

## Machiavelli, The Prince and Political Communication

### *Machiavelli, Prens ve Siyasal İletişim*

#### *Araştırma Makalesi – Research Article*

**Uğur ORAL**

Yaşar Üniversitesi, Bilim Kültürü Bölümü,  
[ugur.oral@yasar.edu.tr](mailto:ugur.oral@yasar.edu.tr), ORCID Numarası|ORCID Numbers: 0000-0001-7460-0381

#### **Abstract**

Niccolò Machiavelli has been a much-discussed thinker both in his time and today. Both positive and negative comments are frequently made about Machiavelli's views. In some interpretations, Machiavelli is presented as a tyrant who advises the rulers to establish authority over the people by oppression, but according to some interpretations, he is the pioneer of the modern political approach, which purifies political thought from religious influences and defines it with a human-oriented approach. Like Machiavelli, his well-known book *The Prince* too, has always been at the center of controversy. In his book, Machiavelli wrote his suggestions to the rulers in the light of the experiences he gained during his diplomatic missions in European countries. Machiavelli advocated a secular management approach in his book, and that is why *The Prince* drew the reaction of the Catholic Church from the moment it was published.

In his book *The Prince*, Machiavelli offers a different perspective to the rulers in the field of public relations and political communication. While explaining how politics should be done in his work, Machiavelli also explains his views on how to communicate with the public and how a political message should be given. Therefore, *The Prince* reflects Machiavelli's views not only in the field of management science but also in the context of communication management. This study aims to reveal Machiavelli's approach to the concepts of political public relations and political communication in light of his suggestions to the monarch in his book *The Prince*.

**Keywords:** Public relations, communication, Machiavelli, Prince, political communication

#### **Öz**

Niccolò Machiavelli gerek yaşadığı dönemde gerekse günümüzde, çok tartışılan bir düşünür olmuştur. Machiavelli'nin görüşleri hakkında olumlu olduğu kadar olumsuz yorumlar da sıkça yapılmaktadır. Kimi yorumlarda, Machiavelli, yöneticilere halkın üzerinde baskıyla otorite kurmalarını öğütleyen bir zalim olarak lanse edilir ama kimi yorumlara göre ise siyasal düşünceyi dini etkilerden arındırıp insan odaklı bir yaklaşımla tanımlayan modern politika anlayışının öncüsüdür. Machiavelli gibi, tanınmış kitabı *Prens* de hep tartışmaların odağında olmuştur. Machiavelli, kitabında, Avrupa ülkelerindeki diplomatik görevleri sırasında kazandığı deneyimler ışığında hükümdarlara önerilerini kaleme almıştır. Machiavelli kitabında seküler bir yönetim anlayışını savunmuştur ve bu yüzden *Prens* yayınlandığı andan itibaren Katolik Kilisesi'nin tepkisini çekmiştir.

Machiavelli *Prens* isimli kitabında hükümdarlara halkla ilişkiler ve siyasal iletişim alanında da farklı bir perspektif sunmaktadır. Machiavelli eserinde siyasetin nasıl yapılması gerektiğini anlatırken, halkla nasıl iletişim kurulması, siyasal mesajın nasıl verilmesi gerektiğine dair de görüşlerini açıklamaktadır. Dolayısıyla *Prens*, sadece yönetim bilimi alanında değil, iletişim yönetimi bağlamında da Machiavelli'nin görüşlerini yansıtmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Machiavelli'nin *Prens* isimli kitabında, hükümdara önerileri ışığında, siyasi halkla ilişkiler ve siyasal iletişim kavramlarına yaklaşımını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Halkla ilişkiler, iletişim, Machiavelli, Prens, siyasal iletişim

"Every way is possible to achieve the goal." Interestingly, many people know only this famous approach of Niccolò Machiavelli. For most people, this is the first and perhaps the only thing that comes to mind when Machiavelli is mentioned. The sentence referred to as "The end justifies the means", in English sources, that is, "Exitus acta probat" according to the Latin original, was used for the first time in the Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso's *Heroides*, written before Christ.<sup>1</sup> However, this motto has always been attributed to Machiavelli.<sup>2</sup> Machiavelli did not say such a word.<sup>3</sup> Machiavelli's well-known approach of "it is much safer to be feared than to be loved"<sup>4</sup> has inspired the leaders of societies for years. Although Machiavelli's suggestions are a matter of debate today, they continue to affect managers even in the 21st century.<sup>5</sup>

