When Information Conflicts with Obligations the Role of Motivated Cognition

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We experimentally test how psychological motivations can impact the processing of purely objective information. We first document that, when the high-stakes College Entrance Exam is held in the month of Ramadan, Chinese Muslim students perform significantly worse. When asked about the impact of fasting, they severely underestimate the cost of taking the exam during Ramadan, even when presented with direct empirical evidence. In the experiment, we randomly offer students reading materials in which well-respected Muslim clerics explain that it is permissible to postpone the fast until after the exam. Consistent with an interpretation of motivated cognition, students who receive the material distort the statistics about the fasting cost significantly less, and become more accepting of delaying the fast for the exam.

**Url:**<https://www.nber.org/papers/w30581>