How The Emotions of Politicians Explain their Representative Behavior
TEMPER

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Abstract

TEMPER sheds new light on the representative behavior of individual politicians by addressing an overlooked driver of that behavior: their emotions. What makes politicians decide to be responsive to public opinion signals at some occasions, but not at others? And how do politicians go about communicating their viewpoints, sometimes using very emotional or uncivil language, and at other times not? Whereas extant research has been preoccupied with studying the cognitive, strategic reasons that politicians may have to act so-or-so, TEMPER focuses on the emotional explanations of their behavior. It sketches a portrait of politicians who are, above everything, human.

Doing so, TEMPER bridges the gap between theories of elite behavior and theories of the political behavior of citizens, which have—relying on insights from psychology—taken an 'emotional turn' decades ago. As emotions arise in response to concrete situations of signals, TEMPER pays attention to the situations or signals that provoke politicians to communicate and act. Its objectives are to explain (1) how characteristics of situations or signals elicit emotions in politicians, (2) how these emotions influence their subsequent representative behavior, and (3) how the resulting 'emotional explanation' of behavior maps onto existing (mostly cognitive) explanations of behavior.

TEMPER studies the emotions of politicians directly, in a series of (1) survey-experiments with politicians; (2) interviews with politicians; and (3) direct observations of actual media debates and party meetings. It combines self-reported measures of emotion with psychophysiological measures of affect, which are less susceptible to rationalization and social desirability. The findings of TEMPER will reveal how patterns that we currently interpret as strategic behaviors may, in fact, be grounded in emotional mechanisms.

Part B1: Extended Synopsis of the scientific proposal

Introduction

On June 12th, 2018 the U.S. Senate had the opportunity to nominate Brett Kavanaugh for the Supreme Court. From a strategic point of view, there was no doubt about how a Republican senator should vote, as Republican voters would consider the nomination of a conservative judge a major victory. Sill, Republican Senator Jeff Flake forced his party to delay the vote on the nomination after he was emotionalized by two women making sexual-assault accusations right before the vote. That decision, which was important for the legitimacy of the Me Too-movement, was based on 'a feeling' evoked by these passionate women, he explained afterwards (Pelley, 2018). We regularly encounter examples like this one in the news: in the heat of the moment, politicians act emotionally. Importantly, these visible examples represent only the tip of the iceberg of all emotional behavior by politicians. When interviewed off the record, politicians suggest that their actions are—perhaps in subtler ways—more frequently based on (gut) feelings than one might think (see e.g. Walgrave et al., 2022). Moreover, even at instances where politicians *seem* to behave strategically, or *think* they act rationally, emotions may play a powerful role (Bargh & Morsella, 2008; Kahneman, 2011).

Despite clear indications that the representative behavior of politicians is influenced by emotions, there is almost no research on the matter. The comparative study of elite behavior has boomed in the past fifteen years (for an overview see e.g. Kertzer & Renshon, 2022), but the role of politicians' emotions has remained almost entirely untapped. Are politicians more responsive to citizens who manage to make them feel anxious, or guilty, or hopeful? Do politicians' emotions influence their communication style, and do they for instance become more aggressive and uncivil when they experience genuine anger towards their opponents? We have no answer to these important questions yet. The impressive number of studies on how politicians' *cognitive* considerations influence their behavior contrasts sharply with the overall lack of studies on how their *emotional* experiences shape this behavior (for notable exceptions, see e.g. Arceneaux et al., 2018; Öhberg & Cassel, 2023). To be clear, there is some research about how politicians *express* emotions in their rhetoric, but the underlying premise of this literature is that politicians exploit the use of emotional appeals strategically, and the focus is on the effects of these emotional appeals on citizens (e.g. Kosmidis et al., 2019; Osnabrügge et al., 2021). The emotions *felt* by politicians are not considered. As a result, our theories of elite behavior are strikingly out of touch with the increasingly recognized impact of emotions in citizens' political behavior, and across scientific disciplines more generally (Dukes et al., 2021).

The aim of my project, titled 'how The Emotions of Politicians Explain their Representative Behavior' (TEMPER), is to put emotions on the map as a neglected factor driving how politicians represent citizens. The behavior of individual politicians is important because it has a big impact on the functioning of representative democracy, and on citizens' satisfaction with it. For instance, the motivation of individual politicians to engage in negative and attack-oriented campaigns translates into higher levels of incivility in the political arena (Frimer et al., 2023; Ketelaars, 2019), in turn decreasing citizens' trust in politics (Van't Riet & Van Stekelenburg, 2022). The willingness of individual politicians to respond to public opinion is the first step towards responsive policy-making by parties and governments (Butler & Nickerson, 2011; Soroka & Wlezien, 2009), ultimately affecting how well citizens feel represented (Holmberg, 2020). Studying the drivers of individual politicians' representative behavior is therefore essential to understand how political representation works, where it is hampered, and which remedies are likely to be most effective.

To realize its theoretical ambitions, TEMPER will conduct a large-scale study of national and regional politicians. A series of survey-experiments and interviews with politicians (n=700) is complemented with direct observations of real behavior. Both self-reported emotions and

psychophysiological reactions are measured. Such a study requires profound affinity with elite research, which I have. As a member and coordinator of INFOPOL/POLPOP—an international consortium of scholars doing elite studies—I studied large samples of politicians five times now (see Sevenans, 2017, 2018, 2021; Sevenans et al., 2016, 2022, 2023, 2024; Soontjens & Sevenans, 2022; Walgrave et al., 2018, 2022, 2024). Doing so, I gathered theoretical and methodological *expertise*, I built a *relationship of trust* necessary to make politicians participate in this unprecedented endeavor, I established the necessary *contacts* (e.g. for a data collection in Switzerland), and acquired the *management skills* required to get the project done.

State of the art: The limits of an 'old' paradigm

In the current literature on political representation, politicians are predominantly characterized as purposive actors whose decisions can be best understood as an outcome of their cognitive (strategic) considerations. The tendency to focus on what politicians *think* to explain their behavior (rather than on what they *feel*) can be traced back to foundational studies portraying them as "*utility maximizers*" (Downs, 1957) and it reverberates in a lot of research to this date (for a similar argument, see Sheffer et al., 2018). For example, recent work on politicians' communication behavior portrays politicians as "*strategic agents*" who "*based on rational considerations … balance expected benefits and potential costs*" when deciding to engage in attack politics (Maier & Nai, 2023, p. 197), or for whom "*emotive language is a tool used strategically to appeal to voters*" (Osnabrügge et al., 2021, p. 885). Literature on responsive policy-making proposes that politicians are "*strategically (un)responsive*" to voters (Soontjens, 2022, p. 731) in "*rational anticipation*" of the electoral consequences thereof (Franchino et al., 2022, p. 42).

This description of politicians is at odds with how political scientists characterize the political behavior of 'ordinary' people. Inspired by insights from (political) psychology and neuroscience, scholars in this field realized decades ago that people's political behavior (such as who they vote for, whether they participate politically, what information they consult,…) is strongly influenced by their emotions (for recent reviews of this "emotional turn" in political behavior, see Gadarian & Brader, 2023; Webster & Albertson, 2022). All cognitive processes happen against a background of emotions, this literature argues, and accounting for these emotions has proven essential to understanding people's decisions and behavior.

And aren't politicians human, too? Aren't they subject to the same emotional processes as ordinary people? Of course, politicians occupy a special position. One might argue that they are trained to practice politics in a detached manner (Sanchez Salgado, 2021), and that institutions have procedures in place to foster non-emotional, evidence-based decisions (Cairney, 2016). But at the same time, partisanship is rooted in emotion (Huddy et al., 2015; Iyengar et al., 2019), and politicians are pre-eminently strong partisans for whom politics is the essence of their professional and personal lives. It is hard to imagine that these emotions have no bearing on their behavior. On top of that, the acceleration of politics driven by social media (see Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999) creates fertile ground for faster, more emotional decision-making. This gives us good reasons to assume that politicians' behavior, too, is influenced by their emotions.

A growing number of studies question the purely strategic explanation of elite behavior, for instance by showing that politicians' personality traits are a predictor of representative behavior (Dietrich et al., 2012; Dynes et al., 2023), or by replicating psychological decision anomalies, such as motivated reasoning, on political elite samples (Baekgaard et al., 2019; Linde & Vis, 2017; Sheffer et al., 2018). Yet, these studies do not offer an account of the role of emotions. Only in the field of International Relations, there is more explicit attention to emotions and how they affect decision-making (see e.g. Sasley, 2011; Thiers, 2024). This work typically differs from TEMPER in scope (focusing on leaders' decisions in the context of war or terrorism), definitions (viewing emotions as

experienced 'collectively' by nation states), and methodologies (qualitative case studies), but insights from these studies will be valuable for TEMPER to build on.

Theoretical ambition: Changing paradigm, shifting focus

The main premise underlying TEMPER is that, if we want to understand how politicians go about representing citizens, we need to take the emotional drivers of their behavior seriously. This approach is truly innovative—it implies a *paradigm shift*, if you will—as it challenges the current dominant view of who politicians are, and of how they represent citizens, in fundamental ways. By focusing on their emotions, TEMPER will draw a portrait of politicians who are, above everything, human.

An important aspect of this paradigmatic change—and a core innovation of TEMPER—is *shifting the unit of analysis* from the level of the individual politician to the level of the concrete situation or signal eliciting a behavior. Extant literature explains variation in elite behavior foremost by looking at differences between politicians (e.g. role conceptions, personality, gender), parties (e.g. ideology or party type) and the broader context (e.g. the electoral system). Accounting for emotion implies acknowledging that one and the same person may react differently from one instance to another, as the situation triggers different emotions.

