

# The Need for Etiquette and Protocol Rules in Political Communication where Courtesy Is About to Disappear

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**Abstract:** Social relations emerge in a certain order and continue within the framework of certain rules. Just as the rules of law prevent the emergence of disorder and looseness, unwritten rules such as morals and traditions regulate social relations. In this context, etiquette also has an important place in establishing quality and effective communication. Effective communication between individuals as well as between groups, societies and states is possible with mutual respect and courtesy. This becomes even more important in political communication. Conducting communication between states, between politicians or between the state and citizens with mutual respect and courtesy is a necessity for the continuation of the culture of democracy in social peace. As many politicians have underlined and complained about, political expectations and passions have recently made etiquette less important in political communication. For the political institution to move away from the belligerent attitude and enter into a conciliatory, tolerant and respectful political atmosphere, political communication should be re-examined and questioned in the light of etiquette and protocol rules. In this article, the importance of etiquette and protocol rules in the communication of political persons/institutions/organizations is discussed with examples.

**Keywords:** diplomacy, etiquette, manners, political communication, politics, protocol, rules of courtesy

## INTRODUCTION

Barack Obama, one of the previous presidents of the USA, emphasized the importance of the concept of kindness with the sentence “Let’s talk in a way that heals each other, not in a way that hurts,” in a speech he gave in Arizona (Ryan 2012). New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, in an interview, stated that she regrettably observed that political leaders moved away from courtesy because they

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overemphasized power and assertiveness in politics, whereas in solving problems, courtesy and empathy were needed the most (*The Guardian* 2020). The reactions of Donald Trump, who lost the 2020 elections, such as not congratulating the new president and not attending the inauguration ceremony, were considered a kind of political rudeness (Valsania 2021).

All these examples criticize the decline of elegance in politics and express the longing for etiquette in political communication.

Socializing and communicating with others is an innate need for humans, as in Aristotle's analogy of a "social animal" (McKeon 2009), for human beings. There are many definitions of communication, and according to a study, there are even 126 different definitions (Dance & Larson 1976). In its most basic definition, communication is the mutual transfer of feelings, thoughts, information and news from person to person in every conceivable way. Communication occurs when an individual communicates with others, groups, or organizations, or when they exchange information among themselves (McQuail 1984). Communication may differ according to the environment, the participants in the communication and the conditions that guide the communication (Oral 2010). In this context, mass communication is the creation of a message by a few people for a large number of people (Burton & Dimbleby 1990).

## SCOPE OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Although it has been discussed for a long time, no consensus has been reached on what political communication is and what it covers (Grishin 2012). Although it usually evokes election campaigns, messages given through mass media, political debates on television, etc., political communication should be considered as political processes and forms of communication that infiltrate every aspect of our daily lives and should be perceived more comprehensively (Kılıçaslan 2008). Political communication includes all kinds of communication activities carried out by politicians and other political actors for certain political goals through the media, communication between voters, media and political actors for criticism and demand, actions and discourses of political institutions (Çamdereli 2015).

Factors such as trust in the source that gives the message, the power of persuasion of the source, having information about the characteristics of the community that will receive the message, the scope of the message, and the correct transmission of the message

through the right channels are directly effective in the success of political communication (Aziz 2007).

Sometimes the media can also be considered as a political actor (McNair 2017). Considering the manipulation effect of the media, the field of political communication can be defined as the paradigm of voter persuasion (Swanson & Nimmo 1990). Different periods in communication and politics reveal some changing effects on the concepts and theories that define the press-politics relationship, or in other words, political communication (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018). Political communication, despite its flaws, is a necessity of political functioning (Maigret 2014). In effective communication, how the message is sent is as important as the message itself. So, with the rapid development of communication, it became clear that politicians should also be good communicators (Aziz 2016).

The life experiences of individuals, the groups they belong to, their psychological needs and personality traits are effective in the formation of their political attitudes. The special conditions of the period also affect the emergence of these views (Iyengar 1990).

Although the first approaches to political communication are seen in the oldest classical evaluations of Aristotle and Plato in ancient Greece, modern political communication in its current sense is an interdisciplinary field of study based on concepts from communication, political science, journalism, sociology, psychology, history, rhetoric and other fields (Kaid 2004). Political communication can also be considered as a field of contemporary communication studies that entered the development process at the beginning of the current century (Berger & Chaffee 1987). After the Second World War, with the adaptation of advertising techniques and opinion polls to mass media, posters and election campaigns in the USA, political communication took place professionally and started to attract attention in Western European countries after the 60s (Topuz 1991). Today, political communication is professionalizing, turning into a field of expertise, and giving importance to the advice of political communication consultants plays an important role in the success of politicians (Bouza 2004).

