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POLITICAL PARTY INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN MONGOLIA: COMPETITIVENESS, INTERNAL DEMOCRACY, AND THE CHALLENGE OF POLICY- ORIENTED PARTIES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines party institutionalization in Mongolia at the intersection of electoral competitiveness, internal democracy, financial transparency, and digital political culture. Rather than treating political parties only as strategic actors seeking office, this research conceptualizes them as representative institutions that organize participation, structure accountability, and mediate policy formation. The analysis combines party scholarship with empirical evidence from Mongolia's 2023 revised Law on Political Parties, the 2024 parliamentary elections, party statutes, Supreme Court registration decisions, public opinion surveys, and selected digital transparency practices. The findings show that electoral competitiveness and institutionalization do not fully overlap. Parties with stronger electoral performance do not necessarily exhibit stronger internal democracy, clearer financial reporting, or more stable policy processes. Simultaneously, parties with more transparent rules and accountability structures may still have limited electoral reach. The article argues that digital political engagement alone is not sufficient evidence of institutional maturity unless it is linked to reporting practices, policy communication, and participatory mechanisms. The study proposes a two-dimensional framework for assessing Mongolian parties through competitiveness and institutionalization and concludes that the future of policy-oriented party development in Mongolia depends on strengthening internal democracy, transparent finance, member-policy linkages, and accountable digital communication.

KEYWORDS: Political Parties & Finance; Institutionalization; Electoral Competitiveness; Internal Democracy; Digital Political Culture; Mongolia; Representation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political parties are central institutions of representative democracy. They aggregate interests, structure electoral competition, recruit leadership, connect citizens to government, and organize accountability within parliamentary systems (Duverger, 1954; Sartori, 1976; Panebianco, 1988). In democratic theory, Schumpeter (1942) viewed parties as mechanisms organizing elite competition, while Downs (1957) conceptualized them as rational actors competing for votes. Michels (1911/1962), however, warned that party organization tends to generate oligarchic concentration, making internal democracy a persistent institutional problem.

In Mongolia, the 1992 Constitution established the legal foundations of a multi-party system and guaranteed freedom of association (State of Mongolia, 1992). Yet party development has often been driven by electoral cycles, elite bargaining, leadership struggles, and short-term mobilization rather than by stable policy capacity, transparent finance, and routinized internal democracy. Constitutional reform and electoral redesign have further intensified this tension. Following institutional reforms, the 2024 parliamentary election was held under a mixed electoral system with an expanded 126-seat legislature, increasing pluralism in representation while also exposing differences in party institutional quality (ODIHR, 2024; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

The revised 2023 Law on Political Parties introduced stricter requirements for party statutes, candidate selection, internal control, financial management, and member rights (State of Mongolia, 2023a, 2023b). Public attitudes nevertheless remain skeptical. A study by Open Society Forum found that 84.9% of respondents agreed that political parties had become associations of wealthy people, while only 4.2% believed party prestige was increasing (Open Society Forum, 2021). Likewise, the Anti-Corruption Agency's integrity assessment reported low evaluations for internal democracy, financial transparency, and ethical accountability in party organizations (Independent Authority Against Corruption, 2022).

Against this background, this article asks three questions. First, what analytical framework is appropriate for assessing Mongolian political parties through both competitiveness and institutionalization? Second, how do internal democracy, financial transparency, member-policy linkages, and digital political culture affect party institutionalization? Third, what reforms are needed after the 2024 election to move Mongolian parties closer to policy-oriented and institutionalized forms?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Classic party scholarship provides the conceptual foundations for analyzing institutionalization. Duverger (1954) examined party organizational types, Michels (1911/1962) focused on oligarchic tendencies, Sartori (1976) emphasized party-system competition, and Panebianco (1988) highlighted institutionalization, organizational memory, and power distribution within parties. Mainwaring and Scully (1995) extended this logic to party-system institutionalization by stressing regularity in competition, rootedness in society, legitimacy, and organizational stability.