However, Machiavelli who radically secularized political thought, focused on people and society, and became the pioneer of modern social and political theory<sup>6</sup> left deep traces behind him that cannot be limited to a single view. As Nazım Güvenç, who translated Machiavelli's masterpiece *The Prince* (*Il Principe*, 1513) into Turkish, stated in his preface, there is hardly anyone who does not know or heard about Machiavelli and *The Prince*. But those who read the book and question and understand what the thinker is trying to explain are very few. This situation is thought-provoking.<sup>7</sup>

### The Controversial Thinker Machiavelli

Machiavelli's views and suggestions about the understanding of politics and administration, expressed in *The Prince*, are not just theoretical ideas and predictions. After the end of Medici's rule in Florence, Machiavelli's position in politics began to rise, and he also took on important diplomatic missions. Between 1500 and 1510, he studied the political institutions and ways of doing politics in many European countries, especially France and Germany, where he served, and wrote down the ideas that formed the framework of the *Prince* as a result of his observations.<sup>8</sup> After the Medici Family took over the administration of Florence again, Machiavelli was dismissed, exiled, and imprisoned on the charge of helping those who tried to revolt, after that, as a political scientist, he began to question the political events of his age and give advice to the rulers.<sup>9</sup> *The Prince* is one of the most important works he wrote for this purpose. In his famous work, *The Prince*, Machiavelli attacks the old traditions of political thought with a bold and liberating approach. He differs from the thinkers before him with his determined attitude to reveal the harshest realities of political life.<sup>10</sup>

Machiavelli who is considered the ancestor of modern political thought,<sup>11</sup> was able to observe and accept human reality well in a way that very few people could achieve. But perhaps a little unfairly, both while he was alive and after his death, his ideas gathered reactions and became the subject of discussion.<sup>12</sup> Some claim that Machiavelli is a teacher of evil because he advises leaders to maintain their power through brute force and deception. But besides this, some think that he is a thinker who for the first time rationally analyzed the political structure of modern states. Machiavelli was not, as some commentators claim, completely opposed to the rules of social morality. He even advised being moral as long as the rules did not prevent a person from achieving his goal. What made Machiavelli radical was the idea that morality should not be an obstacle to success.<sup>13</sup>

Machiavelli's life is full of ups and downs. He was tortured, deceived, betrayed, sometimes honored, sometimes demoted, and lost all his power. When we compare his experiences with his ideas, there is

<sup>1</sup> Hamerling, 1993, 2

<sup>2</sup> Mahrik, 2017, 124

<sup>3</sup> Machiavelli, 2012, XVII

<sup>4</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 106

<sup>5</sup> Callayan, 2004, 77-83

<sup>6</sup> Ramsay, 2002, 21-40

<sup>7</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 9

<sup>8</sup> Merrill, 1994, 123-136

<sup>9</sup> Şatır, 2001, 225

<sup>10</sup> Major, 2007, 171-179

<sup>11</sup> Hariman, 1989, 3-29

<sup>12</sup> McGuire 2006, 142-149

<sup>13</sup> Meril, 1994, 123-136

no doubt that the world of today's strategists is not as bad or wild as Machiavelli's, full of difficulties, so their ideas are far from the realism that he put forward.<sup>14</sup>

### Prince's analysis

Although Machiavelli dedicated the Prince to the ruler (Lorenzo de Medici), who sent him into exile, he did not attract much attention. Although he did not garner many reactions at first, when the Prince began to become a reference book for opponents of the church, the Roman Church excommunicated Machiavelli in 1559, even though he had already died, and even accused those who praised him of irreligion.<sup>15</sup>

