

# How likely are you to take a bullet?

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How likely are you to take a bullet for somebody? University of Queensland researchers have helped develop a way of predicting the strength of your convictions.

PhD candidate Daniel Crimston and Professor Matthew Hornsey from the School of Psychology introduced the [Moral Expansiveness Scale](#) (MES) to quantify the extent of our moral boundaries.

"We performed six studies with the MES and it uniquely predicted willingness to engage in behaviours at a personal cost," Mr Crimston said.

"One test asked 316 participants from the United States to imagine they lived in a country ruled by a powerful dictator who was planning to annihilate eight specific groups.

"The targeted groups included people from the participant's hometown, people from Africa, people with intellectual disabilities, prisoners, animals and trees.

"Participants were asked to consider how many of each group would need to be killed before they would sacrifice themselves in their place."

Collaborating with Paul Bain of Queensland University of Technology and Brock Bastian of the University of Melbourne, the researchers reliably predicted participant responses using the MES.

A participant's MES score was determined by ascertaining the composition of four moral boundaries – the Inner Circle, Outer Circle, Fringes of Concern, and Outside the Moral Sphere.

The Inner Circle was considered to be entities that people felt a personal responsibility for, while the Outer Circle were entities for which there was concern, but limited personal responsibility.

Entities on the Fringes were defined as those which [people](#) decided deserved minimal moral concern, while entities Outside the Moral Sphere were afforded no [moral](#) concern at all.

"The MES recognises - and factors in - the difference between the breadth of concern, the depth of concern for each entity, and the consideration of personal cost," Mr Crimston said.

"A less morally expansive person restricts their concern to things considered close, such as family.

"A more morally expansive person extends care to distant entities such as plants and animals.

"There are no consistent relationships between the MES and sex, age, politics or religion, but there are relationships to views on stigmatised individuals, high-sentience animals and the environment."

Other tests conducted by researchers ascertained how likely someone was to agree to a kidney transplant, a financial donation, and to support a chimpanzee's claim for legal personhood status.

The research appears in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

**More information:** Daniel Crimston et al. Moral Expansiveness: Examining Variability in the Extension of the Moral World., *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1037/pspp0000086](https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000086)

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