Schumpeter's (1942) institutional conception of democracy and Downs's (1957) rational-choice model both underline competition, but they do not fully explain why some parties become durable institutions while others remain electorally opportunistic. Panebianco (1988) is especially useful here because he treats parties as organizations shaped by internal routines, inherited structures, and leadership patterns. Katz and Mair (1995) further argued that modern parties increasingly rely on state resources, producing cartel-like tendencies that can weaken representative linkages. More recent studies have drawn attention to transformations in membership, mobilization, and leadership personalization under digital media conditions (Scarrow, 2015; Garzia et al., 2021).

Mongolian scholarship has addressed party history, legal development, functions of parties, and internal democracy. Bold-Erdene (2009), for example, conceptualized party functions in relation to society, governance, and internal organizational life. Studies conducted by the 'Defacto Institute' (2020), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Strategic Academy (2021), Open Society Forum (2021), and the Anti-Corruption Agency (2022) have examined internal democracy, institutionalization, and party integrity. However, fewer studies systematically connect party institutionalization with digital political culture and the changing forms of political communication. This article seeks to bridge that gap.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses a qualitatively driven mixed-method design. At the theoretical level, it draws on comparative institutional analysis. At the empirical level, it uses the revised 2023 Law on Political Parties, the 2024 parliamentary election results, publicly available party statutes, Supreme Court registration decisions, transparency materials, public opinion surveys, and selected evidence from official digital platforms.

The analysis focuses on four parliamentary actors after the 2024 election: the Mongolian People's Party (MPP), the Democratic Party (DP), the HUN Party, and the Civil Will-Green Party (CWGP). These cases were selected because they differ in electoral strength, organizational form, internal rule structure, and transparency practices, while also offering accessible public documentation.

Institutionalization is assessed across four dimensions: electoral competitiveness; stability of statutes and organizational hierarchy; internal democracy and candidate selection rules; and financial control and digital transparency. The study is cautious in interpretation because it relies on publicly accessible materials rather than internal party records, candidate-selection minutes, or full financial archives. Therefore, the aim is not to produce a definitive ranking but to identify patterns within the relationship between competitiveness and institutional development.

4. THE NEW LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: MONGOLIA'S 2023 REVISED LAW ON POLITICAL PARTIES

The revised Law on Political Parties, adopted on 7 July 2023, substantially redefined the legal requirements for party organization, internal governance, financial reporting, and accountability (State of Mongolia, 2023a). Article 15 requires party statutes to specify ideological orientation, organizational structure, supreme governing body, representative central body, executive body, control body, regulations for electing and dismissing leaders, rules for amending statutes, financial management, candidate selection, and gender equality provisions.

The law also strengthened internal democracy. Article 19 requires the representative central body of a party to adopt candidate selection procedures and conflict-of-interest rules for public office nominations. Article 20, guarantees equal participation rights for party members. These provisions elevate internal democracy from a symbolic value to a legal and procedural requirement.

Financial regulation was also tightened. The law limits legitimate revenue sources to state support, membership fees, donations, party-owned assets, and other legally permitted income. It requires parties to use a single bank account for income and imposes earmarking rules for public subsidies, including minimum shares for participation of underrepresented groups, civic and democratic education, and policy research and internal democracy (State of Mongolia, 2023a). In this sense,

party finance is no longer merely an accounting issue but also an institutional-development issue.

5. ELECTORAL COMPETITIVENESS AFTER THE 2024 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

The 2024 parliamentary election was the first election held after the reform that expanded parliament to 126 seats and introduced a mixed electoral system (ODIHR, 2024). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2024), the Mongolian People's Party won 68 seats, the Democratic Party 42 seats, the HUN Party 8 seats, the National Coalition 4 seats, and the Civil Will-Green Party 4 seats.

In the proportional tier, the MPP received 35.01% of the list vote, the DP 30.13%, the HUN Party 10.38%, the National Coalition 5.17%, and the CWGP 5.02%. These results show that competition has widened and parliamentary representation has become more pluralistic. Yet electoral strength does not automatically correspond to internal democracy, policy routinization, or financial transparency. This gap makes it necessary to evaluate parties through two dimensions at once: competitiveness and institutionalization.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARTY INSTITUTIONALIZATION

6.1 Mongolian People's Party

The MPP's official statute and organizational materials describe a layered party structure, central decision-making bodies, and territorial organization (Mongolian People's Party, n.d.). This reflects a traditional hierarchical model with substantial organizational continuity. The Supreme Court registered amendments to the party statute on 9 January 2026, indicating institutional continuity and legal compliance in the formal sense (Supreme Court of Mongolia, 2026a). However, the accessibility of public financial information remains more limited than in some other cases.