After the presentation, in *The Prince*, which consists of 26 chapters, Machiavelli's focus is not on "what should happen", but on what happens. The distance between the way one lived and the way one should live is so great that whoever closes their eyes to what is happening and sees only what should happen, actually learns not how to live, but how to lose their own life.<sup>16</sup> In other words, he expressed practical facts, not hopes or fears. Although Machiavelli's *The Prince* is predominantly influential in political science, the statesmanship pattern he describes has also deeply influenced some sociologists.<sup>17</sup>

It will be insufficient to consider *The Prince* only from the perspective of the relationship between the prince and the people. In his book, Machiavelli also explains his views on issues such as human nature, the concept of the state, and forms of government.<sup>18</sup> From time to time his ideas seemed so radical to some circles. According to Gramsci, to translate the title of "Prince", which Machiavelli chose and used as a title for his book, into the language of contemporary politics, its counterpart would not be a head of state or government, but a political leader who wants to seize a state or establish a new type of state.<sup>19</sup>

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli, going beyond the classical moral understanding and the teachings of the Bible, introduced a different perception of virtue, advocating that the individual can do everything to obtain what he needs and protect what he has achieved.<sup>20</sup> Machiavelli argues that the state administration and the people should be independent of the church in all respects. In his opinion, Christianity breaks the political activity of the people and pacifies the people. He accuses the Roman Catholic Church of failing to govern Italy, causing the state to weaken and disintegrate, and praises and recommends the ancient Roman religion based on patriotism.<sup>21</sup>

According to Machiavelli, there are three types of government: monarchical, aristocratic, and popular. Bad and unsuccessful administrations also derive from them. According to him, monarchy is ready to turn into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, and democracy into straying. Therefore, a ruler must determine the form of government very carefully, because it is very difficult to prevent a good state from turning into a bad one.<sup>22</sup> According to Machiavelli, for this reason, choosing only one of these three forms of government created hesitation, and other forms of government were preferred, which had something in common with each of these governments.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, who thought that Machiavelli was addressing the people, even though he advised the monarchs, evaluated the Prince as a kind of manual for republicans in this context.<sup>23</sup> According to Bertrand Russell, to understand the Prince and Machiavelli's ideas correctly, it is necessary to know the political atmosphere of Italy at the time the book was written. For example, in Italy at that time, which inspired the Prince, where only a few legitimate rulers ruled and even the popes won the

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<sup>14</sup> Echevarria, 2014, 9-11

<sup>15</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 31-32

<sup>16</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 100

<sup>17</sup> Scot, 2014, 430

<sup>18</sup> Keskin, 2022, 106-113

<sup>19</sup> Gramsci, 1984,

<sup>20</sup> Harris & Rees, 2000

<sup>21</sup> Thilly, 2002, 20-21

<sup>22</sup> Bouthol, 1997, 62

<sup>23</sup> McKenzie, 1982, 209-228

election fraudulently, the paths to success were very different.<sup>24</sup> Machiavelli made his contradictory suggestions and criticisms according to these political conditions. According to Karl Marx, Machiavelli is a thinker who tried to look at the state from the human eye in history and tried to examine events with reason instead of theology. According to Hançerlioğlu, Machiavelli is a theorist of the bourgeoisie, which has begun to make its presence felt, and he pioneered a progressive approach such as arguing that social history emerged for reasons based on material interests rather than the will of God.<sup>25</sup> According to Bacon, the purpose of Machiavelli when writing *The Prince* is to describe the practices that the rulers make habit of rather than to advise the rulers of the state, that is, it is a kind of political precaution and warning. Emperor Frederic II, in his work "Anti Machiavel", describes the Prince as Pope VI, who was inspired to write the book, Machiavelli. He described it as a portrait of Alexander's son Caesar Borgia.<sup>26</sup> He also claimed that Machiavelli wrote the book to show the real faces of kings who arbitrarily wanted to rule their countries.<sup>27</sup>

