

1990

1990
Mongolia secures its independence from the Soviet Union in a democratic and peaceful revolution.

1998
Prime Minister Elbegdorj sells the state-owned Reconstruction Bank to a private bank owned by fellow Democrats. The MPRP opposition walks out of parliament in protest, and Elbegdorj and his cabinet are forced to resign.

1998
Elbegdorj's nominated successor, Zorig, is assassinated in his home. After a political impasse, Narantsatsralt becomes prime minister two months later.

2000
The MPRP, led by Enkhbayar, wins a landslide victory in parliamentary elections.

2008
After another MPRP electoral victory, Democrats protest alleged vote rigging. Three hundred are injured when riots break out, and Mongolia declares its first-ever state of emergency.

2009
Elbegdorj, a Democrat, defeats MPRP incumbent Enkhbayar to become president.

2012
The Democrats defeat the former MPRP (now MPP) in parliamentary elections.

2012
During the Democrats' rule, former president Enkhbayar is convicted of corruption and sentenced to seven years in prison.

2016
MPP returns to power with a supermajority in peaceful parliamentary elections.

2017
Following a contentious campaign, Battulga of the Democratic Party wins presidential elections.

2017

Mongolia

At a glance



National civil war
Absent



Communal/ideological conflict
Medium Low



National political conflict
Low



Local political and electoral conflict
Low



Transnational terrorism
Absent



Local resource conflict
Medium



Separatism and autonomy
Absent



Urban crime and violence
High

** Rankings are based on the last 15 years and are relative to other Asian countries.*

Overview

Since it emerged from its status as a satellite state of the Soviet Union, there has been little large-scale violence in Mongolia, although the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy has been unsteady and somewhat tumultuous. While the Mongolian Revolution of 1990 was democratic and peaceful, the collapse of the economy after the withdrawal of Soviet support triggered some political instability. The 2008 legislative elections highlighted tensions between the ruling and opposition parties, and a peaceful postelection protest by opposition parties turned violent, resulting in five deaths, many injuries, and damage to property, including the headquarters of the ruling Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and the Central Cultural Palace building. Despite fears of a repeat of the 2008 violence, presidential elections in 2009 and 2013 and legislative elections in 2012 and 2016 were peaceful. Although the campaigns leading up to the 2017 presidential elections were contentious, the elections and run-off went smoothly, resulting in a victory for Khaltmaa Battulga of the Democratic Party. Ever since the government launched its economic development strategy based on mining in the 1990s, the country has experienced intermittent anti-mining and environmental protests. Although the protests are mostly peaceful, people's frustrations with the government and the large, foreign-backed mining companies continue to grow, especially as Mongolia's economy has been declining, with its annual growth rate of 2.3 percent in 2015 a steep five points lower than the previous year.¹ Ulaanbaatar has the highest homicide rate of any Asian city.



National civil war

National civil war has not been present in Mongolia since 1264.² In 1920, the Russian Civil War spread into Mongolia. With the support of Mongols, the anti-Bolshevik Lieutenant General Roman von Ungern-Sternberg led his troops into Mongolia. In February 1921, Ungern and his troops defeated Chinese forces. Shortly after establishing its independence, the country came under Soviet control. After the breakup of communist regimes in Europe in the late 1980s, Mongolia experienced a peaceful democratic revolution in the early 1990s.