6.2 Democratic Party

The Democratic Party remained the main opposition force after winning 42 seats in 2024. Its revised statute was considered by the Supreme Court on 9 January 2026. While most amendments were registered, one key clause expanding the size of the National Policy Committee was rejected on the grounds that it conflicted with the authority of the party's supreme body (Supreme Court of Mongolia, 2026b). This suggests that the party possesses representative institutions and organizational depth, yet internal authority disputes continue to affect its institutional stability.

6.3 HUN Party

The HUN Party's statute is comparatively transparent and detailed. It explicitly affirms democratic principles, majority rule, and openness in finance and activities (HUN Party, n.d.-a). Its rules define central and subnational structures, accountability mechanisms, and continuity provisions in cases of leadership interruption. The party also publicly posts financial reports and audit-related information on its website (HUN Party, n.d.-b). This does not prove complete institutional maturity, but it does indicate a relatively advanced transparency practice.

6.4 Civil Will-Green Party

The CWGP statute outlines organizational rotation, central and local structures, control bodies, and financial provisions (Civil Will-Green Party, n.d.). Its legal trajectory, however, reveals difficulties in aligning internal statutes with the revised law. On 28 March 2025, the Supreme Court refused to register statute changes, citing inconsistencies regarding organizational authority, statute-amendment procedures, and leadership terms (Supreme Court of Mongolia, 2025). Thus, the CWGP demonstrates strong formal institutional ambitions but weaker stability in legal implementation.

7. INTERNAL DEMOCRACY, FINANCE, AND MEMBER-POLICY LINKAGES

The revised legal framework defines internal democracy in procedural terms through member rights, candidate selection rules, representative institutions, and dispute-resolution mechanisms (State of Mongolia, 2023a). However, the cases show that formal rules alone do not ensure stable internal democracy. The DP and CWGP cases in particular reveal that disputes over institutional authority remain central.

Financial transparency is similarly uneven. The law imposes a common benchmark, yet public reporting practices vary. The HUN Party makes financial documents accessible through a dedicated transparency page, while the visibility and comparability of such information are deemed weaker in other cases. This suggests that legal transparency and practical transparency should be analytically distinguished.

The member-policy linkage is also uneven. In theory, policy-oriented parties require members not merely as registered supporters but as participants in policy formulation, deliberation, and monitoring (Scarrows, 2015). Publicly available materials suggest that such linkages are more visible where

institutional rules are clearer and transparency practices are stronger, thus, well-defined.

8. DIGITAL POLITICAL CULTURE: FROM CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION TO POLICY COMMUNICATION

Digital platforms increasingly shape political participation, mobilization, leadership visibility, and communication. Yet digital activity should not be measured only through follower counts or campaign intensity. A more relevant question is whether official platforms are used for policy explanation, reporting, responsiveness, and structured participation (Scarrows, 2015; Garzia et al., 2021).

By this standard, the HUN Party appears to use its digital infrastructure not only for promotion but also for accountability, because statutes, financial reports, and organizational information are publicly available online. Other parties provide statutes and news materials, but the degree of reporting and transparency varies. Therefore, digital political culture should be evaluated through the relationship between campaign communication and institutional accountability rather than through visibility alone.

This issue matters because public trust in parties remains weak. According to the Sant Maral Foundation's May 2024 Politbarometer, 42.7% of respondents said that no party was capable of solving Mongolia's key problems (Sant Maral Foundation, 2024). Under such conditions, digital communication becomes meaningful only when it supports accountability and policy explanation.