According to many political scientists, Machiavelli is one of the founders of modern political science.<sup>28</sup> He was the first to use the term "state" in its current meaning in Europe.<sup>29</sup> He did not advocate any form of government but drew attention to the importance of the existence of a stable unity and order in society. For this purpose, he recommended some unethical behaviors such as despotism and renegeing on the promises to the rulers, and this led to the emergence of the Machiavellian ideology, which evokes concepts such as deceit and immorality in the history of politics. However, Machiavelli also mentions the existence of legitimacy for state power.<sup>30</sup>

### Prince and Political Communication

When we say communication, we think of a process in which there is reciprocity between a group, the individuals forming this group, and these individuals in its simplest form.<sup>31</sup> Political communication, which can also be called a communication process, includes all elements such as creating mutual understanding, attracting attention, and persuading.<sup>32</sup> Political communication occurs when citizens, the media, and leaders engage in dialogue on issues of broad interest to the elite or the public.<sup>33</sup> Although the understanding of the importance of political communication and the beginning of studies in this field took place after World War II,<sup>34</sup> the studies of thinkers in the field of rhetoric in more ancient times are also considered as the first examples of political communication due to the relationship of communication with persuasion. can be done. Therefore, political communication studies date back to Aristotle. Political communication is a field of communication in which not only the behaviors and discourses of the elected but also those who elect them and the society announce their views. Therefore, it should be considered much more comprehensively.

Machiavelli's *Prince* is often presented as one of the first examples in the public relations literature by some experts and questions the relationship between communication and power,<sup>35</sup> Machiavelli offers clues about not only how politics should be done, but also how the political message should be delivered.

In his book, Machiavelli states that societies are always in search of a better government than their current government, and therefore they tend to change their princes constantly. He draws attention to the fact that the princes occupying another region, no matter how strong their armies are, should ensure the closeness of the people of the country they will occupy, and earn their love and respect.<sup>36</sup> This

<sup>24</sup> Russel, 1983, 485

<sup>25</sup> Hançerlioğlu, 1976, 37

<sup>26</sup> Ebenstein, 2009, 171

<sup>27</sup> Sena, 1974, 331-334

<sup>28</sup> McCormick, 2014, XXIII-XXXI

<sup>29</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 16

<sup>30</sup> Ekinci, 1996, 213-252

<sup>31</sup> Türkoğlu, 2004, 41

<sup>32</sup> Ada, 2021, 46

<sup>33</sup> Perloff, 2013,

<sup>34</sup> Topuz, 1991, Kılıçaslan, 2008

<sup>35</sup> García, 2017

<sup>36</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 42

recommendation shows that princes should pay special attention to public relations. In his book, Machiavelli writes, "The subjects are pleased to have a prince to whom they can raise their grievances directly,"<sup>37</sup> then emphasizes the importance of being open to dialogue in political communication. If Machiavelli's approaches to the public-manager relationship in *The Prince* are adapted to the present, they emphasize the importance of public relations and offer an alternative perspective on the role of the public relations practitioner.<sup>38</sup> In his book, Machiavelli emphasizes that the prince needs the love of the people and claims that the only expectation of the people is not to be crushed by their rulers. In his book, he says, "The prince will look first to win the hearts of the people; this will be easy as long as he watches over the people" and points out that the prince should give importance to public relations. Machiavelli also argues that a prince whose people do not hate him is much less likely to be attacked.<sup>39</sup>

Machiavelli is often presented as the founding father of the political and administrative sciences. Although his ideas shocked some commentators and some thinkers to criticize him very harshly, it is also seen that Machiavelli defines the general happiness of the people as the ultimate goal in *The Prince*.<sup>40</sup>

Niccolò Machiavelli talks about three different types of minds in *The Prince*. One of these is the mind, which is capable of thinking for itself. The second is the mind that can understand what others think, and the third is the mind that can neither think for itself nor understand the thoughts of others.<sup>41</sup> With the type of mind he includes in the second group, Machiavelli emphasizes the ability to empathize, that is, the ability to put oneself in the shoes of others and to understand them. The success of political communication is directly related to leaders being empathetic and moderate, not lacking in emotion and judgment.<sup>42</sup> In other words, it can be said that Machiavelli draws attention to the fact that managers should be sensitive to empathetic communication to have the ability to win the love of the people, which he attaches great importance.

