

The background features a teal gradient with several white and orange speech bubbles of various sizes and orientations. At the bottom, there is a dense collection of raised hands in various colors (green, blue, red, yellow, purple, orange, etc.), each emerging from a matching colored sleeve, symbolizing a public forum or a group of people sharing their views.

what is public opinion??

PMCb1013

30.9.2024

The background features a teal gradient with several white and light blue speech bubbles of various shapes and sizes. At the bottom, there is a dense collection of raised hands in various colors (green, orange, red, purple, yellow, blue, etc.), suggesting a public gathering or a survey. A thin white horizontal line is positioned below the main title.

What is it and why do we need it?

- Who should be concerned about public opinion?
- What is it anyway?
- How do we learn about the state of public opinion?

Why is public opinion important?

- Government stability and legitimacy
 - Consent of the governed
- Public opinion as leader constraint
 - What politicians can and cannot do
- Culture – norms and values
 - What is the zeitgeist?
- Mobilization
 - Politicians utilize public opinion



Government legitimacy and stability

- Consent of the governed
- Job approval
- Trumps approval before 2020 election 34%

Table 1. Presidential Approval Ratings of Incumbents Seeking Reelection

Year	June of reelection year	Final measure before election
	% Approve	% Approve
2012	46	52
2004	49	48
1996	55	54
1992	37	34
1984	54	58
1980	32	37
1976	45	n/a
1972	59	n/a
1964	74	n/a
1956	72	68
1948	40	n/a

Source: Gallup. Note: Presidential approval ratings for Truman, Johnson, Nixon and Ford after June. The final rating is the rating in the month of the election. The final rating is not for Eisenhower (August) and Carter (September). June data are based on an average of polls.



- But also trust in government

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Leader constraint

- Should politicians listen to and obey public opinion?
- Do politicians obey public opinion?

An illustration on a blue background featuring two grey cooling towers with white steam rising from them. To the left are two blue atomic symbols. To the right is a yellow sun with rays. Below the towers are green rolling hills and a blue body of water. A white horizontal line is positioned below the title.

Nuclear phase-out in Germany

- After Fukushima accident in March 2011
- Change in public opinion in Germany

Table 1. Changes in the accentuation of thematic aspects in media coverage.

Thematic aspects of nuclear power	2010, before runtime decision	2011, after Fukushima accident	<i>p</i>
	%	%	
Economy	73	52	<.001
Energy supply	62	51	<.05
Renewable energies	46	42	ns
Risk vs security	36	59	<.001
Environmental compatibility	15	7	<.01
Climate protection	17	13	ns
Protests/demonstrations	16	28	<.01
Sum of news items (<i>n</i>)	259	243	

ns: non-significant.

Reading instruction: In 2010, the media mentioned nuclear power economic issues in 73% of the 259 news items. In 2011, these references accounted for 52% of the 243 news items.

- Arlt & Wolling 2015
- Media content analysis
- Panel data (survey)

Table 2. Changes in the thematic argumentation of key actor groups.

Year	Government		Opposition		Nuclear industry		Anti-nuclear movement	
	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
Arguments (<i>n</i>)	165	53	23	9	31	15	15	7
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Cost-effectiveness	66	19	17	11	58	67	53	0
Supply security	26	43	44	22	36	27	33	29
Risk vs security	8	38	39	67	6	7	13	71

Reading instruction: In 2010, government actors used cost-effectiveness arguments to justify their positions on nuclear power in 66% of their 165 statements.

The background is a teal color. It features several white and light blue speech bubbles of various sizes and orientations. At the bottom, there is a row of many raised hands, each emerging from a different colored sleeve (green, blue, orange, red, purple, yellow, etc.).

Culture and norms

- Attitudes on salient issues
- Reveal basic values and orientations
- Can shift!
- E.g. Same-sex partnership



Cultural norms

- Postmaterialist values
- Generational shifts
- Scarcity hypothesis
- Shifts in work ethics, gender roles, sexual norms, and religious beliefs in more economically advanced societies



Culture Shift

IN ADVANCED INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

RONALD INGLEHART

The background features a teal gradient with several white and light blue speech bubbles of various sizes and orientations. A prominent orange speech bubble is centered in the upper half. At the bottom, a dense array of colorful, stylized human hands in various colors (green, blue, red, yellow, purple, orange) are raised, representing a crowd or public participation.

