a decade and a half created a backlash from southern Kyrgyz which, when combined with widespread disillusionment with the administration of elections and the interference of the Akayev family in business life, resulted in the March Revolution in 2005” (Huskey & Iskakova, 2010, p. 251).

Although Western scholars, policy practitioners, and the media tend to include the Tulip Revolution as part of the Color Revolution series, Radnitz (2006) and others deny the role of international influence (Juraev, 2008). Lewis (2008) and Temirkulov (2010) also reject the role of democracy promotion programs or Western-backed NGOs in removing the President Akayev from the power. As Temirkulov (2010) explains, the traditional institutions, patronage networks based on traditional solidarity (*tooganchilik*), and pre-existing, Akayev-endorsed organizations and institutions – *aksakal* (elders) and *kurultai* (assembly), and *palvan* (wrestlers) – played key roles.

President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, 2005 – 2010

This section continues the discussion of how a political leader, who also initially rallied for democratic values and democratic governance, could become an even more brutal authoritarian leader than his predecessor in the absence of strong, institutionalized political parties, especially ones that could both constrain executive powers and facilitate the transfer of this power through

the competitive elections. Unlike his predecessor, President Bakiyev established his own party, Ak Zhol (Right Path), following Putin's United Russia as a presidential party (Fumagalli, 2016, p. 193; Ishiyama & Kennedy, 2010, p. 1184). However, such personalized parties tend to serve at the pleasure of the president rather than its members and voters and lacks institutionalization. Although geopolitical competitions of great powers increased during this period, all great powers were reluctant to intervene in the domestic politics of Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, the geopolitical competition between Russia and the US neutralized Western democracy promotion efforts while providing the bargaining power for Bakiyev to take authoritarian measures to consolidate his power. Therefore, the external factors were not as important as they were in the early 1990s, but they were still constraining factors.

Ascendance to Power

A native of south Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiyev (1949) started his career as an electrical engineer after graduating from the Kuybyshev Polytechnical Institute in Russia and completing his military service in the Soviet Army (BBC, 29 April 2010). From 1990, he began his political career as the first secretary of the city council for Kok-Yangak, a coal-mining town in the Jalal-Abad province and was then elected deputy chair of the provincial legislature. President Askar Akayev appointed him governor of Jalal-Abad in 1995 and then of Chui province in 1997 (BBC, 29 April 2010). After serving as governor in two of six provinces, Bakiyev became Prime Minister in December 2000. However, in May 2002, President Akayev blamed him for the use of force against the Aksy riots and dismissed him (Radnitz, 2005, p. 414; Lewis, 2008, pp. 267-268).¹⁷⁷ This prompted Bakiyev to join the opposition and focus on defending the interests of the southern provinces. In September 2004, after uniting over ten opposition parties, Bakiyev formed the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan, an electoral alliance for the 2005 (February) parliamentary elections, and also declared his intentions of running in the presidential elections in October (Marat, 2008). After losing in the parliamentary election, Bakiyev played a key leadership role in demanding the cancellation of the election and Akayev's resignation. During these protests, Bakiyev was appointed chairman of the Coordinating Council and then became acting President and Prime Minister. Due to key concerns over the restoration of public order and the peaceful transition to a new government, leaders of the Great Powers quickly recognized Bakiyev's interim

¹⁷⁷ In the post-Soviet Kyrgyz politics, Presidents regularly used the post of Prime Minister as an escape route; there were 12 Prime Ministers under the Akayev presidency and 7 under the Bakiyev.

leadership and promised to provide the necessary assistance.¹⁷⁸ Bakiyev established an interim government, set the presidential election date as July 10, 2005, and released Felix Kulov, an influential politician who had been jailed by Akayev, and put him in charge of law enforcement services (Radnitz, 2006, p. 140). Clearly, this was a tactic to overcome the regional divide between the north and south. Although Kulov, who was also popular in northern Kyrgyzstan, was planning to run in the presidential election, Bakiyev managed to convince him to become his running mate for the election and serve as Prime Minister. As a result, Bakiyev won the presidency with 88.7 percent of the votes (OSCE, 2005). The OSCE regarded the election as meeting international standards for democratic elections while still acknowledging that “the candidacy of acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was dominant and was significantly better resourced than his opponents” (OSCE, 2005). Although weaker than President Akayev’s presidency, Bakiyev accumulated all political power following the 2005 election and soon establish his own patronage network while not fulfilling his earlier commitments to strengthening democratic institutions, especially the parliament, and fighting against corruption (Marat, 2008, pp. 231-232).

Abuse of Power

Bakiyev followed similar patterns of his predecessor to use constitutional referendums, decrees, and the judiciary to increase presidential authority, establish his own patronage network for the benefit of his entourage, and suppress political opponents, the media, and public protests. Many contend Bakiyev’s schemes were more complicated, greedier, and violent than Akayev’s.

As in the Akayev’s case, constitutional referendums became Bakiyev’s key instrument to weaken the parliament. Because of his early promises and mounting public pressure, President Bakiyev agreed to curtail presidential powers and increase the number of members and authority of the parliament in November 2006. Yet, in reality, he refused to reduce the power of the presidency and also called an early parliamentary election in 2006. This triggered conflicts with key opposition leaders, including Kulov, Beknazarov, Otunbaeva, and Almazbek Atanbaev, all of whom had not only collaborated with Bakiyev in organizing massive anti-Akayev protests but had also endorsed his leadership (Sengupta, 2013, pp. 60-61, Marat, 2008, pp. 231-232).

¹⁷⁸ At that critical moment, President Bakiyev, you along with Felix Kulov, Foreign Minister Otunbaeva, and other prominent leaders, moved decisively to establish a functioning interim government, which has legitimacy among the people. In doing so, you brought stability and a sense of security to your people in an otherwise very volatile situation, while at the same time respecting human rights. See the statement of the US Mission to the OSCE, June 15, 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.osce.org/pc/15208?download=true>

In October 2007, Bakiyev organized a constitutional referendum for enlarging the parliament from 75 to 90 members, introducing a pure proportional representation system, and called early elections (Sengupta, 2013, p. 62; Huskey & Isakova, 2011, pp. 6-7). The electoral system along with the parliamentary structure were changed at least four times: a majoritarian system for the 1990 and 1995 elections, a mixed system (of majoritarian and proportional representation) for 2000 election, a majoritarian system for 2005 election, and finally a proportional representation system for 2007 election.¹⁷⁹ This new proportional representation system required two sets of thresholds: first, a party must pass a five percent national threshold and then an additional 0.5 percent threshold that the party is required to pass in each of the seven regions and two large cities (i.e., Bishkek and Osh) (OSCE, 2007). The OSCE concluded that “conditions set by the Kyrgyz legislation for eligibility of parties to qualify for seat allocation are unusual” and “the system would allow for an endless cycle of failed elections” if no party passed both thresholds (OSCE, 2007).

Soon after the referendum, Bakiyev dissolved parliament on October 22 and called for pre-term parliamentary elections for December 16. At the same time, on October 15, President Bakiyev established Ak Jol (Right Path) party, which won 71 out of 90 seats (OSCE, 2008). As the OSCE mission described it, “Ak Jol appeared the best organized of the parties and the most well resourced financially” in this snap, unfair election (OSCE, 2007, p. 11).¹⁸⁰ Although Akayev tried the method of having the pro-presidential party dominate the legislature in 2005, it was too late. Until 2005, Akayev had been intentionally distancing himself from any political parties, even the communist party, of which he was a member. In contrast, Bakiyev had more success in establishing the presidential party in 2007 in order to maintain power over the legislature according to Ishiyama and Kennedy (2010). Like Akayev, Bakiyev maintained control over the Central Election Commission at the national and local levels, the judiciary, including the Constitutional Court, and the state bureaucracy; this also enabled him to win the 2009 presidential elections despite observations that the election was unfair according to the OSCE observers, opposition party leaders, and the public. As Juraev concludes,

¹⁷⁹ According to Huskey and Isakova, “the rules governing the presidential elections have remained relatively stable in the post-communist era...Kyrgyzstan has retained a presidential election using a majoritarian voting system” (Huskey & Isakova, p. 10).

¹⁸⁰ According to Juraev, “a party-list based proportional representation system for parliamentary elections had been one of the most popular ideas, which became a reality in 2007 constitutional changes” but, regrettably the election was manipulated and used effectively by Bakiyev (2008, p. 261; Kubicek, 2011).

“the change from single-mandate electoral districts to party-list based elections allowed the pro-presidential Ak Jol Party to secure tight control of the parliament in December 2007 elections, while staunch critics of Bakiyev ended up outside the parliament.” (Juraev, 2008, p. 261)

During his five years of presidency, Bakiyev quickly established his own patronage network, which relied heavily on his family, relatives, and wealthy business associates, many of whom were believed to have strong ties to criminal groups. For example, he put his brother, Janysh Bakiyev, in charge of the Presidential Guard and the National Security Services, appointed two brothers as ambassadors to Germany and China, and posted his other four brothers in senior political and business posts (Ayvaz et al., 2012, p. 617). From October 2009, Bakiyev’s son Maksim led the newly established Central Agency on Development, Investment, and Innovation (CADI), which oversaw all financial inflows, including US and Russian aid payments, Chinese investments, royalties from mining companies, and profits from national hydroelectric and telecommunication companies (Marat, 2015, p. 49). With his commanding authority on economic matters and protection from his father, Maksim established an international money-laundering network with two foreign entrepreneurs, Russian Mikhail Nadel and American Eugene Gourevich, and embezzled up to US\$1.2 billion in offshore accounts while controlling the assets of Kyrgyz’s largest financial institutions (Smythe, 2016; Marat, 2015, p. 49). The following two examples are sufficient to demonstrate the scale of the Bakiyev family patronage network. In February 2009, Bakiyev secured a 40-year loan worth 2 billion USD at 0.75 percent interest from Russia for the hydropower sector reform and \$300 million USD was disbursed immediately (Cooley, 2009, p. 330; Marat, 2015, p. 51). This deal was also believed to end the American military basing rights in Kyrgyzstan. However, only \$100 million USD was actually invested into the construction of the hydroelectric power station (Marat, 2015, p. 51). The rest, \$200 million USD, went to Maksim’s CADI and his colleague Gourevich’s MNG group (Marat, 2015, p. 51). The other example relates to the American fees for the usage of the Manas airport. One of the first orders of Bakiyev was to appoint his close colleagues to control the airport, which had been the main source of rent for the Akayev family (Toktomushev, 2015). Despite many other service fees, the fuel contract was later discovered the most hidden, but lucrative business for President Bakiyev. US congressional investigators, the FBI, and Kyrgyz authorities all discovered that Bakiyev-affiliated subcontractors (six companies under his son’s control) evaded millions of dollars in excise taxes (Nichol, 2013, p. 26-27; Cooley, 2012). Because of the complicated links to Russian refineries, the US Defense

Department used intermediary offshore firms, Toktomushev (2015) argues that the Pentagon's no-bid fuel contracts still remain unresolved even though all the facts were disclosed by a 2010 US Congressional investigation. After settling a deal with Russians in February, Bakiyev made a new contract with Washington to increase the usage fees of the airport from \$17 to \$60 million USD per year in June 2005 (Toktomushev, 2015, p. 68). Again, Maksim and his colleague Gourevitch played a key role in establishing new shell companies, privatizing the airport facilities, and hiding their shares from the government bursary. Although Bakiyev established similar patronage networks as his predecessor, he managed to accumulate more wealth in a shorter period of time by putting his sons and relatives in charge.

