Chapter XIII ("Of Auxiliary, Mixed, and One's Own Soldiers") is the most important chapter of *The Prince*. It outlines Machiavelli's proposal for the best concrete response to the central problem of political violence: the citizen-militia. The citizen militia has the dual desiderata of constraining the prince to respect the norm of non-oppression and of creating a mechanism of violence that is sufficiently capable in projecting force, sufficiently responsive to the public good, and sufficiently limited in its exercise of violence. As a result, it fundamentally changes the way that other important chapters, such as VI, IX, XV-XXIII, XXVI must be read. By paying careful attention to the role of the citizen militia in *The Prince*, it becomes clear that the text was not intended as a trap for its reader, but rather that it is seriously meant to induce self-interested politicians to pursue the common good and stabilize the state.

This article interprets *The Prince* in an unprecedented fashion. It takes chapter XIII ("Of Auxiliary, Mixed, and One's Own Soldiers") as the most important chapter for understanding *The Prince*. One of *The Prince*’s most important lessons is how politicians can best respond to the central problem of political violence and chapter XIII is critical for understanding that lesson. The central problem of political violence lies in creating mechanisms for the use of violence that can ultimately minimize aggregate levels of violence. This problem is the central problem of political violence because mechanisms of violence like armies, police forces, and spy agencies – when poorly constructed – make every other problem of violence more difficult to treat. Moreover, they can easily become tools of oppression. Thus, creating sufficiently capable, responsive, and limited mechanisms of violence is the most important task in treating the central problem of political violence. Chapter XIII offers a concrete proposal for responding to that problem in the context of Machiavelli’s day and the general principles for responding to it in other contexts. Moreover, other chapters of tremendous importance to Machiavelli’s recommended response to the central problem of political violence (VI, XI, XV, XXVI, to name a few) can only be understood in light of chapter XIII. If Machiavelli’s insight into politics – as presented in *The Prince* – is to have any utility
to politicians in autocracies and democracies alike, it must be understood with reference to chapter XIII.

One of Machiavelli’s core observations is that the best way to address the problem of political violence is through a partnership between properly motivated political elites and the people at large. The citizen-militia described in chapter XIII is an embodiment of that partnership. As a result, Machiavelli discourages his reader from pursuing a pure autocracy. In fact, every regime worth emulating must be somewhat populist in both structure and orientation (i.e., some public functions must be carried out by and for the people). In the case of Machiavelli’s principalities (autocracies to us), we see this partnership most clearly in the citizen-militia. For Machiavelli, it is only through an alliance with the people that the prince can solve the central problem of political violence. The citizen militia has two important desiderata as far as the structure of a mechanism of violence is concerned.

1. The use of violence should always have non-oppression as its goal.

Mechanisms of violence must be similarly structured. Broad citizen-participation guarantees non-oppression because citizens have non-oppression as their dominant desire.

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2 In fact, though decisive, it is the only moment of elite-popular partnership in The Prince. Elite-popular partnerships expand to certain legislative and judicial functions in democracies. An examination of these issues in The Discourses would fall within the scope of a much larger project.

3 Niccolò Machiavelli writes of principalities rather than autocracies and tyrannies. (As well as terms like ‘dictatorship’, ‘totalitarian regime’, ‘despotism’, ‘authoritarianism’, and so on.) This shift in language (at least in the case of ‘tyranny’ and ‘autocracy’) illustrates an important dimension Machiavelli’s theory of regime-type and the role of violence played therein. The concepts of autocracies and tyrannies are distinctive for including a gulf in de facto power between the ruler and the ruled. The concept of a principality includes, at most, a de jure differentiation between ruler and subject. The Machiavellian principality maintains that de jure differentiation but attempts to coordinate the power of the prince and the power of the people in the exercise of violence. Nevertheless, I shall use these terms somewhat interchangeably, referring to princes and principalities when discussing Machiavelli’s language, and referring to autocracies when discussing contemporary views of such regimes.

4 I take Machiavelli’s use of oppression to be something like its Latin etymological root of “a pressing down.” This use is consistent with active variation of domination as defined by Frank Lovett in A General Theory of Domination and Justice: “Domination should be understood as a condition experienced by persons or groups to the extent that they are dependent on a social relationship in which some other person or group wields arbitrary power over them.” Machiavelli’s use of “oppression” refers to moments where this arbitrary power is actually used. Lovett’s understanding of domination includes a passive relationship. Lovett, Frank. 2010. A general Theory of Domination and Justice. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Page 2.
2. Any mechanism of violence must be sufficiently capable of exercising force, limited to the necessary exercise of force, and responsive to citizen desires in the exercise of that force. Citizen participation in the citizen militia is necessary for the satisfaction of all three demands. A prince that tries to solve the essential problem of political violence by only working with other elites will, in Machiavelli’s terms, “come to ruin” by depending on unreliable and dangerous political rivals. An armed people will not ruin the prince or the principality, but will secure it from external threats. Moreover, the ‘onestà’ (‘honesty’ or ‘decency’) of the people solve the problem of the destabilizing ambitions of the elite, thus making them an attractive partner for the prince in founding or maintaining the state as well as a morally superior foundation for princely power.

The citizen-militia is the answer to the question of how the people partner with the prince to address the central problem of political violence. Two other key elements of Machiavelli’s thought (the role of founders as liberators and the diverse humors thesis) also point to the importance of cooperation between the prince and the people. They are the what and the why of treating the central problem of political violence. The diverse humors thesis indicates why the central problem of political violence is so intractable. The will to oppress, which Machiavelli takes to be unquenchable in most elites, makes political violence a chronic but treatable problem. The onestà of the people, on the other hand, reflects the people’s moral superiority. That is why treatment of the problem of political violence is geared in their favor. In turn, Machiavelli’s praise of founders who liberate their peoples indicates the what that he has in mind in treating the problem of political violence: freedom from oppression by political elites and the creation of lasting social institutions. The surest means to that freedom in principalities and the best defender of national sovereignty – a requisite for healthy institutions – is the citizen militia.

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6 Likewise, a proper understanding of the limit of Machiavelli’s populism in the use of political violence is essential to understanding his theory of regime type, but that is beyond the scope of this article.
7 Chapters XV-XIX, where Machiavelli develops his radical political ethics, can also be understood as the how of the treatment of the central problem of political violence. These chapters, however, cannot be properly understood without reference to chapter XIII. Not only do they offer competing answers to the question of what Machiavelli means by “one’s own arms” (i.e. a citizen militia vs. moral flexibility) they interact such that chapter XIII contours chapters XV-XIX. A prince behaves differently in the presence of a citizen-militia than he does in the presence of other mechanisms of violence.
If one takes only a single conclusion away from this article, it should be that *The Prince* that the text’s most important chapter is chapter XIII. If one stakes a second conclusion away from this article, it should be that *The Prince* has a populist streak, which is embodied in the proposal for the citizen militia. According to Machiavelli’s universe of regime-types, different regimes have different strengths and weaknesses in solving the essential problem of political violence. Principalities address their chief weakness through the populist move of relying on the citizen-militia as the chief institution of violence.

