Chapter 5
The Wisconsin Spring After Two Gubernatorial Elections

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ABSTRACT

Eight years have passed since the original Arab Spring in Tunisia took place in January 2011. It has been almost six years since the impact of the Wisconsin Spring on Scott Walker's attempts at policy changes in the state occurred. At that time, the effect of social media on public awareness and public participation in political events was considered new and innovative. Since then, Walker won a recall election and a re-election. He made a run for the Presidency and lost. In November 2018, Scott Walker was unseated in the gubernatorial race by Tony Evers. This chapter updates what has transpired since then and the impact of social media on the events in Wisconsin, determining whether social media impacted public opinion, political participation, and electoral outcomes in the state.

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT BASICS

In an introductory American politics class one learns that our democratic political system is based on certain basic principles among which are political equality meaning each person has a vote; universal participation which theoretically implies that people in a democracy should be involved in the decision-making process; and majority rule which means that decisions are made on the basis of fifty percent plus one agreeing with each other. (Janda, et. al. 29).

The members of a democracy are influenced by many factors beyond themselves. Their family, their neighbors, their co-workers, and the media are some of the variables that have an impact on what an individual citizen may think, feel and believe about the political realm. And then there is the formation of public opinion about the major issues that surround us. Public opinion which is the aggregate of citizen attitudes towards certain issues, and even towards politicians and what they stand for, can play an important role in a democracy because it can vary over time and sometimes vary very drastically. (Janda, et. al, 114) Thus politicians as part of responsible party government win their seats on the basis of presenting clear and coherent programs to the voters who in turn choose the candidates to represent them on the

basis of these programs. Should the candidate win they should carry out their program while in office or else the people who put them in power can vote them out of office in the next election. Such is the beauty of a democracy where there is a consistent alternation of power – when you know that elections take place every two (for the House of Representatives), four (the President) and six (the Senate) years.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Based on the original chapter (Jorstad, et. al. 2014), social media is a major player in disseminating information, both accurately and inaccurately. Social media tools such Twitter, blogs, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram are used to explain and document issues and events, but more dramatically, provide a platform to potentially polarize, misinform, or reinforce people's perceptions and opinions.

In Wisconsin, social media was intensively used especially beginning in 2010 and through Governor Walker's presidential attempt five years later. What was reported in Wisconsin through social media during 2010-15 became part of the national discussion particularly entering the 2016 presidential primary race. In addition, social media staffers themselves contributed controversy as presidential candidates tried to become distinctive and gain followers. The Wall Street Journal observed this effect by pointing out as politicians develop through their own "political profile," the social media staffers they hire for their campaign "already have personal brands'' of their own—years of social media posts to thousands of followers, and a sometimes provocative online voice that can cause the candidate problems. (Andrews, Nataline and Ballhaus, Rebecca, 2015). Strategic social media is much more complex than merely posting on Facebook. It requires a strategic look at messaging, strategic focus, seasoned social media staff, an overarching objective of the message, and what the target audience is. The 2018 gubernatorial election in Wisconsin provides an example of this type of messaging via social media which will be the focus of our analysis.

THE ARAB SPRING REVISITED

Appropriately enough, Sohrab Ahmari's article in the Wall Street Journal talks about how five years after 2010 the Arab countries, that had experienced uprisings toppling autocracies and bringing the promise of democratic transition, find themselves no closer to stability than they had expected. The popular uprisings and anger in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria have died down. The revolution that social media brought was only effective against the unpopular regimes they sought to unseat but has not been effective in sustaining the kind of power that would bring about stability to these nations. Without the certainty of political equality and universal participation, without the effectiveness of responsible government alternation in power brought about by regularly scheduled elections, there is no ability to hear the voices of the public. Thus these Arab countries are still finding their way towards democracy.

An example of failed attempts at democratization since the onset of the Arab Spring is the case of Egypt which in 2011 held the promised dream of freedom for many Egyptians. After ousting the dictatorship of President Hosni Mubarak, they held an election which brought Mohammed Morsi to power to be their first democratically elected president. In 2013 Abdel Fattah Al Sisi became president after a

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