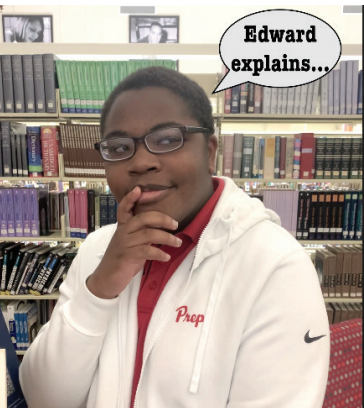


# Edward Explains: Motivated Reasoning and its affects on our politics



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Recently two large issues have rocked political debate: (1) the announcement of former President Trump's 3rd run for the presidency and his subsequent actions as well as (2) Ye's (formally known as Kanye West) statements concerning antisemitic comments.

Trump has recently gone so far as to request the suspension of the constitution to install him as President. In addition, rapper Ye has recently made statements I feel too disgusted to repeat. When Ye disparages Jews and questions the Holocaust, and Trump ignores the Constitution, I am horrified that people constantly excuse and debate the "facts" instead of logically analyzing them. This decision to choose to find facts to defend a position instead of facts to create a position is a massive example of Motivated Reasoning, a lingering issue in our politics tearing our country apart.

Motivated reasoning on politics is the way by which many individuals fail to understand

that personal beliefs restrict them from looking at things objectively and oftentimes, causing many to act and vote in a manner not truly logical in society. Cognitive biases affect this. A cognitive bias refers to a systematic error in the thinking process, of which there are many. For example, confirmation bias involves favoring ideas that confirm preexisting beliefs. People genuinely do not want to be told that what they know and believe is wrong. Confirmation bias is the tendency for people to believe evidence that confirms their preexisting beliefs and discount information that counters those beliefs. Seeking to corroborate our beliefs comes naturally, while it feels uncomfortable and counterintuitive to look for evidence that contradicts them. An additional example is cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance is the discomfort of holding two conflicting beliefs at one time. For example, if you think of yourself as an ethical person, but then cheat on a test, that would create cognitive dissonance that you might then try to reason your way out of. Motivated reasoning can function to reduce cognitive dissonance. One major example we see all these things at work are conspiracy theorists. People can be drawn to conspiracy theories for several reasons. In addition to pervasive misinformation and siloed information ecosystems, psychological factors that drive conspiracy theories include the desire for understanding and certainty, the desire to maintain a positive self-image, and the desire for control and security.

For example, the thinking might go, "If global temperatures are rising catastrophically due to human activity, then I'll have to make painful changes to my lifestyle. But if pundits and politicians assure me that global warming is a hoax, I can maintain my current way of living." In this example a person would rather have someone tell them why their current position is right instead of properly defending why a change in position would be incorrect. This is an example of motivated reasoning.

In politics we often see motivated reasoning for things like climate change like during the 2016 election when Republican candidates campaigning in states heavy on coal industry and fossil fuels won votes by rejecting climate change ideals. The motivated reasoning of those voters who did not want to believe their way of life was detrimental encouraged politicians to attempt to get their vote, to do the same. Additionally on the left of the political spectrum, after the election of Donald Trump there were many who felt that some election irregularities must have taken place and spent the time from before he was sworn in, until he left office trying to prove massive Russian interference even though there was no more evidence of massive fraud in 2016 than there was in 2020, an example when the right chose motivated reasoning.

I caution us all to reevaluate the things that affect our motivated reasoning. Some common examples are our upbringing particularly religion and socioeconomic factors.

The way we interact with others in our community especially when they are so similar.

The "Prep Bubble" is an area ripe for the formation of these ideals to form especially when surrounded by positive feedback loops but readers who wish to avoid the issues of motivated reasoning should follow some basic suggestions.

For one, do not be afraid to question tradition. One of the most prevalent yet equally idiotic excuses people give for not asking questions to ideals or policies is that "it's the way things have always been done", which provides no room for advancement.

Additionally, ensure that the positions you partake in are built on evidence and reason as opposed to allowing your positions to control your evidence and reasoning

Even I am not above. Motivated reasoning particularly on issues concerning Affirmative Action mainly due to my personal experience with the issue but I think it much better to recognize the bias then to pretend it is not even there. Motivated Reasoning is pervasive and all around us and recognizing that is essential to moving forward and not making excuses for people like Trump and Ye and instead making strides towards a better political climate.



Former President of the United States, Donald Trump, and Kanye (Ye) West put side-by-side. Both are considered possible candidates for the 2024 Presidential elections.

Photo by Entertainment Weekly