The Bakiyev period is considered the most brutal in terms of dealing with his political opponents, media, and public protests. Beyond his powers over the executives and judiciary, Bakiyev apparently employed criminal networks to physically threaten and even assassinate politicians and journalists (Collins, 2011; Marat, 2015). "Since Bakiyev became president, about 10 well-known public figures – including five members of parliament – have been murdered" (Temirkulov, 2010, p. 595). For instance, in September 2006, opposition leader Omurbek Tekebayev was arrested after heroin was found in his luggage at the Warsaw airport. After feuding with Bakiyev, Tekebayev resigned as speaker of parliament and founded the 'For Reforms' political movement, which staged large-scale protests against President Bakiyev. This was believed to be the main reason of the arrest (Coffey et al., 2017). The death of Medet Sadyrkulov, former chief of staff for presidents Akayev and Bakiyev was also found to be politically motivated and contracted by Bakiyev's brother (Cummings, 2013, p. 445). In January 2009, Sadyrkulov resigned from his post and became an active opposition politician. But, he was later found in his car, burned with his driver and political strategist (*Economist*, January 7, 2010, US State Department, 2010). Similarly, media outlets came under pressure, but again in more brutal fashion than during the Akayev period. The bureaucracy and judiciary pressured the media, particularly those critical towards Bakiyev's presidency and many journalists were physically abused and even murdered (Freedom House, 2010). For instance, Alisher Saipov, who ran an Uzbek language newspaper, was killed in October 2007. Syrgak Abdyldayev, a journalist at an independent weekly newspaper was stabbed in March 2009 and another critical journalist, Kubanychbek Joldoshev was beaten in November. In December 2009, well-known journalist Gennady Pavlyuk was found dead, wrapped in duct tape in Kazakhstan (US State Department, 2010; Amnesty International, 2010). As an indication of this brutality, the OSCE called on the Kyrgyz authority to address the 'safety

crisis' of free press on December 23, 2009 (OSCE, 2009). In 2009, the authorities demanded all media to submit programming for government screening before the broadcast and shut down several independent newspapers, websites, and radio stations for reporting about the Gourevitch affair, which disclosed facts of the money laundering by President's son Maksim and Gourevitch (*Ferghana News*, 2010).

Removal from Power

Unlike President Akayev, Bakiyev experienced frequent public demonstrations and protests, orchestrated by opposition leaders, over corruption, cronyism, and deteriorating socio-economic conditions, especially the energy crisis during the winter of 2009 – 2010 (McGlinchey, 2011, pp. 100-108; Collins, 2011, p. 154). The government proposed to increase heating costs by 400% and electricity by 170% while a sudden rise in fuel prices further contributed to public discontent (Temirkulov, 2010, p. 596). On 17 March 2010, opposition leaders convened a national Kurultai, a traditional assembly [a different entity than the parliament], issued “an ultimatum to the authorities consisting of seven points, which included demanding the removal of Bakiyev's family from power, a return of privatized state companies, and a decrease in tariffs” (Temirkulov, 2010, p. 596). As Bakiyev ignored these demands, the opposition began to plan a national Kurultai all over the country on April 7, 2010 (Collins, 2011, p. 155). But, the president preempted this plan. In response, on April 6, about 1,000 protestors demonstrated in the western city of Talas, occupied a government building, and took government workers hostage (EurasiaNet, 7 April 2010). The police and security forces freed the government workers and arrested prominent opposition leaders - Omurbek Tekebayev, Almazbek Atambayev, and many others (Nichol, 2010, p. 3). On this same day, similar protests occurred in the capital city Bishkek, and several other northern cities. On the morning of April 7, the police arrested a small number of protestors outside the Social Democratic Party headquarters in Bishkek (Nichol, 2010, p. 4). This triggered more demonstrations. Hundreds of protestors filled the city's main square, Ala-Too Square, surrounded the presidential White House, and attempted to storm the presidential office. At this point, security forces and police fired upon protestors with live ammunition. Immediately, President Bakiyev declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew. But, opposition leaders had already taken control of both the parliament building and the Kyrgyz national television broadcaster, and declared the establishment

of an interim government. On that evening, President Bakiyev fled to the southern city of Osh. Over forty people were killed and many protestors and police personnel were wounded.¹⁸¹

On April 8, the interim government declared Roza Otunbayeva interim president, demanded President Bakiyev's resignation, and promised elections within six months (Collins, 2011, pp. 156-157). The police and the army came under the control of the interim government. From his hometown of Osh, President Bakiyev called for the United Nations to restore order and refused to resign from the presidency. In response, the interim government issued an arrest warrant and removed his immunity. During this crisis, Russian President Medvedev and Kazakh President Nazarbayev were meeting with President Obama at a Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, DC. All three presidents were in agreement in demanding President Bakiyev's resignation and for him to leave the country in order to prevent civil war in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁸² On April 13, after learning of these international reactions, Bakiyev agreed to resign if his, and his family's and entourage's, security could be guaranteed. In response, interim leader Otunbayeva refused to provide immunity, and insisted on holding Bakiyev, his minister of defense, and his relatives in the government accountable for the deaths of protestors. Subsequently, the Kyrgyz court issued arrest warrants for Bakiyev, his brother, his eldest son, and the former Prime Minister (*Reuters*, April 11, 2010). On April 15, Bakiyev fled to Kazakhstan and then to Belarus after President Alexander Lukashenko assured that Bakiyev and three members of his family would be under "the protection of our state, and personally of the president" (*The Guardian*, April 20, 2010).

Meanwhile, Bakiyev made two contradictory statements. On April 15, he submitted a handwritten resignation letter stating, "I tender my resignation in these tragic days as I understand the full scale of my responsibility for the future of the Kyrgyz people" (*Reuters*, April 15, 2010). This was written when he was in Kazakhstan. On April 21, from Minsk, the capital city of Belarus, he said, "I do not recognize my resignation. Nine months ago the people of Kyrgyzstan elected me their president and there is no power can stop me. Only death can stop me," and vowed to fight to return to power (*BBC News*, April 21, 2010; *Aljazeera*, April 21, 2010; *News24*, 2010). During this period, from April 19 to May 13, pro-Bakiyev supporters staged numerous protests against newly appointed governors in southern cities, where Bakiyev had been the most popular. For example,

¹⁸¹ For more detailed analysis, see International Crisis Group Report, 2010. Retrieved from [http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/193%20The%20Pogroms%20in%20Kyrgyzstan\(1\).pdf](http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/193%20The%20Pogroms%20in%20Kyrgyzstan(1).pdf)

¹⁸² Medvedev warned that Kyrgyzstan was at the brink of a civil war and could turn into a "second Afghanistan." Also, Kazakh President Nazarbayev, whose country was chairing the OSCE, shared Medvedev's view (*New York Times*, April 15, 2010; *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, April 20, 2010).

pro-Bakiyev protestors attacked government offices in Jalal-Abad, Osh, and Batken provinces, youth in the Bishkek suburbs rioted to seize lands from ethnic Russians, and armed protestors attacked the US Transit Centre at the Manas Airport. These protestors demanded president Bakiyev's return and that the appointments of the interim governments be invalidated. As a result of these protests, seven people were killed and over sixty-five people injured (ICG, 2010). The interim government pledged to restore the law and order in southern cities and announced a constitutional referendum (on 27 June 2010) to reduce the power of the president and parliamentary elections in October 2010. Interim President Otunbayeva declared that she would not run in the upcoming presidential election in 2011 (Collins, 2011, p. 159).

Starting from June 9, protests against the interim government were exacerbated by ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz nationals and Uzbek ethnic minorities in the southern city of Osh and along the Fergana valley, where Uzbek ethnic groups predominate. The ethnic clashes left over 2,000 people, mostly Uzbeks, killed, thousands wounded, 400,000 internally displaced, and over 100,000 refugees to Uzbekistan (UNHCR, 2010; ICG, 2010; KIC, 2010). On June 12, interim president Otunbayeva declared a state of emergency and appealed to Russian leaders to deploy the military to end the violence. However, the Russian president declined, stating that, in the words of President's spokeswoman, "it is an internal conflict and for now Russia does not see the conditions for taking part in its resolution"¹⁸³ Finally, by June 15, the Kyrgyz security forces contained the ethnic violence and began international and national investigations and reconciliation. Despite reluctance by all great powers, except China, to intervene militarily, Russian President Medvedev and Chinese President Hu Jintao extended their political support to Kyrgyzstan's provincial government to restore order.

Amidst political and social instability, Kyrgyzstan conducted a constitutional referendum on June 27th; as a result, the revised constitution reduced the presidential term to a single term and strengthened the roles of the legislature and political parties.¹⁸⁴ It also adapted several mechanisms to prevent further constitutional amendments and to constrain ways for presidents to concentrate political power. Under the revised constitution, on July 3, interim President Otunbayeva was sworn

¹⁸³ Even though Interim President Otunbayeva requested Russian military deployment, the Kremlin refused to interfere militarily in Kyrgyzstan (Gorecki, 2010; Black & Johns, 2013, p. 177). In contrast, the Chinese expressed their interests in deploying military force in the aftermath of the ethnic violence.

¹⁸⁴ Scholars concluded that Kyrgyzstan made a clear shift from presidential system to parliamentary system (e.g., Collins, 2011). It is worthwhile to note that Russian President Medvedev advised not to adapt the parliamentary system, which was not suitable to the Kyrgyz politics (Troitskiy, 2012, p. 21).

in as president; however, she was prohibited from running in the 2011 presidential election. As stipulated by the new constitution, only political parties and coalitions were authorized to run in the parliamentary election in October 2010 (for results, see Table 12); as a result, a new coalition government was formed. Similar to the previous parliamentary pre-term election in 2007, the proportional representation system was used to elect parliament members (OSCE, 2010). According to OSCE reports, “to gain seats in parliament, a political party had to surpass a 5 percent national and 0.5 percent regional threshold, both calculated against the number of registered voters rather than based on turnout” (OSCE, 2010, p. 1). Moreover, the new constitution limited the number of parliamentary seats for a single party to 65 out of 120 regardless of the number of votes in order to prevent the dominance by one political party, which could change the constitution (OSCE, 2010). Unlike previous elections, the new constitution and other relevant laws (e.g., Electoral Code and Law on Political Parties) stipulated political parties as the only organizations entitled to nominate candidates for parliament. As concluded by foreign observers, the parliamentary election was a major achievement towards the consolidation of the parliamentary democracy, but many still expressed concerns over the stability of these new political arrangements.¹⁸⁵

Table 12. Result of the 2010 Parliamentary Election

Party	Votes	%	Seats
Ata-Zhurt	257,100	15.41	28
Social Democratic Party	237,634	14.15	26
Ar-Namys	229,916	13.78	25
Respublika	210,594	12.62	23
Ata Meken Socialist Party	166,714	9.99	18

Source: General Election Commission; OSCE, 2010.

