

## **Determining the Impact of Information Systems on Political Organisations : The case of US presidential elections in 2008 and the Australian election in 2007**

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**Abstract:** Political organisations use information systems for its day to day operations and also for special occasions like elections to the national government. This paper is a study of the use and impact of information systems on political organisations. The focus will be on the US presidential elections in 2008 and the Australian election in 2007. The growing dependency on IT systems by political organisations will also be studied along with its practical applications in day to running as well as in certain special occasions like elections.

**Keywords:** Information systems; Digital media strategies; Political organisations.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today's information systems can achieve more benefits for political organisations than any tools they have used before. It is pertinent to define and explain a little about political organizations with a few examples of such bodies in the United States and Australia. There are diverse definitions or perceptions of political organizations and a few of them are worth mentioning. According to [4], political organizations are comprised of "those portions of social organization that specifically relate to the individuals or groups that management the affairs of public policy or seek to control the appointment or action of those individuals or groups". A legal perception of such bodies as perceived by the North Dakota Supreme Court defines political organization as "a political party or other group, a principal purpose of which is to further the election or appointment of candidates for legislative or executive office or to support or oppose the continuation, amendment, repeal, enactment, initiative, or referendum of any constitutional, statutory, or regulatory provision" [17]. A much narrower and even stronger definition is given by Radcliff-Brown, in the sense that they emphasize the words coercive authority and physical force to be a factor in politics. The common thread that runs through all the definitions is the element of control that a political organization can have over the society and individuals in the society. But only the legal definition mentions the term election and not the other two. This indicates that election is not mandatory for an organization to be considered political. So, a monarchy, where continuity is by birth rather than by mandate can also be considered to be political if has the power to control the society. It can also be applicable in the case

of a dictatorship. Generally speaking, any group that fields candidates to be elected to positions of power in a government can be considered to political organizations. Many countries have two or three major political groups while some may have hundreds. India is an example of the latter while USA, UK, and Australia and content with two or three major political players. For example, the United States has Republican and Democrats, while the UK is dominated by Labor Party and the Democrats. There are some more regional or smaller political groups like Greens, Sinn Fein (of Ireland), and the Scottish National Party in the UK. In Australia also, two major parties dominate the political environment in the country namely the Labor Party and the Liberal Party along with a few smaller groups like National Party, Greens and Family First.

It has been observed [5], that there is now a greater emphasis on an enterprise-wide view of political organisations, with a greater focus on the importance of their use of information systems. Information systems enable an organisation to let users from any department to access information they need to be more effective. According to [5], this capability to share information has evolved as one of the basic goals of information systems management in modern political organizations.

### **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The aim of this study is to determine how information systems impact the ability of political organizations to function more effectively. To accomplish this, the objectives are to:

- Research the history of information systems in political organizations in the United States and Australia.
- Investigate how information systems have improved the operation of political organizations.
- Study the 2008 general election in USA and the 2007 Australian elections.
- Try to determine the future of information systems in political organizations.

There is a rationale for selecting both USA and Australia. Both are colonized nations, mainly through mass immigration from UK initially and many parts of the world later on. Both are functioning democracies with no history of coups, monarchy or dictatorships. Hence democratic politics based on elections is followed in both countries which is relevant for political organizations.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the above mentioned aims and objectives, the research questions for this study are given below.

- What are the views of political organizations in USA and Australia that depend on IT and related information systems for their general working, elections, and election campaigns in particular.
- How would IT and information systems make impacts on the above areas with regard to political organizations in both countries.
- To what extent was information systems used in the 2008 and 2007 general elections in USA and Australia respectively.

### ISSUES TO EXPLORE

Some of the issues that will be included in the study are: How computerized information systems are used by political organizations; use of Strategic Information Systems Planning (SISP); Digital media strategies; the use of database and Internet technologies; data mining techniques; predictive analytics software. Assuming that political organizations are a mix of public service, and economics the role of SISP becomes very relevant. There is no assumption here that political organizations exist solely for altruistic and selfless service. The survival of a political party is not just dependent on the vote or support it gets. The organization needs finance for its growth and survival. Hence, like any modern corporation, manipulation and use of information is essential here. Handling large volume of data is practical only with a properly installed information system. Apart from its day to day functioning, statistics of public opinion, popularity of its functionaries, a website to showcase its achievements, and a channel for communication are considered to be essential elements in modern day

politics. A political organization is a mix of economics and public service. As [6] points out, “the concept of strategic information planning (SISP) is well developed in the literature of private sector organizations. It also has relevance to public sector organizations undergoing reform” [6]. So, SISP is extremely relevant for political organizations which are a mixture of profit, survival, and public service.

### BACKGROUND LITERATURE

While a more detailed list of some of the key literature that will contribute to this study is included in the Bibliography, a few are highlighted here. [14] indicated that, Strategic Information Systems Planning (SISP) has long been an important issue in the use and effectiveness of information systems in organizations. The literature also indicates that alignment of information systems is critical, especially with the development of new technology [7,27] In other words, advancement of IT is a continual process. It is up to any organization (whether political or private) to see to it that the available technology is in alignment with its goals and aspirations. A simple example is exit poll predications. Many news agencies and the party itself will conduct exit polls so that a general view of the results can be obtained. Another example would be to conduct online surveys as to the popularity of a particular candidate. All this would need IT and information systems in place. Additionally, [5]. stated that advanced information systems are now fully integrated into many political organizations.

Research (i.e., [18,11]) have also indicated that political organizations use information systems to gather and exchange information on a wide range of topics including polling, advertising, public relations, election campaigns, and research. [3] noted that the fate of many political campaigns has been determined by the quality and quantity of information that political organizations have access to. Also, [25] reported on the increased use of predictive analytics software by political organizations to analyze, model and score demographic and behavioral data. Such software “can dramatically improve the consistency and quality of decision making throughout an organization” [22]. A scenario just before a general election can be the ideal situation in which such software can become useful to political organizations. Predictive analysis software is used as a statistical tool by diverse organizations to analyze data. Advancements in data processing capability in information technology have enabled easier analysis of data using computers and software. An ideal example would be the SPSS or Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

Finally, [2] acknowledge that the 2008 presidential election produced many firsts in the use of

information systems by political organizations, especially in the Obama campaign.

### SUGGESTED METHODOLOGY

In recent years, research into information systems has been focused more on management and organizational issues rather than technical aspects. That trend has led to the use of qualitative methods of research instead of quantitative [15]. As a result, much of the information systems research features interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts, and impressions and reactions. Additionally, one of the most common qualitative methods used in information systems studies are case studies [13,26,23,16]. Therefore, this study will use qualitative methods featuring case studies based on the 2008 election in the USA and the 2007 elections in Australia. Due to restrictions on resources and time, the methodology will be secondary in nature. One of the best ways to gather quality and accurate data would be to conduct surveys. The advantage is that questionnaires can be prepared in direct relation to the topic being studied. But in this case, it is proposed that secondary data based on previous studies be taken into account for two reasons. One reason is that obtaining primary data needs large amount of resources in terms of money, personnel and time. The second reason is that a lot of relevant secondary data is already available.

### CONCLUSION

The 2008 election in the United States is already recognized as being different from previous elections due to the expanded use of information technology and systems by political organizations [2]. A detailed study of the Presidential campaign as well as several key state level contests will provide important information that will indicate the future direction of political organizations' use of information systems. The Australian election was not as dramatic, even though it is a prime example of political democracy in action. It is assumed that the study results will clearly show dependency on information systems in all areas of the working of a political organization.

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