National political conflict

The political landscape is volatile in Mongolia. In 1998, under Democratic Party rule, a number of significant political events undermined Mongolian democracy and weakened the ability of the government to effectively manage the country. When Prime Minister Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj made the controversial decision to sell the state-owned Reconstruction Bank to Golomt Bank, which was owned by Mongolian Democrats, members of the opposition party, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), walked out of parliament in protest. As a result, Elbegdorj and his cabinet were forced to resign in July 1998. Sanjaasurengiin Zorig, minister of infrastructure and a member of the Democratic Party, became a potential candidate for prime minister. On the night of October 2, 1998, however, as the Democratic coalition leaders agreed to nominate Zorig as the new prime minister, he was stabbed to death in his home by two unknown assailants.³ Media reported speculation of political motivations behind Zorig's unsolved murder. A political impasse between the Democratic coalition and the president, a member of the opposition party, lingered for another two months, until Janlavyn Narantsatsralt, the well-liked but politically weak mayor of Ulaanbaatar, took office as prime minister in December 1998. The MPRP, led by Nambaryn Enkhbayar, returned to power in a landslide victory in the year 2000.

During the summer of 2008, political crises again gripped the country. Mongolia held parliamentary elections on June 29, 2008. The MPRP achieved a major victory, securing 46 of the 76 seats in parliament. The Democratic Party led protests against alleged vote rigging by the MPRP. Riots broke out in Ulaanbaatar, where several thousand people had gathered in the streets after the preliminary results of the elections were announced.⁴ In the ensuing violence, four individuals were killed by police, and one MPRP activist died of carbon monoxide poisoning in a fire at the party headquarters.⁵ Over 300 people were injured, one-third of them police.⁶ For the first time in Mongolia's history, a five-day state of emergency was declared by then president Nambaryn

700 arrested
in a 5-day state of
emergency in 2008

Enkhbayar. More than 700 people were arrested. Several hundred of the arrested received prison sentences of between two and seven years; most of the charges related to burning and looting during the riots. A report by a coalition of Mongolian NGOs determined that government authorities had violated several national and international human rights laws.⁷

The MPRP, which reverted to its original name, the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) in 2010,⁸ lost the 2012 parliamentary elections to the Democratic Party, following Democrat Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj's defeat of incumbent president Enkhbayar in the 2009 presidential elections. During the Democratic Party's rule, former president Enkhbayar was convicted of corruption and sentenced to seven years in prison in August 2012 (his prison term was later reduced to two and a half years). Despite the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Agency in 2006, corruption remains prevalent in Mongolia, which ranked 87th out of 176 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2016.⁹

The country had a peaceful transfer of power after the 2016 parliamentary elections, in which the MPP won a supermajority with 65 seats.¹⁰ Prior to the 2016 elections, parliament amended the election law to return to a fully majoritarian system. Critics argued that the last-minute change favored the two main political parties at the expense of smaller parties and independents. Tensions between the ruling and opposition parties rose ahead of the 2017 presidential election. When none of the candidates won a majority in the June elections, a run-off was held peacefully in early July. A former martial arts champion, Khaltmaa Battulga of the Democratic Party, became president, defeating his MPP opponent, Miyegombo Enkhbold.



Transnational terrorism

Terrorism is not a pressing issue in Mongolia, and there have been no reports of terrorist attacks or groups in the country.¹¹ According to the 2016 Global Terrorism Index, Mongolia is considered a country where terrorism has no direct impacts.¹² However, Mongolia has more than 6,000 kilometers of porous borders, giving travelers from outside the country relatively easy access. As a consequence, government officials have increased awareness about terrorism and have instituted new laws. Mongolian officials, including the police, the Ministry of Justice and the General Intelligence Agency's counterterrorism branch, have begun cooperating with the United States on counterterrorism issues.¹³

Subnational level



Separatism and autonomy

There have been no active movements advocating separatism or autonomy in Mongolia since the region of Outer Mongolia declared its independence as the People's Republic of Mongolia in 1921. Inner Mongolia, a major part of Mongol territory, remained under Chinese control.



Large-scale communal and ideological conflicts

Tensions related to foreigners have risen due to a clash between traditional pastoral livelihoods and the large-scale mining operations run by foreign companies in the countryside, particularly in southern Mongolia. Mining-driven economic growth is threatening to the environment and the livelihoods of Mongolian herders, and local herders and environmental activists frequently protest against the land claims of mining and mineral resources industries and the pollution they cause (see local conflict over resources and community rights, below, for more information).