The objectives of TEMPER are, therefore, to investigate (1) how characteristics of situations or signals elicit emotions in politicians, (2) how these emotions influence their subsequent representative behavior, and (3) how the resulting 'emotional explanation' of behavior maps onto existing (mostly cognitive) explanations of behavior. These three objectives are visualized in Figure 1.
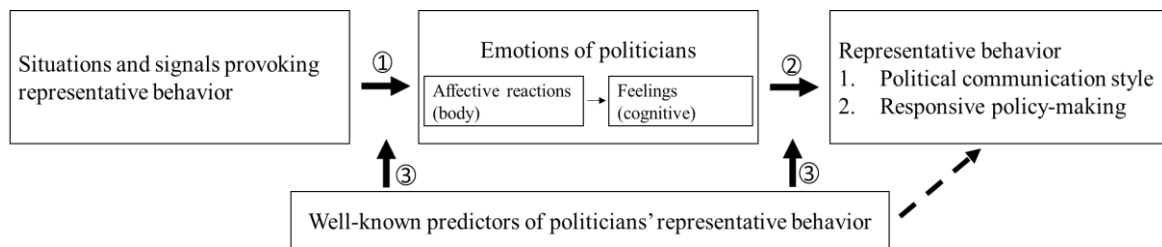

Figure 1—Framework of TEMPER (simplified version)

Emotions: experiences in the body *and* mind—Let me first define the central concept of the project. In line with much of the contemporary work in political psychology, I define emotions as "*reactions to signals about the significance that circumstances hold for an individual's goals and well-being*" (Gadarian & Brader, 2023, p. 192). An example in the realm of politics would be the reaction that occurs when a politician is personally attacked by an opponent in a debate. The signal—here: the speech—immediately activates the sympathetic nervous system (Cacioppo et al., 2007), alerting the person they are under attack. This evokes uncontrollable bodily reactions such as sweating, a heightened heart rate, or the tightening of muscles, possibly followed by cognitive emotional evaluations, such as the realization that one is angry. I use the term '*affective reactions*' to refer to the bodily reactions and the term '*feelings*' to refer to the conscious, cognitive experiences—and '*emotions*' as an umbrella term encompassing both.

Most research relies on *measures of self-reported emotions* to predict political behavior, tapping into conscious feelings only (e.g. Delton et al., 2018; Huddy et al., 2015). Interestingly, however, psychologists showed that our conscious feelings correlate only weakly with our bodily affective reactions to stimuli (LeDoux & Pine, 2016), because self-reported emotions suffer from rationalization (respondents not knowing how they feel), recall problems (respondents not remembering how they felt), and social desirability (respondents not willing to share how they really feel). *Psychophysiological measures of affect* (e.g. skin conductance as an indicator of arousal; or facial expression for valence) are less susceptible to these problems as they capture the uncontrollable, bodily reactions to signals. There seems to be a growing consensus that—even if working with physiological data is challenging because they are often noisy and processing them is labor-intensive—combining the two types of measures is valuable and allows best to predict people's political behavior (e.g. Bakker & Schumacher, 2023; Garrett, 2019; Renshon et al., 2015). This is why TEMPER will measure self-reported emotions *and* psychophysiological reactions of politicians.

Representative behavior: what politicians *say* and what they *do*—In the interest of feasibility, TEMPER clearly delineates its scope and focuses on the effects of emotions on two specific types of behavior, drawn from two subfields of the political representation literature (conceived broadly). The first, on the *political communication style* of politicians, focuses on what they *say* and tries to explain variation in, for instance, politicians' reliance on emotional appeals, their focus on attacking opponents, or their use of incivility (e.g. Osnabrügge et al., 2021; Poljak & Seeberg, 2024; Ridout & Searles, 2011; Widmann, 2021)—this is the first set of dependent variables of TEMPER. The second subfield, on *responsive policy-making,* is concerned with what politicians *do*, and more specifically to what extent their decisions reflect the concerns and preferences of citizens (Pitkin, 1967). Vast literatures explain the variation in politicians' responsiveness to public opinion signals such as constituent e-mails, protests, social media, polls, and so on (e.g. Butler, 2014; Dynes et al., 2023; Sevenans, 2021; Wouters & Walgrave, 2017)—TEMPER's second dependent variable.

The literature typically assumes strategic behavior on the part of politicians. There is obviously value in this assumption: political campaigns *are* carefully crafted and policy decisions *are* thought out carefully. So, research has successfully identified a set of factors that explain variation in these representative behaviors. These factors are summarized at the bottom of Figure 1 and the dashed arrow represents how they predict behavior. TEMPER accounts for these factors, but argues that there is much to gain by considering an emotional explanation of politicians' communication and responsiveness, to which I turn now.

Towards an emotional explanation of behavior—To understand the role of emotions, TEMPER takes two steps. First, as emotions arise in response to concrete signals, TEMPER will pay explicit attention to situations that provoke politicians to communicate (e.g. media debates, parliamentary interventions, or social media posts), as well as to signals that provoke (un)responsive action (e.g. e-mails from citizens, protests, or polls). It will test how characteristics of these situations/signals influence the type and intensity of emotions experienced by politicians (see **Figure 1, arrow 1**). I anticipate that politicians' emotional experiences depend on characteristics of the sender, message, receiver, and context. An example hypothesis is that the use of moral arguments elicits stronger emotions in politicians (Garrett, 2019). Second, TEMPER investigates how these emotions influence politicians' behavior (see **Figure 1, arrow 2**). With regards to politicians' communication style, drawing on theories of emotion (e.g. Brady et al., 2017; Chen, 2015), I expect for example that politicians who experience anger or fear (e.g. evoked by moral arguments, see step 1) will be more likely to communicate in an uncivil manner, regardless of any strategic reasons they may have. With regards to responsiveness, I expect for instance that stronger emotions evoked by public opinion signals—irrespective of the type of emotions—generate more responsive action because the stronger emotional response boosts the accessibility of the information in the mind of the politician (Yiend, 2010).

A key question is how these findings map onto existing explanations of behavior. As visualized (**Figure 1, arrow 3**), TEMPER's main assumption is that many of the well-known predictors of behavior are, in fact, (partial) *moderators* of the effect of emotion. Put differently, I expect that emotion is the mechanism underlying some of our current findings. For example, politicians are less responsive to citizens with another ethnic background (e.g. Griffin & Newman, 2007). It is often assumed that this is rooted in strategy: politicians anticipate these people will be less likely to vote for them. TEMPER puts forward an alternative interpretation of this finding: that politicians experience stronger positive emotional responses to people who are like them because they can identify with their problems—and that, vice versa, the unresponsiveness to voters who are different is due to a lack of emotional resonance. In the discussion on whether it is important to have politicians from all subgroups of society present in the legislative arena ('*descriptive representation*'), or whether legislators can be strategically incentivized to represent people who are not like them (Mansbridge, 1999), the mechanism is important. The type of incentive needed to make politicians overcome an emotional reflex is fundamentally different from the type of incentive required to counter a cognitive behavior (see also Butler & Broockman, 2011). If the behavior is cognitive, giving reasons (or arguments) should work. If the behavior is emotional, it will be important to offer politicians insight into these emotional processes and, for instance, to offer strategies to *reappraise* these spontaneous emotions (Goldin et al., 2008). This is the type of debates TEMPER will contribute to.

Empirical ambition: A large-scale study of politicians' emotions

The empirical part of TEMPER consists of a series of *survey-experiments and interviews* with elected politicians in two similar countries: Belgium and Switzerland. Additionally, and in Belgium only, we will do *direct observations* of actual media debates and party meetings. We combine self-reported emotions with psychophysiological measures of affect. Such an ambitious elite study is feasibly only because my colleagues and I truly acquired politicians' trust over the years. Our personalized approach, with regular feedback about our findings, and our careful handling of the sensitive data makes them willing to participate over and again. I can now leverage this trust relationship to introduce new methods to these respondents.

Survey-experiments with politicians—The research population of TEMPER are *national and regional* members of parliament, ministers, and party leaders. I include two countries (Belgium and Switzerland) to maximize the sample size (because there are only so many politicians in a country) and I plan two rounds of data collection (in 2027 and 2029) to maximize the number of survey-experiments we can do. Like done successfully in previous projects, all politicians are invited for a face-to-face meeting of one hour in which they complete a closed questionnaire (on a laptop) combined with an open interview. Based on previous response rates (78% response; n=363 in Belgium, n=368 in Switzerland) (e.g. Sevenans et al., 2023), I know it is realistic to get a representative sample of at least 700 politicians to participate. Not all politicians may be prepared to share psychophysiological data, but even if only 25% of them are willing to, which is a highly conservative estimate (n=175), meaningful effects can be detected (e.g. Sassenus et al., 2022).

It is feasible to do three to four survey-experiments per round (due to survey fatigue). In the experiments politicians are presented with hypothetical (but realistic) situations or signals. For example, we make them read a social media post of a politician making a controversial statement, or we present them with a TV news item including a public opinion signal. A politician is exposed to several versions of a similar scenario, resulting in a 'vignette' design (Wallander, 2009). We carefully manipulate one or two characteristics of the situation/signal—corresponding to a concrete hypothesis (e.g. moral argument or not).

To measure how the manipulation affects politicians' *affective reactions*, they wear *Empatica EmbracePlus* wristbands (measuring skin conductance as an indicator of emotional intensity or 'arousal'), and we record politicians' facial expressions to be analyzed with *iMotions* software (capturing the positive/negative direction or 'valence'). These recently developed tools allow to reliably measure people's physiological reactions in much less obtrusive ways than before (Borrego et al., 2019; Kulke et al., 2020; Schuurmans et al., 2020; Skiendziel et al., 2019), and they can simply be taken to politicians' offices, making it realistic to collect this kind of data with elites. To measure politicians *self-reported emotions*, we rely on validated survey question batteries, taking into account best practices (Webster & Albertson, 2022).

To measure how the emotions influence behavior, we give politicians a short, but realistic communication task (which can be written, but also oral) to tap how they intend to react publicly (DV1), or we ask about their intentions to act responsively to the public opinion signal (DV2). Because individual politicians, in reality, face severe partisan and institutional constraints (e.g. they are supposed to toe the party line), we opt for measures that account for these constraints (see e.g. Butler et al., 2017). An obvious limitation is that we measure *intended* behavior, but this is true for a lot of—nevertheless highly interesting—experimental elite studies (Grose, 2021). Moreover, to compensate for this limitation, we will also observe politicians' *actual,* real-world behavior. Triangulation of the survey-experimental data (strong on causality) and the observational data (strong on external validity) will be a key asset of the methodology.

Interviews—The open interviews allow to gauge politicians' perceptions of their own behavior. They will be asked to elaborate in-depth on their earlier answers about their intended behavior in response to the experimental stimuli; i.e. on *why* they would behave so-or-so. Politicians' will likely pay more attention to strategic/cognitive than to emotional drivers (due to rationalization), but this is exactly what I am after here: to integrate emotional and cognitive explanations, it is crucial to get insight into the cognitive considerations too; into how politicians themselves give meaning to these processes.

Observations—As a complement to the survey-experiments and interviews, we will observe politicians' actual behavior. To observe politicians' *political communication style* (DV1), I zoom in on one venue: media debates. More specifically, over a period of two years, we will attend approximately 25 sessions of the debate program '*Het Debat'*, where politicians debate important social issues. Each intervention of the debate will be coded for relevant characteristics. To examine how the occurrence of characteristics influences the debaters' affective reactions, we measure arousal (again via wristbands) and valence (via recordings of facial expression). Right after the debates, we ask politicians to participate in a very brief interview (5 mins) where we bring up concrete situations that happened during the debate to gauge self-reported emotions. All these variables are then used to explain politicians' actual behavior. In a similar vein, to observe politicians' *responsive policy-making behavior* (DV2), we will observe meetings held by the parties' parliamentary factions in preparation of the plenary parliamentary session. We observe which public opinion signals are brought up in these meetings and code them for important characteristics, we measure what kind of emotions these signals evoke in politicians, and we register the degree of responsive action.