9. DISCUSSION: A 2 × 2 FRAMEWORK OF COMPETITIVENESS AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

The Mongolian case can be interpreted through a two-dimensional framework combining competitiveness and institutionalization. The MPP and DP are highly competitive but do not display identical institutional profiles. The HUN Party is less electorally powerful but appears relatively stronger in transparency and rule clarity. The CWGP demonstrates institutional ambition in formal statutes but weaker stability in legal compliance.

This confirms Sartori's (1976) argument that the mechanics of party competition do not by themselves reveal institutional quality. It also supports Panebianco's (1988) view that party development depends on organizational stabilization, internal authority structures, and institutional memory. In Mainwaring and Scully's (1995) terms, active competition does not automatically produce institutionalized party politics. The Mongolian case

shows that competitiveness and institutionalization intersect, but they do not fully overlap. Theoretical Implications of Non-Congruent Party Development in Emerging Democracies

The divergence between formal electoral participation and organizational durability necessitates a shift in scholarly focus from mere competitive dynamics toward the distinct processes of party formation and internal adaptation (Cimini, 2023, p. 20). Such an analytical transition acknowledges that party organizations in newer democracies often follow idiosyncratic trajectories rather than converging toward established Western models, as they must navigate unique environmental constraints and opportunistic incentives (Mazzoleni & Heinisch, 2023, p. 15). Furthermore, the enduring influence of authoritarian legacies, ranging from the organizational survival of successor parties to the baseline level of institutionalization under previous regimes, remains a critical determinant of how these entities navigate post-transition environments (Self & Hicken, 2025).

Conceptual Frameworks for Evaluating Institutional Heterogeneity in Post-Authoritarian Party Systems

This framework addresses the analytical tension between formal organizational structures and the informal strategic imperatives that shape political competition in transitioning states. By disentangling the structural resilience of successor parties from the personalistic tendencies of newly formed entities, this approach clarifies how disparate organizational origins influence long-term democratic performance (Nisnevich, 2021, p. 190; Self & Hicken, 2025). Consequently, this taxonomy allows researchers to isolate the causal pathways through which initial organizational weaknesses may catalyze or impede systemic stability (Bértoa et al., 2023).

By accounting for both the lingering influence of authoritarian legacies and the prevalence of personalistic factionalism, this model bridges the gap between static indicators of party age and the dynamic reality of institutional consolidation (Kim, 2022, p. 56; Loxton & Power, 2021, p. 465).

Such a multidimensional assessment is essential for capturing why lower levels of institutionalization frequently correlate with compromised governance and, in more extreme scenarios, heightened risks of democratic breakdown (Kim et al., 2024). This vulnerability is further exacerbated when parties transition from state-centric models to competitive systems without shedding the organizational pathologies that prioritize internal factional loyalty

over consistent programmatic adherence (Mutlu & Yasun, 2024). Furthermore, the strategic reliance on clientelist networks, often inherited from previous autocratic configurations, can actively undermine the development of the horizontal accountability mechanisms necessary for effective democratic governance (Frantz & Higashijima, 2024; Kim, 2022, p. 19).

To mitigate these risks, future comparative studies must incorporate longitudinal data that distinguishes between superficial procedural compliance and the substantive maturation of extra-parliamentary party infrastructures (Stauber, 2015, p. 273). Beyond institutional metrics, scholars must also integrate the analysis of foundational national narratives, as these ideological frameworks can either facilitate inclusive party growth or exacerbate the exclusionary tendencies that destabilize post-authoritarian polities (Teehankee, 2023, p. 222). Moreover, as research indicates that party institutionalization and system-level stability represent distinct phenomena, empirical models must systematically differentiate between these variables to accurately assess their independent impacts on governance outcomes (Bértoa et al., 2023, p. 207).

This distinction is vital, as research suggests that prioritizing party-level organizational building is often a prerequisite for fostering the transparent relations and predictable governing patterns required for broader democratic resilience (Bértoa et al., 2023, p. 207). Ultimately, this underscores that the successful transition toward stable governance depends less on the mere longevity of the electoral arena and more on the intentional construction of parties that can successfully translate societal interests into sustainable, programmatic policy agendas (Mainwaring, 2016, p. 694). In this context, the development of robust organizational roots serves as a critical buffer against the volatility typical of emerging democracies, where the absence of programmatic linkages often prevents parties from acting as stable intermediaries between the state and the citizenry (Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006; Teehankee, 2023, p. 223).

