

Mongolia

# *Ethnicity in Mongolia*

## *Group selection*

Mongolia is a fairly homogenous, sparsely populated country of less than three million people. While according the CIA World Factbook some 90 per cent of the population is of **Mongol** background, mainly Khalka (90 per cent), Durbet, and other Mongols, there is a substantial **Kazakh**-speaking Muslim minority concentrated mainly in the northwestern corner of the country in the province of Bayan-Olgii (approx. 5 percent; since their population number has varied over time (see below), this is an average for the whole EPR period).

Other ethnic minorities are small, not organized politically and thus, irrelevant for this dataset.

There are a number of different Mongol groups (sometimes referred to as tribes or subethnic groups <sup>(3427)</sup>), such as the Durbet, Bayad, Buryat and Dariganga Mongols with dialects and cultures distinct from the official Khalka variety of Mongolian used by the government and spoken mainly in the central parts of the country. But whether they are dialects or really distinct Mongolian languages is something of an open question <sup>(3428)</sup>. Generally, ethnic distinctions between the Mongol subgroups are relatively minor, and those that do exist have not become significant in political or social terms <sup>(3429)</sup>.

The group sizes of the Mongols and the Kazakhs were updated with population estimates of 2015 from the World Factbook <sup>(3430)</sup>.

## *Power relations*

Aymags (Mongolian provinces) were established on the basis of, inter alia, geographic boundaries, ethnic groupings and population density <sup>(3431)</sup>. As mentioned, the Kazakhs live in Bayan-Olgii Aymag in the far western part of Mongolia, where they constitute the majority <sup>(3432; 3433)</sup>. It is a largely Kazakh administrative unit created in 1940 <sup>(3434)</sup>, where the Kazakh language is used in primary schools and in local administrative offices <sup>(3435; 3436)</sup>. Kazakhs dominate among the representatives elected in the local elections in Bayan-Olgii <sup>(3437)</sup>, and in all Kazakh-majority areas, the local administrations are largely dominated by Kazakhs <sup>(3438)</sup>. Therefore, they are coded with regional autonomy.

Bilingual Kazakhs participate in the professional and bureaucratic elite just like the Mongols (which may reflect government efforts to

<sup>3427</sup> [Worden & Matles Savada, 1989]

<sup>3428</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2014]

<sup>3429</sup> [Worden & Matles Savada, 1989]

<sup>3430</sup> [Central Intelligence Agency, 2020]

<sup>3431</sup> [Worden & Matles Savada, 1989]

<sup>3432</sup> [Worden & Matles Savada, 1989]

<sup>3433</sup> [Soni, 2007]

<sup>3434</sup> [Soni, 2007]

<sup>3435</sup> [Worden & Matles Savada, 1989]

<sup>3436</sup> [Soni, 2007]

<sup>3437</sup> [DEZA, 2008]

<sup>3438</sup> [Soni, 2007]

favor a potentially restive minority) <sup>(3439; 3440; 3441)</sup>. However, even though the 1960 Constitution guarantees equality irrespective of racial or national affiliation, elite government positions are occupied by Khalka Mongols <sup>(3442)</sup>, while the Kazakh minority enjoys only token parliamentary membership <sup>(3443; 3444)</sup>. Kazakhs do, however, occupy senior ranks in various other government institutions <sup>(3445)</sup>. In 2009 (and for some years prior), there were 2-3 Kazakhs in parliament <sup>(3446; 3447)</sup>, which remained the same throughout the years 2010/11/12/13 <sup>(3448; 3449)</sup>. According to DEZA, this accounts for 4% of the parliament, which is approx. equivalent to the share of Kazakh citizens in the total population.

In general, there have been no instances of ethnicity-based oppression of Kazakhs by the Mongolian government. Both socio-economically and politically, ethnic Kazakhs are not subjected to systematic discrimination. Nevertheless, since the beginning of democratization (1990 - 1996), there has been a rise in ethnic tensions due to increasing nationalism among both Kazakhs and Mongols <sup>(3450)</sup>.

Already during Soviet times, there was a fairly high level of contact with Kazakhstan <sup>(3451)</sup>. Many Kazakhs migrated to Kazakhstan after the dissolution of the Soviet Union as well as after the disastrous winters of 2001 and 2002 when extremely cold weather killed six million cattle, bringing much of the country on the edge of famine. Emigration by Kazakhs may have been induced further also by economic growth in Kazakhstan, at a time when Mongolia experienced economic difficulties, as well as by the Kazakh government's call "to come home" <sup>(3452; 3453)</sup>. Figures for total Kazakh emigrants range from 63,900 <sup>(3454)</sup> to 70, 000 <sup>(3455)</sup>. However, as of 1994, a trend of re-migration back to Mongolia could be observed, since many Kazakhs found themselves politically, socially and economically marginalized in Kazakhstan (no reliable figures are available, approximations suggest between 10,000 and 20,000) <sup>(3456)</sup>.