Public opinion mobilization

- Politicians utilize public opinion



What is the public?

- Evolved in 19th century
 - In contrast to crowds and masses
 - Crowds
 - Anonymous, spread of ideas and emotions, suggestive
 - Mass
 - Herbert Blumer: Interpersonal isolation, anonymous individuals, not communicating, heterogenous, own needs
 - Public
 - In context of issues, various positions, discussion and conscious reflection
- HOW ACCURATE IS IT?

Public opinion definitions

Aggregation of individual options

- Majority opinion
- Clash of group interests
- Media and elite influence
- Fiction

• <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahgjEjJkZks>

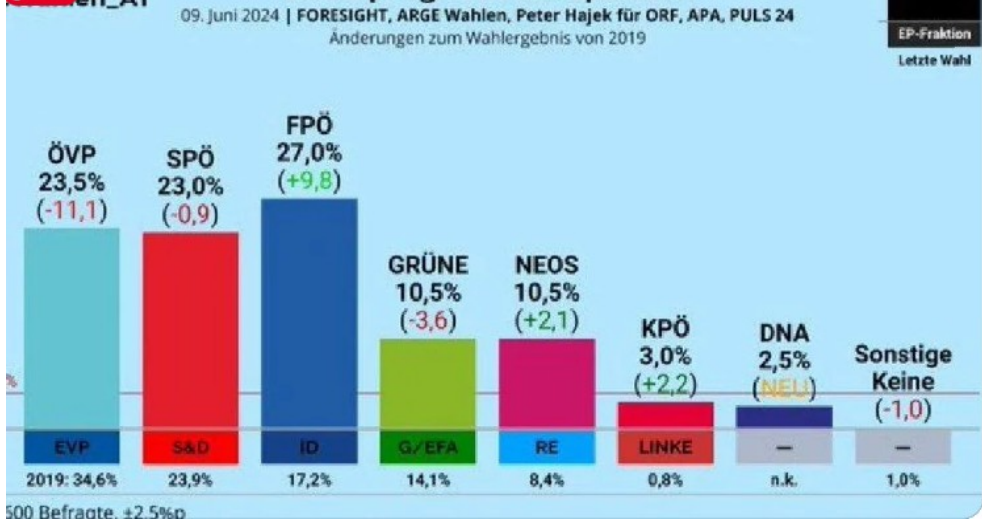
Aggregation of individual opinions

Americans Most Likely to Want Increased Emphasis on Solar, Wind Energy Production

Do you think that, as a country, the United States should put more emphasis, less emphasis, or about the same emphasis as it does now on producing domestic energy from each of the following sources -- [RANDOM ORDER]?

	More emphasis	Same as now	Less emphasis
	%	%	%
Solar power	73	17	10
Wind	66	18	16
Natural gas	49	33	19
Nuclear power	39	32	28
Oil	38	22	39
Coal	23	28	48

March 1-15, 2021
GALLUP



Who is leading national polls?

Harris has been ahead of Trump in the national polling averages since she entered the race at the end of July, as shown in the chart below with the latest figures rounded to the nearest whole number.



Source: [538/ABC News](#) • Updated: 30 Sep 2024

Majority opinion

- Opinion climate
- Spiral of Silence (Noelle-Neumann 1974)

- Opinion climate can influence participation (online)

 Available access | Research article | First published online December 12, 2017

The “Spiral of Silence” Revisited: A Meta-Analysis on the Relationship Between Perceptions of Opinion Support and Political Opinion Expression

[Jörg Matthes](#) , [Johannes Knoll](#), and [Christian von Sikorski](#) [View all authors and affiliations](#)

Volume 45, Issue 4 | [https://doi.org/10.1177/0893650317745400](#)

Conflict of interests

- Organized groups
- Whose opinions do policy-makers take more seriously??

