

## **Power and Leadership in Machiavelli's Political Thought: A Strategy for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The problems of the quest for power and domination over others have been a very serious fundamental issue in human society. This paper attempts to x-ray the existential question of power and leadership in Machiavelli's political thought. The themes such as power, success, glory, civic liberty and republicanism, maintenance of leadership or rulership, freedom, prudence, law and order, justice, stability, fortune, virtue, domination, recognition, human nature, religion, corruption, morality, politics, law, the State, theory of social change, history, violence, and force are quite inherent in Machiavelli's political thought. Nigeria as a country can be fundamentally inspired by the Machiavellian vision of democratic government. Democracy in contemporary Nigeria has been a total failure due to bad system of political governance and leadership. Effective political leadership structure in Nigeria can bring about national security or national development, social order, democratic sustainability and promotion of human rights and the common good of the people. The objective of this paper, is that, Machiavelli's political philosophy does not only connote negativity but his philosophy if well natured and nurtured have some positive implications on human society because for Machiavelli, power and leadership are purely fundamental issues that concerned the collective interests of the people in a republican State. For him, the leader must be concern about the common good of his people. The Machiavellian tradition presupposes the normative possibility of the common good, law and order. This paper adopts the analytical framework in discussing the democratic principle of Machiavellian conceptualization of justice, politics, ethics, morality, power, authority and leadership structure of the political State. This paper, therefore, concludes that Machiavelli's writings are primarily a historical and contemporary political analysis of how political power is won, maintained, or sustained and lost. It demonstrates the fact that leadership is public responsibility and politics underlines this public responsibility. Political power and authority are matters of public responsibility.

**Keywords:** Authority, freedom, leadership, power, the state.

## Introduction

According to Subrata Murkherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy in their book *“A History of Political Thought”* argued that Machiavelli’s political thought has stood the test of time and despite his sinister reputation and political cynicism and tyranny, his theoretical reconstruction still has some relevance in our present day Nigerian society. Machiavelli’s conceptualization of the State is realistic and teleological. The Machiavellian tradition is in consonance with the Aristotelian tradition and it is evident that the State is a creation of nature and human beings are by nature political animal (Stumpf, 2003:95). This theoretical discourse critically examines Machiavelli’s notion of political power and leadership and its contextual framework for human contemporary society. Human beings are by nature always hungry for power and domination over others. It is worthy of note that human being always want to be recognized by others. Machiavelli posits that due to this excessive desire for power and domination over others there is the tendency for the misuse of political power and tyrannical attitude by man. For Machiavelli, man is selfish, greedy, artificial, exhibitionist and wicked (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007:137).

Machiavelli’s thought is political elitism and political realism. Political independence in Africa, therefore, was a victory for the elite class and not a conscious experience of the entire African peoples (Maathai, 2009:54). They ensured the installation of structures of democracy, which they believed were capable of engendering and sustaining democratic culture in Africa (Ekwenze, 2009:33). Machiavelli’s political philosophy reveals the principle of despotism and fear as the principle of life in a despotic government (Odimegwu, 2008:147). Machiavelli’s contemporary legacy is that the political State or political community is anchored on democratic interaction (Megan & Maugh, 2009:165). Machiavelli’s *“The Prince”* exhibits some level of masculinity – which represents the physical, behavioural and mental or emotional traits believed to be characteristics of males (Ferrante, 2003:54). In consonance with Subrata Murkherjee *et al*, Innocent Asouzu, in his book titled *“Effective Leadership and the Ambivalence of Human Interest. The Nigerian Paradox in a Complementary Perspective”*, argues that Machiavelli’s political theorizing best explains the uniqueness of leadership position of the prince (Asouzu, 2003:124). According to Asouzu, “One can even say that every position in life has a type of uniqueness peculiar to it and any uniqueness sought outside the parameters of this uniqueness is empty and misplaced. Today in Nigeria, people hardly believe in uniqueness and sacredness of leadership positions. Machiavelli’s principle of leadership is that leadership is deeply rooted within the framework of the common good that seeks to overcome all forms of fragmentation and ambivalence (Asouzu, 2003:124-125).