Team & supportive environment—TEMPER will be conducted by a team of two PhD students, one experienced postdoc, and myself as a PI. I will recruit an postdoc with a background in theoretical and experimental psychology, complementing my expertise in political science. One PhD will make their dissertation on political communication (DV1), the other on responsive policy-making (DV2).

The choice to collaborate with Switzerland was straightforward. The overall similarity of the countries (electoral system, similar cultural expression of emotion, etc.) is good for the comparability of the survey-experimental data; the differences (Swiss direct democracy and

"militia" parliament) allow to explore how institutions constrain the patterns studied (Pilotti, 2015). Importantly, there are good possible subcontractors in Switzerland with an excellent track record in elite interviewing.

The project will benefit greatly from the immediate presence of the *Antwerp Social Lab* next to my office, a 'core facility' of my university that is devoted to helping researchers do psychophysiological measurements. They rent out all the necessary tools and software *and* provide essential methodological design advice and technical assistance. Furthermore, three experts with ample experience at the intersection of political science research, political communication, and emotion/psychophysiology have accepted to be part of the *Advisory Committee* of TEMPER: Prof. dr. Gijs Schumacher (University of Amsterdam, and director of the 'Hot Politics Lab'), Prof. dr. Stuart Soroka (University of California), and Prof. dr. Karolien Poels (University of Antwerp). They will provide valuable feedback three times during the project.

Table 1—Planning & coordination

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
*Development of the theoretical framework**	▓				
Data collection					
Pilot studies of local politicians	▓		▓		
Survey-experiments and interviews		▓		▓	
Observations		▓			
Analysis & papers[+]					
Theoretical papers (start/end)	▓				▓
Papers about survey-experiments (6 à 8)			▓	▓	▓
Papers about observations (2 à 4)					▓
Papers about qualitative interviews (2 à 4)			▓		▓

* PhD 1 makes dissertation on DV1, supervised by postdoc and PI. PhD 2 makes dissertation on DV2, supervised by PI.

[+] Analysis plans are preregistered and theory sections can be written before the data are in.

Conclusion—TEMPER breaks new ground by investigating the emotional drivers of politicians' representative behavior, thereby initiating an urgently-needed paradigm shift in how we think about political elites. The data collection of TEMPER is ambitious, with a good balance between well-established methods of elite research (survey-experiments, interviews), and new, highly innovative ones (psychophysiological measures, observations). The project is feasible as it leverages the key strengths of the PI.

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Part B2: Full project proposal

<u>Section a</u>. **State-of-the-art and objectives**

Introduction

One very exciting development in political science in the past fifteen years has been the rigorous comparative study of the behavior of political elites (Grose, 2021; Kertzer & Renshon, 2022). Researchers have managed to do large-scale surveys, experiments and interviews with elected politicians to understand how these individuals go about representing citizens. They have studied how politicians consult and process information (e.g. Baekgaard et al., 2019; Butler & Dynes, 2016), how the information affects their preferences, their perceptions of citizens' preferences, and their policy decisions (e.g. Jablonski & Seim, 2022; Lee, 2022; Pereira, 2021; Sheffer et al., 2018), and how politicians communicate back to citizens, tailoring their arguments and rhetorical strategies (e.g. Amsalem et al., 2017; Butler & Broockman, 2011; Grose et al., 2015), to give just a few examples. As a member and coordinator of INFOPOL/POLPOP—an international consortium of scholars doing elite studies—I have had the luck to be at the forefront of these developments (Sevenans, 2017, 2018, 2021; Sevenans et al., 2016, 2022, 2023, 2024; Soontjens & Sevenans, 2022; Walgrave et al., 2018, 2022, 2024).

This micro-level research is important because what individual politicians *say* and *do* has a large impact on the broader workings of politics, and on citizens' satisfaction with it. For example, the motivation of individual politicians to engage in negative campaigning (Ketelaars, 2019) translates into higher levels of incivility in the political arena (Frimer et al., 2023), in turn decreasing citizens' trust in politics (Van't Riet & Van Stekelenburg, 2022). The willingness of individual politicians to respond to public opinion (Sevenans, 2021) is the first step towards responsive policy-making by parties and governments (Soroka & Wlezien, 2009), ultimately affecting how well citizens feel represented (Holmberg, 2020). In other words, to understand how representative democracy works, where it is hampered, and which remedies are most likely to be effective, we need to gain insight into what drives the behavior of individual politicians.

Remarkably, in the rapidly expanding field on elite behavior, one crucial driver of human behavior has remained untapped: the emotions of politicians. There are now dozens of studies asking politicians to report what they *think* about a diverse set of phenomena to explain their representative actions, but almost no study to date has assessed how they *feel* about these phenomena as an explanation of attitudes or behavior (for notable exceptions, see Arceneaux et al., 2018; Öhberg & Cassel, 2023; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011). To be clear, there is research about how politicians *express* emotions in their rhetoric, but the underlying premise of this literature is that politicians exploit the use of emotional appeals strategically, and the focus is on the effects of these emotional appeals on citizens (e.g. Kosmidis et al., 2019; Osnabrügge et al., 2021; Widmann, 2024). The emotions *felt* by politicians are not considered. Their emotional experiences are missing from our theory of political representation. As a result, our theories of elite behavior are strikingly out of touch with the increasingly recognized impact of emotions in citizens' political behavior, and across scientific disciplines more generally (Dukes et al., 2021).

The goal of my project, titled 'how <u>T</u>he <u>Em</u>otions of <u>P</u>oliticians <u>E</u>xplain their <u>R</u>epresentative Behavior' (TEMPER), is to change this. TEMPER bridges the gap between theories of elite behavior and theories of the political behavior of citizens, which have—relying on insights from psychology—taken an "emotional turn" decades ago. Relying on survey-experiments and interviews with and direct observations of political elites—and combining self-reported measures of emotions

with psychophysiological measures—TEMPER sets off to investigate how the emotions of politicians influence their representative behavior.

Politicians' emotions matter—We need not look far to find well-known examples of situations where politicians' emotions visibly took the upper hand. In the United States, Senator Jeff Flake forced the Republicans to delay the vote on the nomination of Kavanaugh for the Supreme Court after he was halted by two women making sexual-assault accusations right before the vote—a decision that was significant for the legitimacy of the Me Too-movement. The decision, which he later regretted, was based on 'a feeling' evoked by these passionate women, he explained later (Pelley, 2018). In France, president Nicolas Sarkozy went viral after he said "Casse-toi, pauvre con!" ("piss off, poor idiot") to a farmer who refused to give him a hand—an emotional reaction deemed 'unpresidential' by many (Le Monde, 2008). While these are examples where emotions played up in the heat of the moment, we have indications that emotions also matter—perhaps in subtler ways—at less tense moments: in many interviews my colleagues and I conducted over the years, politicians suggested that their decisions and actions are more frequently based on (gut) feelings than one might think (see e.g. Walgrave et al., 2022). Importantly, politicians' own anecdotes likely represent only the tip of the iceberg, because even at instances where people *think* they act based on ratio, or where they *seem* to behave strategically, emotions actually play a powerful role and the cognitive explanations are in fact post-hoc rationalizations. The idea that emotions are simply at the basis of human behavior is well-established in psychology and neuroscience (Bargh & Morsella, 2008; Kahneman, 2011).

The importance of emotions has not been overlooked in the broader political science discipline: research on *citizens'* political behavior has embraced the importance of emotions decades ago (for recent reviews, see Gadarian & Brader, 2023; Webster & Albertson, 2022). We have learned that we can meaningfully predict how people react emotionally to political cues (e.g. Brader, 2006); and that emotions subsequently explain whether people search for information about political issues and whether they are persuaded by it (e.g. Marcus et al., 2000), whether they participate in politics (e.g. Valentino et al., 2011), who they vote for (e.g. Magni, 2017) and even whom they prefer to be friends with or marry (e.g. Iyengar et al., 2019). Political scientists realized that cognitive processes such as deciding to vote happen against a constant (and changing) background of emotion, making it important to study how political cues elicit emotions and how these emotions make certain attitudes and behaviors more likely than others.

This maturing research field offers fertile ground for a theory of *politicians'* emotional behavior. After all, politicians are people too. In their day-to-day business—while deciding which information to consult, who to listen to, or how to communicate to voters—politicians are essentially subject to the same emotional processes as ordinary people. Of course, politicians occupy a special position. One might argue that they are trained to control their emotions when forming opinions or taking decisions, and to behave in a detached manner (Sanchez Salgado, 2021), and that even if they sometimes react emotionally at first, political institutions have procedures in place (extensive deliberation, support by staffers, delay mechanisms…) to avoid whimsical decision-making (e.g. Cairney, 2016). But on the other hand, partisanship is rooted in emotion (Huddy et al., 2015; Iyengar et al., 2019), and as politicians are pre-eminently strong partisans for whom politics is the essence of their professional and personal lives, politicians may experience even stronger emotions in politics-related situations than citizens (Baekgaard et al., 2019). It is hard to imagine that these emotions have no bearing on their behavior. Moreover, we know that political decisions often need to be taken fast—this is especially true for communication decisions, in an era where communication has accelerated immensely (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999), but it is also true for certain policy decisions (such as COVID measures or reactions to terrorism)—creating fertile ground for them to be influenced by emotion despite institutional arrangements (see e.g. Claeys & Coombs, 2020). This gives us good reasons to assume that some of the findings about the importance of emotion for citizens can be translated to politicians.

14

In fact, we have evidence of one psychological bias that politicians are, just like ordinary citizens, susceptible to: motivated reasoning (e.g. Baekgaard et al., 2019; Christensen & Moynihan, 2024). Politicians favor information that aligns with their current beliefs, and reject information that contradicts these beliefs. For instance, they discount public opinion signals from citizens they disagree with as 'uninformed' (Butler & Dynes, 2016), and they underestimate how many citizens disagree with them (Pereira, 2021; Sevenans et al., 2023). Although research on motivated reasoning among elites has focused only on the cognitive manifestation of it, we know from research on citizens that motivated reasoning is rooted in emotion. The confrontation with counter-attitudinal information elicits immediate, automatic, negative affective reactions (Bakker et al., 2021; Lodge & Taber, 2013), which in turn lead to biased cognitive processing of the information. They make the person motivated to confirm prior beliefs rather than to acquire accurate beliefs (Kunda, 1990). The findings align with the general premise of TEMPER: that emotion likely influences the behavior of politicians, just like that of citizens.

