



# IJMRRS

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# **The American Dream of Freedom and Democracy: From a Machiavellian lens in Theory and Practice**

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The United States of America recently held its election on the 5th of November for the election of its 47th president. In the bipartisan system of American politics, where there is very little sway for a third party option, with the fight between the Democrats and Republicans much awaited, not just within domestic spheres but also from the perspective of global policy. Simply put, with the stronghold and hegemony that the USA wields, it became absolutely imperative for the globe to keep a track of the results; results that showcased a trifecta of Republican victory in the Senate, the White House and the Congress. This is especially interesting to track for political scientists who predict a strong shift to conservative politics aimed at supporting domestic industries, providing jobs within the country and lowering of easy immigration laws. As a budding political scientist, it also drew me to be aware of a familiar term, 'Republic', a term talked about by Niccolo Machiavelli that has found its influence in everyday politics and institutions of the government.

## **THE AMERICAN STATE AND ITS INSTITUTIONS**

Election 2024: Your guide to the 2024 election cycle. (2024, November). CNN. Retrieved November 15, 2024, from <https://edition.cnn.com/election/2024>

The American state is governed on two primary principles: democracy and republicanism. The state is individual-centric wherein individuals have rights. The government or the state, is represented by the president. The president is the embodiment of the will of the majority. It is a middle ground between a republic and despotism of the Machiavellian Prince. In an ideal world, one could say that the president embodies the princely virtue to have a hold over Fortuna. Princely virtue, for Machiavelli, is the ability to deal with any contingency that the fickle goddess of prosperity, Fortuna places before one.<sup>1</sup> Machiavelli believes that the end result that the ruler achieves is what matters most, since leaders sometimes may need to take harsh or strict decisions. He contended that a ruler need not always adhere to conventional

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<sup>1</sup> Jha, S. (2010). *Western Political Thought: Machiavelli* (1st ed.). Pearson Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd.

morality rather he should be willing to do so. A state and a ruler had to be judged by an independent criterion, the morality of success, which was protection of citizens guaranteeing their well-being, expansion of territory and a zealous safeguarding of national interests.<sup>2</sup>

Another idea of Machiavelli that the USA promptly absorbed was the idea of a Republic on the basis of which the Grand Old Party was first named in the 18th century.<sup>3</sup> The Machiavellian Republic was one that emphasised on unity, and destruction of corruption in the form of wealth. It viewed human nature as corrupt, who had to be reigned in by the Prince using his princely virtue to guide people to be better, virtuous and patriotic. Once individuals become better versions of themselves, they could contribute as much as possible in a positive manner to society. This would result in Civic virtue, such that one would be able to grow to use their individual liberty in the maximum and best possible manner. Machiavelli defined individual liberty as the liberty of one's possessions and of one's family life. Once a Civic virtue is established for the good of the people, the despotic rule of the Prince would be removed and ruled by representatives who were wise men and also had conversations with the public. This would be called a Republic. These Republics in which a free and pure government is maintained will not suffer any of their citizens either to be, or to live as gentlemen; but on the contrary, while preserving a strict equality among themselves will achieve greater good.<sup>4</sup> Republics are only achievable once the people have grown to become virtuous and patriotic under the Prince.

When we compare the political concept of the Republic and its predecessor of the despotic Prince, we see that the USA ends up being a middle ground. It is neither a Republic nor the rule of the Prince. It does work towards safeguarding its national interests and work for its well being. A simple example of this would be how the USA safeguards its interest in the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> However, it does not work as well in holding interactions with the people and

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<sup>2</sup> Mukherjee, S., & Ramaswamy, S. (2012). A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx. In *Machiavelli* (Second Edition, pp. 148–179). PHI Learning Private Limited.

<sup>3</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2024, November 15). *Republican Party | Definition, History, & Beliefs*. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Republican-Party>

<sup>4</sup> Shefali Jha, Machiavelli Jha, S. (2010). *Western Political Thought: Machiavelli* (1st ed.). Pearson Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd.

<sup>5</sup> Byman, D., Moller, S. B., The Tobin Project, & Oxford University Press. (n.d.). *The United States and the Middle East: Interests, Risks, and Costs* (Jeremi Suri & Benjamin Valentino, Eds.). [https://www.tobinproject.org/sites/default/files/assets/Byman%20%20Moller%20%20The%20United%20State%20and%20the%20Middle%20East\\_0.pdf](https://www.tobinproject.org/sites/default/files/assets/Byman%20%20Moller%20%20The%20United%20State%20and%20the%20Middle%20East_0.pdf)

ground reality. Most of its politicians are unaware of what the people want. A simple example would be about both the demand for Black Lives Matter<sup>6</sup> and School Shootings<sup>7</sup>. Even in the idea of individual liberty, despite making huge promises it hasn't been able to fulfil any adequately.