Furthermore, leadership position in contemporary Nigerian society should be devoid of any philosophy of excessive independence, self-indulgence, and self reliance which is fundamentally flawed and can lead to all forms of indiscretion and recklessness because it is grounded in anti – we spirit (Asouzu, 2003:125). Asouzu further heightens his position by asserting that “As leaders, we are not only mutually dependent but our being is mystically interwoven such that our interests must be nursed by the mystical source of its strength. Any leadership position one finds oneself is always an opportunity for one to be something different but to be everything excellent. Successful leadership and healthy human relationship is possible only therefore based on complementation even of extremes (Asouzu, 2003:125-126).

Machiavelli’s conception of politics necessitates the need for transformational and revolutionary leadership. Good leadership structure demands revolutionary measures. As succinctly observed by Umaru Usman, in his book titled “*The Crisis of Leadership in Nigeria: The Realities and the Way Forward*”, leadership requires sense of service, it is people-oriented and revolutionary (Umaru, 2012:5). He further asserts that:

The revolution demands that its leaders not merely support honesty and transparency in government from the president and the highest ministerial level to the grassroot, but embody it in their behaviour as well. No longer should African leaders or their supporters play politics with ethnicity, grab public lands, self- off national resources, and loot the treasury – or tolerate such actions by others in African States. However, the revolution in leadership and the need to instill a sense of service cannot be confined only to those at the top of African societies (Umaru, 2012: 4-5).

Moreover, this paper starts with an introductory remark. This paper critically examines Machiavelli’s conception of political ideology and sociology. This paper takes a cursory look at the myriad of thematic highlights of Machiavelli’s political thought. This paper also reveals the contemporary relevance of Machiavelli’s political thought to the Nigerian democratic government. This paper reflects on the evaluative principle of Machiavelli’s political realism and political pragmatism. The conclusion of this paper is anchored on the historical and contemporary political analysis of Machiavelli’s political thought. This paper concludes that Machiavelli’s writings are primarily a historical and contemporary political analysis of how political power is won, maintained, or sustained and lost (Cohen, 2008:94-95). It demonstrates the fact that leadership is public responsibility and politics

underlines this public responsibility. Political power and authority are matters of public responsibility.

### **Machiavelli's Political Thought: A Terse Review**

Machiavelli saw stable political authority and order as necessary for social cohesion and moral regeneration and it was for this reason that he stressed the need for a unified polity, and a republican and free government committed to the liberty of its people. Machiavelli understood the realities of politics in human society. For Harold Laski, the whole of the Renaissance is in Machiavelli. There is its lust for power; its admiration for success, its carelessness of means, its rejection of medieval bonds, its frank pragmatism; its conviction of national unity makes for national strength. Neither his cynicism nor his praise of craftiness is sufficient to conceal the idealist in him (Laski, 1936:36). Accordingly, Subrata Murkherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy, posited that Machiavelli the cherished republican liberty, but was aware of the danger tyranny posed amidst chaos to free institutions. Machiavelli highlighted the importance of the security and unity of the democratic State as the primary concerns of the prince or ruler. Machiavelli's political writings are primarily predicated on liberty and republicanism (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007:136-137).

### **Machiavelli's Notion of Human Nature**

Machiavelli's notion of human nature was a pragmatic one. The individual, according to Machiavelli was wicked, selfish, and egoistic. He was fundamentally weak, ungrateful, exhibitionist, artificial, anxious to avoid danger and excessively desirous of gain or power (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007:137). He lacks honesty, and justice. He lacks purity of intention or honesty of purpose. He was ready to act in a manner that was detrimental to the democratic community. It was only under compulsion or when there is a personal gain that an individual was ready to do good in the democratic society (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007:138). It is, therefore, germane to note that the individual has an aversion to pain and death but he is always desirous of pleasure.

Furthermore, the human being is essentially anti-social, anarchical, selfish, greedy and sensual. The individual would readily forgive the murder of his father, but never the seizure of his property or patrimony. He was grateful to the extent of expecting benefits and rewards. The individual was generally timid, averse to new ideas and complaints. The individual always desire power, glory and material well being. Machiavelli rightfully observed that the desires for novelty, fear and love dictated human actions. However, the desire for personal safety and the security of their possessions prompted individuals to establish a democratic government, with the strongest and the most courageous becoming

lawgivers and leaders. Machiavelli conceived human beings as being basically restless, ambitious, aggressive, and acquisitive, in a state of constant strife and anarchy.