Importantly, however, TEMPER is *not* a mere replication of citizen studies on elite samples. TEMPER will mostly raise and investigate *new* questions, that cannot be answered by studying citizens, simply because many behaviors are specific to political elites. For example, are politicians more responsive to citizens or to interest groups who manage to make them feel anxious or guilty, or hopeful? When participating in media debates, do politicians become more aggressive and uncivil when they experience genuine anger towards their opponents? We cannot properly answer these questions by studying citizens, not even when we select subsamples of citizens that resemble the composition of governments or parliaments (e.g. by oversampling higher-educated citizens, see Kertzer, 2022), because these are matters that citizens are simply not confronted with. And more so than citizens' behavior, politicians' behavior is *constrained* by the parties and institutions in which they operate. TEMPER will not lose sight of these constraints, but will address them directly in the design.

Why politicians' emotions have not been studied—The actual reason for the lack of attention to the emotions of politicians is, probably, an interplay of historical theoretical assumptions and methodological obstacles. Theoretically, foundational works in the field of political representation described elected politicians as "*utility maximizers*", as *strategic actors who make rational choices based on calculations of costs and benefits* (Downs, 1957). Politicians pursue vote-, office-, and policy-seeking goals (Strøm, 1990), this literature argues, and their policy stances or their campaign strategies are a well-reasoned balancing act between these core goals (e.g. Lees-Marshment, 2001; Stimson et al., 1995). The tendency to characterize politicians as purposive actors, whose decisions can be best understood as an outcome of *cognitive, strategic* considerations, reverberates in a lot of research to this date (for a similar argument, see Sheffer et al., 2018). Certainly, more and more studies question these assumptions for instance by looking at personality traits as a predictor of representative behavior (e.g. Dietrich et al., 2012; Dynes et al., 2023; Nai & Maier, 2021) or by replicating psychological decision anomalies on samples of political elites (e.g. Baekgaard et al., 2019; Linde & Vis, 2017; Sheffer et al., 2018), but these studies remain a minority, and they do not offer an account of the role of emotions. Only in the field of International Relations, there is more explicit attention to emotions and how they affect decision-making (see e.g. Sasley, 2011; Thiers, 2024). This work typically differs from TEMPER in scope (case studies of leaders' decisions in the context of war or terrorism), definitions (viewing emotions as experienced 'collectively' by nation states rather than individually), and methodologies (qualitative, post-hoc analyses), but these studies are nevertheless valuable for TEMPER to build on.

Methodologically, testing theories about the emotional experiences of politicians is challenging. The methods used in research on citizens' political behavior—typically: survey or laboratory experiments—are still relatively rare in elite research. After all, it is a challenge to get politicians to cooperate in research (Vis & Stolwijk, 2021; Walgrave & Joly, 2018), certainly in a lab setting, and the typically small samples of many studies place restrictions on what can be studied (Bailer, 2014; Grose, 2021). Conceptually speaking, emotions are often short-lived and arise in response to

concrete contexts or signals (unlike attitudes, or personality traits, which are more stable and therefore more easily studied in a survey design). Observing politicians in such concrete, relevant moments, or simulating such moments credibly in survey experiments, is challenging and requires a profound understanding how politicians operate on a daily basis. As an alternative to experimental methods, a handful of scholars in political communication have done efforts to infer the emotional experiences of politicians from their speeches, but the challenge here is that it is almost impossible to distinguish genuinely felt emotions from the strategic expression of emotion (Ekman et al., 1991; although voice pitch is notably difficult to control and therefore highly interesting, see Dietrich et al., 2019). This is why TEMPER opts for *direct* measurements of emotion.

Changing paradigm, shifting focus—The main premise underlying TEMPER is that, if we want to understand how politicians go about representing citizens, we need to take the emotional drivers of their behavior seriously. Importantly, studying the emotional foundations of elite's representative behavior is more than adding one explanatory factor (emotions) to an already long list of well-known (cognitive) factors. Studying emotion is a more ground-breaking innovation—it implies a *paradigm shift*, if you will—as it challenges our view of who politicians are, and how they make decisions, in fundamental ways. Laying bare the emotional underpinnings of representation, TEMPER will draw a portrait of politicians who are, above everything, human. As will be explained in more detail below, our interpretation of existing findings and patterns may change one we account for the role of emotions.

An important aspect of this paradigmatic change is *shifting the unit of analysis* from the level of the individual to the level of the concrete situation or signal eliciting a behavior. This is where TEMPER innovates in comparison with other studies that have started to challenge the notion of cool-headed politicians, such as those on politicians' personality traits or cognitive biases. Basically all extant literature explains variation in how politicians communicate and act foremost by scrutinizing differences between politicians (e.g. their role perceptions, personality, or gender), their parties (e.g. ideology, party type, or party position), and the broader context (e.g. the electoral system). It considers *who* communicates in more uncivil ways, or *who* is more responsive to what kind of voters on what kind of issues. This is obviously interesting, but it does not explain (yet) while the same politician may in one instance communicate very emotionally about a topic, and in another occasion not; or why the politician may react very differently to seemingly similar requests from voters. To focus on emotions means acknowledging that one and the same person may react differently from one instance to another, as the setting triggers different emotions. This does not mean that behavior is no longer predictable, but it means that we need to account for characteristics of concrete situations or signals. TEMPER will theorize systematically how characteristics of situations evoke emotions, and how these emotions contribute to explaining variation in communicative and responsive behaviors.

The added value of physiological measurements—I will say more about emotions below, but one important notion is that emotions, evoked by signals (e.g. a verbal attack), are multi-layered and consist of immediate, bodily components (e.g. sweating, a heightened heart rate, the tightening of muscles), and slower, conscious components (e.g. feeling angry). Most research on emotions and political behavior has relied on *measures of self-reported emotions*—which tap into the 'conscious components' only—successfully showing how they are predictive of behavior (e.g. Delton et al., 2018; Huddy et al., 2015). Interestingly, however, we know from research in psychology that our conscious feelings correlate only weakly with our immediate affective reactions to stimuli (LeDoux & Pine, 2016). The reason is that self-reported emotions are susceptible to rationalization (respondents not knowing how they feel), recall problems (respondents not remembering how they felt), and social desirability (respondents not willing to share how they really feel). *Psychophysiological measures of affect* (e.g. skin conductance as an indicator of arousal) are less susceptible to these problems as they capture the uncontrollable, bodily reactions to signals. Scholars have recently started to explore the potential of such measures in the context of politics, showing that affective reactions are predictive of people's political behavior *on top of* the effects of their

conscious feelings (e.g. Bakker & Schumacher, 2023; Garrett, 2019; Renshon et al., 2015). Although some are critical of this type of measures—as the data are often noisy and processing them is labor-intensive—there seems to be a growing consensus that a combination of both types of measures is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the role of emotions (Bakker et al., 2021; see also Webster & Albertson, 2022, p. 414).

Why me, why now—I see a unique opportunity to surmount the theoretical and methodological challenges related to studying politicians' emotions, and to engage in a study of their self-reported feelings *and* physiological reactions. As a longstanding member of the INFOPOL/POLPOP consortium—an international consortium of scholars doing elite studies—I designed and conducted large-scale surveys, survey-experiments, and interviews with national and regional elected politicians five times now: in 2013, 2015, 2018, 2022, and 2025 (data collection currently in preparation). I personally did hundreds of face-to-face interviews and acquired a profound affinity with how politicians think and act. As a result, I possess five essential qualities that are needed to pull this project off.

First, I have *theoretical expertise*. I have been working on individual politicians' representative behavior throughout my career, and several of my most important contributions are situated at the intersection of political representation, political communication, and political psychology (e.g. Sevenans, 2021; Sevenans et al., 2022, 2023). Second, I have ample *methodological experience*. While working on various topics, a common thread throughout my work was the development of credible survey-experimental scenarios (Sevenans, 2021; Soontjens & Sevenans, 2022; Walgrave et al., 2018) or of creative designs (e.g. Sevenans et al., 2016, 2022) to get as close as possible to how politicians behave in the real world. This will be a much needed skill for this project. Third, and maybe most importantly, I have *unique access* to politicians. Throughout the years, my colleagues and I have worked hard to build a relationship of trust with national and regional politicians and their parties, resulting in high (and rising) response rates—in the last wave, we obtained a response rate of 78% (n = 363) among national and regional Belgian politicians. This is why I know for sure it is feasible to do another large-scale elite study. Crucially, I can leverage our good reputation among politicians to go beyond self-reported measures (which can be implemented in 'traditional' surveys or interviews), and make them participate in an unprecedented data collection of their physiological reactions, both to signals embedded in surveys and to real-life political events (via direct observations). Even if only a part of the politicians is willing to participate in these newer methods, the data will offer unique insights into the emotional underpinnings of the behavior of politicians. Fourth, I have the much-needed *contacts* to conduct a multifaceted project of this size. For example, to carry out the physiological measurements, I can rely on the vast experience of my colleagues of the *Antwerp Social Lab*, a 'core facility' of my university that brings together expertise and research infrastructure in one unit, which happens to be located right next to my office. Finally, I have experience with *project coordination and management*. As a postdoc, I have taken up a pivotal role in the INFOPOL/POLPOP consortium for many years now, coordinating both external management processes (successfully collaborating with a growing group of now 14 country teams) and internal team processes (how to organize the Belgian team to lead this consortium). I am ready to assemble and lead my own team.

The moment to conduct TEMPER is *now*. Theoretically, the sooner we gain insight into the emotional foundations of politicians' behavior, the sooner we (as a field) can adapt our theories and models to account for these processes, and catch up with the "*rise of affectivism*" that we observe across scientific disciplines (Dukes et al., 2021). Methodologically, the latest technological developments have brought these theoretical ambitions within reach. With regards to the psychophysiological measurements of affect, in particular, we now have reliable instruments that can be taken to politicians' offices instead of being dependent on a lab-setting, making it more realistic to do these measurements on elite respondents (Borrego et al., 2019; Kulke et al., 2020; Schuurmans et al., 2020; Skiendziel et al., 2019).

Objectives

The ultimate goal of TEMPER is to initiate a new paradigm in the field of elite behavior, that accounts for the role of emotion in the coming about of representative actions. Given the limited time and resources of a single project, I clearly delineate the substantive scope of interest, and engage with two specific areas of political representation research (conceived broadly). The first subfield, on the *political communication style* of politicians, focuses on what they *say* and tries to understand, for instance, the varying levels of incivility in their communications. The second subfield, on *responsive policy-making*, is concerned with what politicians *do*, and more specifically to what extent their policy decisions reflect the preferences and interests of citizens. These domains lend themselves well to the subject (as I will explain below). That said, they represent only a fraction of the broader representation literature, and I hope to be able to extend my study to other dimensions of the representational relationship in the future.