Elite and media influence

- Lippmann
 - What is important for opinion?
 - What do we actually perceive?
 - Who gives us ideas or “images” about the world we live in?
 - Construction of consent?

Pierre Bourdieu

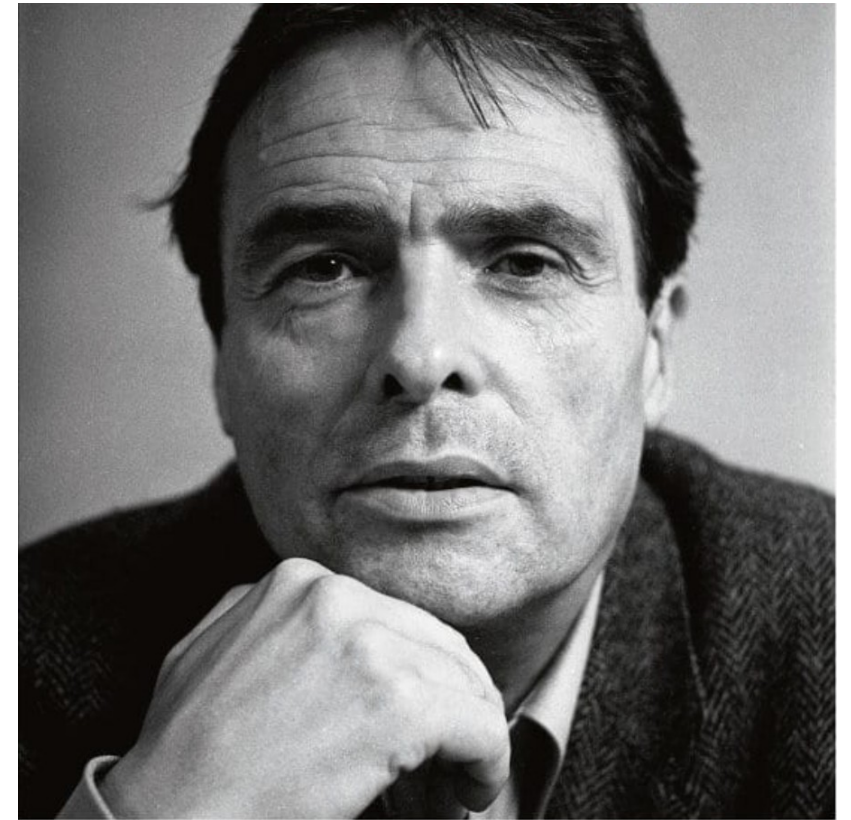
**PUBLIC OPINION
DOES NOT EXIST**

(France, 1972)

