

# Grant application proposal form 2021

## NWO Talent Programme – Vidi scheme

Applied and Engineering Sciences  
Social Sciences and Humanities  
Science  
Health Research and Development



← Expand for general Explanatory Notes

## 1. Institution and field of research

← Expand for Explanatory Notes on section 1

### 1a. NWO domain

Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH/SGW)

### 1b. Title of the research proposal

**Under pressure: How citizens respond to threats and adopt the attitudes and behaviours to counter them**

### 1c. Summary (max 300 words)

With a pandemic, climate change, terrorist attacks, and financial meltdowns, we have in the last twenty years experienced multiple threats that potentially could have (or will in the future) fundamentally alter our way of life. Threats have adverse effects when they erode democratic stability by sparking violence and fuelling support for anti-democratic politics. However, threats might benefit society when they trigger desired behaviour, such as reducing the eco-footprint or getting a vaccination. Given the complex role of threat in society, it is crucial to understand better the processes underlying people's threat perceptions and develop strategies for mitigating the adverse effects and stimulating the beneficial effects of threat perceptions on democracy and society.

Multiple disciplines study threat: political scientists study the role of elites in causing threat; (political) psychologists study the attitudes and behaviors individuals adopt to counter and regulate threats; and neuroscientists analyze how the body responds to threats, and how such responses are regulated. Problematically, the different disciplinary approaches to threat do not communicate. Thereby limiting our general understanding of the role of threat in society. This project bridges theories from political science, psychology, and neuroscience by the overarching research question: **How do people perceive and regulate threats and adopt political attitudes and behaviours to counter these threats**

We will use an innovative mixed-methods design: in-depth interviews, cross-country surveys, survey experiments, and laboratory experiments, as well as intensive experience sampling studies that track threats over multiple days. We aim to provide a new theory of the threat-politics link and influence the next generation of research on the interplay between threats and politics in political science, psychology, and neuroscience. In addition, the project provides insights into how citizens can deal with the threats they will face and contribute to the resilience of modern-day society.

## 1d. Keywords (max 5)

Political psychology, political attitudes, political behaviour, threat, threat regulation

## 1e. Main field of research

Indicate the main field of research and (if applicable) other fields of research, in order of relevance, using the codes and names from the dropdown menu. For more information see the Explanatory Notes.

	Code/ Field of research:
Main field of research:	44.20.00 Political science
Other field(s) of research (if applicable):	Choose field of research
	Choose field of research

## 1f. Public summary

NL

### **Onder druk: onderzoek naar de oorzaken en gevolgen van maatschappelijke dreiging.**

*Dr. B.N. Bakker, Universiteit van Amsterdam*

Met een pandemie, klimaatverandering en terroristische aanslagen zijn er een hoop dreigingen die de wereld nu, of in de toekomst, dramatisch kunnen veranderen. Het gevoel van dreiging kan de maatschappij ontwrichten doordat het leidt tot protest, steun voor antidemocratische opvattingen of zelfs geweld. De centrale vraag in dit project is dan ook hoe ontstaat het gevoel van dreiging en hoe gaan mensen om met dit gevoel? De uitkomsten van dit project kunnen mensen helpen om te gaan met de dreigingen van de 21<sup>ste</sup> eeuw en voorkomen dat dreiging de maatschappij ontwricht.

Wordcount: 91

ENG

### **Under pressure: studying the causes and consequences of societal threats**

*Dr. B.N. Bakker, University of Amsterdam*

With a pandemic, climate change, and terrorist attacks, we have seen threats that could have, or will in the future, fundamentally alter our way of life. The perceptions of threat can disrupt society as threat fuels protest, support for anti-democratic policies, and even leads to violence. In this project, the researchers will study how people perceive and regulate threats and adopt political attitudes and behaviours to counter these threats. The project will inform citizens how to deal with the threats of the 21st century and prevent threats from disrupting society.

Wordcount: 90

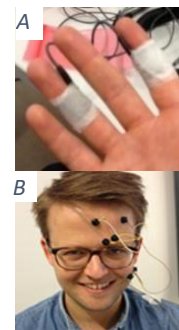
## 2. Research Proposal

### 2a. A description of the proposed research

#### 2a1 Overall aim and key objectives

With a pandemic, climate change, terrorist attacks, and financial meltdowns, we have in the last twenty years experienced multiple threats that potentially could have (or will in the future) fundamentally alter our way of life. These threats can (or will) have adverse and beneficial effects on democracy and society. The effects are adverse when threat responses erode democratic stability: financial crises caused riots; terrorist attacks increased popular support for anti-democratic policies; and threatened by 5G, people set fire to 5G antennas. The effects of threat responses are beneficial when they set in motion desired behaviour: the experience of climate threat stimulated people to reduce their eco-footprint, and threat motivated the take-up of the COVID-19 vaccines. Hence, it is crucial to understand better the processes underlying people's threat perceptions and develop strategies for mitigating the negative or stimulating the positive effects of threat perceptions on democracy and society.