In each of the two fields, my objectives are to assess, in a systematic manner, (1) which characteristics of situations/signals evoke what kind of emotional responses in politicians; (2) how these emotions influence their subsequent behavior; and (3) how the 'emotional explanation' of behavior maps onto existing (mostly cognitive) explanations of behavior. I will first elaborate the dependent variables, and then clarify how I intend to approach each of the three objectives. Before that, however, I need to take a step back and define the concept of 'emotions'. The overall framework of TEMPER is visualized in Figure 1.
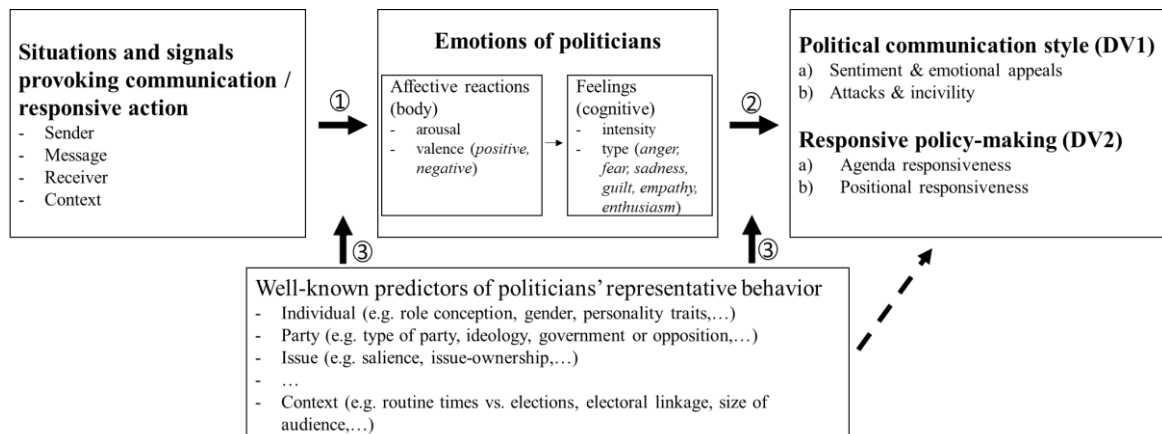

Figure 1—Framework of TEMPER

Defining emotions—Emotions have been defined in many ways and it is impossible to do justice to the different approaches within the scope of a project proposal, but it is important to be transparent upfront about the working definition used here. In line with much of the contemporary work in political psychology, I define emotions as "*reactions to signals about the significance that circumstances hold for an individual's goals and well-being*" (Gadarian & Brader, 2023, p. 192). An example in the realm of politics would be the reaction that occurs when an politician is personally attacked by an opponent in a debate. The signal—here: the speech—immediately activates the sympathetic nervous system (Cacioppo et al., 2007), alerting the person they are under attack. This evokes uncontrollable bodily reactions such as sweating, a heightened heart rate, or the tightening

of muscles, possibly followed by cognitive emotional evaluations, such as the realization that one is angry (because the attack is unjustified), or afraid (for the electoral consequences). I use the term '*affective reactions*' to refer to the bodily reactions and the term '*feelings*' to refer to the conscious, cognitive experiences—and 'e*motions*' as an umbrella term encompassing both.

Importantly, emotions occur in direct response to signals (such as an attack during a debate), but they can also be brought about prospectively or retrospectively. For instance, a politician may feel angry in recalling an attack received days earlier. This is how emotions can influence not only immediate behaviors (e.g. the reply during the debate), but also behaviors that take place at later points in time. The angry politician may write a retaliatory social media post the next day. The emotions evoked by a rousing speech from an interest group leader may resonate weeks later, motivating a parliamentarian to question a minister.

How exactly do emotions influence people's attitudes and behavior, then? Put simply, and in line with dominant theories in political psychology such as Artificial Intelligence Theory (Brader, 2006) or appraisal theories (Scherer et al., 2001), I see emotions as a continuous process going on in the background of the human body and mind, affecting everything else we do. Forming attitudes or taking decisions happens against a constant (and changing) background of emotion. Interestingly, different emotional states evoke different types of behavior, in a predictable manner (Lazarus, 1991). For example, we know that people who experience fear are more likely to engage in information seeking behavior, and are more open to change their opinions (Valentino et al., 2008); while angry people, by contrast, stick more with their pre-existing opinions, but are more likely to engage in action (e.g. MacKuen et al., 2010; Suhay & Erisen, 2018). To come back to the example: there is reason to think that an attacked politician who experiences anger will react differently (stick to message; fight back) than one who experiences fear (hesitate; withdraw).

Contrary to what the acronym TEMPER might suggest, I will look not only at negative emotions but will pay as much attention to positive emotions. Positive emotions such as enthusiasm or pride (for instance evoked by the rewards from meeting grateful voters) or compassion (with a voter who was treated unfairly) must be important emotional drivers of politicians' behavior—why else would they be motivated to stay in politics? When it comes to negative emotions, I will focus on emotions such as fear, anger, sadness (or disappointment) and guilt, which have been suggested to be the most relevant emotions in the context of political behavior (Gadarian & Brader, 2023).

The definition comes with two important implications. First, emotions do *not* necessarily lead to "irrational" decisions (McDermott, 2004). The idea that emotion is antagonistic to reason (which we inherited from ancient philosophy, see e.g. Plato's work on rhetoric) and that behavior is either rational or emotional, is outdated from a neuroscientific point of view (Marcus et al., 2000). All decisions are shaped by emotions and whereas some emotional states foster thoughtful and 'rational' decision-making, other emotional states lead to whimsical or biased decisions. The strength of research on emotion lies in understanding how political cues or situations elicit emotions, and how these emotions subsequently make certain attitudes and behaviors more likely than others. This is what TEMPER will do with a focus on elite behavior specifically.

The second implication is that TEMPER will focus on emotions as experienced by individuals, not by collectivities. Of course, individuals' emotions are affected by group dynamics. For instance, politicians' emotions will be driven by partisan identification, with politicians being predisposed to experience negative (positive) emotions towards political out-groups (in-groups) (Lodge & Taber, 2013). The 'signals' that elicit a politician's emotions do not need to affect the person's own well-being directly: political leaders can experience feelings 'on behalf of' their country or state, for example (Keys & Yorke, 2019). These kinds of processes will be accounted for in the project. But a take on emotions as truly collective in nature (i.e. group experiences, see e.g. Mercer, 2010) would—however interesting—bring us too far here.

Emotions & political communication (DV1)—The first set of dependent variables is situated in the field where politicians and emotions have been studied most (but with a focus on *expressed* emotions, not *felt* emotions): the field of political communication. Scholars in this field, as early as Aristotle, realized that emotion (or *pathos*) is a powerful rhetorical tool. Most initial work was devoted to mapping the effects that emotive political rhetoric has on citizens (e.g. Brader, 2006; Damasio, 1994; Marcus et al., 2000). As researchers accumulated knowledge about the—sometimes helpful (e.g. Valentino et al., 2011), sometimes harmful (Mutz & Reeves, 2005)—effects of emotional communication, they started to take an interest in the *supply side* of emotive communication by politicians: Who appeals to what kind of emotions? And under which circumstances? We need to understand how politicians communicate in real-life to assess its impact on voters, and we need to understand *why* they do so, if we want to incentivize politicians to avoid certain types of emotional communication, such as uncivil emotional attacks.

This is the first literature to which TEMPER will contribute, by looking at two dimensions of the emotive communication of politicians. The first is the extent to which what politicians say (e.g. words, style figures,…) is affectively charged. Literature has looked into the 'overall' level of *sentiment* (i.e. positive or negative affect) in political communication (e.g. Crabtree et al., 2020; Kosmidis et al., 2019; Osnabrügge et al., 2021; Pipal et al., 2024; Rheault et al., 2019), as well as the extent to which politicians *appeal to specific emotions* such as fear, anger or enthusiasm (e.g. Nai & Maier, 2024; Ridout & Searles, 2011; Widmann, 2021, 2024; Wojcik et al., 2015). The second taps into what is often labeled 'negative campaigning': communication aimed at criticizing opponents as opposed to promoting oneself (Geer, 2006). As this happens not only in campaign times, but also in day-to-day politics (see e.g. Poljak, 2023), we prefer the term 'attack politics'. We distinguish here between civil and *uncivil* attacks, the latter being impolite, rude, and breaking the social norm of respectful debate. A growing body of research is devoted to explaining variation in the use of attacks and incivility (e.g. Dolezal et al., 2017; Frimer et al., 2023; Nai et al., 2022; Nai & Maier, 2020, 2021; Poljak, 2022, 2023; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011; Walter, 2013, 2014).

The remarkable paradox that TEMPER will address is that while the political communication literature recognizes emotions as an extremely powerful force driving human behavior (this is what makes studying the emotive rhetoric of politicians relevant in the first place), it has hardly considered how the very same emotions may be influencing the behavior of politicians. The large bulk of the extant literature takes a rational choice perspective to explain how politicians communicate. Scholars portray politicians and parties as "*strategic agents*" who "*based on rational considerations … balance expected benefits and potential costs*" when deciding to engage in attack politics (Maier and Nai 2023, 197), who are able to anticipate "*backlash effects*" thereof (Dolezal et al., 2017, p. 666), for whom "*emotive language is a tool used strategically to appeal to voters*" (Osnabrügge et al., 2021, p. 885), and who use incivility because they think "*it will help them politically*" (Frimer et al., 2023, p. 266). The assumption is that politicians, being "professional" practitioners of politics, are much more purposive and cool-headed than ordinary citizens, and that we can understand variation in communication styles best by theorizing about the varying strategic considerations that political actors face.

There is obviously much value in this approach: the political campaigns of big parties *are* carefully crafted. So, research has successfully identified a set of factors that explain variation in political communication styles. These factors are situated at the level of individual politicians, their party and its political position, the issue at hand, and the broader electoral context. These factors are summarized at the bottom of Figure 1 (in a non-exhaustive manner), and the dashed arrow represents their effect on politicians' communicative behavior. To elaborate just one example: research suggests that, due to strategic incentives to attract voter attention, politicians use more emotive language in high-profile debates with larger audiences than in more low-profile debates (Osnabrügge et al., 2021), with in particular higher levels of (uncivil) attacks when these debates are about salient issues (Poljak & Seeberg, 2024).