## ETIQUETTE

Etiquette, as a word, is taken from the warning signs that Louis XIV, king of France, once put up to prevent the grass fields covering the Palace of Versailles from being crushed by walkers (Thomas,2017).

Over time, these warning announcements have turned into behavioral norms that determine where and how people should behave, and have begun to regulate social life in Western countries (Demirkaya 2012). Until the 1960s, etiquette was discussed in the context of topics such as how the lower classes behave then became the subject of many studies and began to be considered part of the culture (Vouters 2008).

For people to be accepted by the society they live in rather than knowing the etiquette it is necessary to internalize and make these rules instinctive (Post 1992). Not paying attention to the rules of etiquette in a society leads to unrest, chaos and problems (Preece 2004). Etiquette also shows how people determine their social relations and allows us to understand that society (Wajda 2018).

It is accepted that the first work in the field of etiquette was written in 2400 BC by Ptahhotep, who gave advice to Egyptian young men at the stage of social advancement and drew attention to superior-subordinate relations (Daly 2014). In 1069, Yusuf Has Hacib's book *Kutadgu Bilig* (Kaya & Akpınar 2017), *Fifty Courtesies for the Table* by the Milanese priest Bonvicino Da Rivas in 1290 (Horvat 2004), and the Dutch thinker Erasmus's book *A Handbook on Good Manners for Children: De Civilitate Morum Puerilium Libellus* (Wrońska 2020) in 1530 are the first written documents in this field. As it is seen, the works written centuries ago show that etiquette rules are almost as old as the history of civilization.

## PROTOCOL

Protocol is a system that allows people from different cultures to communicate with each other correctly. In other words, the protocol is the frame, not the picture itself (Leki 2011). Protocol is the application of etiquette in diplomacy, that is, it is the etiquette of diplomacy. We can also say that the protocol is the accepted standard in diplomatic discourses, negotiations and dialogues (Tomalin 2018). The protocol is accepted as an important sub-branch of public relations due to its complex structure (Güngör 2018). The protocol does not only regulate international relations. It is a necessity to fulfill both diplomatic relations and public duties within the framework of protocol rules (Pınar & Demirağ 2018).

The word protocol, which derives from the words *protos* (first) and *kollao* (to add) in ancient Greek, was used later for documents containing official notary documents and administrative decisions (İucu 2008). Wall frescoes in Roman, ancient Egyptian and Asian

cultures show us that even in ancient times the rules for respecting the leaders of the communities were similar to today's protocol rules (De Froideville & Verheul 2016). Rituals held in temples were performed in order and system. We can say that palaces and temples played an important role in the emergence of the protocol rules (Aytürk 2017). The protocol became even more important as international relations increased, especially at the 1815 Congress of Vienna, when rules were needed to regulate relations between states (Staniszewska 2020).

While the expression of respect and kindness in interpersonal relations is realized by etiquette, protocol rules take over this function in official relations. Not following the protocol rules can negatively affect the relations of states, and not obeying the rules of etiquette harms interpersonal relations (Dussault 2009).

## RESPECT AND KINDNESS

Especially since the mid-60s, people's trust in politics and politicians has tended to decrease in industrialized societies. People began to question the sincerity of governments and their approach to citizens (Batalli 2011). One of the primary expectations of the governed from the rulers is to be valued and appreciated. Politicians also expect the public to trust and support them. These mutual expectations of both groups make the place of courtesy rules in communication even more important. The address in communication is important in this respect (Dereli 2008). When Mahatma Gandhi said, "You can shake the world with kindness," he emphasized that kindness makes a politician much stronger (Sharma 2017).

According to Albert Mehrabian's "7-38-55" rule, body language has an effect of 55%, tone of voice 38% and words 7% in communication (Bailey 2018). However, in political communication, the way of addressing, and the way of saying the chosen words and expressions are as important as the body language (Powell & Cowart 2003). In politics, leaders' moral and cultural values are part of their personality traits, and leaders communicate not only with their followers but also with their values (Masciulli et al. 2009).

Nowadays, populist expectations are making the discourse of politicians tougher (Jagers & Walgrave 2007). According to the results of a study conducted in the United States in 2018, 68% of Americans found it wrong for politicians to use words that insulted their opponents, and 31% said this was partially acceptable. 71% of the female voters who participated in the survey stated that insulting is

never acceptable. According to the findings of the same research, 55% of American voters stated that they were uncomfortable with the language of politics in their country (Pew Research Center 2018).

### LONGING FOR COURTESY IN POLITICS

Canadian journalist Steve Paikin, who questions the political establishment in his country in terms of politeness, complains in his article titled “A Dirty Word in Today’s Politics: Courtesy” that the concept of courtesy has turned into a funny and outdated concept. Stating that today’s understanding of politics is a part of society, Paikin (2013) underlines that it is not surprising that politicians bring the same rudeness to politics.