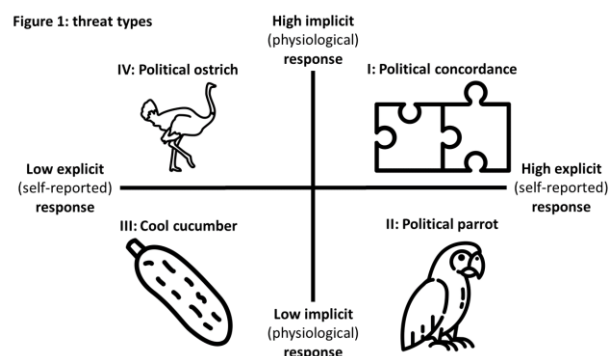
Threats are a person's perceptions that trouble, danger, or disaster is underway<sup>1,2</sup>. The focus is on **societal threats** such as pandemics and climate change, and **imagined threats** such as 5G, and the Illuminati. Threats arouse: our body responds with implicit responses, and we explicitly report threats verbally.<sup>3</sup> Implicit threat responses are the affective physiological responses to threat and happen unconsciously and 50 to 100 milliseconds after exposure to the threat<sup>4,5</sup>. Affective physiological responses consist of two dimensions<sup>6</sup>: arousal is the intensity of the response, and skin conductance activity captures this (picture A)<sup>7-9</sup>; negative valence captures negative affect and activity of the corrugator supercilli (muscle above eyebrow, picture B) measured with facial Electromyography (fEMG) captures this.<sup>10,11</sup>



Multiple disciplines study threat: political scientists analyze how elites influence explicit, self-reported threats by constructing and communicating threats<sup>12-14</sup>. (Political) Psychologists<sup>15-20</sup> study the explicit attitudes and behaviors individuals adopt to counter and regulate threats. Neuroscientists, by contrast, analyze implicit responses to threats and how implicit responses are regulated<sup>21-25</sup>.

Problematically, because these different disciplinary approaches to threat do not communicate, there is no overarching theory of how implicit and explicit threat measures produce particular behaviors and attitudes vis-à-vis societal and imagined threats. To this end, this project bridges theories from political science, psychology, and neuroscience with the overarching research question: **How do people perceive [RQ1] and regulate threats [RQ2] and adopt political attitudes and behaviours to counter these threats [RQ3]?**

The distinction between explicit and implicit responses to threat is crucial to understanding how citizens process threats. I introduce possible combinations of explicit and implicit responses to threats (Figure 1): (1) the **politically concordant** person has a similar high implicit and high explicit response to threat; (2) the **political parrot** reports threat but has no physiological response; (3) the **cool cucumber** has no implicit and explicit response to threat; (4) the **political ostrich** has an implicit response to threat but does not acknowledge it.



To answer the **first part of the research question (i.e., how do people perceive threats [RQ1])**, I propose that “elite cues” are a critically intervening variable that cause people to see issues and events as threatening or not. Elite cues could influence explicit threats and make people self-report issues and events as threatening (**political parrot**) or non-threatening (**cool cucumber**). For example, if the elites of your party say that climate change is a threat, you see it as threatening, while if elites of your party say climate change is a hoax, you see climate change as non-threatening. Two lines of political science research lead to these expectations: (1) people adopt issue attitudes that are cued as party-consistent in the political information environment<sup>13,26-29</sup>; (2) self-reported attitudes<sup>30,31</sup> and discrete emotions<sup>12,32,33</sup> can be an expression of the support for a political group. As threats are expressive, the implicit affective physiological responses to threats are low (or absent) for parrots.

Threats can, however, evoke high implicit affective physiological responses<sup>7,11</sup>. **Political concordance** between high self-reported threat and a high affective physiological response occurs when elite cues give meaning to physiological responses using threat frames. This expectation builds upon neuroscience research which suggests that when a person experiences affective physiological responses, the brain tries to explain these sensations<sup>21,23,34</sup>. A brief message can give meaning to a physiological response<sup>35,36</sup>. Political science research shows that frames – which highlight certain aspects over others<sup>37</sup> – shape public opinion<sup>38,39</sup>. Building upon political science research, I introduce threat frames that subscribe (“You should feel...”) the state of threat (“threat label”) to a person. A threat frame causes alignment between the implicit physiological response and the explicit self-reported response. At the same time, non-threat frames (which subscribe the state of no threat) create the **political ostrich**: people have a physiological response, but elites tell them not be threatened.

**Whether people are political concordant, political parrots, cool cucumbers, or political ostriches could influence the extent to which elite cues lead people to adopt attitudes and behaviours to tackle the threat [RQ3].** The threats of political parrots are expressive, and for them, the effect of threat on attitudes and behaviours should be minimal. Cool cucumbers have no reason to adopt attitudes and behaviours to tackle threats as they are not threatened. However, when people are politically concordant, the aligned explicit and implicit responses should make them likely to adopt attitudes and behaviours to tackle the threat. When people are ostriches, the implicit responses will, most likely, not translate into attitudes and behaviours.