ANALYSIS

The evidence presented in this chapter shows how the changing dynamics of geopolitical interests of Great Powers and the absence of strong political parties have complicated the consolidation process of electoral democracy. Kyrgyzstan lacked a strong political party, or a party

¹⁸⁵ For example, Collins (2011) expresses her hope whereas Radnitz (2010) expresses his doubts for the future development of democratization. There were 850 international observers during the parliamentary election; for instance, the OSCE placed the largest election observation mission with 300 personnel.

that was dominated by reform-minded, collective leaders, institutionalized decision-making procedures, and had a nation-wide infrastructure of reaching out, representing, and mobilizing society. The absence of such a strong, institutionalized party seems the missing piece in the Kyrgyz democratization process. In addition to penetrating, representing, and mobilizing roles, a strong party promotes the political stability by constraining behaviours of populist leaders and facilitating the smooth transition of power through regular, inclusive, and fair elections. Most importantly, in electoral democracies, the party reduces the uncertainty for outgoing political leaders.

In the first period, leaders of Kyrgyzstan enjoyed a favourable geopolitical environment, or the geopolitical blessing, for its democratic transition. All great powers lacked direct geopolitical competitions in Kyrgyzstan, which did not present any geostrategic or economic attractions for neighbouring as well as distant great powers. After endorsing the Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev, who was pro-Russian (i.e., pro-Gorbachev and pro-Yeltsin), the Kremlin pulled out from Kyrgyz politics and economy as a part of its retrenchment. Leaders in Beijing did not have immediate economic interests in Kyrgyzstan, but they did want to secure the Kyrgyz leaders' support on key foreign policy objectives and also sought to develop stronger bilateral relations, in hopes of making Kyrgyzstan less dependent on the Kremlin. The United States apparently had clear ideological interests in supporting the Kyrgyz leader's commitment to implementing simultaneous economic and political reforms. Sino-Russian geopolitical interests were satisfied by their explicit agreements of not engaging in direct geopolitical competition in Kyrgyzstan and supporting its geostrategic neutrality. In case of the United States, the promotion of Kyrgyzstan's political and economic liberalization was its primary geopolitical interests, a strategy that also avoided in engaging in direct geopolitical competition with Russia and China. In absence of conflicting geostrategic interests from Beijing, the Kremlin, and Washington (see Table 13), Kyrgyz leaders had no other options other than reaching out to the United States for its support. Without popular support, president Akayev had chosen the path of continuing Gorbachev and Yeltsin-type political reforms and permitting a more liberal approach to passing the constitution, providing more space for civil society, and encouraging the free press.

Table 13. Interests of Great Powers in Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s

Great Powers	Priority of Interests	Content of Interests	Satisfied (if)
Russia	Security*	Neutrality	No security presence/alliance
China	Security	Neutrality	No security presence/alliance
	Political	One China Policy (Terrorism, separatism, and religious)	Non-interference in domestic matters (Xinjiang Uyghur/East Turkestan)

		extremism)	
United States	Political	Electoral Democracy	No reversal
	Economic	Market Economy	No reversal

This supports two key findings of the democratization literature. First, the absence of direct geopolitical competition between great powers provides breathing space for domestic politics. This absence of direct geopolitical interests is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the transition. Second, Western democracy promotion efforts and conditions are more credible and stronger when Western powers do not have overriding security and economic interests. This creates favourable external conditions for electoral democracy in the unipolar moment of 1990s.

In the second period, the emergence of geopolitical competitions among great powers complicated the consolidation process of electoral democracy, but it did not play a decisive role like in the first period. Following its immediate security objectives to conduct military operations in Afghanistan, the United States and its allies increased their support to Kyrgyzstan. Starting from the late 1990s, Western governments ignored authoritarian behaviors of Kyrgyz authorities and became more concerned with gaining reliable access to military transit bases in Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian states. The Western military deployments in Central Asia triggered Russian geostrategic concerns. The Kremlin immediately pressured the first president to provide similar basing rights for the Russian military deployments and later demanded from the second president to expel the Western military from Kyrgyzstan. Although not at a similar level, Chinese leaders also voiced their concerns over Western military deployments and enhanced their engagements with Kyrgyz authorities in all areas of cooperation. While the United States government was silent over faulty elections and post-election violence, the Kremlin deployed its resources to organize negative media campaign, raised tariffs of critical imports (i.e., fuel and electricity), received opposition leaders, and rendered its support to interim government leaders. At the same time, China increased its developmental aid and immediately rendered political recognition for new Kyrgyz leaders multilaterally (e.g., SCO) and bilaterally. The dynamics of the second period also confirms key findings of the democratization literature. For one, the presence of conflicting geostrategic interests of great powers complicates the consolidation, especially as it increases the bargaining power of authoritarian leaders vis-à-vis great powers. Second, the overarching security and/or economic interests reduce the credibility of the Western democracy promotion efforts and the effectiveness of the conditionality. The Kyrgyz case shows that the Kremlin has ability to punish or pressure leaders of the peripheral state if they do not accommodate its geopolitical

concerns. At the same time, there is no evidence of either the Kremlin or Beijing engaging in autocracy promotion either multilaterally (e.g., SCO, CSTO, EEU) or bilaterally. However, not all evidence shows that external factors play a decisive role in the consolidation period. For example, all Great Powers were reluctant to interfere in Kyrgyz domestic politics especially during and after the two violent protests and, instead of the military deployment, all quickly endorsed the interim leaders. This shows that the main concern of all Great Powers is Kyrgyzstan's stability and their security interests (see Table 14).

Table 14. Interests of Great Powers in Kyrgyzstan after 2000

Great Powers	Priority of Interests	Content of Interests	Satisfied (if)
Russia	Security*	Neutrality	No security presence/alliance
China	Security	Neutrality	No security presence/alliance
	Political	One China Policy (Terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism)	Non-interference in domestic matters (Xinjiang Uyghur/East Turkestan)
United States	Security	Maintenance of Military Base	Permits the maintenance
	Economic	Market Economy	No reversal

The changing dynamics of the geopolitical setting (or structure) is an important variable for the democratization process of a small, peripheral state. The absence of direct geopolitical competition creates a favourable condition for the transition and consolidation of electoral democracy while its presence could contribute to the reversal to authoritarianism. Like Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan lack membership conditionality and institutional checks from the democracy-based or regional security or economic organizations (EU, NATO, OECD) as well as close linkages with developed democracies.

This evidence highlights that a key domestic variable is the political party and competitive party system. In the absence of the strong political party, which is dominated by reform-minded, collective leaders, the democratic transition could happen, but it is not sustainable. In the Kyrgyz case, the democratic transition process was led by Akayev; this made it less sustainable than the democratic transition led by a strong, institutionalized party as happened in Mongolia. In the absence of a competitive party system, the likelihood of the consolidation of electoral democracy is low. Because there were no strong political parties to constrain leaders like Akayev and Bakiyev, Kyrgyz democratization was derailed.

There are two potential explanations for the absence of a strong political party. One is related to the institutional design of the former Soviet Union and particularly decisions of Gorbachev and Yeltsin to departicize the state and society in 1986 – 1991. The other is intentional measures, which were taken by Presidents Akayev and Bakiyev, to prevent the emergence of

strong nationwide political parties and empower their own patronage networks such as personalistic parties or traditional institutions (e.g., clans, community elders, and kurultai).

In 1986 – 1991, like the majority of former Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan had a weak tradition of party collective decision-making due to three factors. Firstly, the Kremlin's appointed powerful first secretary was typically more loyal to the Kremlin and dependent on the communist party of the Soviet Union rather than the party's branch (esp., the political bureau) in the republic. Therefore, the Kremlin-appointed first secretary along with his Russian deputy were more powerful than the republic's collective decision-making bodies: party's politburo, central committee, and presidium. This was not the case in Mongolia. Being a satellite state meant that the Mongolian communist party was more autonomous than parties belonging to the Soviet republic. Secondly, starting in 1986, Gorbachev's policies undermined the communist party's role and influence, and opened up opportunities for populist leaders such as Askar Akayev to takeover through newly the created presidency after 1990. In the Mongolian case, Gorbachev's removal of an authoritarian leader helped to strengthen the party's collective decision-making; thus preventing the emergence of populist leaders. Thirdly, Kyrgyzstan, like most republics, banned and dismantled the communist party and stripped its resources in the aftermath of the August coup in 1991 following steps taken by Yeltsin in Moscow.¹⁸⁶ This different trajectory of dismantlement explains the absence of the strong political organization (i.e., party) and the take-over by populist presidents – Akayev and Bakiyev. The Kyrgyz ruling party was completely destroyed, whereas in Mongolia the party did not exit from power and remained in a position to bargain or to become regenerated (reformed) parliamentary parties.¹⁸⁷

The evidence presented in this chapter has shown similar behaviors and actions of Kyrgyz presidents. Both campaigned for democracy, strengthened their power by manipulating laws and elections, abused their powers, and were removed by violent protests.

After taking power on pro-liberal and reform principles, President Akayev's power base was threatened by the legislature, newly emerging political party leaders, civil society organizations, and the media. This caused him to take protective measures by allowing local

¹⁸⁶ Koldys argues the Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan is the successor to the Kyrgyz branch of the CPSU. "Although many of its resources were confiscated and its organizational structure was virtually dismantled, the Communist Party remains one of the largest parties in terms of membership, and it receives considerable support from its compatriots in Russia and other states in the former Soviet Union" (Koldys, 1997, p. 367).

¹⁸⁷ The Moldovan communist party was the only communist party remained intact and maintain a majority in the government while all others were banned in 1991 and slowly re-emerged in 1993-1994 elections.

communities to elect their parliament members, changing the structure and number of parliament members three times, manipulating the election procedures and regulations, and marginalizing key opposition leaders through law enforcement agencies and the judiciary.¹⁸⁸ Particularly, Akayev's direct amendment to the parliamentary electoral law in October 1994, as argued by Koldys (1997), had serious implications to the development of a party system (p. 351). The amendment allowed "public associations" and "local communities" (essentially local government councils) to field candidates alongside political parties, labor collectives, and meetings of voters at their place of residence, and self-nominated candidates" (Koldys, 1997, p. 351).¹⁸⁹

On the one hand, the 1994 amendment seems to have been passed in favour of decentralization and empowering the local representations in the legislature. But, on the other hand, this was done to prevent the emergence of strong political parties and legislature. Starting from 2003, when pressures for the empowerment of parliament increased, President Akayev realized the importance of the political party, which would provide an institutional support for his patronage network in the parliament. Alga Kyrgyzstan was founded in 2003 and associated with Bermet Akayeva, a daughter of President Akayev. The other pro-Akayev party was Adilet, which was run by the former Head of the Presidential Administration. According to the OSCE report, these two major pro-presidential parties, Alga Kyrgyzstan and Adilet, together nominated 65 percent of the total party-nominated candidates (OSCE, 2005). The importance of political parties increased after the post-election violent protests in 2005. In this context, President Bakiyev established his Ak Jol party on 15 October 2007 in order to assert its influence in the 2007 parliamentary election.¹⁹⁰ Ak Jol party served as a presidential party, which also received financial support and protection from President Bakiyev and his associates as Ishiyama & Kennedy (2010) contend.