Nowadays, the Nigerian democratic States have become very anarchical. Interestingly, Machiavelli presumed that human nature remained constant, for history move in a cyclical way, alternating between growth and decay. Machiavelli posited that the human mind tended to glorify the past, decry the present and hope for a better future (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 137-138). Machiavelli's writings are fundamentally predicated on the Aristotelian perspective. While Aristotle implied the innate sociability of the human beings, Machiavelli referred to the individual's love for power, reputation, keenness to establish superiority over others and the innate desire to control and dominate others. Machiavelli recognized the importance of stability and order provided by a stable, lawful political community consisting of public spirited and virtuous citizens. A ruler who preserved the State without undermining or flouting laws or causing harms attained fame and respect. On the contrary, the absence of civic virtue led to moral degradation or moral degeneration and corruption (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007:144-145). It is germane to note that Machiavelli believes that corruption is inherent in every human society (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, *Ibid*).

### **Machiavelli's Views on Corruption**

Machiavelli's views on corruption and civic virtue reflect political realism. Machiavelli toed the path of Rousseau, by asserting that civilization meant corruption. However, a republic, established when individuals were good, had a greater chance of surviving than that which was founded when individuals were mean and crafty. Moreover, unlike Rousseau, Machiavelli made moral degradation and civic corruption the starting point of his theoretical analysis, and looked into factors that fostered public spirit overriding private interests. Machiavelli declared wealth without worth as the cause of corruption. He extolled the virtue of poverty over wealth, for simplicity of lifestyle brought honour to cities. He saw a close link or an inextricable nexus between luxurious habits and moral decline. Machiavelli's political realism is fundamentally inspired by the conserving and realistic element in Aristotle's philosophy. It is for this range, depth and profundity that intellectuals throughout the world continue to pay well-desired homage to Aristotle. He was a great pioneer in political science, and no discussion is ever complete without a reference to his brilliant theoretical insights and methodological analysis. Corruption, to Machiavelli, meant licence, violence, great inequities, injustice, disorderly ambition and growth, lawlessness, dishonesty and contempt for religion. It is worthy of note that corruption means the subordination of public values to the private/selfish interests of the individual, when the public sphere was used for furthering private aims and interests.

Every corrupt society tends to exclude the common people from playing an active role in democratic government and political life. Accordingly, Subrata Murkherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy observed that:

Corruption could be tackled only with extraordinary measures, like rule by a strong prince with overwhelming powers. Machiavelli argues that a corrupt people could not achieve nor maintain free politics, for they would be unable to distinguish between subjective private interests and the public domain. Machiavelli believed that a measure of public virtue as a common ideal will make a better democratic system and in persons whom in fairness would not only ending corruption, but also in making a beginning of the real development of the individual and his democratic society (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 146-147).

### **Machiavelli's Ideas on Religion and Morality**

The novelty in Machiavelli's writings was his attitude towards religion and morality. Machiavelli was anti-clergy and anti-Church, but not anti-religion. He considers religion as necessary not only for man's social life, but also for the health and prosperity of the democratic State. It was important within a democratic State because of the influence it needed over political life in general (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 147). As a political tool, princes and rulers were to use religion in their power struggles effectively, but responsibly and cautiously, otherwise it could be disastrous. Religion was good only if it produced social order, for normative peace brought forth fortune and success. Machiavelli's attitude towards religion was strictly utilitarian. It was a social force and did not have any spiritual connotation (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 147-148). Machiavelli had no interest in philosophic contemplation as the highest form of human life, nor was he interested in what constituted good life. Machiavelli was categorical that public spirit was crucial to the democratic stability of the State.

Moreover, one of the key determinants of public spirit was religion, good laws, and liberty. Machiavelli argues that Christianity makes men weak or docile. For Machiavelli, Christianity makes men effeminate, charitable, and weak, glorifying qualities like renunciation, humility, lowliness, other worldliness, asceticism, charity and patience under injustice (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 148-149). In the light of these, Subrata Murkherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy, therefore, observed that:

Machiavelli admires qualities like courage, self-assertiveness, forthrightness, ambition, vitality, intelligence, fame, and strength. Machiavelli distinguished

between Pagan morality and Christian morality and chose Paganism. He did not condemn Christian morality, nor did he try to redefine the Christian conception of a good person. Machiavelli chose pagan morality that focused on public life, social existence and institutional requirements, while Christian morality was inward looking, individualistic, and concerned with the need to tend one's soul. However, despite preferring paganism, Machiavelli did not despise Christian values (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 147).

