

**External Factors Outside of Presidential Duties and the Extent of their Impact on Public
Opinion**

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Poli Sci 190: Senior Thesis

Introduction

The office of the President of the United States is a major topic of discussion across the world due to its political importance, as well as the complex web of opinions and perceptions that surround the person who holds that position. The physical appearance and mannerisms of American presidents stand out as one of many aspects affecting public opinion and society's perceptions of them. This research sets out to explore the complex ways that appearance factors such as body language, communication style, grooming, and dress styles influence public opinion, believability, and social perception as a whole.

The importance of appearance in presidential politics goes beyond aesthetics; it has far-reaching effects on public discourse and governing dynamics. Presidents may send strong signals about their competency, character, and leadership style through their choice of clothing, personal hygiene routine, nonverbal clues, and rhetorical devices. This research aims to provide light on these appearance elements' complex interactions with public opinion, credibility, and social perception by closely evaluating them throughout the course of several presidential administrations.

The understanding that appearance is an essential component of political communication that may trigger gut emotions and influence collective narratives is at the heart of this investigation. Presidents' public personas are shaped in part by the clothes they wear in public, how they conduct themselves in public, and the language they use while communicating. This research aims to reveal the subtle but significant ways that appearance elements penetrate the fabric of American political discourse through a thorough review of public opinion surveys and media coverage (Douglas 143).

Framing the Study

Public perceptions of Presidents are shaped by a variety of factors, which have been extensively explored in scholarly literature. Richard Brody's "Assessing the President: The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support" (1991) highlights the significant influence of media coverage and elite opinions on public support for Presidents. Brody argues that the media not only disseminate information but also frame the narrative around presidential actions and policies, thereby significantly influencing public opinion. Political elites' opinions, as broadcasted through media channels, further shape public attitudes, demonstrating a powerful interplay between media, elites, and the public (Brody, 1991).

Adding a psychological dimension to this discourse, Keating, Randall, and Kendrick (1999) examine the influence of physical appearance on public perceptions in "Presidential Physiognomies: Altered Images, Altered Perceptions." Their findings indicate that superficial characteristics, such as facial features and overall appearance, can significantly alter public evaluations of Presidents (Keating et al., 1999). This research underscores the importance of first impressions and visual cues, suggesting that these superficial perceptions can impact not only evaluations of the President but also perceptions of their policies and rhetoric. Building on these insights, my research focuses on how these superficial perceptions interact with more substantive factors, offering a nuanced understanding of the dynamics that influence public evaluations of presidential leadership and policy effectiveness.

Research Design

This study goes beyond the conventional framework of evaluating the performance of presidents and instead explores outside factors that have a meaningful influence on public opinion. Through an examination of the subtleties of appearance and how it interacts with cultural norms, public perceptions, and social expectations, I want to clarify the intricate ways in

which presidents maneuver public opinion and credibility. For my research project on societal perceptions of presidents, I have intentionally chosen Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden as the main subjects. Each of them represents different aspects of how presidents can change their public image. Through an analysis of Obama's well-known controversy surrounding his tan suit, Biden's televised instances of falling, and Trump's unconventional methods of communication and confrontational approach towards the media, it becomes evident that seemingly unconnected incidents may have a substantial impact on the public's perception of presidents. Although these episodes do not have a direct connection to their ability as presidents, they have a significant impact on how society perceives these leaders as a whole. My research aims to emphasize the intricate relationship between public opinion, media portrayal, and presidential performance by examining different Republican and Democratic presidents and events.

Essentially, the goal of this research is to highlight the continued importance of appearance in defining the boundaries of American democracy. Through an analysis of the experiences of several presidents in a range of historical situations, my goal is to identify trends and revelations that shed light on the more comprehensive dynamics of presidential image management. In the end, this investigation provides insightful information on the nuances of modern politics and culture, while attesting to the complicated relationship between appearance and public perception.

Case Study 1: Fashion, Alternative Media, and Obama

On August 8th, 2014, people were surprised by President Obama's tan suit, which was different from the usual dark suits worn in the Oval Office. This event became the subject of extensive public attention. There was a great deal of talk about the instance on social media, and

news sites covered it with an unusual amount of intensity. Some people said that the tan suit showed that Barack Obama wasn't taking the job seriously or respecting it. United States Representative Peter King, a member of the Republican Party, said that the President's suit "pointed to a lack of seriousness" and some said that his choice of color made his job seem less important (Ashford 2019).