The absence of a strong institutionalized political party contributed to the takeover by populist political leaders such as Akayev and Bakiyev and also the violent power transfers in 2005 and 2010. First, Akayev and Bakiyev were not checked by institutionalized political parties. In the

¹⁸⁸ For barriers to intra-opposition cooperation and parties, see Eugene Huskey and Gulnara Iskakova (2010 and 2011).

¹⁸⁹ In fact, 67 out of 105 parliament members were independent members while the largest political party had only 14 members in the 1995 parliamentary election (Koldys, 1997; Huskey & Iskakova, 2011). In the 2000 parliamentary election, 73 out of 105 members were independent candidates (Collins, 2006, p. 240). Similarly, 80 percent of candidates for the 2005 parliamentary election were self-nominated (OSCE, 2005).

¹⁹⁰ With clear manipulation of the electoral system and marginalization of opposition leaders and parties, Ak Jol party won 71 seats out of 90 parliamentary seats in suddenly timed pre-term parliamentary election, whilst two other opposition parties, Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan winning 11 seats and Party of Communists with 8 seats (OSCE, 2007; Huskey & Iskakova, 2011).

absence of institutionalized constraints, the two presidents accumulated political power and weakened opposition leaders by manipulating the rules of the game and using the state apparatus to eliminate key opposition leaders. Second, the absence of a strong political party and competitive party systems explains the reluctance of both presidents to transfer political power through parliamentary and presidential elections. Both were wary of their immunity and security after each election. If there had been a strong political party to provide the political stability after the transfer of power, Akayev and Bakiyev would have both likely been more willing to peacefully resign. Third, the absence of strong political parties, which would represent and mobilize large segments of the society, demonstrates the key-missing instrument for electoral democracy. Lastly, the reluctance of Western democracy promoters to provide party development assistance to opposition parties indicates (1) the difficulty of identifying opposition parties and (2) the avoidance of getting into conflict with seemingly pro-liberal leaders like Akayev. As a result, Western democracy promoters provided extensive assistance to civil society organizations and media rather than to parliament and political parties.

In the end, I contend that if there were a strong ruling party, which was dominated by reform-minded leaders, electoral democracy could have been consolidated even if the overarching geopolitical dynamics become unfavourable for democratization. First, leaders of the strong ruling parties would be inclined to support collective decision-making institutions in regards to the national and party's decision making process. If there had been a strong political party, which was dominated by pro-reform leaders, Kyrgyz leaders would likely have been more inclined to empower the legislature, a collective decision-making institution. Second, a strong political party could provide a model and anti-incumbent impetus for opposition parties and facilitate the smooth power transition process; and this would contribute to strengthening of electoral democracy. If there were a strong political party, which guaranteed political stability and certainty (immunity or protection from reprisals), then both presidents would be less reluctant to resign. Third, once the transition process was complete, external factors have less impact on domestic politics of a small, peripheral state unless the small state is under the direct political and military control of Great Powers. The absence of direct geopolitical competitions of great powers is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the democratic consolidation. Similarly, the presence of a strong political party, led by pro-reform collective leaders, is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the consolidation of electoral democracy. Clearly, democratization could happen or fail for many other reasons.

Alternative Explanations

There are several alternative explanations for the success and failure of the Kyrgyz democracy, particularly the clan politics and institutional choices, but I argue that such factors fail to provide sufficient explanations.

One of the most prominent theories for the rise and decline of the Kyrgyz democratization is Collins' clan politics. Clans, defined as networks of individuals linked through kinship and fictive kin identities (Collins, 2006, p. 17), function as political actors, who have undermined political change in Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan. This theory provides a plausible explanation for Akayev's power consolidation by employing traditional informal networks to strengthen his power and then undermine his pro-democracy reform efforts. But, the theory fails to explain the role of (1) other social networks such as ethnic Russian versus Uzbek, professional, local community, and business ties; (2) the regional divide between south and north; (3) external actors especially the Russian and Western policies on democratization. In the aftermath of the 2010 protest, Kyrgyz political elites collectively agreed that only political parties could compete in presidential and parliamentary elections. This was not only the acknowledgement of the problem (i.e., the influence of clan politics and a regional divide), but also a practical solution – to institutionalize political parties in order to consolidate the electoral democracy.

Another angle on this debate suggests that institutional choices would explain the failure of the Kyrgyz democratization. Institutional choice theory explains that initial choices about presidential *versus* parliamentary systems or majoritarian *versus* proportional representation systems determine the outcome of the democratization process. Many argue that presidentialism is dangerous for democracy (Linz 1990; Mainwaring 1993; Cheibub 2002). Building on this line of argument, Fish presents a strong argument of the superpresidentialism, a constitutional arrangement that provides greater power to the presidency than the legislature, and argues that this would explain the failure of Kyrgyz democracy (Fish, 2001, p. 55). As Elgie and Moestrup (2017) argue, we should be careful about claims that semi-presidentialism is either good or bad for democracy. First, institutional arrangements of new democracies vary. For example, following Shugart and Carey's (1992) distinction of the president-parliamentary/premier-presidential subtypes, we could contend that the Kyrgyz democracy failed because of its president-parliamentary choice and Mongolian democracy succeeded due to the premier-presidential type. This is a quite plausible argument, but it is difficult to prove. Second, institutions are weak in new democracies, especially those that are not tied to larger democratic institutional structures such as

EU or NATO, who set conditions on the institutional stability for its member and candidate states. In the absence of external conditionality, actors change the institutions – whether it is the macro political arrangement (e.g., separation of powers) or electoral mechanism. Just as Mongolian political leaders revised the constitution for several times (during the transition as well as consolidation), Kyrgyz presidents revised the constitutions through 7 referendums between 1994 and 2010 and also switched the electoral system between the majoritarian to proportional representation several times. Therefore, the institutional choice theory fails to account for the role of agency in either strengthening or weakening the institutional arrangements. In this chapter, I argued that the absence of the strong political party, led by pro-reform leaders, and populist leaders' efforts to weaken the emergence of the strong, nationwide party contributed to the derailment of the democratization process in the Kyrgyz Republic.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Kyrgyz case provides an interesting contrast to Mongolia's democratization even though both countries were affected by similar external and internal factors in 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s. Due to the absence of direct geopolitical competitions among immediate great powers, China and Russia, Kyrgyz leaders reached out to the United States and its allies to adopt new political and economic orders. To receive Western assistance, especially financial aid, the first Kyrgyz president Akayev took pro-democracy measures by adapting a democratic constitution and allowing space for civil-society organizations; however, he gradually conducted more authoritarian measures to stay in power. In the aftermath of 9/11, Kyrgyzstan attracted security interests from all great powers. The criticality of the Manas Airport overrode the Western democracy promotion agenda and provided bargaining power for presidents Akayev and Bakiyev to not only neutralize international and domestic pressures on political reform but also marginalize domestic opposition. Both presidents used pro-democracy stances to gain political power, constitutional referendum and elections to marginalize their opponents and prevent the emergence of the strong nationwide political parties, and then were ousted by violent protests. The overarching geopolitical situation of the first period created a favourable setting for democratization whereas the second period provided a favourable setting for the authoritarian reversals. Despite many other factors such as a weak state and multi-ethnic society, this chapter argues the key missing domestic variable for the electoral democracy is the absence of strong political parties. Populist presidents took all possible measures to eliminate opportunities for the

communist successor party to regenerate and for strong nationwide opposition parties to emerge and mature.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

A day before my flight back to Vancouver, I was anxiously waiting for John DiPirro, the country director of the International Republic Institute (IRI), in a busy, modern-style coffee shop, Vanilla Sky, in Bishkek. Each meeting in Bishkek had offered new insights into my queries – some confirming my arguments, others disconfirming. However, this was an especially important interview, as it would shed light on why the IRI had not engaged in democracy promotion Kyrgyzstan in the early 1990s, especially given the exact same enthusiasm and efforts by the US government towards Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan to build democratic outposts in the authoritarian seas.

Both countries were, as Mongolian ambassadors and a Kyrgyz friend recalled, “the spoiled kids of the international community” due to the amount of international assistance and attention they received.¹⁹¹ During my interview with DiPirro and the organization’s long-time local partner, Kanat, it was clear the IRI did not engage with Kyrgyzstan because there was neither a clear opposition party to support nor an official welcoming from any of the fledgling political parties. Even after its operations began in Kyrgyzstan in 2004, the IRI’s main focus was, unsurprisingly, not political parties (IRI, 2012).

In contrast, Mike Mitchell, a strategist for the IRI’s Mongolia program, shared memories of his collaboration with leaders of Mongolian opposition parties, as well as constructive encounters with former ruling communist party leaders in the frigid winter of 1990, using the only fax machine at the Central Post to communicate with IRI’s headquarters in Washington, D.C. Documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs archive illustrated the sincere welcoming to all Western political foundations, for example, by arranging high-level meetings for senior visiting delegates and even providing diplomatic recognition and immunity to representatives of the IRI and KAS (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung). Ambassador Bayaraa, a former translator and office manager for the IRI, Ganbat, a director of the KAS-sponsored political education, and Asia Foundation officers could not recall any pressures from the state institutions or former ruling parties on foreign political offices operating in Mongolia (Bayaraa, personal interview, 2015; Badamdash, personal interview, 2016, Ganbat, personal interview, 2016). Clearly, the IRI opened its office in Ulaanbaatar because, firstly, there was a clear dividing line between the former ruling

¹⁹¹ Interestingly, Ambassador Udval and Ambassador Choinkhor, who represented Mongolia in Berlin and Washington respectively, in the early 1990s, made similar comments (Udval, personal interview, 2016; Choinkhor, personal interview, 2015).

party and opposition parties, and secondly, leaders of opposition parties officially requested party development assistance, and the ruling party did not hinder such collaboration.

Despite operating in quite similar geopolitical contexts, the democratization process produced different outcomes in the two small, peripheral states. Lacking resources and vested interests from great powers, both states embarked on simultaneous political and economic reforms, which were aided by Western donors and not hindered by neighbouring authoritarian great powers. After two decades, electoral democracy passed its 'two-turnover' test in Mongolia, while failing in Kyrgyzstan, where political power was transferred twice by violent protests.

This chapter re-introduces the key argument, presents the dissertation's findings and implications, discusses potential generalizations, and concludes with a few thoughts on gaps and lessons learned.