In *Prince*, there are also suggestions for personal image, which is considered an important element in the way of success in public relations and political communication by experts. For example, Machiavelli draws attention to the nuance of having power and having glory. In his book, he says, "It is not possible to call killing his people, betraying his friends, having neither respect for his promises, nor pity nor religion as a virtue in a prince. All these can give people power, but not glory"<sup>43</sup>, that is, he also emphasizes the importance of the positive image that the leader should give to the public in political communication. Issues such as trust in the source from which the message is given, the source being sufficiently convincing, the characteristics of the community that will receive the message, knowledge about the scope of the message, and the correct and accurate transmission of the message are factors that directly affect the success of political communication.<sup>44</sup> Machiavelli also underlines the importance of people trusting the leader's words. Machiavelli states that it is important for the public to accept him as a merciful person rather than a cruel person.<sup>45</sup> Again, in the context of personal image, Machiavelli advises that the prince's appearance of floppy, slippery, feminine, grouchy, and indecisive will cause him to be despised, and he should flee from it like the plague. Machiavelli, who draws attention to the importance of greatness, seriousness, solemnity, and character strength in the prince's actions, says that the monarch should display a confident attitude in a way that will lead to the conviction that no one can deceive him.<sup>46</sup>

Machiavelli thinks that as the princes overcome the difficulties they face, they become stronger and increase their fame. According to him, from time to time, fortune throws enemies and mischief in the way of the princes, just so that the prince can overcome, that is, achieve success by climbing the stairs.

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<sup>37</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 44

<sup>38</sup> Harris & Rees, 2000

<sup>39</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 78

<sup>40</sup> Tholen, 2016, 101-114

<sup>41</sup> Wu, Liu, et al, 2020, 242-252

<sup>42</sup> Isotalus & Almonkari, 2011, 19-21

<sup>43</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 72

<sup>44</sup> Aziz, 2007, 69-72

<sup>45</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 105

<sup>46</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 112

Moreover, Machiavelli says that sometimes to increase his reputation, the prince cunningly tries to reinforce his image by creating some problems for himself and overcoming them.<sup>47</sup>

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli underlines that it is possible to lead a principality either with the support of powerful sections or the people. However, he argues that a prince can stay on the throne with the will and support of the people, not the powerful. He writes in his work, "The enmity of the people disturbs the security of the prince because the people are crowded; he can protect himself from the powerful because they are few. The prince must always live with the same people; but there is nothing that compels him to always be with the same powerful group", and he advises today's politicians to keep their dialogue very well with the public rather than trying to look cute to power groups,<sup>48</sup>

One of the factors that bring success in political communication is the knowledge of the leader. The value of information reflects the quality of its judgment. Knowledge of history is a guide in the leader's development of the initiative in everyday matters.<sup>49</sup> Machiavelli also argues that the prince should have a very good knowledge of history, and draws attention to the importance of knowing the actions of great names in history.<sup>50</sup> The prince should study well how the rulers in history behaved during the war and the reasons for their victories and defeats.

Machiavelli also emphasizes that a prince should be honest. According to him, it is enough for a prince not to touch the property and women of his citizens. He explains the qualities that a prince should have with the example of a fox and a lion. Machiavelli advises the prince to act as cunning as a fox when necessary in order not to be caught in the traps, and to act like a lion to scare the wolves and criticizes the princes who only and always act like lions.

Public relations has an important role in motivating the employees within the organization and thus increasing performance. It is important to be able to provide this motivation in political communication. In his work, Machiavelli advises the prince to be careful when addressing a minister or official with whom he is always together and to work, as a part of political communication, and to avoid heavy insults. According to Machiavelli, who drew attention to the importance of appreciation, the prince should honor those who are successful in any field and show that he knows how to evaluate talents. The prince should encourage his people to work comfortably, whether in commerce, agriculture, or whatever, and he should give rewards to those who make an effort to enrich his city or state in some way. According to him, the prince should take the pulse of the people and show an example of humanity and generosity by attending the meetings of professional organizations from time to time.

