

INNOVATIVE'S DYNAMIC MODEL OF PUBLIC OPINION

In today's fast-paced and ever-changing world, perception is reality. It has become critical to stay on top of current trends and ensure that your organization is being perceived in the way you wish. Public opinion isn't random; it moves in measurable, predictable ways. Understanding how opinions change allows us to understand what strategies will move public opinion in a particular direction.

Imagine a little red boat floating off the coast. This little red boat is like public opinion. The boat moves about as the currents change and the winds blow. But when it is connected to an anchor, the boat can only drift so far.

WHAT MOVES PUBLIC OPINION?

Public opinion, like our little red boat, is moved by the winds of public debate and the currents of society's underlying values.

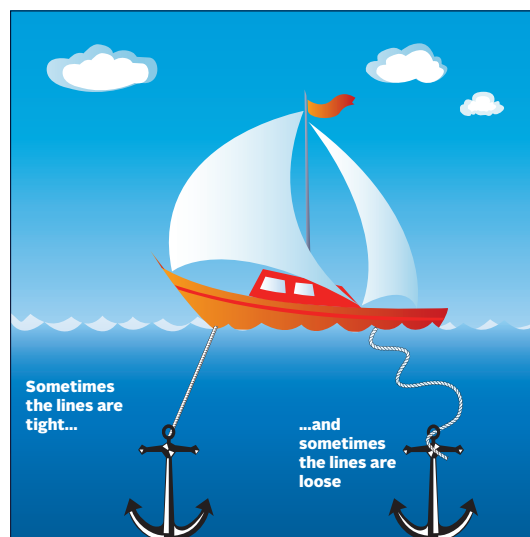
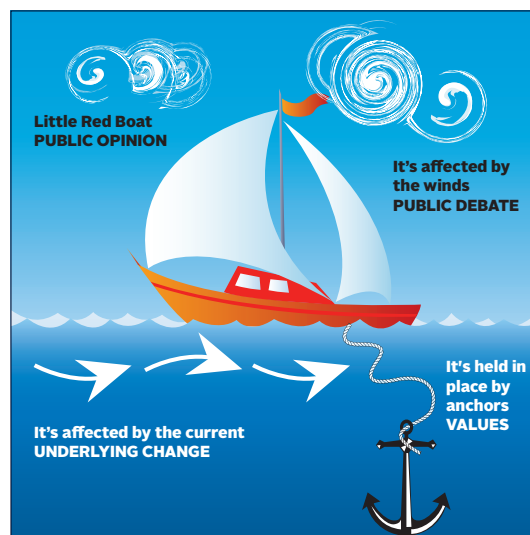
Examples of public debate include media coverage and how social groups and organizations discuss an issue within their constituency. Value changes, like the shift seen in the past decade regarding gay marriage, are longer-term shifts, while public debate — like the wind — can turn at a moment's notice.

Similarly, when public discussion about an issue moves to the forefront — during an election campaign or following a high-profile news story — people become more engaged in a particular issue. This rising tide of public discourse lifts all boats. A higher tide means anchor lines hold the boats of public opinion more tightly in place. When the story moves off the front page — the equivalent of the tide going out — anchor lines loosen and opinions once again drift more easily.

WHAT HOLDS PUBLIC OPINION IN PLACE?

Public opinion is anchored by predispositions like personal values, feelings about social groups and political identity. These anchors predispose a person to think in a certain way about an issue, just like an anchor limits how far a boat can drift from a specific location.

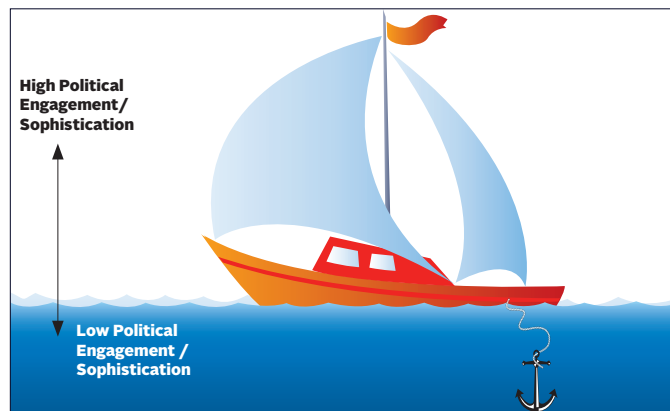
The stronger these anchors are, the more influence they have over a person's opinion. If the connection to an opinion anchor is weak, opinion — like a boat with a loose anchor line — can drift more freely from that value. When the connection to an opinion anchor is strong, opinion stays locked in place.



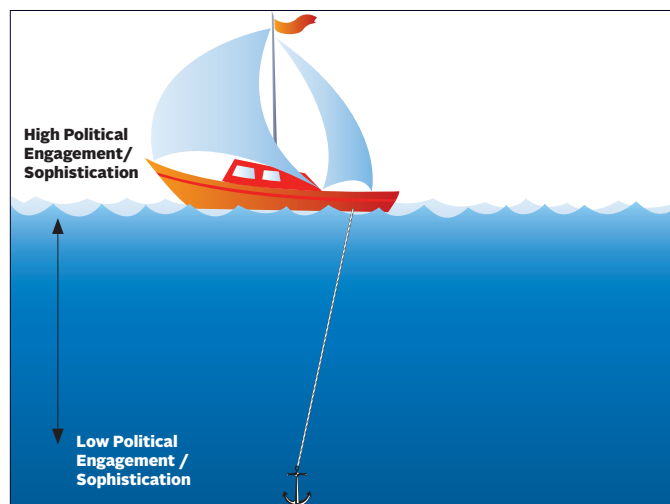
Anchors are predispositions to opinions. Moving public opinion depends on how tightly or loosely the public is anchored to the personal values that influence how opinion is formed.

The degree to which a person's opinion will change is also limited by their level of political sophistication. Just as when the tide rises and anchor lines become tighter, individuals with a high degree of political sophistication hold stronger opinions. These people are less vulnerable to the shifting winds of public debate and changes in the currents of social values. Just as a boat will drift farther from its anchor during low tide, opinion changes more easily for those with low levels of political sophistication.

When the water is low, connections to values are loose and the Little Red Boat drifts.



When the water is high, connections to values are tight and the Little Red Boat stays in one place.



CHANGING PUBLIC OPINION

Changing public opinion isn't impossible; it's inevitable. At INNOVATIVE, we use a systematic research approach to understand the components that influence public opinion. Just like every ship needs help navigating the waters, INNOVATIVE will work with you to create a strategy that addresses the unique public opinion challenges facing your organization.

CONTACT US TO GET STARTED

Innovative Research Group provides research-based strategic advice in the fields of public affairs, corporate communications and fundraising.

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