## OF RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND RELIGION

Brasch, B. (2024, November 6). Front pages show how the world is feeling about the U.S. election: See how newspapers around the United States and across the globe portrayed the Election Day battle between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Washington Post. Retrieved November 15, 2024, from

The USA is a democratic society, where individual rights are prioritised and freedom is the American dream. However, under the Trump government of 2016, there was a multipronged attack on different aspects of private life, something that is not reflective of the Machiavellian Republic. According to Machiavelli, individual liberty was being able to do whatever it was that one wanted to do. For such a liberty to be achievable, however, it was necessary that the law constrain the citizens towards civic virtue.<sup>8</sup> Machiavelli separated the private from the public sphere of morality.<sup>9</sup> This became a problem within the US as the state unnecessarily started intervening within the private sphere, as exemplified recently by the overturning of the Roe v Wade law in June 2022.<sup>10</sup> This overturning came as a result of the Republican government's heavy influence of Christian ideals, making it a contradictory idea.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Tesler, M. (2021, December 8). Why Republican Support For Peaceful Racial Justice Protests Was ShortLived. *FiveThirtyEight*. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-republican-support-for-peaceful-racial-justiceprotests-was-short-lived/>

<sup>7</sup> Khan, A. (2022). Violence and Voting in the United States: How School Shootings Affect Elections. *AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION*. [https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridgecore/content/view/F9693F827F94E24E89423A1313CF8A46/S2766013322000151a.pdf/violence\\_and\\_voting\\_i\\_n\\_the\\_united\\_states\\_how\\_school\\_shootings\\_affect\\_elections](https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridgecore/content/view/F9693F827F94E24E89423A1313CF8A46/S2766013322000151a.pdf/violence_and_voting_i_n_the_united_states_how_school_shootings_affect_elections).

<sup>8</sup> Jha, S. (2010). *Western Political Thought: Machiavelli* (1st ed.). Pearson Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd.

<sup>9</sup> Mukherjee, S., & Ramaswamy, S. (2012). A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx. In *Machiavelli* (Second Edition, pp. 148–179). PHI Learning Private Limited.

<sup>10</sup> Center for Reproductive Rights. (2024, April 1). Roe v. Wade - Center for Reproductive Rights. <https://reproductiverights.org/roe-v-wade/>

<sup>11</sup> Dias, E. (2022, June 25). For Conservative Christians, the End of Roe Was a Spiritual Victory. The New York Times. Retrieved November 15, 2024, from

Machiavelli was anti-Church and anti-clergy, but not anti-religion. He considered religion as necessary not only for man's social life, but also for the health and prosperity of the state.<sup>12</sup>

Machiavelli was scathing in his criticism of the Church and the clergy, as he believed that these were corrupted due to the lust for wealth and indirectly, power; however he did not oppose religion.

Machiavelli writes, 'Religion is the most necessary and assured support of any civil society. This is because religion, according to Machiavelli, can be used by the state to serve its purposes. Religion should be subordinated to the state and made to serve political ends. What makes religion valuable for Machiavelli is that it compels people to obey civil laws.<sup>12</sup> This is contradictory in its nature because when the state starts following a religion, rather than using it as a tool for social welfare and civic virtue, it loses its rational ability to understand what is right and wrong for the people. In addition, the state forgets that it's supposed to enforce a Civic virtue and allow people to live their peaceful private lives. Rather, the very corruption that Machiavelli fears would corrupt the state, has manifested itself by forcing the government (the Republican party) to listen to it on the basis of money and wealth power.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Throughout his writings, Machiavelli exists between two extremes. He talks about the Republic where people are the most virtuous, honest and patriotic, and he talks about the Prince where he advocates for despotic rule. Unlike Machiavelli, the USA does not exist merely as an intellectual thought but rather a country with enormous power that embodies the Republic on paper, but translates more so as a command under the Prince. Individual rights are present in the country as it is a democracy, however, the government encroaches upon these driven by a lust for power.

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/25/us/conservative-christians-roe-wade-abortion.html><sup>12</sup>  
Mukherjee, S., & Ramaswamy, S. (2012). A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx. In *Machiavelli* (Second Edition, pp. 148–179). PHI Learning Private Limited.

<sup>12</sup> Shefali Jha, Machiavelli Jha, S. (2010). *Western Political Thought: Machiavelli* (1st ed.). Pearson Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd.

<sup>13</sup> Powers, N., & Borek, S. (2022, August 15). Wealthy Donors Bankroll Christian Nationalists to Sustain Unregulated Capitalism. Truthout. <https://truthout.org/articles/wealthy-donors-bankroll-christian-nationalists-tosustain-unregulated-capitalism/>

Machiavelli also talks about the absolute despotic power of the Prince when people are not patriotic about the nation, and as a byproduct also dissuades any discussion/ dissent from occurring within the state. However, the USA is well known for its freedom of speech, which is quite absolute in its nature. In a country that prioritises freedom of speech and is quite patriotic in nature, it is important that dissent happen to embolden not only the political structures but also shed new light on existing power structures. As a country that is the mother of spreading democracy everywhere, it must also prioritise representing its citizens and their issues well, otherwise they will showcase their disappointment during elections. Example: Muslim voters and Kamala Harris.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, ideas of Machiavelli should not be dissolved completely but rather be evolved and adapted to the changing times. National security and interests must be prioritised but not at the cost of the welfare of the citizens. Governments must listen to citizens, work for their welfare and have faith that they would prioritise their own collective good. However, the boundary between collective good and individual good can only be balanced by the government. Therefore, Machiavelli, as a product of the Renaissance, is not only relevant but rather an omniscient presence in everyday political science and practice. Thus, American politique can aptly be called Machiavellian politique.

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<sup>14</sup> Hamid, S. (2024, October 22). A wake-up call for Kamala Harris from Muslim and Arab Americans: The vice president's neglect has allowed Trump to make gains. *Washington Post*. Retrieved November 15, 2024, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/10/22/harris-muslim-arab-american-vote/>