The central importance of the citizen-militia remains unrecognized in dominant interpretations of *The Prince*. Three broad classes of interpretations of *The Prince* bear mention here. The first, and most influential in the popular imagination, are those that, like Innocent Gentillet’s, regard the Florentine as an advocate of amoral power politics. These interpretations, such as those of Herbert Butterfield and Leo Strauss for example, tend to ignore the constraining effects of the citizen militia on the activities of the prince. Butterfield writes of Machiavelli that he

> “Taught a man how to usurp a government, how to perpetuate and increase his power, the methods he must use to take away a people’s liberties, and the manner in which he could exercise severities on the population with the least likelihood of ultimate detriment to himself.”

How this Machiavelli is consistent with the Machiavelli that tells his reader to arm the people whose liberty he would take away, I do not know. Leo Strauss, who calls the “old-fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil” both true and incomplete, dismisses the extended discussion of military tactics in chapter XXVI as far less important than Machiavelli’s omission of the evils required of a prince who would liberate Italy from the “barbarians.” Never does Strauss acknowledge that Machiavelli’s military policies are incompatible with the evils that Strauss thinks Machiavelli recommends to his reader.

Next, we have those interpretations that, in contrast to the first class, try to republicanize the prince. These interpretations all fail to notice the degree to which chapter XIII (and chapters VI, IX, and XXVI) blunt the critiques of the first class. Garrett Mattingly, for example, takes *The Prince* to be a satire on the mirror for

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princes literature as a whole. Rousseau, Spinoza, and others take Machiavelli to be warning his readers and arming them with the very means to combat would-be tyrants. As Rousseau puts it – “he could not help veiling his love of liberty in the midst of his country’s oppression. The choice of his detestable hero, Cesare Borgia, clearly enough shows his hidden aim.” Neither Rousseau, nor Mattingly, squares their claims with the populist elements of the text. Mary Dietz argues that Machiavelli created a package of recommendations that, if followed, would result in a “trap” for the prince. According to her, *The Prince* was designed to leave Machiavelli’s Medici reader hated, undefended, and living with an armed citizenry. There is a degree of truth to this claim, but it would be much more accurate to say that the citizen militia is meant to *constrain* rather than trap the prince. It simultaneously empowers the prince to defend the principality and limits him from taking overly oppressive action against the people. Even Sheldon Wolin’s strongly populist reading of Machiavelli seems to see the people as merely passive actors in *The Prince*: “The notion which dominated *The Prince* was that of the mass as malleable matter ready to respond to the shaping hand of the hero-artist.” To understand the people, and their desire not to be oppressed, as “malleable matter” is inconsistent with Wolin’s later appreciation for Machiavelli’s grasping “the fact that popular consent represented a form of social power.” Perhaps it is this ambivalence that leads Wolin to almost entirely marginalize the citizen militia in his discussion of Machiavelli. John McCormick’s recent, excellent articulation of the democratic dimension of Machiavelli’s writings sees the popular army only emerging as an important factor in Machiavelli’s thinking in *The Discourses* and therefore only relevant to his thinking on republics. My interpretation sees it as an important factor in *The Prince* – and thus one that cuts across Machiavelli’s views of different regime-types.

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14 For Dietz’s full, compelling argument, see: Dietz, Mary G. 1986. "Trapping The Prince: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception". *The American Political Science Review*. 80 (3)
16 Ibid., Page 199.
Even the class of interpretations that sees *The Prince* as an exploration of state power and institutions fails to recognize the profound role played by the citizen-militia. This class of interpretations tends to take the citizen-militia as a passing example of princely empowerment. J.G.A. Pocock, who argues that the subject of *The Prince* is the innovations required of both founder-legislators and new princes, also marginalizes the role of the people, saying, “Il Principe is not a work of ideology, in the sense that it cannot be identified as expressing the outlook of a group.”\textsuperscript{18} Pocock is right in claiming that no single group’s outlook is exclusively represented, but he then goes on to describe the text as one outlining the tasks and challenges of politics from the perspective of political actors known as founders.\textsuperscript{19} Pocock’s understanding of *The Prince* largely misses the populist dimension – and the citizen-militia, which is the most important expression of that dimension – until he turns his attention to *The Discourses*.\textsuperscript{20} Similarly, Quentin Skinner writes of *The Prince* that “the chief merit of the people is taken by contrast to lie in their characteristic tendency to benign passivity” and that the prince must make the people as dependent on him as possible.\textsuperscript{21} Skinner fails to see that Machiavelli recommends interdependence between the prince and the people – and that the most important moment of that interdependence is in the citizen militia. Even Harvey Mansfield sidesteps the citizen-militia in favor of a knowledge of the “art of war” when discussing Machiavelli’s meaning of a prince having his “own arms.”\textsuperscript{22} He similarly sidesteps the citizen-militia in favor of the Roman institution of the dictatorship when discussing Machiavelli’s views of the practice of war.\textsuperscript{23} Philip Bobbitt’s recent contribution to Machiavelli scholarship sees *The Prince* and *The Discourses* as working in tandem to outline a modern theory of constitutionalism, which is consistent with the idea that *The Prince* advocates an elite-people partnership in addressing the problem of political violence, but mistakes the ends of the state for the ends of the


\textsuperscript{19} “Il Principe is a study of the “new prince”-we know this from Machiavelli’s internal correspondence as well as from internal evidence-or rather that class of political innovators to which he belongs.” *Ibid.*, Page 160.

\textsuperscript{20} *Ibid.*, Page 183.


people. The former is meant to serve the latter. Bobbitt’s interpretation loses sight of that fact. It is with these omissions in mind that we ought to turn to the important role played by the citizen-militia in *The Prince*.

The people as a basis for power

We commonly assume that the subjects of an autocracy do not actively participate in their own oppression. They might acquiesce to it, and it is certainly the case that some classes of autocracies have become adept at coercing the average citizen into spying on his or her neighbor. But we generally think of the autocrat and the members of his or her government as standing alone in both interest and action. The words ‘prince’ and ‘principality’ carry none of these connotations as Machiavelli uses them. The prince must wield power just as much for the people as for himself. The commonplace understanding according to which *The Prince* teaches its readers to acquire and maintain power *per se* mistakes the instrument

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26 This assumption is consistent with the etymology of the word ‘autocracy’. It is a combination of the Greek words *auto* (single, self, same, alone) and *kratien* (power), which in turn combine to form the word *autokrates* (one who governs alone). As with the concept of autocracy, Machiavelli’s concept of the principality differs from tyranny. The earliest known use of the word *tyrannos* is the 7th century B.C.E. poet Archilochus’s description of Gyges of Lydia. (Finley, M. I. 1963. *The ancient Greeks, an introduction to their life and thought*. New York: Viking Press. Page 25.) The 7th century use of the word *tyrannos* is distinctive for its lack of judgment with respect to the *quality* of the tyrant’s rule. From the perspective of the tyrant’s subjects, a tyrant could rule worse, better, or as well as a legitimate head of state. Indeed, the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus was praised for the quality of his rule. See: Herodotos, and Aubrey De Sélincourt. 1954. *Herodotus: the Histories*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books. 1.59. It was only fourth century thinkers like Plato and Aristotle who transformed the term into a negative one by describing tyrants as parasitic rulers.