### **Machiavelli's Views on Double Standards of Morality**

For Machiavelli, a successful ruler or State was one which would be able to acquire, maintain consolidate and increase power. It is worthy of note that the survival and the preservation of the common wealth was his fundamental concern (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 148). Politics was ultimately and fundamentally a constant struggle for power and domination, which had to be judged by its own rules and norms so that States could survive. Machiavelli pointed out that in writing about the rules of politics, he was projecting the real truth and not leaving anything to imagination (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 151). Machiavelli tries to distinguish "ought" from "is". He argues that the prince must be deceptive like the chameleon and crafty in order to maintain and sustain his legitimate territorial boundary.

### **Machiavelli's Notion of Science of Statecraft**

Furthermore, politics deals with observation, testing and social experimentation. Politics has some characteristics of science. Science is observational and public. Machiavelli's political writings mainly concerned with the public sphere rather than the private sphere. He is more concerned with the real issues in democratic government. For Machiavelli, the fundamental objective of every democratic government is to guarantee the collective interests of its people. Politics is all about the public good of the democratic State.

### **Machiavelli's Notion of History**

Machiavelli's attitude to history was practical. History tended to repeat itself, rather than create or generate new things and ideas. Change was essentially kaleidoscopic, with no fundamental transformation (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007:150). Change was cyclical, alternating between growth and decay. He stressed the need to read and imitate the lives and fortunes of great men or leaders and use them as guides for understanding the present or correcting the mistake of the past and the present and ensuring or fostering the correct ordering of the future. Machiavelli, like the other renaissance thinkers, could not visualize that civilization could continually and constantly evolve with new ideas and perceptions.

In this regard, perception is critical to human existential and political relations. Perception is critical or key to human understanding of reality and society (Machiavelli, 1950, 129).

### **Machiavelli on Republican Politics and Notion of Liberty**

Machiavelli distinguished between republics and princedoms, free and un-free States. Free States were those which are far from all external servitude, and are able to govern themselves according to their own whims and caprices. Machiavelli argues that a republic was superior to a princedom, which however, did not suit all people, except those who were highly public spirited. He argues that liberty was threatened by human selfishness (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 153-154). Freedom, to Machiavelli, produced not only powerful States but also strong individuals, whose strengths were not in dominating or influencing others but in the independence of spirit, in their ability to think and decide for themselves. By liberty, Machiavelli means independence from external aggression and internal tyranny, implying the right of people to be able to govern themselves; Machiavelli saw devotion to the public cause as a necessary precondition for claiming and enjoying private freedom without fear or interference. Machiavelli saw or admired a free, virile and resourceful people, strong, powerful and successful leaders. Machiavelli saw liberty as being possible within the normative framework of law. Laws ensured the enjoyment of liberty by all; for they represented interference and curtailed the corrupt use of wealth. Laws not only protected individuals from a corrupt leader, but also liberated them from following their natural self destructive tendency, namely the pursuit of self-interest (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 154-155). Laws are necessary instrument for the correct ordering of the political States.

### **Machiavelli's Metaphysical Implication of Violence**

Machiavelli was convinced that the use of violence could be controlled but could not be totally eliminated. He recommended the cautious and judicious exercise of despotic violence for otherwise it would create a widespread distrust and hostility towards the democratic government, thereby, resulting in social disorderliness and democratic instability. As rightly observed by Subrata Murkherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy:

Machiavelli saw violence as shock therapy to cure corruption and rejuvenate civic virtue. A republican government ought to use force carefully even in external affairs. A republican government was maintained and sustained by the power of its people, rather than by exerting force over them. It is worthy of note that people's identification and participation in the democratic system would economize the employment of violence, which was why the prince should cultivate and



secure people's support. Machiavelli very rightly asserted that only weak regimes would intensify the use of violence and cruelty (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 155).

Machiavelli posits that the use of violence should be avoided in the political State in order to guarantee peace and tranquility.

