Erik Herron

Introduction to Comparative Politics

December 2, 2004

Think Piece # 5

Mongolia and the United States share a major characteristic that binds their electoral processes. Both of the countries employ majoritarian systems when electing their legislatures. This commonality which actually put the countries into a minority when it comes to electoral systems forces several questions to the forefront of political science debate. Is this process effective in developing and nurturing democracy in a state and should these countries continue to utilize these systems? This paper aims to offer separate opinions from students about the systems in their respective countries.

Opinion from Mongolia

Around 1990s with the breakdown of communist regime political and economical drastic change occurred in Mongolia. It became a democratic country with a market economy. The monopoly of Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party that ruled the government solely for 70 years was eliminated and in a new Constitution it proclaims that Mongolia is a democratic country with the multiparty system. Since then it was said that the government will encourage multiparty system in every way.

In 1992 Mongolia chose a majoritarian electoral system. I was wondering why it chose majoritarian system that according to Duverger’s Law contributes more to emergence of two-party system. Historically, before choosing the majoritarian election
system Mongolia never had a parliament consisting of many parties. It seems to me that after 7 decades of a single-party system and after it was said that Mongolia will favor multiparty system – Mongolia should have choose or at least try to have many parties in a parliament and accept proportional representative.

In my opinion after 1990 Mongolia tried several approaches to get democratized and transform to market economy quickly, by taking from the practice and experience of other democratized countries, sometimes not very successfully since it wasn’t calculated well to fit the context, culture and mindset of Mongolian people after socialism. So it was quite possible that Mongolia could have choose PR, that again according to Duverger’s Law gives more chance for minor political parties.

Right now in Mongolia many parties exist but there are two main parties that compete with each other in every election. One is Revolutionary Party and the other is Democratic Party. After 90s people in Mongolia were tend to vote for Democratic Party coz it was considered to have comparatively new set of ideas and policies and Revolutionary Party was thought to have conservative notions and won’t bring changes to the country that needed shifts and modernization. But now it looks like people trust more Revolutionary party because it is the oldest party here and is believed to have more experiences and to be more organized. Besides, party members are considered to be new generation and to have different views and attitudes.

So to my mind there is a problem related to two-party system in Mongolia. There are many government organs, agencies, committees, organizations. And with every election they change their structure, administration and staff according to the party that got the authority over the organ, agency, committee, organization. If, for example,
Revolutionary Party gets the majority in a parliament, it appoints people from the party to be the administrative person there and that person also changes the staff inside the organ according to his or her interest. With the next election, if Democratic Party gets majority of seats in a parliament it changes everything the previous party did and alters things as it wants. Seems like a tit-for-tat, and everything is not about the interests of people, but of parties. Sometimes when the parties are blamed for not fulfilling the promises they made to people during election campaigns the usual reason for that is that the 4 years are too short and not enough for long-term goals. With every election parties stop the activities the previous party was doing and start their own projects. With every election all the government agencies have a “time-out” awaiting the change that will take place after election. I might be very wrong, but I don’t see any big differences in policies and views of two parties – to my mind they just struggle to have an authority for 4 years and have an advantage from the government money.

In an election of this summer here Revolutionary Party and Coalition of three Democratic parties won almost equal seats in a parliament. They agreed to change their responsibilities and duties in 2 years. So the period for governments to implement their policies are getting even shorter.

I’m interested in PR system and wanted to learn more about it. As we learned about the contentious politics I consider Mongolia to be comparatively calm country – political protests’ and demonstrations’ frequency and amplitude are small. Mongolians are quite laid back and relaxed people – even though there were wars during the time of Chinggis Khaan and other great Khaans, there weren’t many conflicts inside the country coz the government was strong. From this ancient time to the collapse of communist
regime Mongolians had a kind of strong and authoritarian government. Having a multiparty system didn't make people politically and socially active – since we have two main parties competing with each other not by their achievements, discouraging people, and since Mongolians are not used to defend their interests and two-party system is sort of a barrier to that.

But still there are a lot of issues and social, economical problems to address. There are interests of appalling poor people living in the outskirts of Ulan-Bator, living in the rural areas. I presume that usually parties represent the interests of people centralized in UB and other central areas in remote villages. But as you know Mongolia is a country with the vast territory and very small population. And we are practicing nomadic way of life. So it is quite hard to meet those people who always move from one place to another, to talk with them, or even to find them. I've heard that during election campaigns if the sum, aimag governors/administrative units in Mongolia/ belong to Democratic Party he wouldn't take people who takes the votes from people/ to the families who usually vote for Revolutionary party. And to say nothing about the isolation of these rural zones from everything – mass media, politics, trade and etc.

Therefore, I would rather prefer proportional representation to majoritarian system in Mongolia. The Democratic Coalition was able to be successful in this election coz one of the things it promised to people if it gets the seats in a parliament was to give to all the children 10,000 T /around $9/ every month. /unfortunately it wasn't possible – the amount decreased to 3,000 T /$3/ and to be given to very poor families/. So half of the people voted for Democratic coalition, which as it seems to me shows how poor is Mongolia and how people not educated, in terms of politics. And also I thought that
people don't need parties who claim to achieve the same things – I mean both parties say they will reduce the poverty, support education, all those general things – of course these are main goals, but maybe we need more and active parties to truly assess the situation and have the voices heard.

Recently I saw an article which says that in the latest statistic data the poverty in Mongolia was assessed to be 35%, but anonymous person from Statistics Bureau claims that it's 45% and that the government tries to hide the real numbers. Two parties consensually hide the reality. Maybe we have to support other parties and accept other opinions and ideas. Mongolia is a peaceful and homogeneous country – I don't think that choosing PR and choosing to have several parties in a parliament will lead to major political and social cleavages, we will have minority interests represented, more politically active and interested to participate people.

And also I think whether choosing a party or choosing the candidate doesn't really matter. Anyway the parliament will be assessed in terms of how many candidates from what party won the seat. And anyway people often vote for a candidate depending on what party he belongs to. It is just a matter of party loyalty.

Opinion from America

My opinion on the election process in the United States tends to revolve around the protection of the Status Quo. Of course, changes are listened to and considered with true sincerity, but a combination of factors that shape the political and cultural realms of the States lead me to the conclusion that the current system of electing the representatives and senators of the United States is the best one for the country, at least for now.
The development and stability of the two political parties in the United States has been one of its most defining and separating characteristics among fellow democratic states. America has embraced this position. In fact, I feel that it would be safe to say that Americans in general would not appreciate a change in the system that would encourage a more European multiparty setup. This is due to a historical American mistrust of outside ideals and modes. From its inception, the United States of America has been an isolationist state, and this factor coupled with the recent growth of anti-Euro rancor among much of the populace forms a conclusion that the response to a proportional system and derivatively a multiparty system, would not be easily tolerated by the political climate and culture of the United States.

Besides this, the American political system has proven, at least so far, to work. Able to wear the title of the longest lasting democracy in the world[1], the Constitution of the United States of America it would seem has gotten right. That is not to say that flaws don’t exist and that the ability for the constitution to evolve isn’t necessary, but until undeniable data that proves that the American system is no longer a democratic one has been presented clearly to me, I plan to stick by the old cliché, “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” I feel it is important to me that I state that my mindset is not one which supports the belief that America’s morality and rightness is ironclad and nothing should ever be done to change it. Rather, I just tend to lean fairly towards the defense of the present system.