27 Maurice Merleau-Ponty characterizes the responsibility of the prince in the following way: “Through his mastery of his relationship with others, the man in power clears away obstacles between man and man and puts a little daylight in our relationships.” Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. Signs. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 217. Merleau-Ponty’s characterization of putting ‘a little daylight in our relationships’ also captures the negative characteristic of the freedom the prince must pursue. The *Prince* cultivates freedom from external interference, whether that means freeing the people from the oppression of the elite or freeing the principality from potential conquest.

28 Harvey Mansfield agrees: “Machiavellian virtue has a two-fold character that seems to account for the peculiar ambivalence of the modern executive, who is strong, but always claims to be acting on behalf of a will or force that is stronger.” Mansfield, Harvey Claflin. 1989. *Taming the prince: the ambivalence of modern executive power*. New York: Free Press. Page 130.
Machiavelli describes in detail (power) for the end for which it is designed (popular liberation). The person in power does not own that power the way one owns a house, land, or even the labor of others as defined by a contract. To put the matter another way, when Machiavelli speaks of a prince “always maintain[ing] himself in his state,” he speaks of the prince maintaining a relation (his state) between himself and the people, rather than maintaining ownership of the state.²⁹ For Machiavelli, the possession of power is conditional upon the prince’s ability to cater to popular “humors” and to suppress elite ones. The language of ownership is useful in the context of claims over objects, which are fundamentally will-less. Political institutions, on the other hand, are made up of people who do have wills and are capable of independent action. Their existence, and thus the existence of a certain kind of power, always depends to a degree on a number of wills working in concert.

When faced with the choice between catering to the many and catering to the few, Machiavelli chooses the former as the most praiseworthy way to handle political power.³⁰ Thus, Machiavelli defines proper execution of state power in terms of the needs of the people.³¹ The people are the starting point for addressing the central problem of political violence because their ends are more ‘decent’ than those of the elites and because they make up the citizen-militia. The people themselves are the means by which political violence can be exercised without overwhelming the order it is meant to defend.

In chapter IX (“Of the Civil Principality”) Machiavelli claims that the people are, in fact, the best foundation for princely power both in moral and strategic terms.³² Machiavelli writes: “one cannot satisfy the great with decency and without injury to others, but one can satisfy the people; for the end of the people is more decent than that of the great, since the great want to oppress and the people want not to be oppressed.”³³ The elite have an impulse to oppress and they make their decisions in terms of their capacity to oppress, rather than power, profit, or long-term security.³⁴ One cannot help but think of a schoolyard bully or a domestic

³³ Ibid. Page 39.
abuser. These types act out of a sense of smallness and insecurity and find illusory satisfaction in the abuse of those who cannot physically or emotionally resist them. There is no moral value in what they do. And when Machiavelli metaphorically divides the political world into beasts and men, those who have the drive to oppress the people play the part of the wolves. Wolves, though social and intelligent, have no place in a stable political association. Their drives are too strong to respect any given order other than the one that caters to those drives. We can agree with Machiavelli that an order based upon the systematic oppression of the many by the few is morally repugnant.

The importance of this characteristic of the nature of the people cannot be understated because it leads to a standard by which we can judge uses of political violence and the institutions that structure it. In all uses of political violence, we must determine which desire it satisfies, the one for oppression or the one for the freedom from oppression. This feat, of course, is no easy one because the pursuit of freedom from oppression and oppression per se can easily resemble each other where the exercise of violence is concerned. Even when these pursuits do not resemble each other, institutions of violence such as militaries and penal systems can easily be reappropriated from projects of liberation to projects of oppression. The difficulty of judging between projects of oppression and projects of liberation should not overshadow the importance of having the right basis for judgment. According to the diverse humors thesis, the use of violence must cohere with the ends of the people, because their ends are more decent, which is to say morally superior than those of the elites. The presence of hard cases does not overturn this relationship.

The moral superiority of the people’s desire is obvious, but Machiavelli would also have his reader take note of the strategic advantage of the limited nature of the people’s desire. The people ask ‘only’ not to be oppressed. The people can be satisfied in its freedom from oppression, whereas we know that those who wish to oppress others cannot ever be satiated. As a result, it is possible to find a stable equilibrium in the political game when the people play a major role. The insatiable nature of elite appetites places political institutions and outcomes into flux. Popular

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31 In this respect, Hannah Pitkin is wrong when she claims that the prince can ‘command’ and ‘manage’ his popular support at will.” Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. 1984. Fortune is a woman: gender and politics in the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli. Berkeley: University of California Press. Page 20. She is right insofar as the prince does have a greater degree of freedom to operate when he allies himself with the people, but he cannot command the people at will. The humor for non-oppression defines the limit of his command.
appetites do not. Their desired end (non-oppression) is a fixed goal; it is a solid and predictable basis for political order.\textsuperscript{38}

A particularly crafty reader of \textit{The Prince} will, of course, learn to exploit the informational asymmetries endemic to the prince-people relationship. Many of Machiavelli’s most memorable passages praise princes who are able to mislead the people when they must. The prince must, for example, maintain the appearance of honesty and mercy, even if he does not always exercise those virtues. The popular appetite for non-oppression establishes the limit of those deceptions. I ask the reader to bracket his or her valid objections to the claim that Machiavelli thinks that the partnership between the prince and the people extends to all things. Princely secrecy and deception is tied to specific ends and limited to specific situations, but exists nevertheless. For Machiavelli, it is an unavoidable necessity of politics in principalities.

\textbf{Machiavelli’s “Greatest” Examples}

These asymmetries aside, \textit{The Prince} seeks to align the interests between the prince and the people by creating a normative register of political action that elevates politicians who are defined by their popular service above those defined by anything else. The people’s freedom from oppression is the ur-value against which princely actions – particularly the use of violence - are measured. Chapter VI features Machiavelli’s “greatest examples,” a group of political figures who demonstrate peak political skill (and are thus the ‘greatest’ per se) and from whom Machiavelli’s reader can learn the most (and are thus ‘greatest examples’).\textsuperscript{39} Their


\textsuperscript{39} Machiavelli, Niccolò, and Harvey Claflin Mansfield. 1985. \textit{The prince}. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Page 21. In each case, Machiavelli speaks of new principalities, which implies simultaneously that questions of arms and \textit{virtù} are crucial ones for new principalities and that they are less so for established ones. Machiavelli has already made it explicit that the question of \textit{virtù} is a marginal one in established principalities, because the prince’s ‘vices’, which include his use of violence, are already embedded within that order – that is to say that they are already ordinary. But his later distinction between one's own arms and the arms of others, in conjunction with his perspective on the defense of newly acquired territories, implies that the formation of a reliable mechanism of violence outside the principality is also intertwined with the \textit{virtù} of the prince. In established principalities, questions of the formation of mechanisms of violence are less relevant than others, because those arms already exist. And questions of the use of violence are politically (though not morally) less consequential because certain uses of violence are already accepted.
common pursuit is their putting their peoples in a position to avoid oppression. Each of the figures he singles out for praise pursues some sort of liberating act. Moses finds “the people of Israel in Egypt, enslaved and oppressed by the Egyptians.” Cyrus finds “the Persians malcontent with the empire of the Medes, and the Medes soft and effeminate because of a long peace.” Theseus finds the Athenians “dispersed.” Romulus is not cited for liberating the Romans, but is praised instead for overcoming exposure at birth. Nevertheless, he shares with the others the distinction of succeeding in founding a thriving state. And should any doubt remain about the lesson that the reader must take away from chapter VI, it is put to rest in Chapter XXVI where Machiavelli will gesture towards an Italian founder (his reader) and characterize Italy as

“more enslaved than the Hebrews, more servile than the Persians, more dispersed than the Athenians, without a head, without order, beaten, despoiled, torn, pillaged, and having endured ruin of every sort.”