### **Machiavelli's Advice to the Prince (Ruler)**

Machiavelli cautioned the prince against excessive generosity, strictness or kindness, and stressed the need for moderate behaviour. A prince had to be gentle or severe depending on the situation or circumstances. His relationship with his subjects was similar to the one between a father and his children. A prince had to be strong and demonstrate his strength whenever necessary. He has to govern the State responsibly and efficiently ensuring its democratic stability and socio-economic survival (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 156-157). He had to uphold conventional standards of morality and notions of right by preserving the normative foundations of religion. Machiavelli insisted on the need for legal remedies against official abuses of democratic government in order to avoid illegal violence. Machiavelli advised the prince to adopt a policy of coalition rather than remain isolated, for neutrality was impossible both domestically and internationally. A prince in order to succeed had to be willing to act ruthlessly, combining valour and courage. He ought to exhibit the cunning and shrewdness of a fox and he has to be courageous like a lion. This was because a lion could be able to ward off wolves and a fox could recognize traps (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 155-156). A ruler had to be courageous to fight his enemies, and cunning enough to detect conspiracies. He could do this only if he would change his colours like a chameleon for in a corrupt age, greatness could only be achieved only by immoral means. A prince should know how to fight with the help of laws and force. While laws were for civilized people, force was for the brutes. Machiavelli pointed out that princes ought to exterminate the families of the rulers whose territories they wished to possess or secure (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 157-159). It is germane to note that Machiavelli also pointed out that the prince should abstain from the wives of his subjects in order for the prince to maintain his grandeur and this will enable the prince to rule with all sense of modesty and morality.

### **Machiavelli's Views of the Role of the Law-giver**

Machiavelli believes that the lawgiver is a person that is equipped with certain charismatic qualities. The primary concern of the lawgiver is that he should be concerned with the welfare of his people. The lawgiver is a constitutional builder. His primary responsibility is to make and implement laws. Laws are instruments meant to safeguard the lives of the

peoples in the political State. Law is rationalistic in nature and it is aimed at ensuring democratic sustainability, stability and the public good. Law becomes a rational instrument for the political State. The lawgiver is a system builder and a moral educator. The lawgiver is like an architect. His role is to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct. The lawgiver ought to promulgate laws for the overall good of his people and not for his own selfish aggrandizement. The lawgiver ought to be equipped with intellectual prowess in order to ensure the smooth operation of the democratic State. The lawgiver is saddled with the notion that the overall objective of law is to guarantee the public good, social order and social justice. Law is predicated on reason. Law demonstrates the need for democratic accountability and responsibility. Law is a command. It is built around the need for human order.

### **Power and Leadership in Nigeria: Adapting Machiavellian Perspective**

Machiavelli's political writings call for the need for patriotic democratic citizenship and transformative leadership. The mission and vision of Nigeria requires a contextual statement of a future that calls for the democratic commitment of everyone. The current socio-economic and political situation in Nigeria today requires patriotic citizens to come forward with sincere and useful suggestions as well as advice for a way out of the confused and disturbing sorry state of affairs we have found ourselves in Nigeria. The main problems hindering our progress in Nigeria in almost all areas of endeavours are bad leadership and bad system of democratic governance (Umaru, 2012:3-4). Machiavelli's writings are primarily on political power and leadership. Leadership is a responsibility not a privilege, therefore, leaders at all levels must be ready to shoulder the responsibility of leadership. No society progresses without quality leadership with a clear vision of its journey to success.

Machiavelli's conception of political power and leadership is predicated on social order and the idea of the common good. No good economic system or true democracy can survive and flourish in a dislocated social order. The Nigerian society is now traumatized, deprived and is suffering from moral decadence, indiscipline and apathy mainly due to lack of good political leadership (Umaru, 4-5). Machiavelli posits that true democratic government presupposes the fact that people must obey the laws of the land and show civility to tolerate constructive criticism and promote genuine dialogue with its democratic citizens. Democratic government engenders the common good of the people, the rule of law and order. The Nigerian nation has remained most of the time in darkness, economic hardship, social unrest, general insecurity, with government flagrant disregards for public interest and the rule of law. In contemporary Nigerian society nothing has been done in concrete terms to alleviate the sufferings of the masses. The constant disruptions of the

Nigerian democratic States have prevented continuity in government politics (Umaru, 5-6). Nigerian politicians or political leaders lack the spirit of statesmanship or stewardship. Machiavelli's political writings are anchored on the normative foundation of the common good. The call for the common good in Nigerian democratic society is becoming unrealistic due to the prevalence of the destructive tendency of corruption and injustice.