The American political scientist George Friedman also criticized the fact that etiquette has lost its importance for both politicians and citizens today in his article titled “Etiquette and Political Life”. Stating that etiquette is a necessity, he claimed that the sense of shame in politics gradually decreases and the virtue of respecting different views disappears (Friedman 2017).

### MISSIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Leaders, politicians, representatives of the state, and administrators, that is, those who direct the masses and hold the position of opinion leaders, are also considered as role models with their behaviors and attitudes and set an example for those who support them. For example, politicians who take bribes, evade taxes, and engage in illegal activities by the power of their privileges may encourage others to do the same (Gächter & Renner 2018). A wrong address in written or verbal communication, erroneous attitudes during a meeting, not complying with the seating arrangement, and wearing clothes that do not suit the environment in which he will attend are behaviors that do not comply with the protocol rules and are not welcomed (Hosso 2017).

Perhaps in some political cultures, there may be a prevailing opinion that harsh tone and accusatory addressing will increase the popularity of politicians. But at this point, a sociological conclusion of the 8th President of the Republic of Turkey, Turgut Özal, is remarkable. Özal said, “People like to watch fights, but hate those who fight” (Star 2018). As Özal stated, the politician who is considered a “warrior” may attract attention for the moment but will lose in the long run. Research conducted among German and Austrian voters also shows that voters do not tolerate rudeness in political style. According

to the findings of this research, voters are against politicians' instinctive reactions to creating an atmosphere of chaos or war for the country (Aichholzer & Willmann 2020).

In today's world, where new media has replaced traditional media, political messages reach wide audiences at any time of the day and in many different ways, thanks to smartphones regardless of time and place. The internet, which is accepted as the main communication tool of globalization, has accelerated and strengthened the interaction of social movements with each other (Karaçor 2009). Although social media is a virtual environment, the people here are real. Therefore, the rules of etiquette regulating face-to-face social relations should also apply there. It will be effective in terms of setting an example to society by filtering the insulting and offensive statements of politicians and announcing respectful and polite attitudes more frequently. The gatekeepers, who have titles such as editor in the print media, news director in the electronic media and apply the pre-control filter (Shabir et al. 2015), determine which news will be given in which way and in what way. The frequent presence of rude statements in the media that disturb society can also create a public reaction against their owners (Skytte 2019).

The importance given to courtesy is as decisive as the level of civilization in determining the democratic level society (Papacharissi 2004). Since everyone has different approaches on how to show this respect, protocol rules play a guiding role in regulating them (Voziyan 2015). If those who have official duties and responsibilities know the basic protocol rules will integrate into relationships more easily and this will enable them to be successful in their relationships (Hosso 2017).

In addition, since compliance with the rules of etiquette and protocol is a factor that increases the prestige of an institution, it is very important for those representing institutions or states to be very competent in this regard to prevent problems between individuals and institutions.

## CONCLUSION

The fact that many opinion leaders and politicians, whose views are quoted in the study, emphasizes the importance of respect and courtesy in political communication, is it not an evidence that these virtues have been eroded in the world of politics? Especially in recent years, the language of politics has started to harden, and discourses devoid of

respect and courtesy have begun to take place in the communication of both politicians and political parties with each other. Some power-poisoned politicians began to criticize their opponents very harshly, even insultingly, to become more popular and impress their supporters.

Sensitivity to protocol and etiquette is a requirement of the culture of democracy and also contributes to the formation of a tolerant and respectful political atmosphere. In addition, it will have a positive effect on eliminating the lack of trust and reputation of politics and politicians in the eyes of society in recent years. The definition and scope of political communication, which was perceived as propaganda activities carried out only in election campaigns when it first emerged, has changed with the dominance of digital communication in all areas of our lives. Sustainable communication is vital for social peace and world peace. However, the use of these rules based on mutual respect and courtesy in political communication will ensure that the door of dialogue between individuals, societies, institutions and states will always remain open.

Politicians reflect the values of the society in which they live. Politicians of a society devoted to etiquette will also be sensitive to these virtues. Therefore, the society should be educated in this regard. Voters who internalize virtues such as courtesy and respect never accept or approve of rudeness in the political scene. Seeing that offensive and derogatory rhetoric is no longer a premium, politicians are also forced to change their style. In this context, training in this field in schools, especially in youth organizations of political parties, will contribute to the establishment of etiquette and protocol rules in political communication. Establishing protocol units within political parties where experts on the subject will take charge or obtaining consultancy services will make it possible to conduct political communication according to universal criteria.

The way of doing politics is also the result of a kind of supply-demand balance. To build a more tolerant and respectful future in political communication, the public should not support politicians who engage in rude rhetoric and actions. It is indispensable for the media, which is the main tool of political communication, to show the same sensitive attitude.

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