These redemptions reveal the central value animating the text. Any other strategies and arguments are connected to and arrayed around the value of popular non-oppression. Consider the outright bans Machiavelli recommends against theft of subject property and against sexual assault by the prince. They are completely at odds with popular humors. To practice these activities – and to allow citizens to practice them on each other – would be consistent with a political order that accepts oppression as normal. The princes that Machiavelli condemns for abuses of

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40 It is here that J.G.A. Pocock errs, for example, when he writes: “Not only is the legislator’s virtù related to fortuna in a way utterly different from that of the new prince; he is performing an innovation of a different order. He finds his material-the people he is to mold-in a condition so anomic that his virtù needs only a sword to impose form upon it; very little is said of the previous structure of accustomed behavior in which other innovators displace.” Pocock, J. G. A. 1975. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition*. [Princeton, N.J.]: Princeton University Press. The situation of the people on behalf of whom the founder works is only anomic in the sense that no state that effectively imposes law exists. The two humors that we encounter in all human communities do, however, precede the founder and constrain the founder’s action. While they are not nomoi in the strictest sense of the term, the moral and practical constraints of those humors already constitute a form that the founder must respect, rather than “impose.”


42 Ibid. Page 102. Leo Strauss points out a dual dimension to this parallel when he writes: “The liberator of Italy is described as a new prince, for the liberation of Italy presupposes the introduction of new laws and new orders: he must do for the people of Italy what Moses did for the people of Israel.” The most praiseworthy political figures both liberate people from oppression and introduce the laws and orders that will maintain that liberty. Strauss, Leo. *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978 Page 64.
power (Agathocles in chapter VIII, Emperor Severus in chapter XIX, and Ferdinand of Aragon in chapter XXI) all permit unnecessary ‘cruelties.’

Violent oppression is the hallmark of a failed political order and liberation requires the creation of a new one. For Machiavelli, the creation of such orders requires the violent wresting of political power from abusive actors invested in an order of oppression. When Machiavelli heaps praise upon those who do so, it is with an eye towards the challenges built into that struggle.

“Nothing is more difficult to handle, more doubtful to manage,” than replacing an order that facilitates oppression with one that does not, because “the introducer has all those who benefit from the old orders as enemies and lukewarm defenders in all those who might benefit from the new orders.”

Political innovation requires virtuosic skill because the members of the old, oppressive order are deeply invested in it. It is no wonder that Machiavelli, like Marx or Fanon after him, sees political violence as a legitimate means for liberating the people.

If we take chapters VI, IX, and XXVI as decisive for normative thrust of the text as a whole, then a few conclusions about Machiavelli’s counsel follow. First, non-oppression is the central motivation for both political innovation and praiseworthy political violence. Second, in the context of political oppression, Machiavelli assumes that the creation of a new political order (i.e. the most significant kind of political innovation) may require the use of political violence. Third, in the context of political oppression, innovation may require the use of political violence because the enmity of dominating parties makes such innovation difficult and doubtful. These are some of the parameters within which the prince must operate. As such, they provide Machiavelli’s reader with opportunities to evaluate past and future princely action. A good prince (i.e. worthy of normative praise) will imitate the founders of chapter VI in having non-oppression as a central

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44 Ibid. Page 23.
46 Pocock helpfully points out that “Machiavelli enters the realm of moral ambiguity by the single step of defining virtú as an innovative force. It is not merely that by which men control their fortunes in a delegitimized world; it may also be that by which men innovate and so delegitimate their worlds, and… …it may even be that which imposes legitimacy on a world which has never know it.” Pocock, J. G. A. 1975. The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition. [Princeton, N.J.]: Princeton University Press. Page 167.
motivation, tying both political violence and political innovation to the pursuit of non-oppression (which typically depends on the repression of the elite). On these grounds, princes like Severus (Chapter XIX) and Ferdinand (Chapter XXI) receive praise for skilful political action, but are not praised along the lines of the founders of chapter VI. Severus and Ferdinand each kept the people “astonished and stupefied” through acts of political and military daring. Moreover, the former gave special license to the corrupted Roman military, thereby securing their support even at the risk of popular anger. Neither leader joins Machiavelli’s class of fundamentally praiseworthy actors because each, in his own way, behaved contrary to the popular desire for non-oppression. Severus catered to client military that had taken on the elite appetite for oppression. Ferdinand, on the other hand, is rightly condemned for his expulsion of the Marranos from Spain – an act for which Machiavelli reserves the label of “pious cruelty.” In both cases, the violence that they exercise fails to pass muster at the bar of popular non-oppression.

The Prince’s motivational genius

Machiavelli’s use of his ‘greatest examples’ indicates the normative stance of The Prince, but the genius of the argument does not lay in its deep appreciation for the people’s desire not to be oppressed. The genius of Machiavelli’s argument lays in the way in which he yokes the self-interest of his reader to popular service. His appeal to the sense of duty of the reader is straightforward and salient. In chapter VI, Machiavelli asks his reader to imitate four exemplary founders. In chapter XXVI, Machiavelli paints Italy’s political situation in the 16th century in the same hues as those of the peoples who are redeemed by his favored founders. In praising these examples as the ‘greatest’, Machiavelli is making the case for what his reader should take as the highest political action. Most of The Prince, however, is not couched in terms of political heroism, but rather in terms of the pursuit of self-interest. In this respect, The Prince is not only written for a would-be Theseus or Moses, who already value popular liberation for its own sake or for glory’s sake. Rather, The Prince is also written for that narrowly self-interested politician, who is frankly all-too-common. The Prince is accessible and useful to readers of many stripes. Above all, it is useful to the people as a whole because the strategies recommended for a petty tyrant cater just as much to popular desires as those

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47 I take up the example of Severus and his client military again in section 2.5. It is an example of a prince who remains in power but does not use a citizen militia. However, Machiavelli gives even the most self-interested reader reasons for eschewing Severus’ path.
recommended for a would-be Theseus or Moses. We see this idea embodied most clearly in the proposal for the citizen militia. Both the prince moved by noble aspiration and the prince moved by narrow self-interest are gain by creating a citizen militia and thereby taking the people as the basis for their power. Popular empowerment is recommended as a good strategy in all cases.