People may have thought the response to Obama's tan suit was unfair, but it's important to remember that the president has always been criticized for fashion choices. The people and the media look closely at every aspect of a president's appearance, from what they wear to how they style their hair. Donald Trump, known for his distinctive hairstyle, often found himself the subject of speculation regarding the authenticity of his hair during the 2016 presidential race. In an effort to dispel any doubts, at a rally in South Carolina, he brought Mary Margaret Bannister, the wife of the state's House Majority leader, onto the stage and invited her to touch his hair. This unconventional move aimed to prove once and for all that his famous hairstyle was indeed real, after facing so much scrutiny from the public. Bannister approached the microphone and confirmed, "Yes, I believe it is." Donald Trump's handling of the scrutiny surrounding his hairstyle during the 2016 presidential race highlights how public perceptions can shift, even over seemingly trivial matters like hair (Deb 2015).

Trump's decision to invite individuals onstage to touch his hair was a bold move aimed at dispelling doubts about its authenticity. The fact that Trump felt the need to address concerns about his appearance underscores the importance of image in politics and how it can influence public opinion. From this point of view, the tan suit event is just one example of how the public has talked about the president's personal decisions. Since the event, the tan suit scandal has grown and changed into something else. As a warning, it shows how personal image and

political opinion can come together in a unique way. The tan suit ‘scandal’ may seem like a small part of Obama's leadership as a whole, but it can be used to look at the complicated relationship between style, how people see you, and the expectations people have of powerful people.

The criticism President Obama received for wearing a tan suit goes beyond simple fashion analysis; it highlights the connection between race, perception, and politics in the United States. Although the incident may seem little, its exaggerated magnification exposes underlying cultural prejudices. The criticism aimed at Obama's tan suit might be interpreted in terms of racial bias. The response to his clothing selection exemplifies the wider prejudices and unequal treatment experienced by individuals of color in positions of authority. The varying degrees of attention experienced by Joe Biden, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama while donning tan suits may be ascribed to a multitude of reasons, encompassing societal attitudes, historical context, and racial prejudices. Although all three presidents wore tan suits, Obama's fashion choice drew significant criticism, although Biden and Reagan were mostly spared from comparable levels of scrutiny.

First and foremost, it is crucial to take into account the historical background that surrounds each administration. Ronald Reagan, a Caucasian president, wore tan suits on several occasions without facing substantial criticism. Likewise, Joe Biden, who is also a Caucasian president, wore a tan suit on August 6th, 2021 while giving a press conference, which generated no criticism (Palmieri 2021). Conversely, Barack Obama, the very first African American president of the United States, received more criticism for wearing a tan suit, suggesting a possible racial prejudice in the public's evaluation of presidential sartorial selections. These biases may have influenced certain people to interpret Obama's clothing choices in a way that is influenced by racial stereotypes, therefore magnifying any apparent deviation from the typical

norm. Those opposed to Obama may have exploited the tan suit episode as a chance to weaken his power and trustworthiness, utilizing it as a way to question his capabilities as a leader (Piston 2010). Reagan and Biden, being white presidents, may have been given more flexibility in their fashion decisions due to the cultural advantages and of white privilege.

To summarize, the contrasting reception of Obama, Reagan, and Biden in relation to their tan suit episodes highlights the intricate relationship between race, politics, and fashion in American culture. Obama's experience underscores the lasting influence of racial prejudices on how professionalism and authority are seen. The critique of Obama's tan suit reveals the pervasive racial prejudices that still exist in notions of professionalism. The belief that a tan suit is necessarily less respectable or serious reflects long-held preconceptions about race and fashion.

President Barack Obama's tan suit incident on August 8, 2014, illustrates the relationship between personal image and political opinion. Obama's departure from presidential black suits changed public debate and may have affected his popularity ratings, which dropped slightly from 42% to 41% in the days after the incident. Obama's tan suit sparked a social media frenzy and media interest. Commentators and others were surprised and disdainful of the president's outfit, believing that it was unsuitable for his position.