Local political conflict and electoral violence

Electoral violence has mostly occurred at the national level. Local political violence has not been a major issue in Mongolia. The most recent elections for the citizens' representative khurals (local parliaments) of the capital city (Ulaanbaatar) and *aimags* (provinces) were held on the same day as the national parliamentary elections in June 2016,¹⁴ while the elections for *soums* (districts) were held that October.¹⁵ Despite last-minute changes in the electoral system, discussed above, the elections were conducted peacefully at all levels.¹⁶



Local conflict over resources and community rights

Land conflict is a growing problem in Mongolia, particularly due to the recent rise of the mining industry. Competition over access to land and water has fueled tensions between Mongolian herders and those involved in mining, including large and medium-sized companies, both domestic and foreign. The mining boom started in the 1990s, when the government of Mongolia, facing one of its worst economic crises after the collapse of the Soviet Union, developed the Gold Program to promote gold mining as a way to overcome the deficit. The mining sector was liberalized with the passing of the Mineral Law in 1997. Expanding into new territories, mining activities across Mongolia's countryside have threatened the environmental, material, and cultural foundations of the livelihood of the country's herders. While some companies recognize and redress environmental concerns, others in mining and mineral resources industries continue to create serious environmental problems, such as soil pollution and overuse of the country's limited water sources.

Since early 2000, local resistance movements have emerged in response to mining-related environmental issues and accompanying threats to livelihoods. The grassroots anti-mining movements are organizing a series of peaceful protests, petition drives, legal battles, and educational activities. For example, the Ongi River Movement succeeded in suspending 36 out of 37 exploration and mining licenses issued for sites along the Ongi River.¹⁷ Another example is an international campaign, organized by a large group of students, workers, former politicians, environmental organizations, and herder activists at home and abroad, to protect Noyon Uul, one of the sacred mountains in Mongolia.¹⁸ Since 2014, the group has been organizing protests against the government and a Canadian mining company, Centerra Gold. In May 2017, the Primary Court decided to suspend Centerra Gold's four mining licenses; therefore, the company cannot operate at Noyon Uul until further decisions are made.¹⁹ Although the anti-mining movements in Mongolia have been peaceful, they have the potential to turn violent, as was demonstrated in a case in the southeastern Mongolian province of Dornogovi. In April 2010, a local herder was run over and killed by an employee of Yan Te Uul, a Chinese mining company. The incident occurred during a land dispute between locals and Yan Te Uul security guards.

In addition to land conflicts between Mongolian herders and mining companies in the countryside, land disputes in residential areas surrounding Ulaanbaatar are an emerging issue. The growing urban population has increased demand for residential land in the capital city, leading to the adoption of Resolution A/726 restricting the allocation of land for ownership by people who moved from rural areas.²⁰ Illegal encroachment of plot boundaries, combined with occasional survey errors, have contributed to the increase in land disputes. The number of land disputes brought to the Capital City Administrative Court increased from 156 cases in 2011 to 269 cases in 2016 (figure 1).²¹ Land disputes often arise due to overlapping land ownership, land acquisition without compensation, and multiple sales of land.²² They are also fueled by confusion and manipulation of land-use application information and the absence of clear zoning laws.²³



Urban crime and violence

Over two-thirds of the Mongolian population now lives in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, and other provincial centers,²⁴ and crime and violence in urban areas have become a growing concern. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) noted that Ulaanbaatar had the highest homicide rate among Asian cities.²⁵ Although the rate of homicides in Ulaanbaatar has declined since 2011 (figure 2), National Police Agency statistics show that overall incidents of crime in the capital city increased by 4.3 percent between 2014 and 2015.²⁶ As Mongolia's urban population is growing, the city administration of Ulaanbaatar has temporarily halted inward migration from rural areas. It is important for the national and local government to adopt effective urban development strategies that include appropriate violence-prevention measures to reduce crime in urban areas.