We can see *The Prince’s* capaciousness in its terribly heterodox treatment of the typical virtues required for being praiseworthy. Unlike many of the other texts in the mirror-for-princes genre, *The Prince* frequently couches the obligations of its reader in terms of imitation, semblance, and appearance, rather than the actual possession of typical humanist values. “A prudent man,” Machiavelli claims, will emulate these examples “so that if his own virtue does not reach that far, he is at least in odor of it.” On the one hand, we can take this injunction to mean that though one may not be in a position to unify the Athenian tribes or liberate the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, one can still act prudently by imitating these legendary examples. But, in defining *prudence* (as opposed to dutifulness or public-spiritedness) as imitation of these examples, Machiavelli is opening up the profitability of imitation of these examples to a whole other class of political actors: those who may not have the intentions of Moses or Theseus, but may never the less profit by “their odor.” The second meaning of this statement is that no matter the praiseworthiness of one’s intention, the imitation of the examples that Machiavelli cites will contribute to a maximum strategic efficacy in any social endeavor, particularly in politics. In this sense, Machiavelli appeals to both the self-interest and the sense of conventional virtue of the reader. Therein lays much of *The Prince’s* motivational genius.

Machiavelli’s reader, the Florentine must have understood, would probably not possess the kind of duty-bound selflessness praised by the humanists of Machiavelli’s day. Such men were too rare. And even if they were abundant, the conditions for their success in politics rarely existed. Machiavelli knew that the human material before him could be moved best by levers of self-interest. When Machiavelli composed *The Prince*, Giulio di Giuliano de’ Medici (the de facto administrator of Florence in 1513), could not have been far from his mind.

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was a competent political operator, functioning as both Archbishop of Florence and chief minister to his brother, Pope Leo X. Yet, as a prominent member of the Medici family, Machiavelli could not have seen Giulio as motivated by the same republican patriotism that burned in Machiavelli's heart. The problem of motivation would have only been compounded by a problem of competence when Giulio ceded rule of Florence in 1514 to The Prince's ultimate recipient, his nephew Lorenzo. Machiavelli needed some way to get a nobleman like Giulio (and then Lorenzo) to act in the interests of the Florentine people. I take it that Machiavelli's solution to this particular political problem was to harness the self-interest of the member of the Medici to whom the text would be sent (Giulio at the time of composition, Lorenzo at the time of submission) by emphasizing the connection between popular empowerment and the pursuit of that self-interest. I would not go so far as to suggest that Machiavelli presents a view of politics meant for his Medici reader alone. The Medici must have been on Machiavelli's mind while he wrote, but Machiavelli's diverse humors thesis, which is repeated in The Discourses, as well as other claims about the tendency of elites to behave self-interestedly suggest that the arguments of The Prince would apply to other nobles as well. Machiavelli's first interest must have been to motivate his Medici reader to strengthen the Florentine state in a manner consistent with his diverse humors thesis and with an eye toward the unification of Italy. But the ideas that animate The Prince go beyond his native Tuscany to any situation of state formation and stabilization.

In this respect, Machiavelli anticipates the question that animates so much of the contemporary literature on state formation and stabilization. These studies seek to explain why warlords find it in their self-interest to create and maintain states out of anarchy, defend limited property rights, and even invest in certain public goods. Robert Bates argues, for example, that ‘specialists in violence’ help form and maintain states when they believe that their long-term protection rents (i.e. income for using force to maintain order) will outweigh the short-term gain of systematic, forcible appropriation of subject goods. Mancur Olson posits a similar dynamic in arguing that warlords choose to form states because their long-term income through protection rents (i.e. taxation) outweighs the short-term income through pillage due to the economic growth created by the (even partial) enforcement of

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property rights.53 Douglass North and Barry Weingast claim that “the natural state has lasted so long because it aligns the interests of powerful individuals to forge a dominant coalition in such a way that limits violence and makes sustained social interaction possible on a larger scale.”54 Charles Tilly points to the interaction between state making and war making, with elites finding the former in their interest in order to prosecute the latter.55 Adam Przeworski outlines the mechanisms by which elites in non-democratic regimes come to see limited liberalization and democratization as an appealing avenue for maintaining power.56 In each of these arguments, the self-interest of elite actors does the heavy lifting in determining their socially desirable behaviors. They are not altruistic actors in any meaningful sense of the term. Nor are they would-be founders. They come from that broad class of self-interested politicians, for whom imitation of the founder is beneficial – that same class, by the way, to which Machiavelli’s Medici reader belonged.

This class of politician gives rise to the principal-agent problem, wherein one person or group must rely on another to accomplish some task. This sort of problem occurs frequently in politics – where politicians act as agents on behalf of some principal. When the political process functions well, the agent’s specialized capacities maximize the welfare of the principal to whom the agent is responsible, however that welfare is defined.57 Of course, from the perspective of the principal, the drawback to having an agent is a result of the typical agent’s being a self-interested actor. Given the superior skillset of the agent, the agent may promote his or her interests at the expense of the principal’s when they do not align. The principal’s dependency on the agent means that the principal usually has limited recourse to ensure that the agent does not deviate from their agreement. The

57 For example, delegation in a democratic context makes sense when direct decision-making is too slow, too unstable, or too uninformed. Likewise, delegation from legislators to bureaucrats makes sense for similar reasons. See Lupia and McCubbins. 1998. The Democratic Dilemma. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. As discussed above, principal-agent delegation makes sense in non-democratic contexts, where the creation of a monopoly on violence improves popular welfare, even by a petty warlord who regularly violates property rights and is subject to no democratic accountability. Popular loyalty to such figures is common where people face a choice between a stable warlord and the unpredictable and irregular violations inherent in anarchy.
principal’s enforcement capacity is also limited by an asymmetry of information, especially with respect to effort on the part of the agent. A principal usually does not know whether an agent has maximized effort. Thus, self-interested political agents will always claim that they have governed as well as possible, whether that claim is true or false.

These suboptimal outcomes are commonly known as ‘agency loss.’ Much of the work on the principal-agent problem is dedicated to understanding the ways in which principals solve this problem. In the business world, mechanisms like contract design, commission, profit-sharing, and performance review are all used to align the interests of the principal and the agent.58 A common \textit{a priori} mechanism is the interview, which is designed to select an agent whose interests align with those of the principal. In democracies, elections function as a similar \textit{a priori} mechanism (and as an \textit{a posteriori} mechanism in the case of re-election) for the selection of agents.

On some level, Machiavelli must have written \textit{The Prince} with an eye towards solving the principal-agent problem. The social scientists above described the circumstances under which political elites would make socially optimal choices. They described circumstances in which the principal-agent problem was minimized by the right set of inputs. To echo Rousseau at the opening of \textit{The Social Contract}, they took human beings as they were, not as they could be.59 In contrast to the humanists of his day, so does Machiavelli.60 Unlike the social scientists above, however, Machiavelli’s work was couched in terms of active prescriptions. Olson, Tilly, and the others present the truth of the political world as they see it and leave the active political work to politicians. They have their preferred policy outcomes, to be sure. And they see a clear-eyed understanding of the world as a precursor to those outcomes. But they leave their readers to come to their own policy prescriptions. Machiavelli’s treatment of the political world is in service of nothing if not the agenda he has for his reader. That agenda, in turn, is a reflection of the normative register of political action Machiavelli lays out over the course of \textit{The Prince}. Machiavelli looks to solve the principal-agent problem in such a way that

populist ends are served. He does so by yoking the self-interest of a typical agent to strategies that serve those ends. The most important of those strategies is the citizen militia.