ARGUMENT & APPROACH

My dissertation examines *why*, *how*, and *under what conditions* a small, peripheral state in an authoritarian neighbourhood transitions to and consolidates electoral democracy through the transfer of political power through regular, peaceful, and inclusive elections. An authoritarian neighbourhood lacks two key mechanisms for democracy promotion, as highlighted in the democratization literature: (1) spillover effects of developed, democratic neighbours, and (2) institutionalized membership conditionality from international organizations. Therefore, the success or failure of the democratization process will be better explained by examining two crucial factors: (1) the dynamics of great powers' geopolitical interests, and (2) the absence or presence of a strong political party. However, it is important to highlight that I am not proposing a complete theory of democratization of small countries because democracy can succeed or fail for a variety of other reasons.

A democratic transition will not happen in the presence of direct geopolitical competition between great powers for three primary reasons. First, either democratic or authoritarian great powers maintain tight control over the small state's politics through extended political and military presence. Second, the geostrategic interests of great powers increase political and economic support for the small state, and this contributes to the international and domestic legitimacy of the governing party and increases the bargaining power of political leaders to deal with great powers. Third, the presence of geostrategic interests of great powers enables the ruling regime and leaders of small states to marginalize and even suppress the opposition and dissenting citizens. Therefore, the absence of direct geopolitical competition among great powers, as argued in the

democratization literature, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democratic transition. In the absence of direct geopolitical competition, the presence of a political party is a secondary, but constructive factor – if it (1) is under a pro-reform collective leadership, and (2) is a well-institutionalized and nationwide party. The presence of such a party provides political stability; prevents hijacking by populist leaders, interest groups, and factions; and serves as an institutionalized forum for political reform and transition.

The consolidation of electoral democracy will not occur without a strong political party and competitive party system for three reasons. First, a strong political party has collective decision-making procedures, supports similar constitutional arrangements of collective governance, and constrains populist leadership take-overs. Second, the presence of a strong political party provides a model and anti-incumbent motives and platforms for other emerging political parties. This requires opposition parties to form an electoral coalition to compete against the ruling party in an election. Third, the survival of the ruling party makes Western democracy (party) development assistance to opposition parties easier and more effective than in situations of either no or too many parties or small and fragmented parties. Therefore, the presence of a strong party, if it commits to the principles of electoral democracy, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the consolidation of electoral democracy. At the consolidation stage, the dynamics of geopolitical importance will have secondary importance. In other words, the absence of direct geopolitical competition among great powers would create a favourable external environment for consolidation, but the effect would not be decisive, as it would be for the case of a transition.

FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

Geopolitics matter to the domestic politics of small, peripheral states. The geopolitical dynamics of great powers are the most important and most relevant factor for the transition, but this is not so crucial for the consolidation of electoral democracy.

The Geopolitics of Transition

This dissertation concurs with the major conclusions in the literature on the third wave of democratization regarding the role of great powers. In particular, the end of the Cold War and the decline of geopolitical competition between great powers provided breathing space for domestic politics and reduced support for authoritarian leaders and regimes. This was a necessary but not sufficient condition for Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan. The decline of Soviet geopolitical competition with China and dramatic changes in Soviet foreign policy toward the United States and communist bloc members provided breathing space for Mongolian domestic politics. This removed Soviet

political and security control over Mongolian leaders, and also removed Mongolia's domestic justifications for the militarization and ideological-intelligence control over society. Similarly, Sino-Soviet rapprochement, Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and domestic crisis within the Soviet Union had a similar effect on the domestic politics of Kyrgyzstan. The decline of Kyrgyzstan's geopolitical value reduced the Kremlin's control and influence there.

I would also like to highlight two interesting findings concerning the external factors of democratization. First, the role of agents (actors) was not sufficiently addressed in the democratization literature in general, and in studies of Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan in particular. Like the importance of local leaders, the role of external agents was important and deserves in-depth study. For instance, Mongolia's democratic transition would have been impossible without Gorbachev. If Gorbachev had not removed Mongolia's long-standing authoritarian leader and his spouse, had not accepted Chinese conditionality of a complete military withdrawal, and had not approved of Mongolia's direct contact with the United States and its allies, it would be difficult to imagine the democratic transition happening in Mongolia in the 1990s.¹⁹² Tsedenbal and his spouse would have suppressed the opposition, delayed or stopped any discussions of the withdrawal of the Soviet military and its leaders, and joined other non-European communist states in solidarity against capitalist expansion, especially given Tsedenbal's close ties with the leaders of Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam. Similarly, the role of then US Secretary of State James Baker was crucial. Without Baker's direct personal involvement, it is doubtful that the George H. W. Bush Administration and US Congress would have paid any attention to Mongolia, especially given continuing communist party control even after the first multiparty elections. The US government and its allies were focused on Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Nevertheless, Secretary Baker convinced the US Congress and Bush Administration to support Mongolia's communist party leaders, provided extensive economic support for Mongolia survive its harsh winters, and persuaded leaders of key allies (i.e., Australia, Germany, Japan, and South Korea) to assist Mongolia's simultaneous political and economic reforms.¹⁹³ When communication between the Kremlin and Ulaanbaatar failed in the early 1990s, Baker discussed Mongolian leaders' concerns over Russian-Mongolian relations with Soviet leaders at the request of

¹⁹² Tsedenbal was the very first Brezhnev-era leader, and was removed by Gorbachev.

¹⁹³ The US Congress and George H. W. Bush Administration were reluctant to deal with communist leaders, but Baker persuaded President Bush to restore Mongolia's most-favoured-nation (MFN) trading status and also influenced a similar Congressional decision.

Mongolian leaders.¹⁹⁴ From 1990 to 1996, Baker made three trips to Mongolia and received all Mongolian dignitaries in Washington while making sure the non-reversal conditionality and the absence of American geostrategic interests were understood by Mongolian leaders. This was also true for the Kyrgyzstan case. Gorbachev introduced political reforms and endorsed a reformist leader, Askar Akayev, to become the president of the Kyrgyz republic. James Baker directed an increase in political and economic assistance to former Soviet republics, especially those committed to simultaneous political and economic reforms.

Second is the positive role of the authoritarian powers in the democratic transitions. China made an unintentionally positive contribution to the democratic transition in Mongolia and, to a lesser extent, in Kyrgyzstan, in two ways. First, Chinese conditionality of the complete withdrawal of the Soviet military from Mongolia and the reduction of the Soviet military along the Sino-Soviet border, which included Kyrgyzstan, helped loosen the Kremlin's control of these geo-strategically significant small states. The only way for the Kremlin to normalize the Sino-Soviet relationship was to accept Chinese conditions. The second was a concern about dealing directly with a traditionally expansionist power, China, without the Kremlin's assistance. This apparently pushed Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan to reach out to the United States and its allies, whose conditionality for political recognition and economic assistance was simultaneous political and economic reforms. When authoritarian powers avoid engaging in direct geopolitical competition, they play a constructive role in the democratization process of small, peripheral states. In both cases, the geopolitical interests of China and Russia were satisfied by their explicit agreements to not engage in direct geostrategic competition in those peripheral states, along with the commitment of these small states to maintain geostrategic neutrality. Western geopolitical interests were satisfied by non-reversible political and economic reforms.

The Geopolitics of Consolidation

Unlike their impact on democratic transitions, geopolitical dynamics seem to have a slightly different and even lesser impact on democratic consolidation. The evidence presented in this dissertation confirms that increased geopolitical interests contribute to the unfavourable conditions for democratic consolidation, while the absence of direct geopolitical competition creates a geopolitical 'blessing' for democratic consolidation. The Kyrgyz case provides strong

¹⁹⁴ On several occasions, as the archival sources indicate that in response to Mongolian requests, Secretary of State James Baker raised issues with Soviet/Russian presidents and foreign ministers in 1990-1992.

evidence that the United States' security interests in using Manas Airport for its military operations in Afghanistan undermined Western democracy promotion efforts in Kyrgyzstan. The evidence highlights that the its interests in Kyrgyzstan began to shift from normative to security objectives starting at the end of the 1990s to gain support from the Akayev presidency initially to prevent against terrorist activities and then to secure the logistical support for US military operations in Afghanistan. The US administration lessened its pressure regarding the authoritarian behaviours of Akayev and Bakiyev, and became solely concerned with maintaining its leasing rights of Manas Airport. In the aftermath of each power transition in Bishkek, the US administration immediately sent senior delegates like Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to secure the basing rights with the new leaders in Bishkek. It means that Western powers will put the normative agenda on the back burner when there are immediate economic or security objectives.

There are three interesting findings from this dissertation that challenge some theoretical assumptions about Western security interests, resource curse, and autocracy promotion. First, military deployments and resource booms can positively affect relationships with great powers, especially Western powers. Unlike the provision of military bases or passageways, which generates 'rents' for the ruling elites, Mongolia's military deployments to the US-led coalition operations did not generate any rents or bargaining power for the country's political leaders. Rather, it resulted in closer political and security ties with the relevant Western powers, contributed to healthy civil-military relations, and kept the military externally-oriented rather than focused on domestic politics. As a direct result, a few years later, Mongolia became a member of the OSCE and a partner of NATO. Similarly, the sudden resource boom in Mongolia has thus far not produced the effects which are predicted by the 'resource curse' literature. The mining boom increased the economic interest of Western multinational corporations and junior mining companies. As a consequence, the visibility of Mongolia's domestic politics increased in Western capitals (e.g., through media and Western business presence), public discontent became effective at using the investment agreements as leverage on leaders and parties, and political competition became intense as the economic benefits from the mining boom rose. The findings pose an interesting question as to why the resource boom in Mongolia made a positive contribution to democratic consolidation. It may be because of (1) the timing of both democracy and the resource boom; (2) the type of mining deposits found there (minerals *versus* oil/gas); and/or (3) the type of

mining investors (authoritarian versus democratic). But, it may also be that it will take more time for a resource curse to set in there.

Second, China did not interfere in neighbouring small states' domestic politics or react to the states' political and economic institutional choices, as expected in the autocracy promotion literature. Like in the transitional periods in the 1990s, China did not support specific political leaders, parties, or political factions in its neighbouring small states. Moreover, it did not use its political or especially economic leverage to influence the politics of these small states, with the exception of when the Dalai Lama visited Mongolia. Beijing's leaders did not attempt to persuade or export their specific political and economic developmental models. In the Mongolian case, unlike the United States or Russia, China has avoided arranging any high-level meetings and visits around election periods; institutionalized annual engagements with leaders of all major political parties, regardless who is in power; and extended its recognition to new leaders after elections. Similarly, in the Kyrgyz case, Chinese leaders have recognized and extended their recognition to all new leaders even after the violent power transfers in Bishkek, while stressing the importance of stability. This certainly challenges the assumptions of autocracy promotion theories; however, we cannot predict how long these hands-off Chinese attitudes will continue in the future, especially as it begins to flex its muscle to raise its hegemonic status.