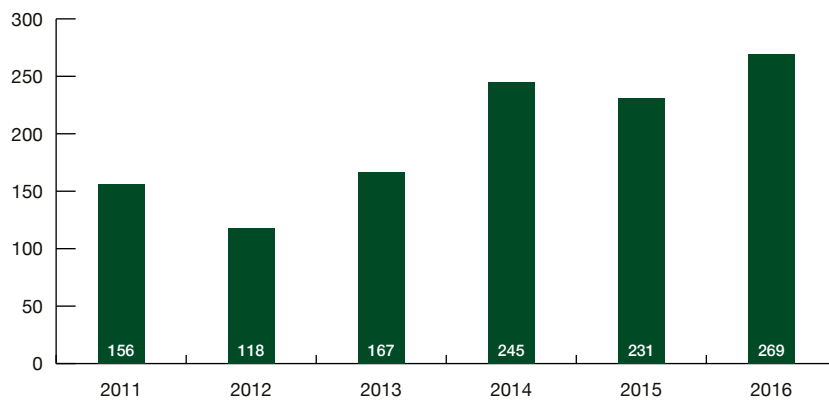


Figure 1. Land dispute cases at the Capital City Administrative Court

Source: Capital City Administrative Court ²⁷

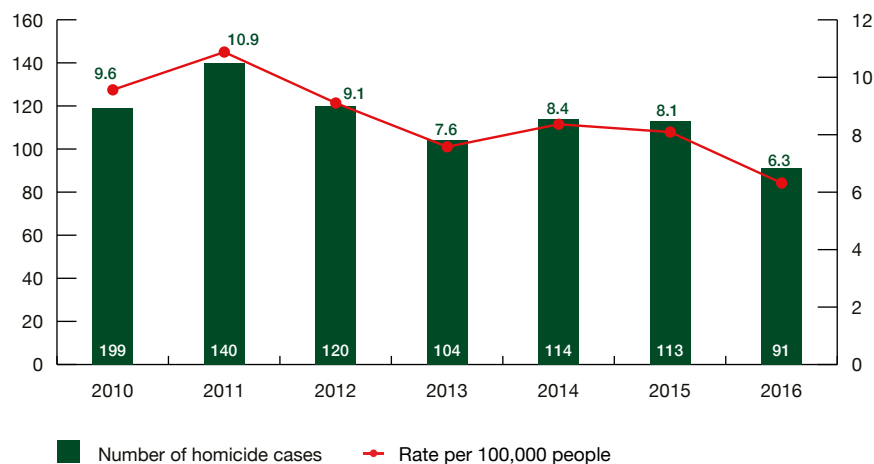


Figure 2. Number and rate of homicide cases in Ulaanbaatar (2010–2016)

Source: Prepared from crime and population statistics provided by the National Statistics Office (NSO) and the National Police Agency (NPA)²⁸



Domestic and gender-based violence

Mongolian women and girls face many forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, rape, and human trafficking. Domestic violence is widespread in the country. The number of domestic violence cases has increased sharply in the past few years (figure 3). The National Police Agency recorded 1,449 criminal cases associated with domestic violence in 2016, a 6.9 percent increase over 2015.²⁹ Despite the increase in reported domestic violence cases, victims are often reluctant to discuss incidents, as they are regarded as a private, family matter. In December 2016, the 2004 Law to Combat Domestic Violence was amended to make domestic violence a criminal offense for the first time in the country's history.³⁰ The amended provisions prescribe the roles and responsibilities of government agencies so that they can coordinate their efforts more effectively to provide protection and support to victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