This reply highlights the importance of presidential looks and the cultural expectations of powerful people. The public has scrutinized presidents' dress, haircuts, and body language throughout history, mirroring their predisposition to analyze everything about them. Obama's tan suit issue showed how personal style can affect perceptions of competence and authority within politics.

Several reasons contributed to Obama's approval ratings drop after the tan suit incident. Public opinion, shaped by media narratives and social conventions, greatly affects acceptance rates (Ausat 35-44). Obama's leadership style was undoubtedly tarnished by extensive criticism of his dress, affecting popular opinion of his administration. Tan suits may have reinforced previous myths or prejudices in some groups. The episode may have been used by Obama detractors to demonstrate his inadequacies or indifference. Supporters of the president may have regarded the debate as a fabricated distraction from policy matters. This incident also shows how personal appearance and political communication interact. This paradox highlights the challenges of meeting public expectations while preserving leadership legitimacy.

President Obama's tan suit episode illuminates popular opinion and approval ratings. We may better understand how seemingly insignificant incidents might build presidential leadership narratives by evaluating personal image, media coverage, and societal expectations. The event highlights the importance of appearance in politics and the necessity to critically examine public opinion.

President Obama's appearance on Zach Galifianakis' comedy show, "Between Two Ferns," represents a notable example of presidents utilizing unconventional media platforms to engage with the public. This move illustrates the evolving relationship between political figures and media outlets, showcasing how presidents leverage popular culture to connect with diverse audiences and shape their public image.

Inviting a sitting president to a comedy show like "Between Two Ferns" not only breaks traditional political norms but also humanizes the president in the eyes of the public. By participating in such lighthearted and humorous contexts, presidents demonstrate a willingness to engage with citizens on their terms, outside the confines of formal political settings (Gallagher

3-5, 2016). This approach fosters a sense of relatability and accessibility, enhancing the president's appeal to a broader spectrum of the population.

Appearances on unconventional media platforms allow presidents to convey their message in a more informal and engaging manner. Rather than relying solely on formal speeches or press conferences, these appearances offer an opportunity for presidents to communicate their policies and initiatives in a conversational tone, making complex issues more accessible and relatable to the general public.

However, the use of unconventional media outlets also carries risks. While it can enhance a president's public image and reach new audiences, it may also subject them to criticism or scrutiny for appearing in contexts perceived as trivial or unserious. Critics may argue that such appearances undermine the dignity of the presidency or diminish the seriousness of political discourse.

In an era when political communication takes many forms, President Obama's unique approach of engaging the public, notably through comedy events, has elicited both appreciation and criticism from the public. Obama's willingness to participate on platforms normally associated with entertainment has prompted questions about the president's image and bounds. President Obama's involvement on humorous shows raises questions about the presidential image. While Obama's claim that he went on the comedy show to urge young folks to enroll in health insurance is admirable, the method by which he decided to communicate this message has been viewed with suspicion.

Obama's explanation of his comic performances underscores the significance of reaching out to a varied audience and tailoring communication tactics to appeal to various populations. He hoped to connect with parts of the population that might otherwise be disinterested in traditional

political debate by harnessing popular culture and comedy. However, this method has hazards since it exposes the president to allegations of trivializing significant topics and undermining the gravity of his job as the nation's leader.

The projected risk of unfavorable judgments derives from the link of comedy acts with triviality and frivolity, which stands in contrast to the solemnity expected of the President. While Obama's performances on late-night shows like "The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon" have typically been well-received, his more unconventional picks, such as "Between Two Ferns," have aroused debate. The satirical tone of these shows, which are marked by irreverent humor and challenging inquiry, may not be consistent with the seriousness normally associated with the president.

Obama's appearance on platforms where superstars such as Justin Bieber have received criticism or scorn raises questions about the president's relationship with problematic personalities. While his intentions may be good, sharing a humorous stage with people whose behavior has come under public criticism might taint Obama's image by association. The potential of guilt by association is increased in the age of viral media, because clips of such appearances may spread quickly, altering public perception without context or subtlety (Gallagher 4).

Although President Obama's efforts to engage the public through comedy performances indicate a desire to connect with broad audiences and promote significant policy agendas, they also involve inherent hazards. The contrast of presidential authority with humorous lightness can alter public impressions of the presidency and prompt criticism of the president's judgment and seriousness. As political communication evolves in the digital era, future presidents must strike a careful balance between accessibility and authority while defining their public image.