Indeed, as the literature suggests, the capacity of these organizations to resolve electoral uncertainty through institutionalization is often what determines their durability in regimes transitioning from authoritarian rule (Kim et al., 2024). This process remains fraught with challenges, however, as new incumbents often prioritize the immediate preservation of power over the long-term institutional reforms necessary to check

administrative volatility (Ong, 2021, p. 249).

Such organizational development is further complicated by the interaction between external environmental factors and internal adaptive mechanisms, which requires shifting analytical attention toward specific longitudinal organizational trajectories. This nuanced approach acknowledges that political entities are inherently adaptive, necessitating a closer examination of how varying configurations of organizational structures and legislative incentives interact to shape long-term systemic stability (Fraussen & Halpin, 2016, p. 33). Consequently, this framework suggests that future empirical research should focus on how these adaptive mechanisms modulate the volatility inherent in systems where partisan linkages remain underdeveloped and susceptible to episodic political shifts (Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007). Moreover, integrating programmatic party-building into these analytical models is essential for disrupting the cycles of neopatrimonialism that frequently plague emerging democracies (Barma, 2016, p. 227).

Furthermore, as research demonstrates that party longevity and ideological coherence are primary drivers of signal clarity for voters, the cultivation of stable organizational identities becomes paramount for mitigating the electoral volatility that characterizes these fragile political landscapes (Lupu & Riedl, 2012, p. 1354). By effectively bridging this programmatic gap, parties can move beyond reflexive clientelism, thereby transforming unstable electoral participation into a mechanism for enduring democratic accountability (Ishiyama, 2015; Lupu & Riedl, 2012, p. 1350). This shift toward programmatic consolidation is increasingly viewed as an essential safeguard against the fragmentation often observed in ad hoc coalitional arrangements, which frequently prioritize short-term elite bargains over sustained institutional coherence (Sadat & Basir, 2025). Ultimately, by moving away from volatile, personality-driven strategies, these organizations can foster the institutional depth necessary to withstand the structural shocks that have historically rendered party systems in transitioning states prone to rapid decay (Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006).

Such research should also investigate the extent to which administrative law frameworks can adapt to these partisan fluctuations, as established legal architectures often prove ill-suited to regulate the volatility inherent in immature political systems

(Livermore & Richardson, 2019). In this regard, it is imperative to move beyond binary assessments and consider how politicians strategically combine diverse linkage mechanisms, such as programmatic appeals and clientelist exchanges - to satisfy the evolving utility demands of their electorate (Kitschelt et al., 2009, p. 6).

Future research must therefore interrogate whether such hybrid strategies reflect a temporary bridge toward programmatic maturity or constitute a persistent adaptation to the specific economic constraints of low-income democratic environments (Opalo, 2021). Furthermore, investigating whether these hybrid models promote a movement away from informal, personalized practices toward more formal, rule-bound organizational structures remains a critical, yet underdeveloped, area of inquiry in contemporary political science. Additionally, scholars should assess whether the "movementization" of established parties, a trend marked by the blurring of lines between contentious activism and formal organizational structures, alters the capacity of these entities to maintain consistent programmatic identities during periods of electoral instability (Lucidi, 2025).

10. CONCLUSIONS

The future of Mongolian political parties cannot be assessed through electoral success alone. The 2023 revised Law on Political Parties established a higher institutional threshold for party rules, accountability, finance, and member rights, while the 2024 election widened competition and representation. Yet institutionalization remains uneven across parties.

The evidence suggests that strong electoral performance does not necessarily imply strong internal democracy, transparent finance, or stable policy processes. Conversely, relatively transparent and rule-based parties may still have limited electoral reach. The development of policy-oriented parties in Mongolia therefore depends on strengthening internal democracy, standardizing financial transparency, deepening member-policy linkages, and using digital platforms as instruments of accountability rather than only as campaign tools.

In this sense, the next qualitative stage of Mongolian democracy will depend not simply on whether parties can win elections, but on whether they can become durable, accountable, policy-oriented institutions.

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