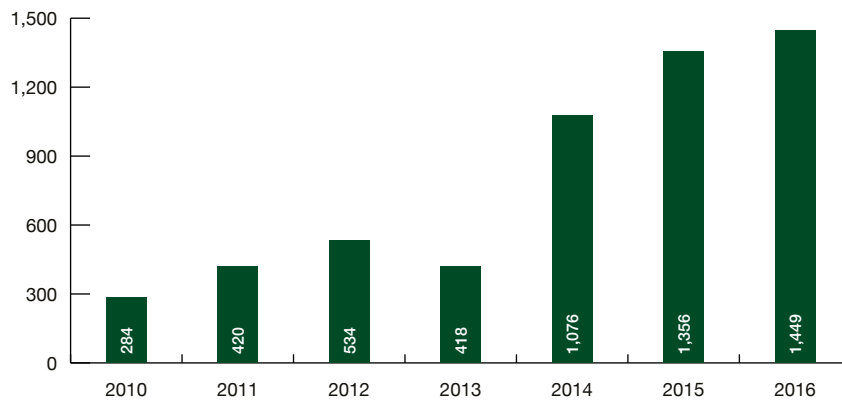


Figure 3. Number of domestic violence cases in Mongolia (2010–2016)
Source: Prepared from crime statistics provided by the NSO and NPA³¹

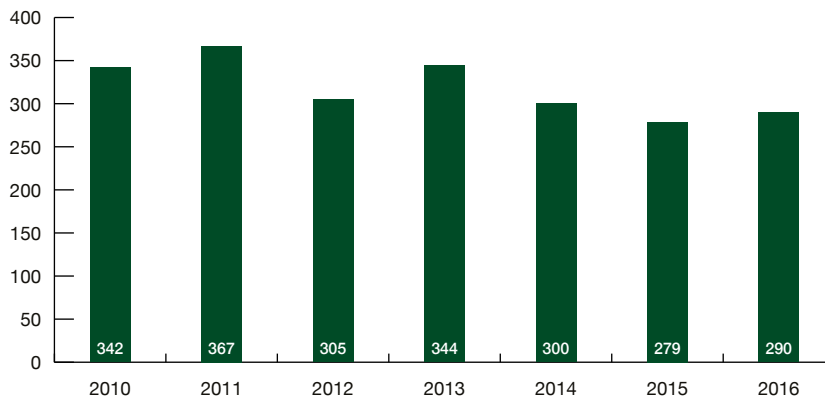


Figure 4. Number of rape cases in Mongolia (2010–2016)
Source: Prepared from crime statistics provided by the NSO and NPA³²

Ulaanbaatar

has the highest homicide rate among Asian cities

Based on police records, the overall number of rape cases reported has declined since 2013 (figure 4). In 2016, the NPA received 290 reports of rape, a slight increase from 279 reports the previous year.³³ One in two victims of rape or sexual violence is under 18 years old.³⁴ Although rape is illegal in the country, only a fraction of rape cases are reported to the authorities. Spousal rape is particularly underreported. Social and cultural norms as well as stressful police and judicial procedures further discourage victims from reporting these crimes.³⁵

Human trafficking is also a growing concern in Mongolia. Men, women, and children are subjected to forced labor in Turkey, Kazakhstan, Israel, Norway, and Sweden and to sex trafficking in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, and South Korea as well as Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Turkey, and the United States.³⁶ Mongolian women and girls are also subjected to commercial sexual exploitation in massage parlors, hotels, bars, and karaoke clubs in the country. Due to increased urban migration, women and girls from rural and poor economic areas are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation in Ulaanbaatar and border areas. A survey conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the NSO found that 95.6 percent of sexually exploited girls became victims when they were 16 years old.³⁷ According to the U.S. State Department's 2016 Human Rights Report, NGOs reported cases where teenage girls were kidnapped, coerced, deceived, and forced to work as prostitutes.³⁸ Factors contributing to human trafficking and sexual exploitation of teenage girls and children include poverty, poor living conditions, child abandonment, and domestic abuse. Many orphaned and runaway children find themselves in highly vulnerable situations.

Notes

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