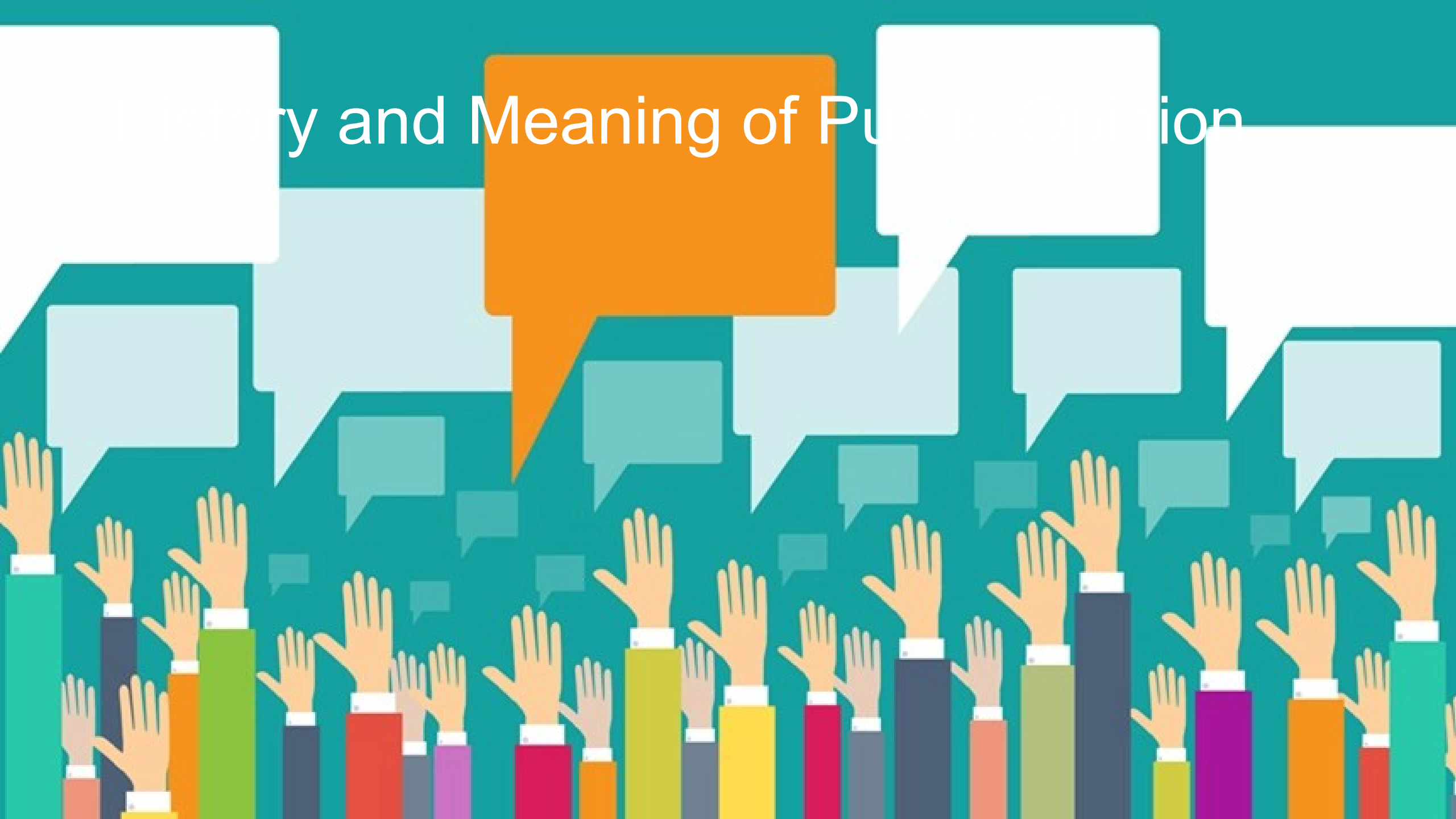
“I say that to speak is to express an opinion, and that opinion consists of an explicitly pronounced discourse.”
Plato