But can strategic calculations explain all communicative behavior? When politicians throw insults at each other, is that always a thought-out strategy, or are they sometimes simply frustrated with the course of the debate or the arguments of the opponent? When politicians shed tears in the communication about a tragic event, is that a well-performed piece of theater, or may they just be genuinely touched? There are clear indications that a substantial part of politicians' communication behavior is *not* strategic (for empirical evidence of this, see Maier et al., 2023) and emotions may account for currently unexplained variance in politicians' communication behavior.

Is it possible, moreover, that there is an emotional explanation for what researchers now interpret as 'strategic behavior'? For instance, the inclination of politicians to go more emotional and uncivil in high-profile debates about salient issues may, at times, be a well thought-out strategy to attract voter attention. But here is an alternative explanation: the electoral stakes for politicians in such debates are significantly higher, and this probably intensifies politicians' emotional reactions to arguments and attacks by their political opponents. They experience a higher risk of 'losing face', which we know (from citizen studies) brings about anger and anxiety (Walter & Ridout, 2021), in turn fostering retaliatory aggression (Chen, 2015). In other words, emotions could be driving the behavior we observe—and not just strategy, as we tend to assume as long as we adhere to a paradigm that sees politicians as purely purposive actors.

TEMPER will investigate these matters in three prototypical venues of political communication: interventions in parliament, media debates, and social media posts. The venues vary on a number of key dimensions. The immediacy of the communication differs: media debates require immediate responses from politicians while reactions via social media, or in parliament, can be (but are not always) slower. Affect and emotions likely play a larger role when the time lag between the emotional reaction and the communication is smaller: there is no time to 'cool down' and reappraise the situation (Claeys & Coombs, 2020). The type of interaction differs too, as debates are face-to-face, oral interactions while social media facilitate distant, written interactions. Face-to-face encounters probably evoke stronger emotions (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). And, the degree of moderation differs, with parliamentary interventions being moderated more strictly than media debates or social media, where emotions easily run high and politicians are not rebuked for going uncivil. To test how emotions affect politicians' communication style, such variation is interesting.

Emotions & responsive policy-making (DV2)—If the first set of dependent variables deals with politicians' *outgoing* communications, the second one focuses more on how politicians deal with *incoming* information from voters and how it affects their legislative actions (i.e. substantive representation). A core assumption of representative democracy is that politicians are somehow responsive to the preferences and interests of citizens (Jacobs & Shapiro, 1994). Being responsive does, of course, not mean that citizens' preferences need to be followed slavishly—as citizen's opinions can be uninformed or selfish—but politicians are expected to pay attention to the concerns and preferences of voters, and bring these to the table for consideration (Pitkin, 1967). Conceptualized this way, responsiveness can take at least two forms: politicians can pay attention to the issues that people care about (*agenda* responsiveness) (Jones & Baumgartner, 2004), and/or they can voice the policy opinions of people when they take legislative action (*positional* responsiveness) (Soroka & Wlezien, 2009). These are the two dimensions of responsive policy-making TEMPER will look at. Importantly, as TEMPER deals with individual politicians, the focus is on responsiveness throughout the policy-making process (i.e. whether politicians act upon citizens' concerns and positions in internal party meetings, by asking parliamentary questions, by initiating bills,…) rather than on responsive policy outcomes (e.g. legislation) (see also e.g. Butler et al., 2017; Esaiasson et al., 2013).

Information about citizens' preferences reaches politicians in many different forms. Citizens write e-mails to politicians, take to the streets to protest, have interest groups voice their concerns, express their views in opinion polls which are reported on by mass media, are active on social media, and so on. I consider all these types of information to be 'public opinion signals'—they teach politicians

something about what (a segment of) the public wants. Vast literatures in political science are devoted to examining under what circumstances politicians are more likely to be responsive to each of these signals (for literature reviews see e.g. Amenta et al., 2010 on social movement signals; Costa, 2017 on citizen-initiated contacts; Dekker & Bekkers, 2015 on social media signals; or Wlezien & Soroka, 2016 on general public opinion signals). I risk falling into repetition, but the overall tenet of these literatures is that the decision to act responsively to public opinion signals (or not) is a *cognitive* one: politicians are "*strategically (un)responsive*" to voters (Soontjens, 2022, p. 731) in "*rational anticipation*" of the electoral consequences thereof (Franchino et al., 2022). To be clear, there is undoubtedly truth in this explanation and the accumulated knowledge on the topic is impressive.

In line with previous arguments, however, the premise of TEMPER is that there is much to gain by considering an emotional explanation of responsiveness. For example, one advocacy strategy of civil society organizations is to appeal to politicians' emotions (Sanchez Salgado, 2018)—as illustrated by Greta Thunberg's repeated "*Our house is on fire*" (aimed at evoking fear) and "*How dare you?*" (aimed at evoking politicians' guilt for their inaction) in her UN climate speeches to world leaders (Reuters, 2019). On a much smaller scale, citizens trying to get something done from their legislator can go for a very emotional approach (e.g. leverage a dramatic personal testimony) or they can focus on factual arguments. Are politicians sensitive to such emotional persuasive attempts, and are they more (or less) responsive to them than to (otherwise similar) non-emotive signals? In what other ways can public opinion signals generate emotional reactions, and with what effects? We do not know.

Again, I believe that emotions can not only explain previously unexplained variance in responsiveness, they may also help us understand the mechanisms underlying extant findings. For example, could the finding that legislators are more responsive to citizens of the same gender or race (see e.g. Butler & Broockman, 2011) be explained by politicians' stronger and more positive emotional responses to people or problems they can identify with—and is, vice versa, the *unresponsiveness* to voters who are *different* the consequence of a lack of emotional resonance? In the discussion on whether it is important to have politicians from all subgroups of society present in the legislative arena ('*descriptive representation*'), or whether legislators can be strategically incentivized to represent people who are not like them (Mansbridge, 1999), the mechanism is important. The type of incentive needed to make politicians overcome an emotional reflex is fundamentally different from the type of incentive required to counter a cognitive behavior. If the behavior is cognitive, giving reasons (or arguments) should work. If the behavior is emotional, it will be important to offer politicians insight into these emotional processes and, for instance, to offer strategies to *reappraise* these spontaneous emotions (Goldin et al., 2008). This is the type of debates TEMPER will contribute to.

This last example nicely illustrates the causal relationships that TEMPER will study. I will investigate how characteristics of situations or signals influence politicians' emotions (e.g. do signals from people who resemble the politician evoke stronger and more positive emotions?) (**Figure 1, arrow 1**), how these emotions affect subsequent behavior (e.g. do the emotions lead to more responsive action?) (**arrow 2**), and how there may as such be an emotional explanation of why well-known predictors exert effects (i.e. these predictors are in fact *moderators* of emotional processes) (**arrow 3**). The core endeavor of TEMPER will be *to develop a systematic theoretical framework* addressing these relationships, to *deduct a set of relevant expectations* from that framework, and to *put these expectations to the empirical test*. Building the theoretical framework involves thoroughly reviewing currently disconnected literatures and making them speak to each other. We want to 'inject' the literature on representation & elite behavior with theories of emotion (from political behavior and political psychology). Below I try to show, objective by objective, how I will go about this, discussing some concrete expectations that are meant to be exemplary of my approach.

How situations/signals elicit emotions—Recall that we are interested in situations and signals that provoke politicians to communicate (DV1) (e.g. the politician participates in a media debate; is 'tagged' in an offensive Facebook post of a competitor;…) or to act (un)responsively (DV2) (e.g. the politician is contacted by a citizen, sees a news report of a protest). Our first goal is to identify characteristics of such situations or signals that affect the emotional experiences of politicians (see **Figure 1, arrow 1**). I anticipate that these characteristics will be situated at various levels, including features of the sender, the message, the receiver (i.e. the politician), and the context (this list is non-exhaustive). I develop examples for the two first levels here. One obvious example of a *sender characteristic* is party affiliation. People tend to dislike partisan out-groups (Iyengar et al., 2019) and the confrontation with supporters from these groups generates negative feelings such as anger, also among politicians (Öhberg & Cassel, 2023). The type and intensity of emotions experienced by politicians towards opponents, voters, or social movements, will depend on these actors' respective party affiliations. Another, less obvious sender characteristic of a public opinion signal is whether the sender is a person (e.g. a voter expressing an opinion) or not (e.g. opinion poll numbers). The inspiration comes from the literature on 'exemplars': personal stories elicit stronger emotions as there is a "face" to direct the emotions to; there are human interest details that make the story vivid (e.g. Aarøe, 2011; Gross, 2008). A few examples of *message characteristics* were developed earlier: the use of emotional appeals by societal actors (Sanchez Salgado, 2018), or the use of personal attacks by opponents in a debate (Goovaerts & Turkenburg, 2023) are expected to evoke strong(er) emotional reactions. Another example is the use of moral arguments—statements about what is 'right' or wrong' (Haidt, 2003)—which are linked to emotion more strongly than empirical or pragmatic arguments. Violations against moral beliefs elicit strong negative emotions in citizens (Garrett, 2019; Lipsitz, 2018; Rozin et al., 1999) and probably in politicians too.

It will be important to account for combinations of situational features (e.g. sender*message characteristics) to understand how they produce emotional reactions in politicians. A basic mechanism of emotional transmission is *mimicry*. Put simply, emotion is 'contagious' (Hatfield et al., 1993), and politicians may for instance "catch" emotions from public opinion signals. An example would be that a politician would experience fear in response to protesters expressing strong anxiety about climate change. However, such mimicry is likely contingent on partisanship: while people easily 'copy' the emotions from members of the in-group, this works very differently for out-group members. Radical right-wing politicians might not feel much when left-wing voters shares their fear; they might experience anger, or even positive emotions (e.g. joy) by seeing the disliked actor feeling bad (Stapleton & Dawkins, 2022). In sum, TEMPER will consider *interactions* of situational/signal characteristics to theorize about which *mechanisms* of emotional transmission evoke what *type and intensity of emotion* in politicians.

How emotions influence behavior—The next step will be to theorize systematically how the experienced emotions of politicians affect their behavior (see **Figure 1, arrow 2**). Again, this is not the place to develop a full theory and I can only elaborate some *exemplary* expectations here.

With regards to the *political communication style* of politicians, the main (obvious but untested) expectation is that sentiment and emotional appeals in the communication of politicians are foremost a product of the emotions genuinely experienced by the politician. I furthermore hypothesize that *attacks and incivility* will be a function of strong, negative emotional experiences. We know from citizen studies that anger (e.g. elicited by the use of moral arguments) provokes more, faster, and more extreme reactions (Van Bavel et al., 2012), for instance on social media (Brady et al., 2017). Translating these findings to elites, I expect that even among politicians who have no strategic reasons to go uncivil, anger could escalate uncivil behavior. But anxiety, too, is relevant: the fear of 'losing face' leads to more aggressive communication (Chen, 2015). This aligns with findings that politicians who score high on dark personality traits (e.g. narcissism) use more incivility: these personalities are particularly sensitive to criticism that threatens their self-esteem (Nai & Maier, 2020).

