



The Asia Foundation

Observation of the Mongolian Parliamentary Election

June 29, 2008

Background

A total of 356 candidates from 12 political parties, one coalition and 45 independent candidates competed in 26 multi-member constituencies as prescribed by the 2005 Election Law. The number of candidates in a constituency varied from 20-30, and the number of seats in each constituency varied from two to four, depending upon the population.

Candidates could campaign only after receiving their candidate license from the General Election Commission. Most candidates were registered and licensed in the first several days of June. Campaigning continued until midnight June 27th, when all television and print ads concluded, and when all billboards and other campaign materials were removed from public places. No campaign activities were permitted on the 28th, or on Election Day.

Parliament budgeted 7.2 billion tugrugs (approx. US\$6.2 million) for the parliamentary election activities. This budget was available for elections-related costs only.

Over 1,500,000 citizens were registered to vote nationwide, and voter turnout is estimated at 70%.

Observer Teams

The Asia Foundation deployed 17 two-person teams to observe the parliamentary election. Other international observation efforts included a total of 26 teams deployed by locally based embassies and international non-governmental organizations, and 9 teams from overseas deployed under the aegis of the Asia-Pacific Democracy Partnership. To the best of TAF's knowledge, a total of 52 teams observed the poll opening, polling process, and some of the vote counting process in polling stations across the Mongolia. The largest concentration of observers monitored in Ulaanbaatar, and in neighboring districts.

Foundation observers conducted approximately 200 polling station visits, to more than 100 different stations. TAF observed opening procedures at 17 stations, and then observed the election process at stations within defined districts. Poll station visits to observe the vote casting process lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. In some districts multiple teams visited the same polling station at different times during the day.

In addition to their observation of the polling process, seven teams observed the counting process in seven locations. One team stayed for the entire count (Khovsgul/Muron). All others observed the count for between 4 and 8 hours.

TAF observers conducted two surveys: one a survey of the vote processes and procedures, the other examining voter perceptions and sentiments. The first was conducted based upon a four-part questionnaire, and data was gathered from observation, and from discussion with station officials and party observers at the polling stations visited. The second comprised interviews with voters randomly selected as they exited the polling stations.

The Voting Process

In 94% of the stations visits, observers saw no campaign activities, or efforts to influence voters. As discussed below, campaign materials had been removed from the immediate areas surrounding all polling stations, with an exception of one station in Songinokhairkhan.

In 6% of the stations, observers identified individuals seemingly trying to influence the voting behavior of others. Most of these cases occurred in the Bayanzurkh district, and involved middle-aged adults. When queried at one station, the individuals denied any involvement in voter manipulation or influence, and they did not disclose their party affiliation.

In 86% of the station visits, there was no loitering near the station by local government or party officials. However, in 18 of the station visits, party officials and candidates were observed 4 times in different stations in Khuvsgul Aimag, and in 5 discreet stations in the Bayanzurkh district.

In many of the polling stations, TAF observers were informed of alleged vote-buying prior to election day and on election day, but no such activity was witnessed or documented.

In several interviews conducted in Ulaanbaatar, elderly voters reported that they had obtained vouchers for 100,000 MNT, which would be honored if they voted for certain candidates. The elderly voters claimed that these types of vouchers had also appeared in local newspapers.

In 92% of the visits, the polling station was in a convenient and neutral location. However, 8% of the stations were not. Many of these polling stations had multiple flights of stairs which made access difficult for the elderly and for physically impaired voters. Many polling stations were small which could compromise ballot secrecy.

There was only one case in which there were campaign materials posted within 100 meters of a polling station. This was in the Songinokhairkhan district.

In 97% of the visits, there were no campaign activities taking place near the station on Election Day. However in 3 discreet polling stations in the Bayanzurkh district, there were perceived to be campaign activities that were conducted. At 1 station in Chingeltai an observer reported campaign activities conducted on Election Day near or away from the station.

In 99% of the stations observed, all essential materials arrived on time. In only 1 polling station in the Bayanzurkh district had all essential materials not arrived.

In all polling stations were observers were present for the opening, and according to all subsequent interviewees, the Election Commission showed the empty ballot boxes to international and party observers before sealing them.