Machiavelli reminds us that corruption and injustice threatens the foundations of society from within and urges that it always be combated whoever it appears and whoever it affects (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 158-159). Machiavelli's political theorizing has a human face because there is much in his writings to suggest a fundamentally good man trying to understand human society in its political form (Cohen, 2008:94-95). Nigerians are experiencing untold economic hardship and psychological trauma leading to economic and political un-freedom due to bad political leadership. Machiavelli's civic republicanism is a novel contribution to contemporary debates over freedom. Machiavelli's writings represent the tradition of civic republicanism. As observed by contemporary political theorists Quentin Skinner, Phillip Petite and Frank Michelman; and this tradition emphasizes political participation in political life (Alan, 2006:294). It is worthy of note that contemporary Nigerian society is presently governed by social disorderliness and negative or structural violence. Machiavelli's writings reflect in the need for socio-political-order. By socio-political order, we mean the due process or right functioning of socio-political issues and affairs (Nwankwor & Udemé, 2013:52). The Nigerian democratic system has become a backlash of an extensive personalization of power, the deviation of fundamental human rights, widespread corruption and the prevalence of an unelected and unaccountable government and all these have fallen short of the Machiavellian notions of democratic accountability or corruption and free-States. Implicit, if not explicit, in this perspective, is a call for economic liberalization and democratization, and national security or development will take place only if political leaders abandon their authoritarian practices and selfish aggrandizements. Certainly, democratic governance is a more useful source of normative legitimacy.

Broadly speaking, government has strong normative outcome to human relationships. The practice of good government is essentially, a fragile process that depends on the restraint of the ruler and the tolerance of the ruled. Government, then, is also the conscious management of regime structures with a view to enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the public realm (Venter, 2004:234-235). It is worthy of note that democracy in Nigeria and Africa in general is primarily focused on political reform. Machiavelli's writings talked about political power and leadership. In theory, leadership is a political and relational concept involving the rulers and the ruled. But in Nigeria, the leaders are more concerned

about themselves rather than the people (Venter, 229). Politics in every real sense of the word is all about leadership, power structure and conversely speaking, leadership is a critical assessment or critical dimension of everyday political life. Leaders must have the charisma to provide for their people with a national vision and purpose, and the ability to galvanize their efforts towards and to sustain their enthusiasm in the pursuit of those collective objectives. Leadership is essential in all human activity, social, economic and political affairs (Venter, 258). It is worthy of note that political leadership in African societies usually functions in a context of marked ideological disunity. Political leadership in Africa operates in an arena often seeded with acrimonious debate or lopsidedness; the entire environment in which it operates is usually pregnant with adversity and dissatisfactions (Venter, 260-261). Machiavelli advocates that leadership is a challenge at the best of time, but it is much easier to be a leader when all is going well (Venter, 263). For Venter, the chronicles of human kind are littered with cases of leaders whose, initial, seemingly harmless antics have later had to great heartbreaks and destructions (Venter, 265).

However, the Machiavellian template is an illustration of the social balancing between legitimate structuring to ensure effective performance and authoritarian government. African governments should involve a practical dimension of operational engagement in addressing the national insecurities that exist both within and between States. For Venter, in the light of current global and regional trends, Africa has no choice but to galvanize and marshall out all positive forces and to take its destiny into its own hands (Venter, 272). However, the conceptualization of civic republicanism in Machiavelli's political theorizing demonstrates how power usage formed the crux of democratic governance; and so open to different treatment, alternately military abuse and civilian respect (Medubi, 2004:312). It is worthy of note that Nigeria as a country must learn from the Machiavellian template of the utilitarian principle; because the idea of the common good has eluded the Nigerian peoples.