With regards to *responsive policy-making*, we know that politicians' responsiveness is, foremost, a function of their *own preferences* (Miller & Stokes, 1963). This means that politicians are more likely to act responsively to a public opinion signal, when the signal is persuasive to the politician (Sevenans, 2021). Interestingly, certain emotional states (such as fear) are more conducive of opinion change (persuasion) than others (Brader, 2006) and this will be the focus of a first set of hypotheses. An example expectation is that politicians are more likely to act responsively to public opinion signals which manage to elicit anxiety among politicians. As politicians act not only on their own preferences but also on their *perceptions of public opinion* (Miller & Stokes, 1963), another exemplary expectation is that public opinion signals that evoke stronger emotional experiences among politicians—irrespective of the direction or type of emotions—have a higher likelihood of generating responsive action. The stronger emotional response boosts the accessibility of the information in the mind of the politician (Yiend, 2010), making the signal weigh more heavily on the formation of a public opinion perception (for a similar argument see Miler, 2007, 2009), ultimately resulting in more responsive behavior.

Linking emotional & cognitive explanations—An explicit objective of TEMPER is to link emotional explanations of elite behavior to existing explanations (**Figure 1, arrow 3**). As visualized in the figure, my main assumption is that many of the well-known predictors of behavior are, in fact, (partial) *moderators* of the effect of emotion. I gave the example above of how the tendency of politicians to go more uncivil in high-profile debates (for which we now have a cognitive/strategic explanation, see Osnabrügge et al., 2021) could be the result of the stronger emotions that politicians experience to emotional triggers (such as moral arguments, personal attacks,…) in such contexts. Importantly, the emotional and the cognitive explanations are not necessarily competing: the emotional experiences are probably the *drivers of* subsequent cognitive considerations. A similar line of reasoning applies to many of the well-known predictors. The different behavior of politicians who are electorally unsafe, as compared to those who are electorally safe (e.g. André et al., 2015), might be driven by an enhanced susceptibility to anxiety. Well-known gender differences in behavior could be the consequence of women's different emotions, most notably their sensitivity to negative emotions (Lithari et al., 2010). Personality traits, too, are linked to the experience of emotion. This is not the place for a discussion of all the possibly relevant factors; what is important is that TEMPER will make an attempt at assessing to what extent factors exert effects *via,* or *because of,* emotion.

Section b. Methodology

The empirical part of TEMPER consists of a series of *survey-experiments and interviews* with elected politicians in two countries: Belgium and Switzerland. Additionally, and in Belgium only, we will do *direct observations* (followed by short questionnaires) during actual media debates and party meetings. Both during the survey-experiments/interviews and the observations we will assess not only politicians' self-reported emotions but also—with permission of the respondents—physiological measures of affect. In this section, I will discuss the data and methodology, justify the country selection, describe the research team and its supportive environment, and sketch a timeline for the project.

Survey-experiments with politicians—The research population of TEMPER are *national and regional* members of parliament, ministers, and party leaders. I run the survey-experiments in two countries, Belgium and Switzerland, foremost to maximize the sample size (as there are only so many politicians in a country; see more on this below), and I plan two rounds of data collection (in 2027 and 2029) simply to maximize the number of survey-experiments we can do. I will rely on our tried-and-tested strategy, which is to invite politicians for a face-to-face meeting of approximately an hour, in which we ask them to complete a questionnaire on a laptop, without observing their answers (+/-30 minutes), combined with an open (semi-structured) interview (+/- 30 minutes). An

online survey would be more cost-efficient, but it typically leads to lower response rates, it comes with the risk that staffers complete the questionnaire rather than the politicians themselves, and most importantly here, it does not allow for physiological measurements of affect nor for open interview questions. We invite all politicians to participate. Based on previous response rates (78% response; n=363 in Belgium, n=368 in Switzerland) I know it is realistic to survey a representative sample of at least 700 politicians. I am aware that maybe not all politicians will allow the physiological measurement—but my intuition is that *at least* 25% of the respondents will be prepared to do so (resulting in an n > 175); this is a *highly* conservative estimate. This is definitely sufficient, as meaningful effects have been detected with smaller samples (e.g. Sassenus et al., 2022). I do not expect any uncooperativeness from politicians when it comes to questions on self-reported emotions, so this part of the analysis can definitely be done on the large sample.

It is feasible to do three to four survey-experiments per round (they will not take the full 30 minutes, but we need to consider survey fatigue). As the theorizing of TEMPER will generate more interesting hypotheses than can be tested in six to eight experiments, I briefly explain here how I intend to decide which hypotheses to prioritize. My strategy consists of several steps: (1) First, in the framework of the ongoing POLPOP-project we will be interviewing politicians in the spring of 2025. As a pilot to TEMPER, in the open-ended part of the interview, I will include question where politicians are asked to tell us about '*the last time they were really [angry/disappointed/ enthusiastic/...] in their job*' (process-tracing). In a semi-structured manner, I will track down the causes of their emotions and the effects it had on their subsequent behaviors. It will be valuable to observe where many politicians themselves, as first-hand witnesses, see a meaningful role of emotion. (2) I can use the online panel of Belgian, Dutch-speaking *local* politicians that I established together with a colleague (response of approx. n=1500) to *pre-test* a broader set of survey-experiments and identify the most promising designs. The pre-tests can also be used for manipulation checks, easing the burden on the actual surveys. (3) The two-round design is an asset for hypothesis prioritization too: the results arising from the first round (to be conducted in '27), and new questions arising from these results, can guide the design of the second round (in '29). (4) Finally, in my view, an important contribution of TEMPER's *advisory committee* (see more information below) can be to give input on which hypotheses to prioritize, considering the scientific and normative relevance of the different possible expectations.

Concretely, in the experiments politicians are presented with hypothetical scenarios. Essentially, we simulate situations that politicians frequently encounter, with the goal of measuring their emotional responses and behavioral intentions in response to these situations. For example, they watch short clips of a (fictitious) politician making a controversial statement in a media debate, or they are presented with (fictitious) public opinion signals (e.g. in the form of letters, opinion polls, or news items covering protest actions) where citizens request them to bring an issue under the attention of parliament. Importantly, a politician is exposed to several versions of a similar scenario, resulting in a (within-subjects) 'vignette' or 'factorial survey' design (Wallander, 2009). We carefully manipulate one or two characteristics of the situation—corresponding to a concrete hypothesis deducted from our theoretical framework (e.g. there is one condition where the fictitious politician uses a moral argument in the debate, and one condition where he or she uses a different kind of argument)—while keeping all other aspects as similar as possible (but not identical, to avoid obvious manipulations/survey fatigue). The question is whether the emotional response of the politician to the vignette, and the subsequent behavioral response, is affected by the manipulation. As we will need relatively strong manipulations to be able to detect differences in physiological affective reactions, we will rely not only on textual, but also on (carefully crafted) *visual* stimuli (see e.g. Bakker et al., 2021; Wouters & Walgrave, 2017).

To measure politicians' *affective reactions*, we invite them to wear an *Empatica EmbracePlus* wristband while completing the survey and being exposed to the stimuli, which reliably measures skin conductance as an indicator of arousal (i.e. the intensity of the emotional response) (Borrego et al., 2019; Schuurmans et al., 2020). We ask permission to use the built-in webcam to record

politicians' facial expressions while reading or watching the stimuli, an indicator of valence (i.e. the positive/negative direction of the emotion). The software package *iMotions* has an emotion detection feature and can tell us, based on subtle facial signs, whether politicians experience positive or negative affect (Kulke et al., 2020; Skiendziel et al., 2019). To measure their *self-reported emotions*, we rely on validated survey question batteries, taking into account recent best practices (Webster & Albertson, 2022). By means of both open- and closed-ended questions we tap the types of emotions that politicians experience, and how strongly they experience these emotions.

In the survey, after the measurement of emotion, we include items to capture the dependent variables. With regards to their communication style (emotionality, attacks, incivility), we for instance give politicians a short communication task to tap how they intend to react publicly (DV1). This can be a written task (e.g. to draft a social media post), but given that an interviewer is present, the instruction in the survey can also be to *tell* the interviewer (in an oral manner) how one would reply (e.g. in the context of a media debate)—increasing the realism of the task. With regards to responsive policy-making, we for instance probe the likelihood that the politician would take action upon a public opinion signal (DV2). Importantly, we opt for measures that account for the partisan and institutional constraints that politicians face. Politicians normally make decisions in consultation with their parties. The preferences of individual politicians matter because party positions and strategies are not fixed: they are constructed and debated by the politicians who make up the parliamentary party group, and all individuals weigh on the debate. But once a party position is decided on, party loyalty kicks in, especially in strong party systems like Belgium (Depauw, 2003). Survey instruments can account for these dynamics by using *politicians' position-taking within the party* as an interesting intended behavior (for a similar argument see Butler et al., 2017; Sevenans, 2021). Examples of questions are "*Would you bring this voter e-mail under the attention of your colleagues?*", "*To what extent are you motivated to try and persuade your party on this issue?*", or "*How will you communicate about the issue given the leeway that you have within the party?*".

An obvious limitation of the design is that the scenarios are *hypothetical*—because avoiding deception of political elites is appropriate from an ethical point of view, see e.g. Naurin & Öhberg (2021)—and that we measure *intended* behavior (i.e. a *proxy* of how they would communicate, the *intent* to act responsively,…) rather than real behavior. However, this is true for a lot of—nevertheless highly interesting—experimental elite studies. As echoed by Grose (2021), the theoretical import of the questions, and the exceptionally large elite sample, can outweigh those limitations. And, intended behavior remains the most informative predictor of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). I will develop questions that minimize the likelihood of making 'empty promises', for instance by asking politicians who claim that they would 'bring a voter e-mail under the attention of a colleague' (DV2) to actually give the name of the colleague they would forward the information to. And, importantly, I will compensate for this limitation by also *observing politicians in the real world*, to which I turn below.

Interviews—The open interviews allow to get in-depth insight into the perceptions that politicians have of the drivers of their behavior. In a series of follow-up questions about the survey-experiments, politicians will be asked to elaborate on their intended reactions to the experimental stimuli, and in particular on their motivations, on *why* they would behave so-or-so. Politicians' answers will be subject to rationalization—they will likely focus on the cognitive/strategic drivers of their behavior more so than on the emotional drivers—but this is exactly what I am after here: in the context of TEMPER's third objective (integrating emotional and cognitive explanations) it is crucial to get insight into these cognitive considerations too. It allows us to observe how politicians themselves give meaning to these processes and to analyze, in a systematic manner, whether and how certain types of emotional reactions are conducive to certain types of cognitive considerations. The qualitative content analysis of the interview transcripts will be done in NVivo.

