

Prospect theory, ethnocentrism, and the value of a human life
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Five experiments examined how much participants valued of the lives of others through decisions they made. Using extensions of Tversky and Kahneman's (1981) paradigm in which certain or uncertain decisions are made under loss or gain frames, we found that lives were valued to the extent those lives are considered "ours." U.S. and British participants valued Iraqi lives positively so long as co-nationals' or allies' lives were not in competition with them. Under intergroup competition, however, the loss frame made decisions more ethnocentric, implying that prospects of losses invoke ethnocentrism through psychological threat. In other experiments, participants were asked to choose between a taboo trade-off (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997): the lives of one nation (own or a current enemy) vs. material interests for the other nation in loss-loss or gain-gain trade-offs. In such experiments, lives of co-nationals were valued, such that number of lives at stake strongly influenced decision preferences. However, participants were nearly indifferent concerning the loss or gain of lives of those in enemy nations, and were not affected by the number of lives at stake across four orders of magnitude. The need for economic and decision-making theories to consider findings from prejudice and intergroup relations is discussed.