Arming the People

At this point, a prudent reader will ask if Machiavelli, as I have described him, effectively addresses the central problem of political violence. After all, teaching a prince to be virtuous is different than designing a set of institutions that both reduce violence and stop short of overwhelming the political order that they are meant to protect. Perhaps more to the point, we can turn to Locke’s observation that the greatest threat to the liberty of a people is a virtuous prince. The people, Locke reasons, will grow accustomed to broad princely powers if they have been used well.61 This complacency poses a threat to liberty. Unlimited power may be able to create order, but only when used well. When used badly, unlimited power is a mechanism of oppression. Locke’s solution, offered in response to Robert Filmer’s Patriarcha (but he may as well have aimed it at any text that advocates the rule of one person) is to limit the use of violence and other political powers in various institutional ways. If Machiavelli’s recommendations were limited to the imitation of the personal virtues of his “most excellent” examples, Machiavelli would certainly seem susceptible to Locke’s critique. Machiavelli would seem to secure peace with only the equity of princely virtue—a policy which would be successful in the presence of an adequately skilled and properly disposed prince and a dismal failure in the presence of a corrupt and/or inept one. Yet Machiavelli’s discussion of praiseworthy princes does not end with their characters. It extends itself into institutional recommendations. A few of these recommendations include:

- A prince must use a citizen-militia, not a mercenary or a foreign army.62
- A prince must not rely on fortresses or fixed fortifications.
- A prince must live in those territories he annexes and, if possible, leave standing laws and customs alone.

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This set of recommendations is noteworthy for the position in which they put the prince vis. the people. When followed, they result in an armed citizenry and a defenseless prince but for that armed citizenry. From Machiavelli’s perspective, such a relationship is ideal for solving the problem of political violence. It creates a fighting force that is eager to defend the homeland while severely limiting the prince’s ability to oppress his own people. As I mentioned above, the citizen militia has two important desiderata as far as the structure of a mechanism of violence is concerned.

1. The use of violence should always have non-oppression as its goal. Mechanisms of violence must be similarly structured. Broad citizen-participation guarantees non-oppression because citizens have non-oppression as their dominant desire.

2. Any mechanism of violence must be sufficiently capable of exercising force, limited to the necessary exercise of force, and responsive to citizen desires in the exercise of that force. Broad citizen participation in the citizen militia is necessary for the satisfaction of all three demands.

These recommendations are different from Locke’s. Where Locke divides types of powers (executive, judicial, legislative), Machiavelli divides the exercise of kinds of powers across political classes. In principalities, this means the people and the prince exercise political violence against internal (elites) and external threats (rival states).

To see how an armed and trained people helps solve the problem of political violence we might turn to a background distinction in Machiavelli between what Roger Boesche calls ‘static’ and ‘mobilizing’ principalities. Static principalities cultivate elite bases of power, disarm the people, rely on fortresses, and cannot project power abroad. Mobilizing principalities cultivate popular bases of power, arm the people, and have a reliable mechanism for projecting power. Neither static nor mobilizing principalities are free from political violence, but Machiavelli praises the latter for repressing the elite and externalizing the exercise of violence through warfare. Mobilizing principalities tap the people as a political and military force. According to Machiavelli, a praiseworthy prince will seize that force to secure his...
position as prince and the principality as a whole. A praiseworthy prince empowers himself by crossing class lines to empower the people.

Remarkably, Machiavelli’s approval of a citizen-militia, and thus an armed and trained citizenry, is unconditioned. Nowhere else in The Prince does Machiavelli substantively qualify his support for the citizen-militia, which cannot be said of virtually every other claim made in The Prince. Anything else is, he suggests, an unreliable mechanism of violence. In a world dominated by the unpredictability of fortuna, nothing can be more important on the field of battle than reliability. To that end, chapters XII and XIII in turn chronicle the dangers of mercenary and auxiliary arms. Mercenary troops are rarely effective in battle and are always costly. They drain the treasury and do not offer a substantive strategic advantage.

Even when they are an effective fighting force, they pose a threat to the principality that employs them insofar as they bear loyalty only to the highest bidder. Auxiliary troops, on the other hand, are typically effective in fighting, but pose an even greater threat due to their loyalty to a rival principality, a loyalty that cannot even be bought. Machiavelli links auxiliary arms to the ‘sins’ responsible for Charles VIII’s conquest of Italy in 1494. They are capable dispensers of violence, but are totally unreliable and unlimited in that dispensation.

In both cases, the demands of the arms themselves trump the sovereignty of the prince: hence their unreliability. The prince finds himself serving his arms rather than those arms serving him. With mercenaries, the need to pay them trumps the political objectives of the war. Mercenaries cater to a logic of extraction, rather than victory, thereby forcing to the prince to chase money. And in the case of auxiliaries, a prince has placed his political fate in the hands of another power. He is thus forced to chase the favor of that power, lest the auxiliary arms be used against him or his people. In all cases, without arms to serve him, the prince and his

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68 Ibid. Chapter XII

69 Ibid. Chapter XII

70 Ibid. Chapter XIII

71 Ibid. Page 53.
principality are at the mercy of Fortuna.\textsuperscript{72} Mercenary and auxiliary troops, though prosaic in Machiavelli's Italy, create situations of uncontrollable violence. Arms that do not belong to the prince are \textit{unresponsive} to the prince’s order and discipline because they are not part of the order of the principality.

A citizen militia, on the other hand, is part of the principality and loyal to it. That loyalty \textit{limits} the violence of the militia. Mercenary and auxiliary troops have no such limitation. A salaried relationship is an external relationship, one wherein two separate wills are bound by contract. The assumption with respect to the limitation that loyalty puts on violence is that members of a political body are less likely to harm the body with which they identify. Mercenaries, as members external to the body with which they contract, are more likely to harm the body they are meant to protect than a citizen-militia is.

Moreover, a citizen-militia may respect the prince as ‘one who commands’, but citizen-soldiers are marked by a loyalty to the principality, rather than their commander. As a result they place a \textit{populist} limit on how their commanders can and cannot use them. And, by extension, the citizen militia brings the prince and the people closer together, not just in terms of interests, but also in terms of capacities and information. This alignment makes perfect sense from both a political and military perspective. Executives in both cases are merely agents who help overcome the collective action and coordination problems encountered by the people at large. They are organizational tools, and thus must work with in the people in order to work for the people. Their status as tools is not meant to diminish their importance or the difficulty of their tasks. Far from it, there is glory in being a brilliant prince or general to be sure, but Machiavelli does not conceive of a glory that comes at the expense of popular liberty. The Arendtian concern that social ends are always in danger of being overwhelmed by social means never disappears.\textsuperscript{73} Rather, it animates Machiavellian thinking on the nature of prince-people relations.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} “I conclude, thus, that without its own arms no principality is secure; indeed it is wholly obliged to fortune since it does not have virtue to defend itself in adversity.” \textit{Ibid.} Page 57.

\textsuperscript{73} “Violent action is ruled by the means-end category, whose chief characteristic, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means which it justifies.” Arendt, Hannah. \textit{On Violence}. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970. P. 4.

