Concept

Status quo bias

We prefer things to stay as they are, even when another option is just as good or better.



In Spanish
Sesgo del statu quo

Origin
Samuelson and Zeckhauser (1988)

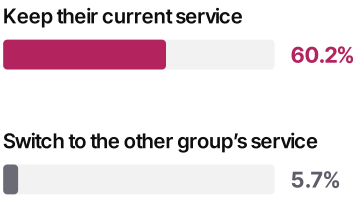
What problem it addresses

It explains why it is so hard to get people to change provider, plan, or habit, even when changing is in their interest.

An example

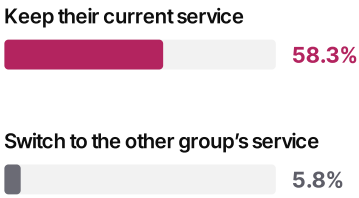
A California electric utility asked its customers which combination of price and reliability they preferred. Some had very reliable service and others had more outages.

Customers with reliable service



Preferred to stay as they were: **60%.**

Customers with more outages



Also preferred to stay as they were: **58%.**

Each group preferred, above all, what it already had. Only 6% chose the other group's service.

Why it happens

1 

What we already have is the reference against which we measure any change.

2 

What we lose by changing weighs more than what we gain.

3 

Not changing requires no decision and no risk of getting it wrong.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this

If you want someone to change, make it easy and show them what they lose by staying as they are.

✗ Avoid

Putting obstacles in the way of canceling and taking advantage of the fact that people do not change.

👁 Don't fall for it

Ask yourself: if you were starting from scratch today, would you choose what you have?

60%

What the research says

Customers with reliable service who preferred their current situation. Among those with more outages, the figure was 58% (Hartman, Doane, and Woo, 1991).

●●● **Solid evidence.** Samuelson and Zeckhauser (1988) also found it in experiments and in real decisions, such as choosing a health or retirement plan.

Connections

Related to

- Loss aversion
- Mere-exposure effect
- Endowment effect
- Default effect
- Deceptive patterns (dark patterns)

Authors and works

1988	**William Samuelson and Richard Zeckhauser**	Named it and measured it in experiments and real decisions.
1991	**Raymond Hartman, Michael Doane, and Chi-Keung Woo**	Observed it in real customers of an electric utility.

Sources

Original sources

- Samuelson, W., & Zeckhauser, R. (1988). Status quo bias in decision making. Journal of Risk and Uncertainty, 1(1), 7–59. View source (https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00055564)
- Hartman, R. S., Doane, M. J., & Woo, C.-K. (1991). Consumer rationality and the status quo. The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 106(1), 141–162. View source (https://doi.org/10.2307/2937910)

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.