Case Study 2: Biden's Pratfalls

Critics expressed concern over the recurrent occurrences of President Biden falling on television. At the Air Force Academy Ceremony in El Paso County, Colorado, on June 1, 2023, President Biden fell, and this led critics to question his position as a president. Even though this situation is unconnected to his official duties, this occurrence might have had a negative impact from a public relations standpoint. It is possible that the perception of weakness and a lack of control that stems from frequent falls may change the way that society regards him. This argument highlights the fact that, as the leader of the nation, consistent falls may be perceived as a sign of diminishing physical control, which has the potential to erode the public's general faith in his leadership. A prolonged pattern of falling may contribute to a negative shift in how the public views President Biden, which is the source of the concern.

This is not the first time President Biden has fallen on national television. In fact, it happened enough that it became a running joke. Children dressed up as President Biden falling for Halloween. In a video that circulated and quickly went viral, even appearing on Australian news stations, a group of teenage boys dressed as President Biden and his bodyguards recreating the scene of the president falling and the bodyguards assisting him up. This video made it to an Australian news channel, Sky News Australia, where they broadcasted the video as “the greatest costume in America.” This could lead to the American public being embarrassed of the national leader and to a downward trend to Biden’s public approval rating.

The impact of such incidents goes beyond mere amusement or embarrassment; it can have profound implications for how the president is perceived domestically and internationally. In an age where images and videos spread rapidly across social media platforms, every stumble becomes magnified, potentially overshadowing policy achievements or leadership qualities. The

presidency is not just about the individual occupying the office but also about the image and authority that person projects to the world. Therefore, when moments of physical vulnerability become the focus, it can undermine confidence not only in the president's abilities but also in the office itself.

The repeated falls of President Biden on camera can exacerbate existing concerns about his age and fitness for office. While age should not be a sole determinant of a leader's capabilities, in a media landscape that thrives on sensationalism and soundbites, perceptions matter greatly. Every misstep, quite literally, reinforces narratives about his age and raises questions about his ability to fulfill the rigorous demands of the presidency. This perception can be particularly damaging in times of crisis when the public seeks reassurance and strength from its leaders.

Beyond the immediate impact on public perception, these incidents also invite speculation and scrutiny about the president's health. Although the White House has consistently downplayed concerns and assured the public of President Biden's well-being, the persistence of these falls only fuels speculation. In an era where transparency and trust in government are already at low levels, any ambiguity or perceived lack of forthrightness can further erode public trust in institutions. Thus, what might initially seem like a trivial matter of clumsiness can snowball into a broader crisis of confidence in the presidency and government as a whole. Biden's recent stumble may appear insignificant at first glance, but its implications extend far beyond mere clumsiness. Such incidents have the potential to catalyze a crisis of confidence not only in the presidency but in the government's capacity as a whole. As highlighted in the source "Biden's Age Is a Campaign Problem, Not a Governing One," the concern surrounding Biden's age has been predominantly framed within the context of his campaign rather than his ability to

govern effectively (Goldberg 2024). However, every public stumble reinforces the narrative of fragility, potentially eroding trust in his leadership and, by extension, the institution of the presidency. Biden's fall is not just a physical misstep but a significant event with broader implications for public perception and confidence in government.

Additionally, the cultural and symbolic significance of these falls cannot be underestimated. In a society where strength and vigor are often associated with leadership, images of a president repeatedly stumbling can challenge deeply ingrained perceptions of power and authority (Tobore 2024). This can have far-reaching implications for how future generations perceive leadership and can shape societal attitudes towards aging and physical frailty. Furthermore, the international ramifications cannot be ignored, as these images are broadcasted globally, potentially undermining America's standing on the world stage and emboldening adversaries.

In conclusion, while individual incidents of falling may seem inconsequential in isolation, their cumulative effect can be significant, shaping public perceptions, fueling speculation, and influencing broader cultural narratives. As President Biden navigates the challenges of leadership, these moments serve as a reminder of the complexities and pitfalls of the modern media landscape. It underscores the importance of projecting strength and stability, not just in policy decisions but also in demeanor and physical presence. Ultimately, the presidency is as much about perception as it is about policy, and every stumble, both literal and metaphorical, carries weight in shaping the narrative of leadership.

