The Analysis of Elections and People's Will from Theories of Machiavelli and Foucault

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Abstract. The debates over the results of elections have been a controversial topic over past decades. Drawing on the political philosophies of Machiavelli and Foucault, this paper argues that while elections can provide a mechanism for the expression of popular will, they are also deeply embedded in structures of power that limit their ability to truly reflect the desires and needs of the electorate. Through an analysis of historical and contemporary case studies, it is explored how elections can be manipulated and distorted by various actors, including elites, media, and technology. While elections can be an important tool for democracy, they must be approached with a critical and nuanced understanding of their limitations and potential pitfalls.

Keywords: Elections; Political Polarization; Machiavellianism.

1 Introduction

For the past several decades, elections and democracy have become synonymous. Governments have convinced people as if the ballot box is the only way to express people's will. Citizens have become accustomed to the words "The will of the people shall be expressed," during an election period in their country. Thus, elections have become a very typical way of describing democracy. However, it is worth thinking whether elections do represent the democracy of a country. This essay will use Machiavelli's and Michel Foucault's theories to study the key question whether elections can satisfy people's will.

2 Brief Discussion of Elections and Democracy

Scholars represented by Przeworski argue that the relationship between democracy and representation lies in the elected leaders in an egalitarian country. Therefore, democracy in a sovereign economy is at its best when elections are freely contested, there is extensive public participation, and the society enjoys political liberty. Through this, the elected administration will act in the best interest of its citizens. Thus, the purpose of elections is to provide a mandate to politicians with reasonable policies and the people's best interest at heart [1].

In an election phase, politicians or party candidates make policy proposals and sell them to the citizens during campaigns. They also explain to the population how the proposed initiatives will affect their welfare. The general public then decides which proposals they want to be adopted by the government and the political candidates in charge of implementing them in the administration [1]. Elections establish a consistent governing body where the favored candidate becomes the leader that the government follows. They also provide a means of holding governments accountable for their actions. As a result, elected officials tend to implement policies that will be positively received by the public in the next election in order to avoid scrutiny.

However, government accountability has become a topic of discussion in various democratic countries worldwide. Several political scholars have challenged this issue in various scholarly publications.

The issue of citizen representation in democratic governments is indeed complex and has been a subject of debate for a long time. It is true that politicians have personal goals, interests, and values, which can sometimes conflict with the needs and wants of the people they represent. One of the challenges is that politicians are often well-informed about certain issues that the general public may not have access to, such as classified information or specialized knowledge. This knowledge can give politicians an advantage in making decisions that may not be immediately apparent to the public.

Furthermore, getting elected into the administration can create pressures for politicians to prioritize special interests, such as their campaign donors or their political party, over the interests of their constituents. This can create a perception that politicians are not truly representing the people they were elected to serve. Therefore, once politicians have political power in the government, they pursue their classified aspirations or some communal objective that does not align with the citizens' interests. Przeworski argues that if politicians have personal motivation, they do other personal things other than representing the general public once elected.

Moreover, voters do not know how to act when they elect a corrupt or selfish politician in the government. If they know some procedural way to hold the leaders accountable, they avoid binding their political leaders to their aspirations. Therefore, if the general public needs more information to scrutinize the politician in power or lacks an interest in evaluating them, the threat of not being re-elected is minimal. Corrupt politicians, therefore, continue pursuing their interests, failing to fulfill the demands of the general public [1].

3   Machiavelli's View

3.1   Machiavelli's Thought on the Ruler, the People and the Government

McLuhan regards Machiavelli as the founder of modern political thought. This is because he is the first advocate of power politics, the first philosopher who separated religion from politics and justified a secular economy, the first exponent of a sovereign State, responsible for the development of modern autonomy, and the one who put forward the supreme, independent government concept and justified a persuasive authority.

Born in 1469, Nicholas Machiavelli was a political philosopher who lived in Italy during the Renaissance. McLuhan believes that the novel spirit of the Renaissance greatly influenced Machiavelli's thoughts and ideas [2]. Thus, during the "rebirth", Italy was Europe's most modern and developed country. However, moral degradation and political chaos accompanied wealth, intellect and artistic achievements. The worst aspect of this era was the corruption, selfishness, and greed of the political elites and religious leaders. Machiavelli, therefore, was born in a period that represented political and societal crises [3]. During that phase, Italy oversaw several independent States. Some of these States were political rivalries with personal ambitions and always in conflict with each other [4]. Therefore, the constant fights among the States and the prey of ambitious neighbouring countries, such as France and Spain, made Italy weak.