TAF observers found party observers present at all polling stations visited. In some instances, as many as 16 party observers were present, and they represented diverse party interests.

In 89% of the visits the polling stations opened at or close to 7:00am. However there were 7 exceptions where the polling station did not open on time, including 2 discreet stations in Darkhan.

In 94% of the polling station visits, the observers and party agents were allowed to observe all aspects of polling. However there were 9 exceptions. In 2 discreet stations in Darkhan, 2 in Bayangol, and 3 stations in Bayanzurkh party agents were not able to observe all aspects of polling. Generally, this was due to the configuration of the station itself, where line of site was obstructed, or where party observers were located at a distance from the registration tables.

97% of the time voters who presented valid national and voter identification cards were permitted to vote, if their information matched the voter lists maintained at the polling stations. However in 3% of the polling station visits this was not the case. Half of these incidents occurred in the Bayanzurkh district.

In 99% of the polling station visits, the ballots issued were signed and counter-signed, and stamped by the Chairman and Secretary. Only in 1 polling station in the Bayanzurkh district was this not the case.

In 71% of the polling station visits, voters were able to mark their ballot in secret, without the potential of being observed by anyone. However in 29% of the polling station visits, observers noted that voter secrecy was not strictly enforced. In these instances, party observers were situated behind the voters, or other voters were able to circulate behind those who were marking their ballots. In other instances, voters were seated in front of open and accessible windows.

In numerous stations, observers witnessed “family” style voting, were family members, and in cases, groups of friends (usually middle-aged men), talked and looked at each other’s ballot. There did not seem to be intimidation involved in this, and those individuals consulting did not return to the station with other voters. .

In 92% of the polling station visits, there were no unauthorized people in the station. However in 10 discreet polling stations there were unauthorized people in the stations. Half of these observations were made in discreet polling stations in the Bayanzurkh district.

Voters' Sentiments and Perceptions

The Asia Foundation conducted approximately 200 interviews with a cross section of Mongolian voters. Urban and countryside voters of different ages and genders were interviewed. They were asked a total of 11 questions each.

The majority of the interviewees (66%) preferred the multi-mandate system since it provided them choice. Only 22% preferred the single-mandate system.

The respondents were also asked whether they had enough information on the candidates or party platforms in order to make an informed choice. A significant majority, 80%, thought they knew enough about the candidates and the parties to make informed electoral decisions. In some instance, interviewees indicated that although they had ample information regarding the two major parties, they did not have sufficient information about the minor parties or independent candidates.

75% of the interviewees felt that the parties and the candidates are addressing the issues that they are most concerned about, as compared with 20% of the voters who said that the candidates and parties did not address the issues that they are most concerned about.

Interviewees were also asked whether they thought the elections could lead to improvement in the future, and whether they believed that their vote could change things. 76% believe that their vote matters and that it can change things. 14% of the interviewees believed that things would not change or get better.

Voters were queried about their views on the GEC. Half of the interviewees believed that the General Election Commission is usually neutral. 18% thought the GEC was either “often” or “sometimes” biased. 14% were either not sure or refused to answer.

Voters were also queried specifically about their perceptions on the prevalence of vote buying within their community. 70% of the voters thought that buying votes in their respective district was not likely. 23% said that it was likely that candidates or parties bought votes with either or gifts in their area.

The Asia Foundation observers also asked about personal experience with vote-buying, in a manner consistent with corruption-related surveys that have been conducted semi-annually for two and one half years. When voters were asked if they themselves had been solicited to sell their votes, 91% said that neither they nor their family-members had been solicited, only 7% had been solicited, and 2% refused to respond.

Voters were questioned about whether they would vote straight party-line or whether they would divide their vote. 38% said that they voted party line, whereas the majority (60%) said that they split their vote among several candidates or parties. Those who divided their vote did so because of the ability to choose candidates whom they preferred, or because of a desire to balance party representation in the State Great Hural.

The last question on whether or not people thought the election process was free and fair. 67% believed that it was free and fair. Only 12% believed that it was not free and fair. 21% were not sure or had no response. Many said that the actual physical voting was free and fair, but questioned whether the vote count would be after the vote count.