

# The “Status quo” Bias and How a Simple syllable helped set Brexit in motion

## Spoiler

Although this is about the United Kingdom and the “Status quo,” today we’re not going to talk about the legendary 90s British rock band of the same name ;)



**Daniel Ortiz**

Expert in Behavioral Design, CRO & Product Strategy

# What is the “Status quo” bias?

It's an innate tendency in humans that leads us to prefer leaving things as **they are**. We resist change because it generates doubts.

In other words, **we tend to stay as we are** because change requires effort.

**And our brain is designed to conserve energy.**

**So, no changes, please!**

# What does this bias have to do with Brexit?

This is where Dominic Cummings comes into play, strategist and creator of the Brexit slogan.

Here was his initial slogan proposal:

**“Take Control”**

Spoiler

He sensed it was good but not good enough. It was missing something.

# What was wrong with it?

It activated two psychological phenomena negatively:

- It generated friction and a high perceived effort for our brain. “Take” implies starting something from scratch, which feels tedious.
- Above all, the “**Status quo**” bias. This slogan reminded citizens that the current situation was being inside **Europe**. And as explained earlier, the “Status quo” bias pushes us toward inaction and a preference for keeping things unchanged.



# So, what did Dominic do?

He understood human behavior and knew he had to overcome this bias.

So, he added a simple syllable:

**“Retake control”**

**Spoiler**

This change was hugely successful, and indeed, Brexit won, and the United Kingdom is no longer part of the European Union.



# By making this change, he activated the endowment effect

This bias makes us overvalue what we already have simply because we possess it.

And of course, “**Retake Control**” hit a nerve—the **British sense of power and ownership**: “Let’s take back what’s ours now!”

## Spoiler

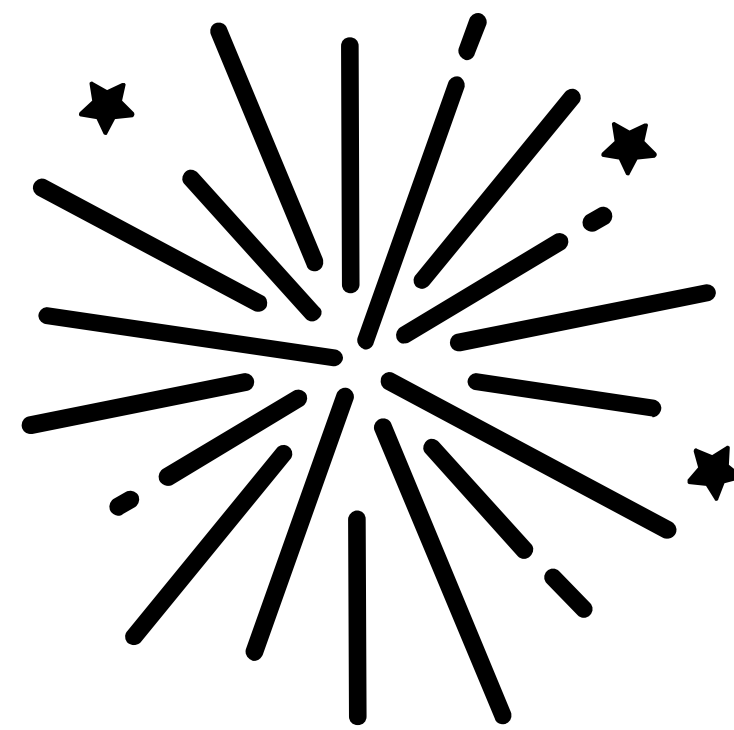
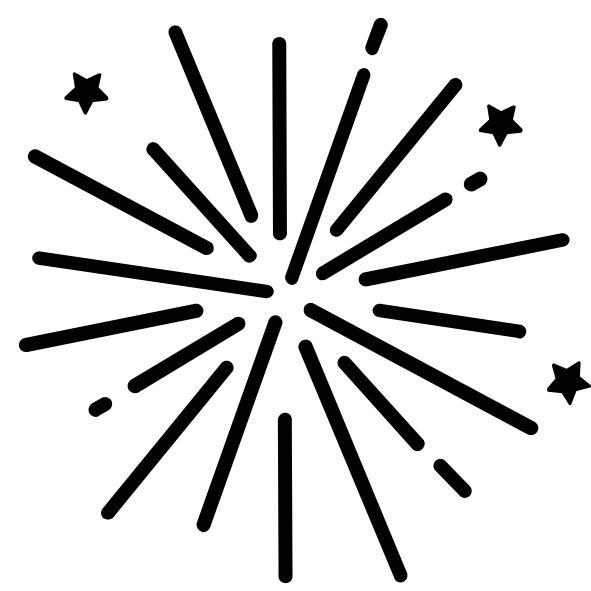
Another bias at play here is the “illusion of control.” Our brain likes having options. And having control means precisely this—the ability to influence (even if it’s just an illusion).

**But above all, it deactivated the “Status quo”**

**“Retake Control”**

completely flipped it. It’s as if he’d used a time machine to go back to the moment before the UK joined the EU. **It made the British feel that their natural state was not being in Europe, completely altering the “Status quo.”**

**Tachannnnn!**



And he's not the only politician to have created a slogan by changing the "Status quo" and reducing the friction of change.

Here's an example from **Donald Trump**.

**“Make America Great  
Again”**





**In summary, the “Status quo” is that invisible bias that leads us to resist change.**

**Understanding it—  
in politics and in any  
aspect of our lives—can  
be very useful.**

**It’s that simple.**

# Thank you very much for your time!



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**If you'd like support in applying these strategies to influence behavior, I'd be happy to help!**



**Daniel Ortiz**

Expert in Behavioral Design, CRO & Product Strategy



[www.linkedin.com/in/danielortizsanjose/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/danielortizsanjose/)