Through these experiences, Machiavelli concluded that unless a strong government ruled Italy, the country would always remain under threat from the powerful neighbouring countries [4]. Nicholas Machiavelli was a true patriot. Therefore, he suggested remedies to ease the plight of his country. In his writings, Machiavelli proposed a brutal and unscrupulous prince of Italy. He did not propose a republican State of Italy as it assumes righteous, sincere and selfless citizens. Moreover, corrupt, selfish, and greedy citizens characterized the personality of Italians in the sixteenth century. Hence, he chose a sturdy and authoritative Italian prince [4].

Machiavelli did not believe in the goodness of people. He argued that everyone was covetous, selfish, wicked, and egoistic [4]. In addition, Machiavelli claimed that people were fundamentally weak, ungrateful, and excessively eager for material gain. Thus, he argued that the prominent traits that characterized human beings were first unlimited human desires. Individuals were selfish and aggressive [4]. The citizens were only interested in security and knew that only the government could provide it. Thus, the elected leader had to ensure the security of life for all individuals. Citizens were anxious and always fearful. Therefore, to ensure law and order in the State, leaders had to be aggressive. They also had to use force when governing people. By nature, all individuals were materialistic, ambitious and constantly unsatisfied. Consequently, no human being was content with what he possessed [3]. He also argued that individuals were interested in endless wars and conflict.

Therefore, Machiavelli wanted to act in an important way for the community. Hence, he suggested a prince with combined qualities of a lion and a fox [4]. The imitation of a fox was essential because it would give him the cunningness and foresight he needed to be a leader. The replication of a lion was also essential because it would give him the necessary strength and force to attain his purpose [4]. In his writings, Machiavelli argued that a powerful prince should win his people's popularity, affection, and goodwill. Because of the egocentric nature of human beings, he advised that the prince should avoid taxing them. He also stated that the prince should not interfere with the culture and traditions of his people because individuals are generally conservative [4]. Machiavelli also argued for a prince with the qualities of a beast. Thus, the prince had to be calm, calculating and opportunistic as a leader.

McLuhan argues that Machiavelli did not view politics as an alternative to attain personal wealth for political leaders. Instead, he perceived it as a way to acquire power and the ability to expand and preserve it. Machiavelli classified the government into

two sections; the ideal and practical State. According to him, a republic government was an ideal State, but it could only exist if the citizens were virtuous [2]. He proposed a monarchial government as a practical State for the vicious citizens. According to him, human nature was selfish, power-hungry, and confrontational. Therefore, Machiavelli argued for a practical government in Italy. He, therefore, emphasized absolute power and authoritarian rule.

3.2   Discussion of Election and People's Will by Machiavelli' Thoughts

Although Machiavelli does not directly discuss whether elections express people's will, his theory on politics and power gives us a clear understanding of his thoughts. According to his political theory, elections can express people's will if the leader or the party control or sway public opinion. He believed a leader should have the combined qualities of a fox and a lion to maintain power [4]. Therefore, Machiavelli does not view an election as a direct expression of people's will but rather an opportunity for political leaders to sway public opinion in their favour. Machiavelli also believed that political candidates should appeal to the general public's emotions, rather than their reason, to win the elections. Specifically, Machiavelli believed that human beings are fundamentally driven by their passions and desires, and that political leaders must be able to tap into these emotions in order to win their support. He suggests that leaders should appeal to the general public's emotions, such as fear, anger, and hope, in order to gain their loyalty and support. In the context of elections, Machiavelli would likely advise candidates to focus on appealing to voters' emotions and desires, rather than presenting detailed policy proposals or relying on logical arguments. This might involve using rhetoric that emphasizes the candidate's strength and decisiveness, playing on voters' fears or hopes, or appealing to their sense of identity and belonging.