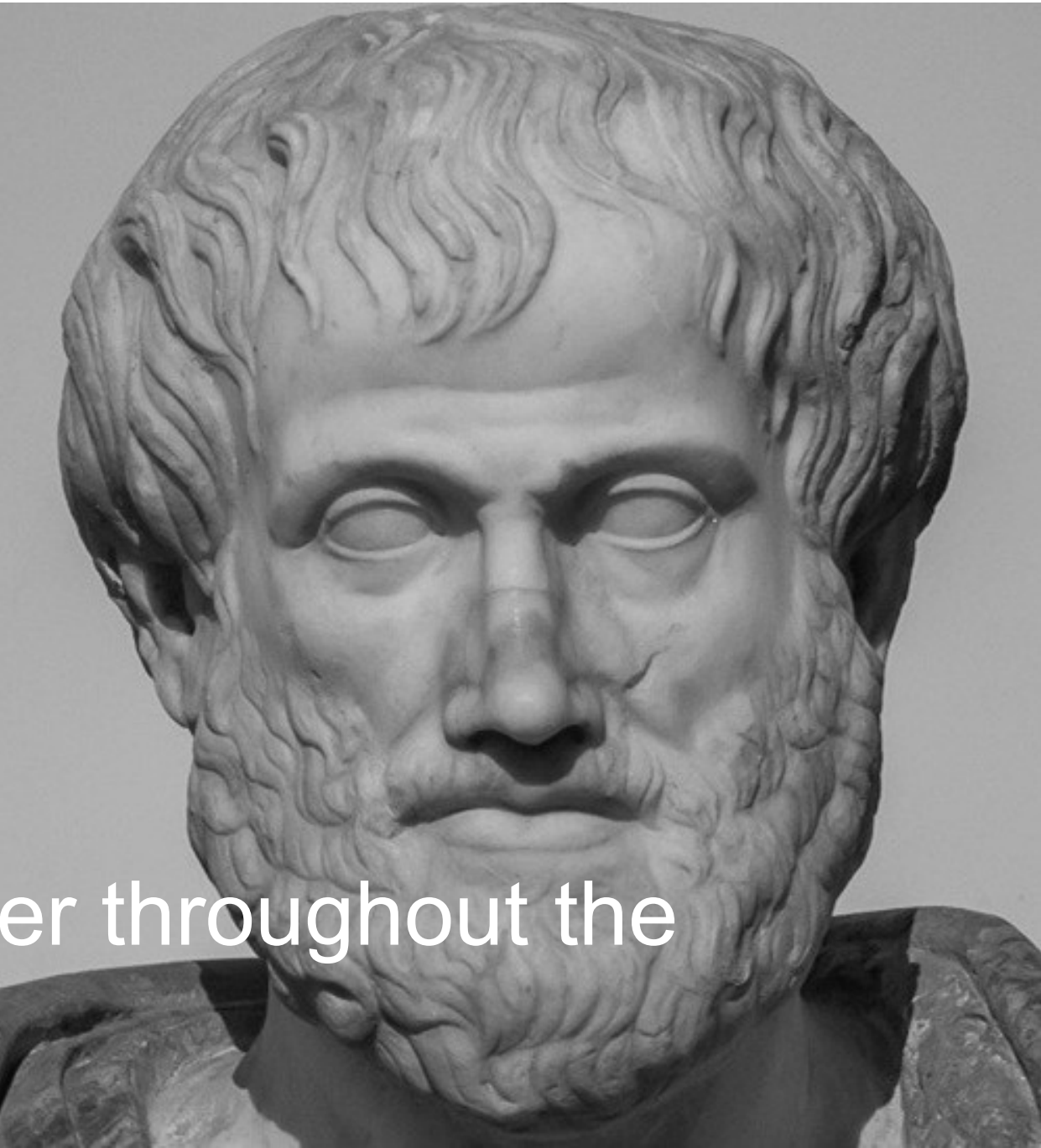