The public fall of President Biden during a nationally televised event at the Air Force Academy on June 1, 2023, had significant repercussions on both his approval ratings and the perception of his presidential legitimacy. This incident, though seemingly insignificant, triggered

a cascade of doubts and concerns among the American populace, contributing to the decline in public support from 43% to 38% and casting shadows on Biden's ability to lead effectively.

One plausible reason for the decline in President Biden's approval ratings following his fall is the immediate association of physical health with leadership capability. Americans, rightly or wrongly, often correlate a leader's physical well-being with their competence to fulfill their duties (Hancock et al. 2021). The sight of the President stumbling and falling in a public setting can inadvertently plant seeds of doubt in the minds of citizens regarding his ability to handle the rigorous demands of the presidency. This sentiment can translate into decreased confidence in his decision-making and leadership prowess, consequently reflected in dwindling approval ratings.

Moreover, the fall may have exacerbated existing concerns about President Biden's age and physical fitness. Throughout his campaign and early presidency, questions regarding Biden's advanced age and potential health issues lingered in the background. The fall provided tangible evidence that further fueled these concerns, leading to heightened scrutiny of his health and fitness to serve as the nation's leader. In an era where the presidency demands immense physical and mental stamina, any sign of frailty or vulnerability can amplify doubts regarding the incumbent's suitability for the role.

Furthermore, the televised nature of the event magnified its impact on public perception. National broadcasts have a broad reach, capturing the attention of millions of viewers across the country. President Biden's fall, broadcasted for all to witness, not only drew immediate attention but also sparked discussions and debates in various media platforms. In the eyes of some Americans, the image of their president stumbling on a public stage could be interpreted as a symbol of weakness, both on a personal and national level. Such incidents can inadvertently

project an image of vulnerability and ineptitude, potentially eroding confidence in the presidency and the country's standing on the global stage.

President Biden's fall at the Air Force Academy on June 1, 2023, had far-reaching implications beyond the immediate physical mishap. It contributed to a decline in his approval ratings and raised questions about his legitimacy as a leader. The incident underscored the interconnectedness of physical health, public perception, and presidential efficacy in the eyes of the American populace. Moving forward, the Biden administration faces the challenge of addressing these concerns and rebuilding public trust in the wake of this highly visible event.

Case Study 3: Trump's Tweets

Donald Trump's administration, on the other hand, was distinguished by a communication style unlike anything seen in modern American politics. His outspoken language and frequent use of Twitter characterized him as a disruptive force, appealing to a certain portion of the population but causing tremendous controversy. This section investigates how Trump's raw and confrontational communication style appealed to supporters while alienating detractors, altering public image and deepening divisiveness.

Trump's followers enjoyed his direct and unfiltered communication style, which challenged political correctness. His inability to follow prepared speech or normal political standards distinguished him from traditional politicians and fueled his reputation as a political outsider. This honesty appealed to those dissatisfied with traditional politics and looking for a frank, unorthodox leader. In a 2016 interview with The New York Times, Trump defended his communication approach, saying, "I tell the truth. I'm a truth teller. All I do is speak the truth. And if I fall short at the end of 90 days because I'm relatively politically incorrect, despite the

fact that I'm supposed to be the clever one with a lot of nice ideas, that's OK. "I return to a very good way of life."

However, Trump's unconventional style of communicating sparked controversy and added to tension. His hasty tweeting, which was frequently devoid of subtlety or context, alarmed critics, who accused him of disseminating disinformation and eroding democratic standards. Trump's tweet on October 16, 2016, alleging that "The election is absolutely being rigged by the dishonest and distorted media pushing Crooked Hillary - but also at many polling places - SAD," was unprecedented for a major party candidate. By asserting that the media and polling places were complicit in rigging the election, Trump undermined trust in the electoral process, a fundamental component of democratic systems. This preemptive delegitimization of the election results not only stoked public fear and uncertainty but also set a troubling precedent for how electoral outcomes could be contested and discredited without substantive evidence, challenging the integrity of democratic institutions. Despite the possible implications, Trump continued to engage with his followers directly over Twitter, bypassing conventional media.