Observations—As a complement to the survey-experiments and interviews, I will observe politicians' actual behavior during media debates and party meetings. Because of the time-intensive nature of such a data collection, this part of the project will be done in Belgium only.

To observe politicians' *political communication style* (DV1), I zoom in on one venue: media debates. More specifically, for a period of two years, we will attend all sessions of the debate program '*Het Debat*', in which a few members of parliament (and sometimes experts) gather in the studio of the Flemish parliament itself to debate important political issues. Based on numbers from the current legislature, I estimate there will be about 25 debates over the two-year period, hosting approximately 60 politicians. The debates are ideal for TEMPER because they are lively (politicians display their whole communication style repertoire), but not too high-profile, making it realistic to approach them beforehand and to ask them to participate in the study. The debates are moderated by journalist Marc Van de Looverbosch, who is also a (practical) teacher in the Political Communication program of my department and who can help us to persuade the politicians to participate. There is a possibility to turn to other, similar types of debates (e.g. regular political debates organized on campus by student organizations) if we want to increase the sample size.

Each intervention in the debate will be coded for relevant characteristics, such as the use of moral arguments, uncivil claims, or emotional appeals (see the theoretical framework). To measure how the politicians react affectively to the occurrence of these characteristics in the interventions of other politicians, we invite them, again, to wear wristbands capturing arousal, and we make professional, frontal recordings of the debaters to be able to assess negative/positive valence from their facial expressions. It is impossible to measure their self-reported emotions in the moment (as we cannot disturb the debates) but right after the debates, politicians will be invited for a very brief follow-up interview (5 mins) where we bring up concrete situations that happened during the debate to gauge self-reported emotions. All these variables are then used to explain politicians' communication style during the debates. It is obviously difficult to make strong causal claims here. To some extent, there is temporal causality: we can test, for example, whether a politician's stronger, more negative reactions to claims made by the opponents (as measured by rising arousal, and negative valence, while the opponent is making these claims) leads to incivility afterwards. But we will need to be cautious because politicians may, for example, be experiencing anger *in anticipation of* the uncivil attack they are about to engage in. In a real-world setting, the distinction between experienced and expressed emotions are harder to make. Triangulation of the survey-experimental data (strong on causality) and the observational data (strong on external validity) will be a key asset of the methodology.

To observe politicians' *responsive policy-making behavior* (DV2), we will observe meetings held by the parties' parliamentary factions in preparation of the plenary parliamentary session. During these meetings, the parties select which oral parliamentary questions they will ask the same afternoon. Parliamentary rules in Belgium prescribe that each party can ask only one or two questions; and as there are typically more members of parliament (MPs) with ideas for questions, a selection needs to be made. This selection process is interesting for TEMPER, because it raises the question whether the emotional reactions of the participants to the various possible questions are predictive of which question will be chosen.

Much in line with the observations of media debates, the idea is to code relevant characteristics of the debates (and more specifically of the question ideas that are up for debate). Politicians wear wristbands (for arousal), we record their facial expressions (for valence), and we gauge their self-reported emotions (in short follow-up interviews after the meeting). The dependent variable is a politician's explicit support for a question idea to be asked in the actual plenary meeting.

As a risk mitigation strategy, in case the respondents are uncomfortable wearing the wristbands during the observations (especially during the media debates, where they are being filmed), we can

look into voice pitch as an indicator of arousal (Dietrich et al., 2012, 2019), which is notably hard to control and therefore an interesting measure of emotional experience.

Country selection—To a considerable extent, the patterns I am after are inherent to human behavior. This is why I believe the added value of TEMPER is not in a large comparative design, but more in the use of innovative methods which are, at least in the field of elite behavior, unprecedented. A lot of research in political psychology relies on data collected in a single country only. This is what I will do for the observational part of TEMPER as well. Nevertheless, for the survey-experiments and interviews, I will study *two* countries: Belgium and Switzerland. An important reason to do so is practical. Relatively large sample sizes are required in order to have sufficient power to do the survey-experiments. As there are only so many politicians in a country, including a second country is the only way to increase the sample size. As doing elite research requires a lot of affinity with the local political context—and politicians are generally much more willing to participate in research from their 'own' (national) universities (Vis & Stolwijk, 2021; Walgrave & Joly, 2018)—an obvious decision is to conduct TEMPER in Belgium, where I personally acquired ample experience with elite surveying and built good relationships with politicians and their parties. The choice to collaborate with Switzerland was straightforward. There are good possible subcontractors in the country with an excellent track record in elite interviewing.

Substantively, the country selection makes sense. Belgium and Switzerland are in many ways similar, which is important if we want to pool the data from the survey-experiments. The countries have similar political systems (proportional, multi-member districts,…), and they do not differ widely with regards to the cultural expression of emotion (Scherer et al., 1986). While studying different cultures would, in the longer term, no doubt be interesting (e.g. Italy as a country of emotional excess, or South-Asian countries as intolerant for public expression of emotion) it is not the core interest here and would threaten the comparability of the data. This being said, there is limited, but interesting institutional variation between Belgium and Switzerland. Most notably, the Swiss political system is set up to foster close contacts between politicians and citizens as the system relies on direct democracy (referendums) for certain types of decisions and the parliament runs on a 'militia principle', allowing politicians to combine their political function with a 'regular' profession (Pilotti, 2015). We can leverage this variation for an exploration of how the emotional linkages we are after are influenced by institutional constraints.

Why politicians will participate—The success of the proposed methods hinges on the willingness of politicians to participate in the project. It is therefore worth reiterating that my colleagues and truly I acquired politicians' trust thanks to the personal connection we could make during the many face-to-face interviews (which politicians like a lot more than distant online surveys), the regular feedback about the results of our studies, and our good reputation of handling the sensitive data with care. In previous rounds of interviews, politicians talked openly about highly sensitive topics, such as pledge-breaking (admitting that it is acceptable to break pledges made to voters) or ideological U-turns (admitting to change opinions for electoral gains). This is why I am confident that a lot of politicians in Belgium and Switzerland will be prepared to participate in this project, not only in the more 'traditional' methods for which we have repeated evidence of excellent response rates (regular survey-experiments and interviews), but also in the 'new' approaches which may seem more sensitive (e.g. psychophysiological measures and observations). Importantly, I believe that politicians themselves will be substantively interested in TEMPER—especially because I plan to reserve some space in the survey/interviews for questions in which *they* are interested. In previous interviews, politicians liked to talk great lengths about the emotionally taxing nature of politics today, and about the difficulties of dealing with angry and uncivil voters, unrespectful colleagues, and so on—things that impact their daily well-being significantly (see also Flinders et al., 2020; Weinberg, 2022). I will pilot what aspects of the relationship between emotion and politics they find interesting (e.g. questions about the various possible coping strategies to deal with the unpleasant sides of being in politics). As politicians' intrinsic motivation is crucial for participation, this likely pays off (Walgrave & Joly, 2018).

Research team and supportive environment—TEMPER will be conducted by a team of two PhD students, one postdoc, and myself as a PI. I will recruit a postdoc with a background in theoretical and experimental psychology, complementing my expertise in political representation and communication. Given that the project is theoretically challenging (as it requires mastering and integrating different areas of research), and given that the empirical study is delicate (studying elites requires maturity, diplomatic communication skills,…), an experienced postdoc is crucial. The idea is that one PhD will make their dissertation in the field of political communication (DV1), while the other makes their dissertation in the field of responsive policy-making (DV2); and that the postdoc co-supervises one of the PhD students. As a PI, I will supervise the full project and will be responsible for the overall coordination and management.

The project will benefit greatly from the immediate presence of the *Antwerp Social Lab* next to my office, a 'core facility' of my university that is devoted to helping researchers do psychophysiological measurements. They rent out all the necessary tools and software *and* provide technical assistance with the use of the tools, data processing, and interpretation. The Swiss team can use the materials from the *Interdisciplinary Centre for Affective Sciences* from the University of Geneva.

Furthermore, three experts with ample experience at the intersection of political science research, political communication, and emotion/psychophysiology have accepted to be part of the *Advisory Committee* of TEMPER: Prof. dr. Gijs Schumacher (University of Amsterdam, director of the renowned 'Hot Politics Lab'), Prof. dr. Stuart Soroka (University of California, world leading scholar on political representation with strong affinity with emotional theories), and Prof. dr. Karolien Poels (University of Antwerp, director of the 'Antwerp Social Lab'). The idea is to meet three times over the course of the project, to discuss the research priorities, the designs and the research findings—and to receive valuable advice and feedback. More generally, I am lucky to be surrounded by the my colleagues from *research group M²P* (including Stefaan Walgrave, Karolin Soontjens, Peter Van Aelst, Evelien Willems,…) and of the broader *INFOPOL/POLPOP network* (including Lior Sheffer from Tel Aviv University, Christian Breunig from the University of Konstanz, and Jack Lucas from the University of Calgary), who are leading scholars in the field of elite behavior and who I envision collaborating with on TEMPER's core research questions.

Timing & planning—In terms of timing, TEMPER strives for a continued good balance between data collection and paper writing. The most intense periods of data collection will be early '27 and early '29, when the survey/interview rounds take place (each preceded by a pre-test on local politicians). In between, we will do the observations (2027-2028), but this is much less time-intensive: it involves the presence of the researchers only once every few weeks. As a consequence, between the two survey rounds, a lot of time can be devoted to producing a first batch of output. It is important to mention that most paper ideas will be preregistered, allowing us to start writing actual theory sections and analysis plans *before* data collection (in 2026). After the second round of surveys/interviews (and from mid '29 onwards), there is thus sufficient time to finish the work. I plan to wait at least half a year after the project kicks off to hire the second PhD—to make sure one person is around until the end of the project. The work plan is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1—Planning overview

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Development of the theoretical framework	▓				
Data collection					
Pilot studies of local politicians	▓		▓		
Survey-experiments and interviews		▓		▓	
Observations		▓	▓		
Analysis & finishing papers					
Theoretical papers		▓			▓
Papers about survey-experiments			▓	▓	▓
Papers about observations				▓	▓
Papers about qualitative interviews			▓		▓

Conclusion—Wrapping up, TEMPER breaks new ground by investigating the emotional drivers of politicians' representative behavior, thereby initiating an urgently-needed paradigm shift in how we think about political elites. The data collection of TEMPER is ambitious. There is a good balance between more traditional methods of elite research (survey-experiments, interviews, self-reported emotions), and new, highly innovative ones (psychophysiological measures, observations). The project is feasible as it leverages the key strengths of the academic profile of the PI.

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