Third, Russia's interference in the democratization process of its neighbours in Eastern Europe has been at the centre of the autocracy promotion literature. But, the findings of my study suggest further examination is needed before making a firm conclusion about Russia's black knight role (Ambrozio, 2009; Tolstrup, 2015; Chou, 2017). For one, the effectiveness of Russian influence seems to be dependent on the type and quality of economic and cultural ties. This could be higher in Kyrgyzstan than in Mongolia. The former has a sizable Russian diaspora and is dependent on Russia's protection and economy. It relies heavily on Russia to deal with its neighbours, especially Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and has a security alliance (i.e., the CSTO) with Russia to cope with China. Its economic dependency on Russia, takes the form of migrant workers in Russia, market access for its products, and the import of petroleum. In contrast, Mongolia had no visible Russian minorities, no migrant workers in Russia, and no products destined for the Russian market. The two countries' mutual defence pact was annulled in 1993. Although Mongolia is heavily dependent on Russian fuel imports, it has access to and through China to other fuel exporters. Therefore, Russian influence on Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan has had different effects.

Another aspect that requires more thorough examination is the unintentional positive impacts of Russian attempts to interfere in the domestic politics of neighbouring small states, namely, the impact on strengthening the electoral democracy. For example, Putin's attempt to endorse the Mongolian incumbent president was effectively used by the opposition to warn Mongolian voters about the potential re-assertion of power from the Kremlin. Similarly, Russian President Medvedev's objection to the Kyrgyz choice of parliamentary democracy was not welcomed in Bishkek. Kyrgyz leaders simply disregarded Medvedev's statement during the constitutional revision process in 2010. Given the past anti-colonial memories and a concern for self-determination, any attempts to interfere in the domestic politics of small states could be counterproductive. Such attempts affect voters' minds and could be used by opposition leaders, parties, and factions to gain support. Also, in the case of peripheral states that are sandwiched between competitive, expansionist great powers, any pressures from one of the neighbouring powers could push actors in the small state to seek assistance and support from the other great powers.

In sum, geopolitics matters in the democratization process of small, peripheral states; however, it has two different effects on the transition and consolidation process. A democratic transition would be impossible in the presence of geopolitical interests of great powers, while the impact of the geopolitical dynamics would vary and would not be decisive for the consolidation of electoral democracy.

Absence or Presence of a Strong Political Party

The nature of political parties is an important variable in both the transition and consolidation stages. The literature on the role of the ruling (communist) party is mostly negative, while the importance of the political parties and party system for the consolidation of electoral democracy should be emphasized. I find the ruling (communist) party to be a crucial factor in the democratization period, and I argue that the ruling party could play a positive role in the democratic transition under certain conditions. Moreover, the evidence presented in this study confirms that the political party was a necessary but not sufficient condition for democratic consolidation.

In Transition

If the ruling party is dominated by pro-reform-minded, bureaucratic leaders, it can play two important roles during the transition period. First, it can constrain the emergence of and takeover

by populist leaders or factions with its institutionalized collective decision-making process and ability to facilitate power transitions. With the existence of strong political institutions, leaders will be more likely to transfer their authority and power than in situations in which there are weak political institutions. Second, a political party with effective nation-wide infrastructure (for reaching out, representing, and mobilizing constituents) can also provide a platform to institutionalize political reforms, thus making the political reforms more in-depth and stable than in situations in which the political reforms were imposed by strong leaders or ad-hoc coalitions. Therefore, democratic transition is more likely when the ruling party is dominated by pro-reform collective leaders than in when the ruling party is ruled by a populist leader or dominated by revolutionary leaders.

Mongolia's ruling communist party played a positive role in initiating the reforms, constraining the emergence of populist leaders, and providing a platform for political and economic reform. It needs to be highlighted that the mode of Mongolia's transition was quite similar to that of the Central and Eastern European communist states, despite their enormous differences.¹⁹⁵ Most communist parties were under the collective leadership of bureaucratic party elites rather than revolutionary leaders. In fact, the Mongolian case was similar to the cases of Albania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. The Mongolian and Bulgarian political leaders removed longstanding authoritarian leaders with the Kremlin's assistance and support. Like the Hungarian communist party, the Mongolian communist party lifted ideological censorship as early as 1988 and began a constructive process of political and economic reforms. Like the Albanian and Bulgarian cases, the Mongolian communist party won in the first election, and similar to Albania, the party established a coalition government with the opposition. Interestingly, all communist parties were taking somewhat similar measures to adapt to the new political context, and most parties strived to distance themselves from their past by changing their names, renouncing Marxist-Leninist ideology, removing the leading role clause from their constitutions, and appointing reformist, politically neutral technocrats while expelling former authoritarian leaders

¹⁹⁵ Albania was similar to North Korea in that its foreign policy was at first sidelined with China, and as a result, it was isolated and sanctioned by the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia from the Warsaw Pact. After the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-76), it pursued a self-reliance policy similar to North Korea. They all began facing economic challenges around the mid-1980s. At the same time, leaders also encountered external pressures from the Kremlin as Gorbachev started pushing his reform policies. The inflexible hardliners, as they were called by Gorbachev, included Nicolae Ceaușescu of Romania, Gustáv Husák of Czechoslovakia, Erich Honecker of East Germany, and Todor Zhivkov of Bulgaria. They were against any political reforms (Waller, 1995; Pop-Eleches, 2008, Lewis, 2000; Linz & Stepan, 1996, pp. 293-365). They were removed from power in 1989 and their successors were also forced to resign shortly after (Waller, 1995; Linz & Stepan, 1997). Hungarian leaders was the most moderate, resigned in May 1988, the party changed into social democratic party.

(Waller, 1995, pp. 473-490; Lewis, 2001; Katz & Crotty, 2006). Although the Mongolian party leaders did not change their party's name, the party leaders expelled Tsedenbal from the party, established commissions to investigate past wrongdoings, stopped state funding, and removed the constitutional leading (vanguard) clause. Unlike most of its European counterparts, the Mongolian communist party remained a strong political organization with its assets, membership, and institutional infrastructure. As Huntington observes, "the party gives up its monopoly of power but not the opportunity to compete for power by democratic means" (1991, p. 120).

The Kyrgyz case presents the opposite outcome. There are three reasons to help explain this. First, the Kyrgyzstan communist party was marginalized by Gorbachev's policies of weakening the link between the party and the state institutions. Second, the communist party was banned in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's August 1991 coup, along with most other communist parties. Third, President Akayev's policies reduced the power of the legislature and the development of nation-wide political parties.

In Consolidation

A political party is necessary but not sufficient factor for the consolidation of electoral democracy. In particular, the successful regeneration of the ruling party makes three crucial contributions to consolidation. For one, the presence of a strong political party dominated by pro-reform leaders would more likely to support a parliamentary type, collective decision-making body when deciding on the country's institutional arrangements (i.e., the constitution-making process). Party leaders will be more likely to prefer institutional arrangements that would constrain the emergence of and takeover by populist leaders. Second, the presence of a strong ruling party provides an anti-incumbent platform and organizational model for opposition parties, especially when all parties are immature and lacking common values (and ideological orientation). Third, the presence and regeneration of the ruling party would make Western democracy promotion, especially assistance for political party development, more effective and easier than in new democracies, where political parties are weak and mostly attached to populist leaders. But, I would like to acknowledge Katz and Crotty's warning: "well-entrenched party systems are no guarantee for democratic consolidation if they compete according to clientelistic and not pragmatic principles" (Katz & Crotty, 2006). However, the survival of the ruling party will most likely result in the development of a competitive two-party system.

The Mongolian case confirms this finding. The successful regeneration of the ruling communist party played a positive role in the consolidation of electoral democracy. Party leaders

supported parliamentary democracy although there was a strong push for presidentialism; party leaders and constitutional framers managed to choose the premier-presidential institutional arrangement and made the political party the main vehicle for political power. The ruling party, indeed, provided anti-incumbent motives and platforms for opposition parties, and all major opposition parties adopted similar institutional and organizational models as the former ruling party. The evidence demonstrates that the existence of a strong political party made Western assistance for political party development the easiest and most effective.

The Kyrgyz case presents how the absence of a strong political party affects the democratic consolidation process. In the absence of a strong, institutionalized political party, populist leaders were able to change the rules of the game through constitutional referenda and taking measures to prevent the emergence of strong institutionalized political parties. Rather, both of the Kyrgyz presidents attempted to establish personalistic parties which served their own political purposes, and to divert state resources to empower personal, business, and local networks. The evidence show that Presidents Akayev and Bakiyev initially made pro-liberal promises of strengthening the legislature or developing political parties, but both acted against their pledges by marginalizing political parties, suppressing opposition leaders, and manipulating the electoral systems for their own political advantage. The absence of a clear divide between opposing political parties has discouraged Western-supported political party development programs in Kyrgyzstan.

POTENTIAL GENERALIZATIONS

To a certain extent, my theoretical framework can be applied to examine the successes or failures of democratization in other small, peripheral states that operate in the spheres of influence of great powers. This framework might be useful to explain three different sets of post-communist cases: Central and Eastern European, Non-European communist states, and former Soviet republics.

The Central and Eastern European Cases

The democratic transitions in the Central and Eastern European communist states succeeded in the absence of geopolitical interests of great powers: the Soviet Union, the United States, and Western European powers. Like Mongolia, most European communist states served as a geostrategic buffer for the Soviet Union in its confrontation with Western Europe. Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland were key states with geostrategic importance; as a result, all four hosted the largest Soviet military presence and were closely controlled politically by the Soviet Union. At the same time, the external threat provided justifications for

local leaders to impose tight control over society through militarization, ideological indoctrination, and secret policing. The normalization of Western and Soviet relations removed the external threat; this reduced the Soviet geopolitical interests in Central and Eastern Europe while opening up breathing space for the domestic politics of these peripheral states. Furthermore, Gorbachev, an external agent, also played a critical role – he rejected the Brezhnev Doctrine, agreed to dismantle the Warsaw Pact, and pressured communist bloc leaders to implement political and economic reforms.

Most of the communist parties were successfully regenerated as parliamentary parties. As discussed earlier in this section, the presence of strong political parties played a crucial role by constraining the emergence of populist leaders, providing the institutionalized platforms for political and economic reform, and also providing political stability. However, the Western factor, unlike in the cases of Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, was crucial for democratic consolidation. For one, the West had vested interests and resources to democratize these states. Second, the West had influential leverage over Central and Eastern European communist states, especially through the membership conditionality of the EU and NATO. Both of these organizations set thresholds for political and economic reform. Therefore, the Western role and interest in democratizing these states were more strategic and comprehensive than democratization support elsewhere.

