

## Chapter 6

### Exercising the Right to Run for Office in Mongolia

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*Editor's introduction: This contribution has a distinctive style of presentation that involves bullet points, quotations, and personal examples drawn from family history rather than standard prose. The author is an accomplished and even best-selling writer in Mongolia, as well as a highly placed and highly regarded political advisor at the Presidential level. The contribution below, which communicates by multi-stranded evocation, tell a powerful and compelling story about elections and running for political office in Mongolia – from the Socialist period under Soviet control to the present. Beyond a “good news” story from “autocracy” of Communist Party control to “democracy,” the story is laced with palpable and important nuance and even irony. To be “elected” was something very different in Mongolia during the 1990s from what we might associate with that term today. And to be “elected” in Mongolia today is not always the ideal scenario of democracy that one might like to envisage. In all, Oyungerel challenges both our sensibilities and our expectations – to be careful and mindful of our easy characterizations, and to respect the specificity, the distinctiveness – and the humor – of Mongolian political process and aspirations.*

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## Mongolian elections in the 1960s : Communist Socialism

- Single candidate for each office on ballot;
- Preferably a person who will vote for anything the party instructs;
- Candidates needn't to be outspoken or even knowledgeable of policy making;
- Candidates need to be leaders in labor and from a “workers” family background;
- No expense accrue to the candidate, all election spending was on the party's, (perhaps on the state's) cost;
- There were meetings with the voters during the election, but the candidate needn't answer questions, his spokesperson assigned by the party would speak for him/her;
- No competition, guaranteed victory with over 99% vote.

### Example

#### Tseveddamba Luvsan's 1960 election campaign leaflet

“Tseveddamba Luvsan was born in a *family of a herder* in 1932, in *Tarialan soum* of Khuvsgul province. He joined the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party in 1957. Following his graduation from a tractor operators' course in 1956, he's been working as a tractor operator in the state enterprise in Tarialan.

Tseveddamba received 'DT-54' tractor in July 1956, and he managed to artfully maintain and use the equipment *for which he was accountable*, and utilized it with love and

care, and he considered his work as a duty to his country and people therefore working honestly and loyally, and fulfilled his annual norms for 155-157.7% each year, and has been saving 415 to 12,400 tugriks annually from fuel saving and good maintenance of the tractor...”

“...Comrade Voters! Let’s vote Tsedevdamba Luvsan, the candidate selected by the *Coalition of the Party and Non-party members!*”

Note: No debate over proposed laws in the Peoples’ Presidium – all merely followed the Party’s instructions on how to vote.

### **Mongolian Elections in 1990- 2008**

- Multiple candidates on the ballots;
- Candidates have to be distinctive and outspoken or have many friends/relatives/supporters. Odd stars thrive;
- Candidates need to know about policymaking;
- Candidates must have money or raise money to finance their campaigns; Fundraising process has been non-transparent throughout these years;
- Most expenses for new candidates lay on their own personal cost, some election spending was on the party’s, perhaps on the state’s cost;
- The political parties demand up-front money from candidates to permit them to run for office as their party member.
- There are much more frequent and active meetings with the voters during the election campaign where the candidate is expected to speak for himself/herself and for the political party;

- Conflicts of interests and nepotism thrive for small and remote constituencies;
- No guaranteed victory for any candidate.

### Example

Result of 2008 election at Tolbo soum of Bayan-Ulgii province shows the deepness of conflicts of interests and nepotism. Tolbo soum is located in 76 kilometers from Ulgii, the center of farthest province.

The soum has 20 elected representatives out of which 11 were selected by the soum representatives as their presidium. The presidium convenes more often than the representatives who, in turn, convenes once a year only during their four years term. The following 11 members of the Tolbo soum representatives that constitute a majority of the elected office of 20, and six *presidium members* that constitute the majority of the Presidium, are related to each other in the following manner:

1. Khabyul Shariv, soum party chairman of Mongolian People's Party or MPP (former MPRP);
2. Adilbek Shariv, MPP, Khabyul's younger brother;
3. Huyat Shariv, MPP, Khabyul's younger brother;
4. Shariv Sabit, MPP, Khabyul's father-in-law;
5. Klaskhan S, MPP, Khabyul's cousin;
6. Leikhan Bugubai, Democratic Party or DP, brother of B.Sadet, one of local DP leader;
7. Jaidarman Bektemir, DP, cousin of B.Sadet;
8. Egunbain Talant, DP, uncle of B.Sadet;
9. Khulunbain Marat, DP, uncle of B.Sadet;

10. Marat Saminkhan, MPP, current chair of the Soum Representative's Khural;

11. Unerkhan Semikhan, MPP, brother of Marat Saminkhan

Huyat's (#3) wife Khamkesh is the secretary of the Khural of the Soum representative, who's also a daughter-in-law of Khabyl (#1). This kind of nepotism in the soum level is the result of a small election constituency and the absence of regulations setting out the rights and requirements for running for office in an ethical manner.

### **Elections in 2012: The Democratic Present**

- Unclear legal environment up to now;
- Harder for new candidates, independents and smaller parties;
- Harder on women and disadvantaged groups – they can't afford the steep party charges;
- Very expensive in the environment of paid media, politician-owned media;
- More awareness of various forms of election fraud.