   In conclusion, according to Machiavelli theory of power and politics, an election can express people's will because the political leader will manipulate or sway public opinion in their favour, is incompatible with democratic values, which emphasize the importance of fair and transparent elections and the rule of law.

4   Michel Foucault's Thoughts

4.1   Foucault's Theory on Power

Political scholars such as Jessen regards Michel Foucault, a French pre-modernist, as an instrumental philosopher in shaping today's understanding of power [5]. They argue that Michel Foucault was the only philosopher to disagree with another theorist who viewed power as an instrument of coercion. Thus, Foucault's theory argues that power is everywhere, and that is what makes us who we are. Therefore, Michel Foucault's hypothesis challenges the idea that individuals or politicians yield power through acts of oppression or supremacy. He argues that power is everywhere and comes from everywhere but does not come from a structure or an agency. According to Foucault's theory, power refers to a regime of truth that permeates society and changes constantly.

Foucault employs the word information to indicate that supremacy is rooted in acceptable structures of technical thoughts and the truth.

Gaventa and John argue that Foucault is among the few philosophers to acknowledge that authority is not just a depressing, coercive object pressuring individuals to do things out of their wishes but a necessity to society [6]. They also claim that he viewed power as a social discipline and conformity source. Thus, Gaventa and John argue that Foucault readings shift away from the sovereign exercise of power within states that employed coercive methods as disciplinary actions to a novel kind of corrective power observed in administrative structures and social services such as mental health services [6]. Thus, the mechanisms of prison surveillance, disciplinary education institutions, population control and administration systems, and the advocacy of norms of physical acts such as sexual activities captivated Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power. The main point of Foucault's supremacy theory is that it surpasses political affairs and perceives power as a day-to-day, socialized and personified occurrence. This is why most powerful resistance, such as revolutions, does not always result from changes in a given society.

Gaventa and John state that contrary to several understandings, Foucault believed in the potential for procedures and struggles [6]. Foucault was lively in societal and political commentary and pursued organic intellectuals. Gaventa and John argue that Foucault thoughts about actions involved our capabilities to identify and understand our socialized models and constraint. Thus, in his readings, Foucault stated that challenging power does not depend on searching for some facts but removing the power of truth from the forms of supremacy, public, financial, and cultural within which it operates now [7].

Scholars such as Gaventa and John argue that several philosophers have extensively employed Foucault's theory of power to evaluate the advanced models in which advanced theories permeate with supremacy. Several philosophers' general understanding of power needs to align with Foucault's thoughts. However, there is a possibility for a critical study and tactical actions to challenge his theory on power [6].

4.2   Michel Foucault's Theory on Politics (Governmentality)

Foucault's readings on "Discipline and Punish" (1975), "the will to knowledge" (1976), and "Society must be defended" (1975) show his interest in State and governmentality. Thus, through these readings, Foucault shifts away from the study of micro-power, which includes prisons and mental health institutions, to macro-power perspectives, such as States and governments.

These readings also introduce his notions on biopolitics and disciplinary power as systems that avoid the juridical-discursive power model. Foucault is not only apprehensive about moving away from a constitutional notion of power that focuses on autonomy, decree and dominion but also moving towards studying how supremacy works and performs in existing practices. Jessen argues that one has to delve into Foucault's readings on "Society must be defended" to appreciate how power functions [5]. Thus, one has to analyze it outside the leviathan theory, outside the constitutional rule and States' Institutions. Jessen argues that Foucault has the same sentiments of power works

and functions in his readings on "The Will to Knowledge [5]." Through these readings, Foucault instigates his course towards a study of governmentality. This examination seeks to shun the States' words and the constitutional-discursive theory of power with its focus on the rule, civil liberties, and independence.

Foucault argues that governments started to emerge in the 16th century as a fraction of the economy and power. Through this, government practices aligned more to political power exercises and people / individual regimes. Foucault, therefore, draws this novel art of governments in the policy of State rationale. He argues that this new economy of power was far from Machiavelli's view on autonomy, which stated that the leader's well-being and power were essential to a country's leadership [7]. Therefore, the States' primary function was to keep the administration in a good state. Thus, the government became a part of rising political science and an entity of information and scrutiny. Jessen argues that Foucault's governmentality analysis explains how the State' becomes a resolution to a crisis rather than a theory [5]. Through this analysis, the State is an effort to solve existing difficulties in governing a country. Thus, the State emerges as a spectrum through which it is probable to perceive and administer emerging aspects such as population [7].