\textsuperscript{74} On this basis, we can say that Pocock is wrong when he asserts that while “the military chapters of \textit{Il Principe} (xii-xiv) passionately assert the inferiority of mercenary and auxiliary troops to those who are “one’s own” (\textit{propie}), but the social relationship between the prince and “his” soldiers is not explored.” 176
Moreover, it shifts and institutionalizes relations of dependence in favor of the people. The prince comes to depend on the citizen-militia as a mechanism of force. The prince needs it for defense of the principality. The citizens who participate in it, on the other hand, come to depend less on the prince insofar as Machiavelli’s citizen-militia is a tool of popular empowerment. The prince gains by its existence, to be sure, because the prince gains by that empowerment. But to understand *The Prince* as a text that recommends princely power at the expense of popular power would be to ignore its core recommendations. Popular empowerment via participation in the citizen militia leads naturally to its capable, responsive, and limited nature. What should be clear by now is that part of its limited nature is the way in which it binds the prince himself.

The Path of Oppression Not Taken

Machiavelli’s condemnation of mercenary soldiers, coupled with his praise of citizen-soldiers, certainly would make the latter seem compelling from the perspective of a would-be prince, but that attraction only exists by virtue of Machiavelli’s ignoring another type of military: the paramilitary or internal security apparatus (hereafter “client militaries”). Chapters XII-XIV do not discuss this manner of fighting force. Client militaries may be loyal to their commanders and thus reliable as fighters, but that loyalty is not patriotic. Executives in non-democratic regimes, from petty warlords to party secretaries have made and continue to make use of these fighting forces. Indeed such relationships are so common that Mancur Olsen and Robert Bates, in their respective accounts of the emergence and stability of the state assume this kind of military apparatus to be the norm.

Machiavelli, for his part, dismisses warlordism as morally vacuous and irrelevant to most regimes. His primary engagement with these types of regimes comes in chapter XIX, where he bemoans the emergence of the Roman army as a self-interested entity. Indeed, Machiavelli depicts a predatory military as a scourge equal to the worst sort of prince. A predatory military forces the prince’s hand in practices of domination. Princes must choose between alienating the people and alienating their client militaries. In chapter XIX, Machiavelli only cites one example of someone successfully navigating the Scylla and Charybdis of a corrupt

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25 In this respect, the citizen-militia is more than just a group of armed citizens, it is a group of armed and trained citizens. The exercise of violence requires special skill – and the exercise of violence as a group requires the additional skill of cooperation. These skills have effects that range beyond the exercise of violence alone, which is especially true of learning to act in concert. To be trained in such a manner is to be empowered.
political order: the roman Emperor Severus. Moreover, despite successfully surviving a client military, Severus is an incomplete figure. “A new prince in a new principality… …should take from Severus those parts which are necessary to found his state and from Marcus those which are fitting and glorious to conserve a state that is already established and firm.”76 Severus’s political skill must be leavened with Marcus Aurelius’s “love of justice.” Machiavelli evokes the latter in chapter XIX as Severus’s counterpoint. According to Machiavelli, Marcus was the last emperor whose power was based on the authority of his office. His virtues were not suited to navigating the raw antagonism of a completely corrupted political order. Rather, they were suited to maintain the virtue of an order capable of subsuming those antagonisms within it. Upon his death, Rome’s internal antagonisms finally overwhelmed its traditional order, paving the way for figures like Severus to emerge. It is hard to imagine Severus successfully operating in an uncorrupted Rome. His skills were suited to navigating disordered contexts.

Nor should we confuse Severus’s skill with the fact that he catered to a client-military. Severus was not a founder. He established no new state. He did not even revive the Roman state. Instead, he allowed his soldiers to vent their appetites on the Roman people. We cannot take Machiavelli to mean that his reader should imitate the actions of Severus (i.e. the management of a client-military) in order to succeed as a new prince in a new state. To do so would directly contradict the diverse humors thesis. Instead, we should pay attention to Machiavelli’s language. His reader should “take from Severus those parts which are necessary to found his state.”77 Parts are not actions. It is far more likely that Machiavelli is referring to the parts of his character that made him so skillful in political and military manners. Such skillfulness is so necessary in political innovation because of the opposition that all princes meet, be it in the form of appetitive elites or, as in Severus’s case, a rogue military.

Finally, a more immediate issue bars consideration of warlordism: Machiavelli saw it as no longer possible in Italy. “Princes of our times have less of this difficulty of satisfying the soldiers by extraordinary means in their governments… …now it is necessary for all princes except the Turk and the Sultan to satisfy the people rather than the soldiers because the people can do more than the soldiers.”78 As we learn in The Discourses, Roman elites sought to undercut the power of the people by

77 Ibid., Page 82.
78 Ibid., Page 81.
corrupting the military. They turned the military into an increasingly clientelistic institution. In effect, the Roman elites corrupted Rome’s citizen army by infecting it with elite humors. Severus found himself under the necessity of catering to those humors because the Roman military still remained such an influential institution. The people at large were simply no match for it. In Machiavelli’s view, no Italian military (or French or German for that matter) enjoyed that much of a power imbalance. No Italian prince could possibly find security in a client military – the dangers posed by an alienated people were simply too great. As a result, Machiavelli characterizes the militaries associated with warlordism and the internal security apparatuses of various dictatorships as unreliable instruments of power and thus not worth recommending to his reader.

The trouble with Machiavelli’s dismissal of Severus’s warlordism is that it is misleading. It suggests that there is no situation according to which forces other than citizen-militias promote the general welfare of a state. Mancur Olsen challenges this assumption when he frames the problem of state formation in terms of ‘banditry’, which is no different from petty warlordism. He imagines two kinds of bandits: one that moves from territory to territory and one that is stationary. Given a choice, rational individuals would select monopolization of violence by a stationary bandit to life subject to roving bandits, because stationary bandits may take a long-term, encompassing interest in a territory and reduce rates of extraction in order to incentivize production. Rule of the stationary bandit is rendered legitimate by the service he or she provides (i.e. protection from other bandits) and his or her extraction is rendered legitimate as taxation for that service. Of course, the stationary bandit sets the tax rate well above that which covers his or her cost for protection. As the holder of the monopoly on violence, the stationary bandit has the coercive capacity to maximize his or her own income. Any public goods that the stationary bandit provides (and the stationary bandit does provide a minimal number of public goods) will be as a function of his or her effort to maximize his income.

Machiavelli’s mischaracterization is based on the implication that client militaries must be predatory at all times, but this implication is wrong, as Robert Bates demonstrates. In the presence of sufficiently high rents, security forces will select long-term income (i.e. salaries) over predatory practices. Stable rents have the capacity to pacify ‘specialists in violence’ because they represent long-run possibility.

of maximizing of income.\textsuperscript{80} They thus cause the preferences of both the members of the security apparatus and members of the citizenry at large to converge. Rather than one preying upon the other, a high GPD/capita induces specialists in violence to protect the productive capacities of citizens and enjoy a slice of the economic pie. Citizens obviously prefer such arrangements to being victims of a predatory, client-military and are happy to engage in productive activities in a state of peace, rather then invest their energy in hiding wealth, starting a rebellion, or fleeing the country altogether.

