Abstract:
Many real-world social dilemmas require interdependent people to repeatedly protect against a large loss that has a low probability of occurring. Examples include protecting against disease outbreak (e.g., vaccination), extreme weather events (e.g., wildfire mitigation), or terrorism (shared border security). Decisions on whether to invest in protection may be made year by year, or investment may be precommitted for a number of years. We propose that precommitment increases the subjective probability of losses, thereby increasing risk aversion and increasing investment rates in interdependent security (IDS) situations. Study 1 examined repeated, loss-framed social dilemmas, and found that although investment rates are lower under uncertainty, this can be mitigated through precommitment. Studies 2-6 investigated the processes driving the precommitment effect, by 1) isolating impacts of precommitment under uncertainty from its impacts on interactions with other people, 2) testing boundary conditions, and 3) explicitly manipulating uncertainty levels.