Non-European Communist States

The presence of geopolitical interests, especially in security terms, prevented democratic transitions in Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam, which all pre-emptively suppressed democratic movements. All four states, even those that had hostile relations with China in the 1970s, expressed their ideological allegiance with Beijing against the United States, enhanced their control over society, and preempted any attempts at democratic transition with force and repression. The situation in those countries was different than in Mongolia and Central and Eastern Europe. For Mongolia, direct geopolitical tensions between China and the Soviet Union were resolved, whereas for Europe, the Soviet Union and Western powers ended the Cold War. In contrast, all of these states had not resolved hostile relations with the United States. North Korea had an armistice, marking a lasting legacy of the Cold War in Asia. Cuba considered the United States a hostile state. Despite ending the war against the United States in 1975, in the early 1990s, Vietnam still considered the United States and its allies hostile parties and it negotiated its military and political withdrawal from Cambodia. Laos was dealing with its long civil war, in which the United States was suspected of supporting anti-regime forces. Given their direct geopolitical

confrontation of the United States, all of these communist parties closed off any opportunities for political and economic reforms. Unlike communist parties in Mongolia and Central and Eastern Europe, these parties were under the dominance of revolutionary leaders, even though collective decision making processes were in place in some (especially Vietnam). With the presence of perceived external threats or geopolitical interests from the Western powers, revolutionary leaders appeared less reluctant to suppress any dissenting views and protests. Therefore, my framework contends that the presence of geopolitical interests and dominance of revolutionary leaders (rather than pro-reform leaders) hindered the initial democratic transitions in non-European communist states.

Former Soviet Republics

Generalizations about the democratization processes of former Soviet republics is the most challenging task because they differ in terms of their relations to the Kremlin, economic capacity (resources), demography, and geographic locations. Soviet retrenchment provided opportunities for all republics, especially those that had challenged the Kremlin's control for many years. For example, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and the Baltic states did not organize referenda to remain in the Soviet Union in March 1991. Even before the official dissolution of the Soviet Union, pro-independence and nationalistic movements emerged in these states and other larger republics, including Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ukraine and Uzbekistan (Alstadt, 2017; Steven & Way, 2010). The Soviet retrenchment and reduced geopolitical interests provided opportunities for democratic transitions in all 14 republics.

However, not all republics made a successful transition to electoral democracy. The Baltic states and a few others (i.e., Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova) were exceptions (Linz & Stepan, 1996, pp. 366-433; Way, 2002, 127-141; Ishiyama & Kennedy, 2010). There are several reasons the other Soviet republics did not make these transitions. First, Tajikistan was caught up in civil war, which provided justification for Soviet/Russian military intervention and support for the authoritarian regime. Second, the first party secretaries of resource-rich republics (i.e., Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) quickly seized the opportunity and consolidated authoritarian regimes (Pomfret, 2000). The energy rents provided these rulers bargaining power with great powers and also resources to provide public goods and to control

society.¹⁹⁶ Third, electoral democracy briefly survived in Belarus and Ukraine, but soon came under the control of authoritarian presidents (Steven & Way, 2010).

As in the democratization of Central and Eastern Europe, the Western powers, the EU, and NATO, played beneficial roles by providing extensive support for political and economic reform and keeping the strong leverage of the membership conditionality. Among the three Baltic states, the Lithuanian communist party had played a crucial role in both transition and consolidation. Party members and affiliated intellectuals responded positively to Gorbachev's call for perestroika and glasnost starting in 1988 (Clark & Praneviciute, 2008). Then, the party, renamed the Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party (LDLP), became the first communist party to officially separate from the CPSU in 1989, spearheading the independence movements, and it successfully led a transition process (Clark & Praneviciute, 2008). Taking the social democratic approach, the successor party, the LDLP, was the governing party in 1992-1996 and again from 2001 (Clark & Praneviciute, 2008). Two other successful communist parties are the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova and the Armenian Communist Party (Way, 2002; Ishiyama & Kennedy, 2010). The former was established in 1993 after a ban on the communist party's activities, and it became a strong opposition in the parliament in 1998 and then won the majority in 2001. The latter separated from the CPSU before the August Coup in 1991 and became a strong political party in Armenian politics (Ishiyama & Kennedy, 2010).

There seems to be one similar factor that affected most communist parties of the Soviet republics. Although all parties had similar institutional and organizational structures, the Politburo and Central Committee of the CPSU (i.e., federal level) controlled its charter parties in each republic. This vertical power structure empowered the Kremlin-appointed First Secretaries and Deputies, while weakening the political party's collective decision-making institutions such as the Politburos, Central Committees, and Presidiums at the republic level. Apparently, most communist parties of the Soviet republics were affected by Gorbachev's measures to reduce the influence of the communist party on state institutions in the late 1980s and then banned and stripped away their resources in the aftermath of the August Coup of 1991. By the early 1990s, all communist parties, excluding a few (e.g., Armenia, Lithuania, and Moldova), were weak and dismantled; therefore, they were not able to constrain the take-over by populist leaders or to provide an institutionalized

¹⁹⁶ Although competitive electoral mechanisms were operationalized briefly in Azerbaijan and Georgia, former party first secretaries came back into power (Altstadt, 2017; Allison et al., 1995).

platform for political reform. The majority of new leaders of the newly independent republics quickly consolidated their political power by taking control of the state institutions and resources. Therefore, the absence of a strong political party – dominated by pro-reform, collective leaders, institutionalized decision-making procedures, and with a nation-wide infrastructure for reaching out to, representing, and mobilizing society – might have contributed to the emergence of authoritarian regimes in the majority of the former Soviet republics.

For the consolidation stage, the geopolitical interests of Russia might have played quite a negative role in the democratization process of some republics, namely, by empowering authoritarian leaders. But, in some cases, for example, the Baltic states, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, Russia's attempts to interfere in the domestic politics of these states could have played an unintentionally positive role by provoking anti-colonial sentiments, providing opportunities for opposition leaders to capitalize on Russia's behaviour, and prompting these states to reach out to developed democracies.

Gaps & Lessons Learned

My dissertation has two major gaps – firstly, it did not study the relationship between the political and economic reforms, and secondly, it examined only two cases, which limits the generalizability of the research framework.

There seems to be many possible causal relationships between the political reforms related to democratizing the political system and economic reforms related to liberalizing the market. The economic reforms, especially those encouraged by the IFIs, created opportunities and challenges for managing the brutal competition over resources; this complicated the consolidation of electoral democracy. The evidence suggests that the privatization of state assets and the competition over licences for mining exploration and exploitation in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan had negative impacts on those countries' political development. It created the immediate need for political and business entrepreneurs to assert their influence over the political process through political parties, interest groups, factions, and elections. The role of a new capitalist class, the effects of privatization on the political process, the impacts of the commodity boom and bust, and roles of the globalization process of these small, peripheral states would help us explain the puzzles of the democratization process. Moreover, the sequencing of democratization and economic liberalization also presents a set of intriguing queries for the future research.

My dissertation has been driven by the puzzle of why electoral democracy was successfully institutionalized in Mongolia in its authoritarian neighbourhood, and a dissatisfaction with the

existing theories to explain this puzzle. To understand the failure to consolidate electoral democracy, I have selected the Kyrgyz case for a comparative study. With extra time and resources, it would have been ideal to include a few other cases. Taiwan and Singapore could provide other possibilities for testing the generalizability of my framework (Eberstadt, 1992). Both states are small and remain in the spheres of influence of great powers. At the same time, both states have a tradition of strong political parties. During the third-wave of democratization processes, the Taiwanese ruling party led the transition process; as a result, electoral democracy has succeeded there. In contrast, the ruling party in Singapore has remained resilient and reluctant to democratize. From the Arab Spring cases, the democratic transition was successfully completed in only Tunisia (Cavatorta, 2001), which is indeed away from the sphere of influence of great powers and had a strong, institutionalized political party.

Recalling the discussions of two US Senate statements concerning Mongolia and the Kyrgyz Republic in my introduction, the politics of these small, peripheral states evolved in different ways over two decades. Political power in Mongolia has been transferred between two major political parties through regular elections whereas Kyrgyz presidents have been ousted by violent protests. To explain these different outcomes, this dissertation has examined the dynamics of geopolitical interests of great powers as well as the nature of domestic politics with a particular focus on the absence/presence of a strong political party. Although more comprehensive studies and archival digging are required, I argue the absence of direct geopolitical competition fosters contestation in domestic politics and the presence of a strong political party is necessary for installing electoral democracy in small states – especially those operating in authoritarian neighbourhoods.

EPILOGUE

Although my dissertation examined the period between 1984 and 2010, my hypothesis of the geopolitical dynamics of great powers and absence/presence of a strong political party is useful to explain current political development in Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan.

Mongolia continues to enjoy its geopolitical blessing as all great powers avoid any direct geostrategic competition in this small, peripheral state. The brief commodity boom of 2005 - 2008 did not result in so-called geo-economic competition among great powers (Wachman, 2009, pp. 594-597). Rather the mismanagement of the commodity revenue as well as the government bonds caused Mongolian politicians to accept another round of IMF conditionality and to seek funds from China, Russia, and Japan. China's initial expectations of promoting Mongolia as an exemplar case for its Belt Road Initiative have declined due to several factors, including the Dalai Lama's visit in December 2016, Mongolia's failure to secure Russian support for its major railroad and hydro-plant projects, and Ulaanbaatar's unwillingness to join the SCO. In the meantime, the US's foreign policy concerns regarding Mongolia do not appear to be significant enough to reach the attention of the Trump administration. As a result, the US commitment towards Mongolia remains almost entirely political, i.e., as a democratic outpost in an authoritarian neighbourhood. Within this relaxed geopolitical setting, the presence of strong political parties has played a crucial role in maintaining the electoral democracy. For the 2012 parliamentary election, two major parties agreed to introduce a mixed electoral system (i.e., 48 majoritarian seats and 28 proportional allocation seats) and a gender quota for nominations. As a result, third parties won more seats in the 2012 parliament. Although this was an important step toward promoting parliamentary democracy, leaders of the two major parties changed the rules back to the majoritarian system for the 2016 parliamentary election. This resulted in a landslide victory for the former ruling party, which won 65 out of 76 seats. As far as the presidential election was concerned, the opposition party (Democratic Party) won in the 2013 and 2017 elections. Yet the major challenge of strengthening the rule of law remains as a key issue for Mongolia, especially in regards to increasing the independence and professionalism of the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. Otherwise, populist politicians and political-economic factions will continue to fight for advancing their parochial interests by using political parties and controlling the judiciary and government bureaucracy.

In contrast to Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan experienced an unfavourable geopolitical setting for its democratization process. Kyrgyzstan has been increasingly drawn into Russian sphere of

influence. Kyrgyzstan joined the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015 and agreed to host a Russian Joint Military Base, which consisted of four facilities. Following President Putin's visit in 2019, Kyrgyz authorities anticipate additional Russian military presence in exchange for economic assistance and loans. In 2014, the US military ended its contract to use the Manas Airport. US-Kyrgyz bilateral relations further deteriorated in 2015, after the US State Department extended the Human Rights Defender Award to Azimjon Askarav, an imprisoned Kyrgyz journalist who disclosed human rights violations during the interethnic clashes in June 2010. In response, the Kyrgyz government has terminated a 1993 cooperation agreement with the United States. In addition, the Kyrgyz government also faces increasing pressure from China to suppress anti-Chinese protests and attacks against Chinese embassy personnel and nationals. In 2016, three Chinese diplomats were injured when a suicide bomb exploded at the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek. Since 2018, several large anti-Chinese demonstrations were organized and harassment of Chinese nationals has been frequently reported in the local news. Kyrgyz anti-Chinese protestors have demanded a reduction in the number of Chinese workers, an increase in transparency for Chinese funds on major developmental projects, and a stop to the Chinese government's repressions of co-ethnic people in Xinjiang Uyghur province. However, the importance of Chinese funds, especially through the Belt and Road Initiative, has pushed Kyrgyz authorities to actively suppress these anti-Chinese protests and control Uyghur militants. This type of direct geopolitical competition creates a favourable setting for ruling elites to bargain with great powers while taking authoritarian measures at home. In the aftermath of the 2010 violence, the most promising decision for Kyrgyz's democracy was to only allow political parties to run in the parliamentary elections. As a result, political parties have become important players in Kyrgyz politics as they had been during the 2010 and 2015 parliamentary elections. Although the 2010 constitutional referendum reduced presidential power and introduced a single-six-year term for the presidency, Kyrgyz presidents (former president Atambayev, 2011-2016 and incumbent president) have still sought out ways to control political parties, government bureaucracy, judiciary, and media. In 2017, the Kyrgyz presidency was peacefully transferred following the regular election, but it will require several more tests.