These accounts challenge Machiavelli’s claim in chapter XIII that the citizen-militia is the only viable mechanism of violence. The fact that a security apparatus need not be a citizen-militia in order to be protective of citizens of a principality calls that esteem into question. This question is deepened by his reference to Agathocles. Agathocles further complicates Machiavelli’s picture given his use of a private security apparatus for maintaining power in Sicily. Machiavelli classifies Agathocles as criminal as a result of the predatory nature of his rule.\textsuperscript{81} But that classification cannot overturn the reliability with which he exercised power through a military that was not a citizen-militia. Why, then, does Machiavelli depict the citizen-militia as the only reliable military institution when he knows that alternatives exist? And how could he respond to the challenges offered by the analyses of Olson and Bates?

First, Machiavelli would mount a prudential challenge. Internal security apparatuses like the ones described by Olson and by Bates are only stable instruments of rule when princes can afford them. If a warlord or prince can ‘buy’ sufficient loyalty from these security officers, then they have acquired a stable instrument of rule. In this respect, such arms may be domestic (i.e. made up of citizens of the state), but they are far closer to mercenary arms than to a citizen-militia. And, of course, Machiavelli rightly observes that mercenary arms force their users into a dependency on extractive practices, which are unstable, unpredictable, and thereby imprudent means of rule. Moreover, excessive extraction (even under the guise of taxation) turns the people into an enemy of the prince. Given the prince’s paucity of allies among the elite – enmity is not something he would want to cultivate among those who could otherwise be his friends.

Second, Machiavelli would point out the indecency of the patterns of extraction that an internal security apparatus would require. Even at rates that do not inspire


\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.} Page 35.
enmity among the people, taxation for the purposes of fielding an internal security apparatus are tantamount to taking a citizen’s patrimony for the purposes of dominating him or her. In other words, the type of regime that Bates and Olson regard as stable is the same type of regime that Machiavelli’s elite would put in place if given the latitude to do so. Machiavelli would have us reject the drives associated with these types of regimes on normative grounds in addition to prudential ones. I think we are compelled to agree. While we can reasonably prefer a *modus vivendi* to anarchy, we can reject a regime of oppression on normative grounds when Machiavelli offers us an alternative that empowers the people, rather than yoking them to their own servitude.

Third, citizen-militias are a means by which Machiavelli covertly brings a principality to closer to a republic. Herein lays Machiavelli’s hidden political motivation (popular empowerment) in steering his reader to citizen-militias. Citizen-militias constrain the prince in such a way as to more closely align the prince’s interests with those of the people at large. A prince simply cannot ask a citizen militia to engage in certain kinds of oppression when its members identify with the state and their fellow citizens at large, as they ought to in any well-constructed militia. Contra the suggestions that *The Prince’s* recommendations for citizen-militia are part of an elaborate trap created by Machiavelli, the citizen-militia is not so much a trap as it is a constraint. Like Odysseus’s crewmen, the citizen-militia ties the prince to the mast of the public good to keep the prince from the temptation of engaging in practices of oppression.

Machiavelli recognizes the profound attraction that oppression held for Florentine nobles. But Machiavelli, in his foresight, also recognizes the profound riskiness and moral repugnance of oppressing the people. In response to these two recognitions, Machiavelli tells his self-interested reader that self-interest is best served by adopting populist practices like the citizen-militia.

**Conclusion**

The partnership between the prince and the people – as concretized in the citizen militia – has the dual desiderata of constraining the prince to respect the norm of non-oppression and of creating a mechanism of violence that is sufficiently capable in projecting force, sufficiently responsive to the public good, and sufficiently limited in its exercise of violence. This partnership relates directly to the

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central problem of political violence because it produces an institution that can both reduce aggregate levels of violence and can stay within the boundaries set for it. If armed, trained, and organized the people will protect itself from oppression and will no longer desire to use force once those threats of oppression have abated. The elite cannot be so reliable a partner for the prince because their appetite is to oppress the people, and the appetite for oppression can never be fully satisfied.

Constraining the appetite for oppression is also the task of Machiavelli’s “greatest examples” of chapter VI, who liberate, unify, and empower the population out of which they help to found states. On the basis of chapter XXVI, we can assume that Machiavelli hoped for the same in Italy. Rather than taking Machiavelli’s political ethics, as developed in chapters XV-XXIII, this reading of *The Prince* takes Machiavelli’s proposal for the citizen militia in chapter XIII as the most important chapter of the text. It embodies the kind of work done by the founders of chapter VI, satisfies the demands of the diverse humors thesis of chapter IX, and decisively contours the ethic developed in the second half of the text. Chapter XIII is literally and figuratively the center of *The Prince*.

Yet why send the text to Lorenzo, who so clearly had neither the desire, nor the capability to be an Italian Theseus or Cyrus, or the next Romulus? What possible utility could *The Prince* have in the hands of a man of such middling political and moral worth? According to the argument that I have developed here, *The Prince*’s motivational genius lays in the attractions that its tenets hold for even self-interested actors who have none of the public spiritedness of Machiavelli’s four founders. Machiavelli convincingly argues for the prudence of populism – specifically embodied in the citizen-militia – in addition to its moral value, thereby inducing right action even in the absence of the right reasons. Moreover, Machiavelli’s motivational alchemy extends into his institutional recommendations. Machiavelli recognizes the need to codify a public-spirited response to violence by creating institutions that will do so, rather than relying on nobles like Lorenzo to transform themselves into founders like Theseus and Romulus. So Machiavelli again presents the public-spirited response as the most self-interested one. The prince helps himself, Machiavelli suggests, by creating a citizen-militia and thereby helping the people to help themselves. Machiavelli’s redefinition of political virtue is first linked to his founders of chapter VI insofar as a flexible moral nature is required for the kind of success they enjoyed. But, as a fail-safe, Machiavelli’s moral flexibility is also tied to the kind of institutions that the prince must create. Even a self-interested prince will behave differently when in the company of an armed people. The presence of a citizen militia severely curtails the possibility of princely abuses of
power. And a citizen militia, Machiavelli tells his reader, is in a prince’s best interest.

This suggestion is deceptive, however, because it ignores a different kind of mechanism of violence: the paramilitary or internal security apparatus. Machiavelli lumps such organizations into the category of mercenaries because they, like mercenaries, respond to the presence of stable rents. In doing so, Machiavelli removes the option of rule through such a mechanism from the package of advice he presents to his reader. This removal is a deceptive editorial decision because Machiavelli discusses figures who effectively ruled through such mechanisms of force. Machiavelli leaves that fact unacknowledged because he does not want to present such an option to the self-interested reader. To rule through a client military like the ones discussed in the penultimate section of this article would be to rule as a typical Florentine noble would (i.e. catering to oppressive humors). And that kind of oppression, for Machiavelli, crosses the line between praise and blameworthy princely rule.

The reading of Machiavelli I have just developed is, of course, one sided. I have not addressed any of the moments where the prince does not partner with the people to solve the essential problem of political violence. These moments are legion and no reading of Machiavelli would be worth its weight in florins without addressing them. They must, however, be reserved for a larger study on the Florentine.

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