Accordingly, Antonio Gramsci posits that "The basic thing about Machiavelli's *The Prince*" is that it is not a systematic treatment but a "live" work in which political ideology and political science are fused in the dramatic form of a "myth". Before Machiavelli, political science had taken the form either of the Utopia or of the scholarly treatise. Machiavelli, combining the two, gave imaginative and artistic form to his conception by embodying the doctrinal, rational element in the person of a condottiere, who represents plastically and anthro-morphically the symbol of the "Collective will" of the people (Gramsci, 1971:125). For Quentin Skinner, "Once we restore Machiavelli to the world in which his ideas were initially formed, we can begin to appreciate the extraordinary

originality of his attack on the prevailing moral assumptions of his age. And once we grasp the implications of his own moral outlook, we can readily see why his name is still so often invoked whenever the issues of political power and leadership are discussed (Skinner, 1981:2). Machiavelli's political theorizing is concerned with the real issues of democratic government. It concerns the fundamental issues of political power and leadership. The initial reaction to Machiavelli's writings was one of shock and he himself was denounced as an inventor of the devil (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007: *Ibid*). For Subrata Murkherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy:

Machiavelli sanctioned the use of deception, cruelty, force, violence, and the like for achieving the desired political ends or goals. Interestingly, Machiavelli had his share of admirers. Spinoza regarded him as a friend of the people for having exposed the prince. Montesquieu regarded him as a lover of liberty. He separated Machiavelli from Machiavellianism and described him as a pioneer in political sociology. However, as a disciple of Montesquieu, Rousseau projected Machiavelli as a republican, a satirist of tyranny and described him as a good citizen and an honourable man. Voltaire read Machiavelli carefully and appreciatively. Denis Diderot (1713 - 1784) pleaded for his rehabilitation in the Encyclopaedia describing him as an erudite man of genius, a cultivated man of letters who wrote some good dramas, hated the despotism of Medici, endured torture because of personal courage and died like a philosopher. Alfieri called him "Divine", an ardent enthusiast of individual freedom and an unabashed lover of all political virtue resulting in true glory (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007: 157-158).

Nevertheless, it is germane to note that scholars have praised Machiavelli for his political realism and political pragmatism, and the fact that he wrote about human nature, the nature and structure of political society and its actual operations, with a concern about how things were, rather than how they ought to be. Machiavelli showed his concern for the moral and political degradation in Italian public life and the urgency to recreate a healthier social life by resurrecting nostalgically the glory of their Roman ancestors. In this reordering, Machiavelli underlined the importance of politics as a public responsibility and the need for rules and maxims distinct from those applicable in the private sphere (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, *Ibid*).

Furthermore, he emphasized the need to judge politics by a purely political criterion, rendering moral platitudes obsolete and irrelevant. For Machiavelli, success was the yard

stick to measure and judge political activities and assessed achievements in light of the initial promise (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 150-151). This will enable him not only to be dispassionately inclined but in his study of political power and authority shorn of its religious and moral orientations, but also to enquire into the secular origins of political authority and the State. Machiavelli did not develop his views systematically, for many of them were in response to particular political exigencies. Though diametrically different in temperament and beliefs, his writings were also situational. The refreshing aspect of his writings was that they were neither speculative nor abstract. Machiavelli represented the dawn of a new age which rejected idealization and insisted on the need to grasp the realities of politics. He was the first to grasp the tone of political / social changes and initiates a scientific study of politics. Machiavelli's writings reflect in Italian humanism and the idea of the modern State. According to Machiavelli, the cause of instability was the hatred that the poor harboured towards the rich. Interestingly, this was also the reason for civic republicanism. The workers realized the need to protect themselves from government repression and act decisively to secure a better life and a stable modern society (Murkherjee & Ramaswamy, 151-152).

### **Evaluation**

Machiavelli's attempt to resolve human nature is very fundamental, controversial and problematic. One fundamental problem associated with the Machiavellian doctrine is that it reveals political despotism or political tyranny. It reveals the problem of the misuse of political power and leadership by man. The Machiavellian tradition of politics reveals political realism, freedom, prudence, and stability, law and order. Machiavelli's political philosophy represents the doctrine of liberty and civic republicanism (Jeko & Ukagba, 2020:86-94). Leadership has become a fundamental issue in contemporary Nigerian society. Leadership is the defining challenge for contemporary Nigeria – today. But for lack of honest and purposeful leadership, Nigeria has all the potentials of becoming a truly great nation. Today, Nigerian leaders eat the best food, wear the best dresses, build the best houses; drive the best cars and jeeps, while their subjects are poverty stricken, hungry and sick; and over 80% of them live below poverty line. The Nigerian Leaders are also using ethnic and religious sentiments to divide and rule; and to keep the public away from looking at their treasury plundering and mismanagement of the nation (Umaru, 2012: 200-201). However, if Nigeria is x-rayed today for the purpose of diagnosis and treatment, the finding is: the country is seriously suffering from social, political and economic ailments resulting to a near total collapse of most machinery of government, law and order, economic structures and loss of sense of direction. The people are suffering, confused and helpless. The chief causes are mainly bad leadership, and wrong system of government, indiscipline, selfishness and anti-patriotism on the part of the public. Machiavelli's