In a successful political communication, it is important that the administrators act precisely and consistently in their discourses and actions, and that they do not fall into contradictions. Machiavelli draws attention to this issue in his book. Machiavelli criticizes the prince's neutrality. According to him, a prince should transparently show his friendship and enmity and should not remain neutral. This attitude will give him greater prestige. According to Machiavelli, hesitant princes do not take sides to get rid of danger momentarily, but this attitude leads them to disaster. If a prince openly sided with one of the parties, and if his side prevails, even stronger than himself, the person he supports will be friendly and grateful to the prince; or vice versa, if the side of the prince is defeated, he will come to the aid of the prince as much as possible and thus a unity of destiny will emerge.<sup>51</sup>

In his book, Machiavelli argues that the first judgment about a prince is made by looking at the people around him, his ministers. He says that appointing qualified and loyal people in important positions will also reflect the wisdom of the prince. According to Machiavelli, bringing the wrong people to important posts damages the dignity of the prince. This doctrine is also a very important criterion in today's political formations. Politics is teamwork, and leaders who choose their team from experts and appropriate people make far fewer mistakes. Parallel to the same thought, Machiavelli divided the XXIII part of the *Prince* into sycophants. According to him, for the prince to avoid sycophants, he needs to tell

<sup>47</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 123-124

<sup>48</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 77

<sup>49</sup> Dewan & Myatt, 2007,

<sup>50</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 99

<sup>51</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 128

those around him that he will not be hurt by telling the truth. A wise prince should choose wise men to trust and permit them to speak freely on the issues they want and to speak the truth when they speak. The prince should consult the opinions of his advisers, but he should make the final decision himself.<sup>52</sup>

Another important advice of Machiavelli to the rulers in terms of political communication is that they should be open to change. According to him, if things suddenly change, the prince who cannot keep up with it does not change the path he has chosen before, even though it brought success to him before, or does not seek a new path will be harmful. As a result, Machiavelli argues that managers who do not persist in their old behavior styles and adapt to the conditions will be more successful. In this context, Machiavelli recommends that princes display an enterprising and courageous attitude, which points to the mission and vision of leaders today to carry innovation to their institutions.

### Conclusion

The views put forward by Machiavelli in *The Prince* contain important clues about the relationship between the ruler and the governed in political communication. Although Machiavelli wrote his proposals to the rulers according to the way and conditions of doing politics at that time, some of the issues that he highlighted throughout the book are important in political communication even today. Although Machiavelli's suggestions to political power holders are seen as "cruel" and criticized by some commentators in his lifetime and today, his emphasis on the importance of establishing good communication with the public in his advice in the field of political communication partially refutes these views.

In today's modern political communication, the leader's interaction with the public is of great importance. Machiavelli also seems to have advised monarchs to pay attention to this issue in his book. Again, in political communication, the ability of the leader to communicate empathetically with the public is considered a very important element on the way to success. It is noteworthy that Machiavelli also gave the same advice in the years when the book was written. According to him, it is important for the monarch to choose suitable and talented people for his team, and to have advisors whose opinions he values. Managers should be open to innovations and review their decisions and attitudes frequently. All these visionary suggestions show that Machiavelli's views are up to date, even though he lived in the renaissance age.

Political communication is a field of study located at the intersection of public relations and politics. Of course, there are gaps between the political communication that Machiavelli described in his lifetime and the current political communication. However, in essence, political communication aims to establish a mutually healthy relationship between the elector-elected, and the ruler-administered segments. In this context, factors such as the interaction of the administrators with the people, and listening to and understanding the people are very important. This is a fact that has not changed since the historical process. The fact that Machiavelli draws attention to these issues in *The Prince* shows that even in that century, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled was discussed and Machiavelli offers a horizon in this respect. Although the form of government he proposed and the behavioral models he recommended to managers have always remained a topic of discussion, most of Machiavelli's recommendations to the monarchs in the field of public relations and political communication in the *Prince* remain valid today.

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<sup>52</sup> Machiavelli, 1994, 132

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