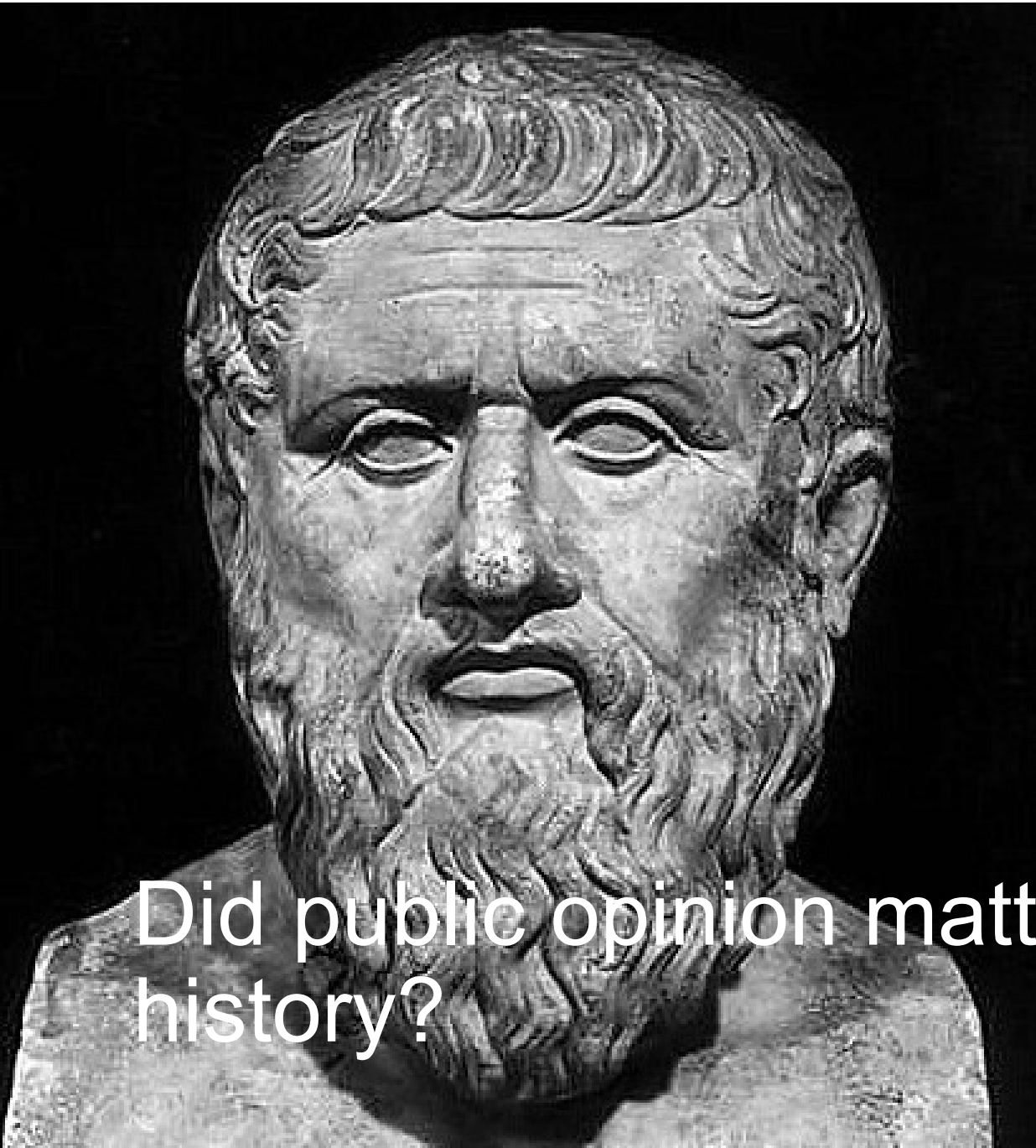
False assumptions:

- Polls assume that people have opinions.
- Each opinion has the same value.
- There is consensus about what questions should be asked.



Importance and Meaning of Publication





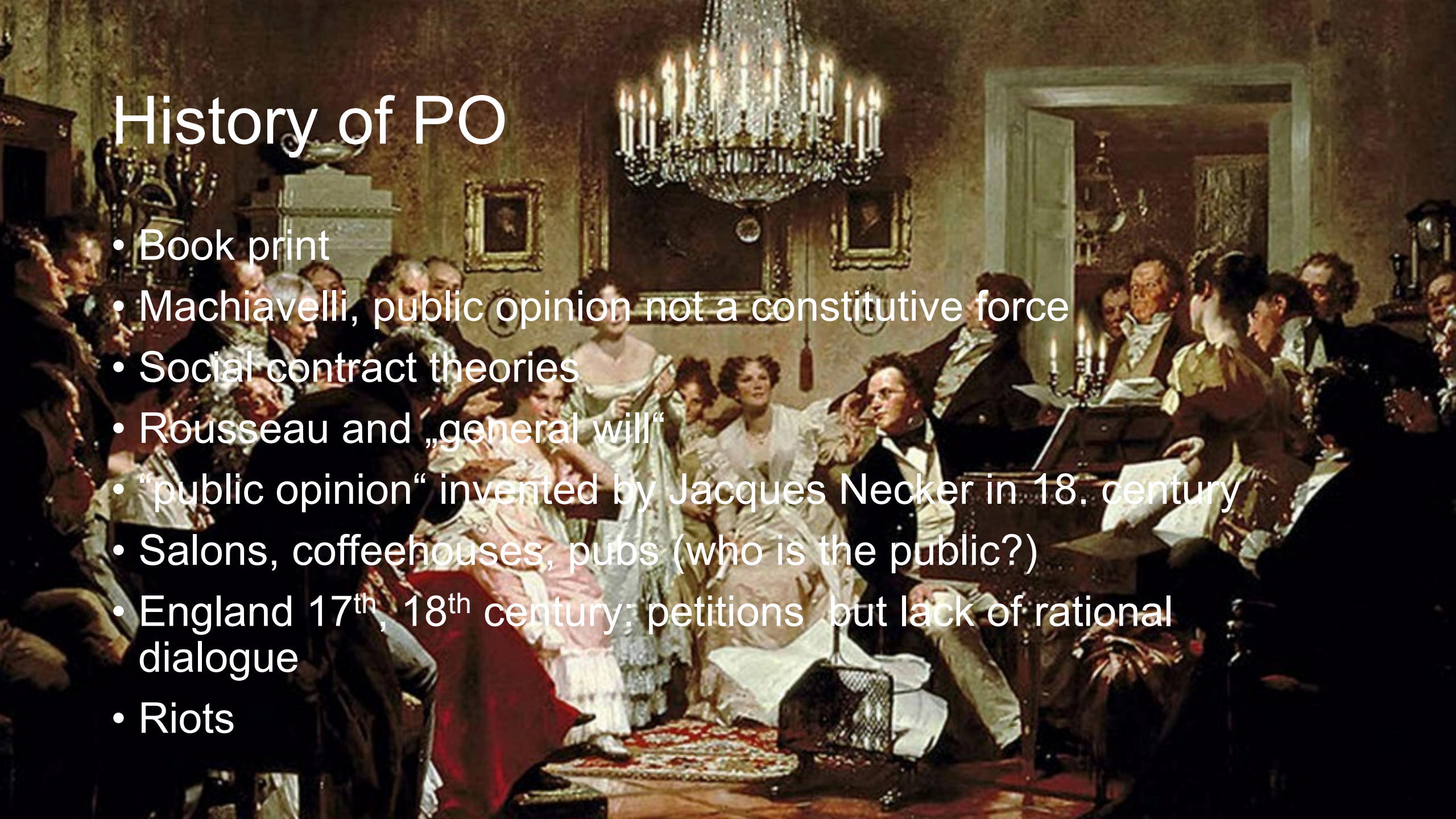
Did public opinion matter throughout the history?

History of public opinion

- Plato vs. Aristotle
- Uninformed public vs. Wisdom of the crowds
- PO through discussions, rhetoric, theatre
- Small scale democracy
- But was it democracy?

History of PO

- Book print
- Machiavelli, public opinion not a constitutive force
- Social contract theories
- Rousseau and „general will“
- “public opinion“ invented by Jacques Necker in 18. century
- Salons, coffeehouses, pubs (who is the public?)
- England 17th, 18th century: petitions but lack of rational dialogue
- Riots



Stronger role of public opinion

- With democratization
- Alexis de Tocqueville
 - Influence over political decision-making
 - Public opinion more important with spread of education
 - Warns against tyranny of the majority
 - Tendency to conformity (social pressure, tendency to align with majority)
 - PO volatile
- Early 20th century: shift to empirical approaches
- New modern society, migration, urbanisation, new social stratification
- Public opinion matters more also in campaigns
- 1896 William McKinney vs. William Jennings Bryan

20th century and new approaches

- Media (Pippmann)
- George Gallup invented polling
- How people feel about issues, policies
- Attention to mass media
- Propaganda
- 21st century
- Internet, social network algorithms (Cambridge Analytica)

Social media and public opinion?

- To measure public opinion
 - Textual data, visual data, user engagement metrics, network analysis.
- Social media as public opinion
- Example: 2016 US Elections

Journalism

Impact Factor: **2.7** / 5-Year Impact Factor

 Available access | Research article | First published online May 9, 2019

Social media as public opinion: How journalists use social media to represent public opinion

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