According to Foucault, an understanding of a collective government is indivisible from all the processes circling the population, in a broader sense, an economy. Thus, Foucault explains that the population or economy are part of the State for this rising art of novel administration and must value the general public's actions, interests and requests to secure wealth and economic development [8]. Jessen argues that according to Foucault, State institutions, the army, taxation systems, and judicial systems already existed in the classical governments [5]. However, what was distinctive in the new government was opening the above factors into a dynamic, intensive and reflected practice.

4.3   Foucault Thoughts on Whether Election Expresses People's Will

To understand Foucault's view on whether an election expresses people's will, we must delve into his readings on politics, governmentality, and power. Michel Foucault's theory on power states that power is not held by those in authority but is present throughout society and embedded in the ways we understand, think, and act [8]. He, therefore, argues that power cannot be easily identified or located but is present in the relationship between individuals and institutions. Therefore, Foucault's theory of power states that power is everywhere and comes from everywhere but does not come from a structure or an agency [8]. In this model, Foucault perceives elections as a manifestation of societal power relations.

Therefore, he would argue that elections do not necessarily express the people's will but reflect the dynamics of power between different groups within the society. Economic class, race, age, and gender, all of which are shaped by societal power relations, may influence the election results. The political polarization reflected in the elections of the United States, such as the one in 2020, is a good example of how the dynamics of power can affect the election. The polarization of political elites is recognized and accepted by people. However, the opposing interests of the two parties have pitted the political elites of the two parties against each other, and even led to a vicious

competition of opposing for the sake of opposing [9]. For example, when voting in Congress, the political elites of both parties will oppose the proposals of the other party for the benefit of their own party, often for reasons that are hard to justify. Such a situation occurs repeatedly, leading to the polarization of the political elites of both parties and indirectly affecting the "polarization of the people". Political elites transmit their ideologies and political views to voters through various forms. For example, during the American general election, political elites of both parties will transmit their views to voters through public speeches, media and other means, thus influencing voters' voting [10]. Voters who support the Democratic Party or the Republican Party, because of their different interest starting points, both hope that the party they support will be in power so as to gain more benefits for themselves. Moreover, the division of red and blue constituencies also makes voters who support the Democratic Party or the Republican Party more and more concentrated, and the opposition among voters becomes more and more serious, which will have a certain impact on the election results and aggravate the "political polarization". The application of displinary power and Foucault's other political thoughts can be seen from this directly.

5   Conclusion

This essay has employed Machiavellianism and Michel Foucault's theory on politics and power to address whether elections can address the people's will. From the above arguments, both Machiavellianism and Michel Foucault's theory provide different perspectives on the role of elections in expressing people's will.

On the one hand, Machiavellianism perceives elections as a tool for those in power to maintain control over the population. Machiavelli believed leaders should use any means necessary to maintain power, including manipulation and coercion. Concerning elections, political candidates can employ propaganda and media deceptions to shape public opinion and sway voters in favour of their party. Machiavelli would therefore argue that elections can express the people's will only to the extent that the leaders allow them to, and the ruling party has the power to influence and shape public opinion towards them.

On the other hand, Foucault's theory suggests that power is held by those in authority and disseminated throughout society in various forms. Through this concept, elections can be seen as an expression of power within society. Foucault would therefore argue that elections do not necessarily express the people's will but rather reflect power dynamics between different groups within a society. Therefore, race, gender, and economic class, all of which are shaped by societal power relations, would influence elections result.

In summary, while Machiavellianism sees election as a tool for those in power to maintain control, Foucault's theory sees elections as an expression of power relations within society, reflecting the various political, social and economic factors. The study is essential because it reflects today's politics and power. According to Machiavellianism and Foucault's theory, most egalitarian economies either have the ruling parties sway or manipulate the citizen's opinion towards them, hence maintaining their power,

or a society with dominant social factors such as economics, age or race continuously affect people's decisions or compose people's mind just as the example of political polarization indicates.

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