Besides the geopolitical dynamics and strong political parties, both cases demonstrate that the rule of law – especially in terms of judicial independence and merit-based public service – is another key factor for the successful consolidation of the electoral democracy and critical

instrument to prevent political parties from falling into the hands of populist politicians and political-economic factions.

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Appendix A: List of Interviewees and Research Sites in Mongolia and Kyrgyz Republic

Research and Archival Sites in Mongolia

National Archives of Mongolia
Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia
Archive of the Ministry of Defence of Mongolia
Library of the Parliament of Mongolia
Library of the National University of Mongolia
Library of the Institute for Strategic Studies

Mongolia: Lists of Interviews (2015 - 2016)

Amarjargal, R. 2015. Former Prime Minister and Member of Parliament. 8 December.

Alгаа, N. 2016. Executive Director, Mongolian Mining Association. 2015. 9 November

Badamdash, D. 2015. Former Staff, The Asian Foundation. 29 November.

Batchimeg, M. 2016. Member of Parliament and former Advisor to the President. 10 June.

Batsaikhan, 2015. Former Member of the People's Great Khural in 1990-1992, President of the Officer's Movement in 1990. 20 November.

Battuvshin, B. Former Participant and Organizer of Democratic Movement. 25 December.

Bayaraa, S. 2015. Former Ambassador and Advisor to the Zorig Foundation. 19 December.

Bayarkhuu, D. 2016. Foreign Policy Scholar and Ambassador. 16 June.

Bekhbat, Kh. 2015. Former Deputy Foreign Minister and Ambassador to the United States in 2008-2012. 16 November.

Bold, Lu. 2015 and 2016. Member of the State Great Hural. 20 November and 18 June.

Bold, R. 2015. Former Secretary of the National Security Council and Ambassador to the United States in 2002 – 2007. 13 October.

Bold, P. 2015. Head of "My Mongolian Land" Movement. 6 November.

Boldsaikhan, Ts. 2016. Secretary of the General Election Commission. 8 June.

Bolormaa, L. 2015. Founder and Editor, Mining Journal of Mongolia. 12 November.

Byambasuren, Ya. 2015. Founding member of the MSDM and MSDP. 18 November.

Campi, A. 2016. President, The Mongolia Society. 14 June.

Castagna, C. 2015. Assistant Program Officer, Asia Division, The International Republican Institute. 15 June.

Cross, Zh. 2015. Head of Mongolian Affairs, US Department of Commerce. 2 June.

Choinkhor, 2015. One of 15 scholars wrote an open letter in 1989 and Former Deputy Foreign Minister and First Resident Ambassador to the United States. 11 November.

Dashpurev, L. 2016. Former Ambassador to Japan and President of Mongolia-Japan Association. 20 May.

Dash-Yondon, B. 2015. Former Secretary of the MPRP in 1991 - 1996. 15 October.

Davaadorj, B. 2015. Former Defense Attaché, Mongolian Embassy to the PRC, 8 December.

Dorjdari, N. 2015. Former Member of Open Society Forum and Mongolia Manager of the Natural Resources Governance Institute. 29 October.

Enkhbayar, Nambar. 2016. Former President, Speaker, and Prime Minister, 17 June.

Enkhsaikhan, J. 2016. Former Ambassador, Russia/UN. 16 June.

Erdenechimeg, D. 2015. Manager for Governance Program, Open Society Forum. 13 November.

Feng, X. 2015. Regional Manager, US Department of Commerce. 10 June.

Ganbat, D. 2015. Board Member of the Academy of Political Education (funded by the KAS). 10 December.

Gerelt-Od, E. 2016. Professor, Mongolian National University of Education. 20 July.

Gombosuren, Ts. 2015. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs. 15 December.

Hatanbold, O. 2015. Research Fellow, Institute of Philosophy, Mongolian Academy of Sciences. 2 November.

Indra, N. 2015. Research, Institute for Strategic Studies. 9 November.

Infante, William. 2015. Country Representative, The Asia Foundation in 2006-2009. 9 and 16 November.

Joseph, B. 2015. Senior Director, National Endowment for Democracy. 25 August.

Khurelbaatar, Ch. 2016. Member of Parliament. 15 June.

La Porta, A. 2015. Former US Ambassador to Mongolia. 25 July.

Lundeejantsan, D. 2016. Member of Parliament. 6 June.

Manring, A. 2015. Mongolia Desk Officer, US Department of State. 19 June.

Meyanathan, S. 2015. Former Country Manager for the World Bank in 2001-2006. 7 November.

Mitchell, Mike. 2015. Former Consultant, International Republican Institute. 16 June.

Munkhmandakh, M. 2015. Executive Director, Press Institute of Mongolia. 3 December.

Myagmarjav, G. 2015. Former Member of Officers' Movement. 28 November.

Narantuya, Ch. 2015. Vice President Economic and Development Policy, National University of Mongolia, political scientist. 30 October.

Orgil, L. 2015. Ambassador and Former US Desk Officer and Diplomat in Mongolian Embassy to the United States. 17 November.

Oyungerel, Ts. 2016. Member of Parliament. 3 June.

Pekowski, J. 2015. Country Desk Officer, US Agency for International Development. 19 July.

Richmond, Michael. 2015. Senior Commercial Specialist, U.S. Embassy. 2 December.

Schmueking, Daniel. 2015. Representative, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. 30 October.

Shurkhuu, D. 2015. Senior Researcher, Institute of International Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Mongolia. 2 December.

Sukhbaatar, D. 2015. One of the Opposition Leader in 1989-1990. 10 November.

Sumati, L. 2015. Director, Sant Maral Foundation. 3 December.

Sunjidmaa, J. 2015. Former Officer of the World Bank and Board Member of the Mongolian Mining Association. 20 November.

Temuujin, Kh. 2016. Member of Parliament. 16 June.

Tsedev, D. 2015. A member of the Working Group for the 1992 Constitution, 16 October.

Tumurchuluun, G. 2015. Counselor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2 December.

Udval, L. 2016. Former Ambassador to Germany. 17 May.

Whelan, A. 2015. Country Director, International Republican Institute. 18 December.

Kyrgyz Republic: Lists of Interviews (2016)

DiPirro, John. 2016. Country Director, International Republican Institute, Kyrgyz Republic, 11 November.

Elbegzaya, B. 2016. Regional Programme Officer, Mountain Partnership. 8 November.

Gonchig, S. 2016. Vice Consul, Consulate General of Mongolia in Kyrgyz Republic. 12 November.

Johnston, C & Nazgul, A. 2016. Office of Democracy and Governance, USAID Mission in the Kyrgyz Republic. 9 November.

Kulova, Nazgul. 2016. Consultant, Natural Resource Governance Institute. Interview by author. 10 November.

Musabekova, D & Nazgul, A. 2016. Executive Director, Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia. 8 November.

Toktomushev, K. 2016. Research Fellow, Institute of Public Policy and Administration, University of Central Asia, 10 November.

Research Sites in Kyrgyz Republic

Mongolian Consulate in Bishkek
University of Central Asia

Appendix B: BTI Democracy Status and Key Indicators of Mongolia and Kyrgyz Republic

	Mongolia	Kyrgyz Republic
Population (M)	2.6	5.8
Population growth (% p.a.)	0.9	2.0
Life expectancy (years)	67	70.2
Urban population (%)	57.0	35.6
HDI	0.73	0.628
HDI rank of 187	115	125
UN Education Index	0.91	0.656
Gender Equality	0.46	0.348
GDP per capita (\$)	3236	3322.2
GINI Index	33.0	27.4
Poverty (%)	49.0	20.0
Aid per Capita (\$)	87.4	93.8
Democracy Status*	6.9	6.0
1) Stateness	8.5	7.5
Monopoly on the use of force	8	8
State identity	10	8
No interference of religious dogmas	10	9
Basic administration	6	5
2) Political Participation	6.8	6.3
Free and fair election	6	6
Effective power to govern	7	5
Association/assembly rights	8	7
Freedom of expression	6	7
3) Rule of Law	5.8	5.0
Separation of powers	7	6
Independent judiciary	6	4
Prosecution of office abuse	4	4
Civil rights	6	6
4) Stability of Democratic Institutions	7.5	6.0
Performance of democratic institutions	7	5
Commitment to democratic institutions	8	7
5) Political and Social Integration	6.0	5.0
Party system	6	4
Interest groups	5	5
Approval of democracy	7	6
Social capital	6	5

Source: BTI and Country Reports (www.bti-project.org)

* The democracy status is consisted of 5 criteria, which are evaluated on a 1-10 scale.

Appendix C: TI Corruption Index for Mongolia and Kyrgyz Republic

Year	Mongolia CPI	World Ranking	Kyrgyz CPI	World Ranking	Total Poll
1999	4.3	43	2.2	87	99
2003	-	-	2.1	118	133
2004	3.0	85	2.2	122	146
2005	3.0	85	2.3	130	159
2006	2.8	99	2.2	142	163
2007	3.0	99	2.1	150	180
2008	3.0	102	1.8	166	180
2009	2.7	120	1.9	162	180
2010	2.7	116	2.0	164	178

Source: Transparency International (<https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi>)

Appendix D: Comparative Freedom House Scores of Mongolia and Kyrgyz Republic (1990 – 2010)

Year	Mongolia			Kyrgyz Republic		
	PR	CL	Status	PR	CL	Status
1998	-	-	-	5	5	PF
1999	2	3	F	6	5	NF
2001	2	3	F	6	5	NF
2002	2	3	F	6	5	NF
2003	2	2	F	6	5	NF
2004	2	2	F	6	5	NF
2005	2	2	F	6	5	NF
2006	2	2	F	5	4	PF
2007	2	2	F	5	4	PF
2008	2	2	F	4	5	PF
2009	2	2	F	4	5	PF
2010	2	2	F	6	5	NF

Source: Freedom House

PR: Political Rights Score

CL: Civil Liberties Score

Status: **F:** Free; **PF:** Partly Free; **NF:** Not Free