In earlier decades, besides some Kazakh schools, other smaller ethnic minorities were largely neglected in government policies; traditionally the country was viewed as containing only ethnic Mongolians. The 1992 Constitution did include a clause regarding the right of national minorities to use their native language in education and communication, although there is no policy or implementation mechanism to ensure the recognition of this right in practice <sup>(3457)</sup>. Also, mechanisms that allow minority groups to participate in decisions concerning the minority are largely absent <sup>(3458)</sup>. Despite Mongolia's reaffirmation of its commitment to equality and non-discrimination on ethnic grounds and to protecting the rights of national minorities as part of its obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2010, minorities do not equally participate in public life <sup>(3459)</sup>. (This particularly applies to smaller ethnic groups that are not politically relevant.)

There were no developments in recent year that demand a change of the coding. Neither the presidential election in July 2013 nor

<sup>3439</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2014]

<sup>3440</sup> [Worden & Matles Savada, 1989]

<sup>3441</sup> [Soni, 2007]

<sup>3442</sup> [Worden & Matles Savada, 1989]

<sup>3443</sup> [DEZA, 2008]

<sup>3444</sup> [US Department of State, 2005-2013]

<sup>3445</sup> [Soni, 2007]

<sup>3446</sup> [DEZA, 2008]

<sup>3447</sup> [US Department of State, 2005-2013]

<sup>3448</sup> [US Department of State, 2005-2013]

<sup>3449</sup> [Soni, 2007]

<sup>3450</sup> [Soni, 2007]

<sup>3451</sup> [Worden & Matles Savada, 1989]

<sup>3452</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2014]

<sup>3453</sup> [Soni, 2007]

<sup>3454</sup> [Soni, 2007]

<sup>3455</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2014]

<sup>3456</sup> [Soni, 2007]

<sup>3457</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2014]

<sup>3458</sup> [DEZA, 2008]

<sup>3459</sup> [Refworld, 2012]

the vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister changed the ethnic power relations. The Mongols, and the Khalka Mongol in particular, continue to dominate national politics. The presidential election saw incumbent President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj from the Democratic Party win a second term and install a cabinet that consisted of ethnic Mongolians exclusively. This did not change after Prime Minister Norov Altankhuyag was replaced by Chimed Saikhanbileg through a vote of no confidence in November 2014 (<sup>3460</sup>).

<sup>3460</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

According to the Bertelsmann Stiftung, “there is no institutionalized discrimination against people based on gender, religion or ethnicity” and members of ethnic minorities have almost equal access to public services and employment (<sup>3461</sup>, <sup>3462</sup>). There have been some minor issues with uncertain citizenship rights of Kazakhs who left the country for Kazakhstan and later returned. However, these issues are due to the government not recognizing dual citizenship. The government does not systematically deny citizenship to any group. The “cultural and political autonomy” (<sup>3463</sup>: 215) of the Kazhaks in Bayan-Olgii continued.

<sup>3461</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

<sup>3462</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020]

<sup>3463</sup> [Barcus & Werner, 2010]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Mongolia

From 1946 until 2015

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Mongols	0.9	DOMINANT
Kazakh	0.05	POWERLESS

From 2016 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Mongols	0.85	DOMINANT
Kazakh	0.04	POWERLESS

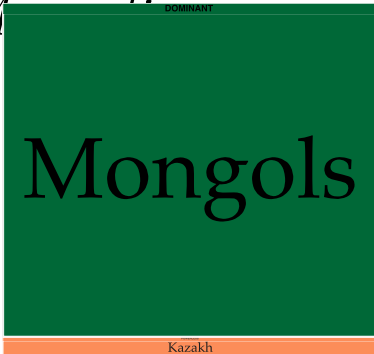


Figure 693: Political status of ethnic groups in Mongolia during 1946-2015.

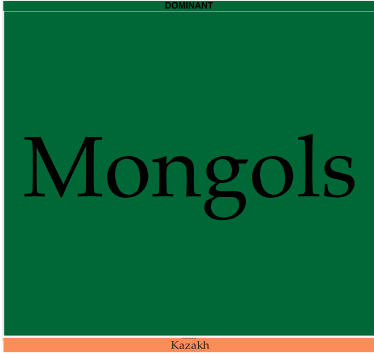


Figure 694: Political status of ethnic groups in Mongolia during 2016-2021.

*Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Mongolia*

*From 1946 until 2021*

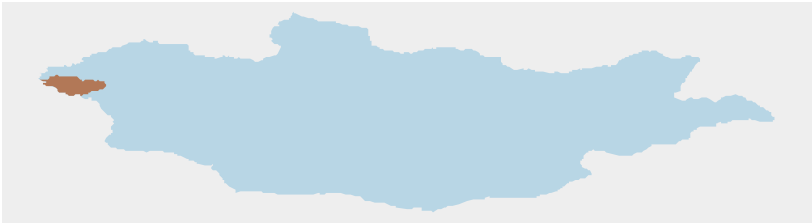


Figure 695: Map of ethnic groups in Mongolia during 1946-2021.

Group name		Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
<span style="color: #4682B4;">■</span>	Mongols	1 562 919	Statewide
<span style="color: #8B4513;">■</span>	Kazakh	15 093	Regionally based

Table 259: List of ethnic groups in Mongolia during 1946-2021.