

# How the Intolerable Becomes Acceptable

March 01, 2018

Public opinion can often seem mercurial. [Obamacare](#) was widely unpopular—[until it took effect](#). The [Republican tax plan](#) was widely derided when it was proposed and debated, but people [now seem to be warming to it](#).

Why the shifts? [New research](#) offers one likely answer: Once something becomes real, we are more inclined to view it more positively.

“People will often rationalize the status quo,” writes University of British Columbia psychologist [Kristin Laurin](#). In the journal *Psychological Science*, she analyzes public opinion on three divisive issues, and finds acceptance of the final outcome spikes soon after the matter is settled.

She traces this to our deep-seated motivation to see our society in a positive light—what psychologist John Jost calls “[system justification](#).” People are “motivated to reconstrue in an exaggeratedly positive light any undesirable elements of the status quo,” she writes, “presumably to reassure themselves that the world they live in is right, good, and likely to satisfy their desires.”