According to a Pew Research Center research, Trump's tweets were highly polarizing, with Democrats and Republicans responding with drastically different sentiments. Most adults on Twitter post infrequently, with a small subset of highly active users, predominantly Democrats, generating the majority of tweets. Twitter users, regardless of party affiliation, tend to be younger and more educated compared to non-users. However, while similar proportions of Republican users and non-users identify as conservative, Democratic Twitter users are more likely to identify as liberal compared to non-users. Additionally, the accounts followed by the largest share of adults on Twitter vary significantly between Democrats and Republicans, with Barack Obama being more popular among Democrats and Donald Trump being more popular

among Republicans (Pew Research Center 2015). While his admirers commended his candor and desire to confront the current quo, his detractors chastised his incendiary vocabulary and seeming contempt for truth. This polarization expanded beyond social media, influencing public debate and increasing societal differences.

In conclusion, Donald Trump's frank communication style and frequent use of Twitter were distinguishing features of his administration. While his genuineness and desire to confront political correctness appealed to some voters, his impetuous tweeting and proclivity for provocative words generated debate and added to divisiveness. As political communication evolves, Trump's communication style stands as a cautionary tale about the power and dangers of unfiltered language in altering public perception and society dynamics. This led Donald Trump to getting banned from Twitter for years until Elon Musk bought the platform back and reinstated him.

Despite the controversies surrounding Donald Trump's communication style, characterized by impulsive tweeting and provocative rhetoric, his approval ratings experienced a notable increase. Trump's unconventional approach to communication often sparked polarizing reactions, with supporters applauding his candidness and willingness to challenge the status quo, while critics denounced his incendiary language and perceived disregard for truth. However, research from the Pew Research Center highlights the polarized nature of responses to Trump's tweets, with Democrats and Republicans exhibiting drastically different sentiments. While his direct communication style may have resonated with certain segments of the population, it also contributed to heightened societal polarization. Despite these dynamics, Trump's approval ratings surged from 34% to 42% over the course of a few months, underscoring the complex interplay between communication strategies, public perception, and political outcomes.

Conclusion:

The research findings presented in this paper underscore the multifaceted role of appearance, communication style, and media engagement in shaping public perceptions of American presidents. Through an analysis of case studies featuring Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden, it becomes evident that seemingly minor incidents related to appearance and communication can have significant ramifications for a president's image and public support. The case of Barack Obama's tan suit controversy highlights the intersection of race, fashion, and political perception. Despite being a superficial issue, the scrutiny Obama faced for his fashion choice revealed underlying racial biases and stereotypes in the evaluation of presidential professionalism. This underscores the importance of considering historical context and societal attitudes when analyzing public reactions to presidential appearance. Similarly, Joe Biden's televised falls have raised concerns about his physical fitness and leadership capabilities. While individual incidents may appear trivial, their cumulative effect can erode public confidence in the president and fuel speculation about his health. These incidents underscore the interconnectedness of physical health, public perception, and presidential efficacy in the eyes of the American populace.

On the other hand, Donald Trump's unorthodox communication style, characterized by impulsive tweeting and provocative rhetoric, appealed to a segment of the population while alienating others. His use of Twitter as a direct communication channel bypassed traditional media channels but also contributed to heightened societal polarization. Trump's approach serves as a cautionary tale about the power and dangers of unfiltered language in altering public perception and exacerbating societal divisions.

In spite of the fact that the case study studies offer useful insights into the influence that a presidential presence has on public opinion, they are constrained by the historical and cultural context in which they were conducted, the availability of extensive media sources, and the possibility of bias in the data that is collected on public perception. Future case studies should investigate a wider variety of presidents, including those from different eras and diverse media settings, in order to provide more light on the ways in which shifting cultural norms and technology improvements impact how people perceive the performance of the president. In addition, a more in-depth comprehension of the modern dynamics that are involved in the development of public opinion might be gained by investigating the role that social media and real-time public involvement play.

Overall, this research highlights the intricate interplay between appearance, communication style, media engagement, and public perception in shaping the image and effectiveness of American presidents. As political communication continues to evolve in the digital age, future presidents must navigate these complexities carefully to maintain public trust and legitimacy. By critically examining the dynamics of presidential image management, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the nuances of modern politics and the challenges faced by leaders in shaping public opinion.

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