political ideology is public. It is worthy of note that the problem in Nigeria is a clear case of chronic bad leadership and societal disorientation and moral decadence. Only honest and purposeful leadership could provide good governance that could guarantee socio-economic development, improve quality of life and security of life and property (Umaru, 201-202). Just like Plato's reasoning, Machiavelli argued that the prince is equipped to know what is good for the democratic community by ensuring justice and rules that will bring the optimum realization of man's well being. From this Machiavellian perspective, a leader should be the prime driver, vision-driven, selfless, purposeful, accountable, transparent and able to set objectives for the rest of the governance system, as well as being able to maximize the use of available resources for the welfare of the governed (Okolo, 2021:231-232). Machiavelli's conception of civic republicanism reveals the tenets of democratic government. The tenet of democratic government is not simply about the protection of life and property or the promotion of a free State: it is also fundamentally, about the equality of each person in the State to have a say in government most especially during the electoral process. However, freedom encapsulates the central egalitarian dimension of Machiavelli's democratic ideal (Mackenzie, 2009:111). And yet, this egalitarian dimension of the democratic ideal is not as clear cut as it may appear in Nigeria. In Nigerian contemporary society, the collective interests of the State have never been the interest of many political leaders. Machiavelli explains how a strong and effective ruler can best serve the interests of the people and the State. His advice is not meant for just anyone: it is advice for princes – rulers whose actions determine the fate of their subjects. Such people, he suggests should not be squeamished (Warburton, 2006:37). It is worthy of note that they need to act swiftly and effectively to do what is best for the democratic State. And what is best for the democratic State may be to ignore conventional morality. One way in which Machiavelli's ideas still form present day debate and counter debate is in the area of dirty hands in politics, the idea that some sorts of apparently immoral behaviour are inevitable consequence of the role of being a political leader. Machiavelli shows no respect for what we would now call human rights. For him individuals can be sacrificed (literally if appropriate) in the collective interests of the democratic State. Machiavelli's political theorizing is political cynicism. Machiavelli has a very low view of human motives (Warburton, 42-43). Machiavelli's political commitment is anchored on liberty. Liberty is a necessary condition of self- development or self- fulfillment and is valued as a means to self- fulfillment and self- actualization (Raphael, 1976:118).

### **Conclusion**

Having critically examined the notion of power and leadership in Machiavelli's political philosophy, this paper, therefore, concludes that Machiavelli's conceptualization of public virtue as a common ideal or collective goal reflects his faith in the political State and he

believes that persons whom power and leadership are entrusted should serve the State with purity of intention or honesty of purpose. He believes that this is a fundamental prerequisite for not involving in corruption in the State. For Martin Cohen, Machiavelli's writings are primarily a historical and contemporary political analysis of how political power is won, maintained, or sustained and lost (Cohen, 2008:92-93). However, it is germane to note that Machiavelli's political theorizing demonstrates the fact that leadership is public responsibility and politics underlines this public responsibility. Political power and authority are matters of public responsibility. Machiavelli saw devotion to the public cause as a necessary precondition for claiming and enjoying private freedom without fear or interference. Machiavelli's "*The Prince*" reflects in the need for the democratic accountability and the general happiness of the people. However, our theoretical position in this paper is that Machiavelli's approach to politics is simply an epistemological, pragmatic and ethical grounding. Machiavelli's theoretical construction and reconstruction is political and realistic. He believes in the workability of things in the political arena. He does not believe in the useless contemplation of human reasoning. His political thought is geared towards the materialism of Aristotelian philosophy rather than the idealism of Plato. The Machiavellian philosophy reflects in the form of universal humanism that is deeply rooted in the utilitarian principle of Bentham and Mill.

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