The **second part of the overarching research question is the question of if and to what extent strategies to regulate threats can help to counter these threats [RQ2].** When threatened, people try to get rid of the feeling and return to a pleasant state of mind<sup>40</sup> using emotion regulation strategies: the strategies people use to “influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions”<sup>25,41,42</sup>. In response to a threat, people could, for instance, engage in: **cognitive reappraisal** and reframe situations to change the emotional impact (e.g., climate change is threatening, but there is hope as climate change offers opportunities to recreate a better society); **down-regulation** and lower the intensity of the threat (about, for instance, climate change); or **distraction** and direct attention away from the threat (e.g., shifting attention from climate change to other (non-)political topics that are not threatening). Preliminary research in one context (US) on one explicit (self-reported) threat (Trump) suggests that there is variation in the regulation strategies people use to deal with a threat<sup>43,44</sup>. As such, it is largely unknown **why, when and how people regulate societal and imagined threats**. It is also unknown if and to what extent **the regulation strategy depends on whether people are political concordant, political parrots or political ostriches**, and to what extent **there are cross-threat differences in the threat regulation strategy**.

**The threat regulation strategy could condition whether people, in response to threat, adopt the attitudes and behaviours to tackle the threat [RQ3].** Threat regulation strategies might explain the different consequences of threat for society: when faced with a threat, people either decrease the feeling of threat via threat regulation or engage in actual action to change the cause of the threat<sup>45,46</sup>. For example, Hillary Clinton voters in the 2016 US Presidential election were *less* politically active when they successfully used cognitive reappraisal to deal with the threat of the Trump presidency compared to those who did not use cognitive reappraisal<sup>44</sup>. This preliminary study focused on one threat (Trump), one aspect of threat (explicit self-reported threat), one threat regulation strategy (cognitive reappraisal) and one outcome (protest). As such it is unknown **why and how people regulate threats in politics**. It is also unknown if and to what extent **the regulation strategy depends on whether people are political concordant, political parrots or political ostriches** (cool cucumbers have no threat to regulate). Finally, there might be **cross-threat differences in the threat regulation strategy**: is suppression the way people deal with climate change, while down regulation a way to deal with crime?

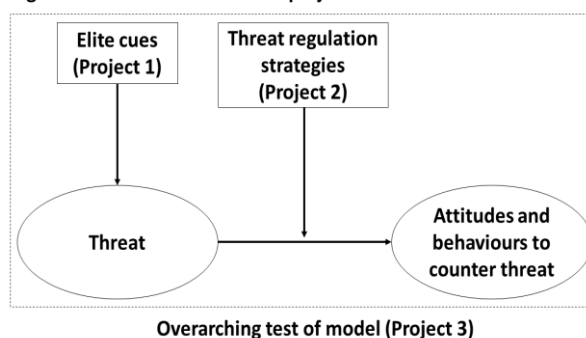
I propose **three integrated projects (see Figure 2)** to test the overarching research question and the three sub-research questions:

**Project 1:** Answers RQ1 by analysing whether and how elite messages can alter the threats and threat perception (PI, PhD1).

**Project 2:** Answers RQ2 by analysing the common threat regulation strategies in response to societal threats and their effect on political attitudes and behaviours to tackle the threat (PI, PhD2).

**Project 3:** Answers the overarching question by analysing how the factors discussed in projects 1 and 2 jointly produce particular attitudes and behaviours to tackle the threat (PI).

Figure 2: Theoretical model and projects



## Novelty and originality

This interdisciplinary project has four theoretical contributions:

1. The main goal is to produce **a theory of how people perceive and regulate threats and adopt political attitudes and behaviours to counter these threats**. Doing so, this project will influence the next generation of research on the link between threat and politics in political science, psychology and neuroscience.
2. This project opens the possibility that there are **multiple pathways between threat and politics depending on whether people are concordant, parrots, or ostriches** and contributes to an ongoing discussion about different aspects of threats in political science<sup>9,47</sup>, psychology<sup>24,48</sup> and neuroscience<sup>21,22,34</sup> and the way these play a role in politics<sup>11,49</sup>
3. By also focusing on imagined threats such as 5G and the illuminati **this project will contribute to understanding the causes, consequences and regulation of misinformation** in political science<sup>50</sup>, psychology<sup>51</sup>, and neuroscience<sup>52,53</sup>.
4. This project will open **a new line of research regarding possible interventions in the threat-politics link via threat regulation strategies**.

## Project 1: Elite messages can alter the threats and threat perception. (months: 6-42, PI+PhD1)

### WP 1.1: Cue-taking experiment: self-reported parrots or cool cucumbers?

*Goal:* To establish whether elite cues cause people to explicitly self-report issues and events as threatening or non-threatening.

*Approach:* I will conduct survey experiments -- an approach most often used to establish the effects of elite cues in political science<sup>13,26,28,54</sup>. The survey-experiments have a 3 [Some groups / In-party / Out-party] x 3 [control / Threat message/ Non threat message] design. Participants are introduced to an issue and some groups (the control condition), the in-party (preferred party) or the out-party (least preferred party) expresses that the issue is threatening, not threatening, or neutral (control). The dependent variable is the explicit self-reported threat towards the issue. The experiment consists of multiple rounds about societal (e.g., water pollution and food irradiation) and imagined (e.g., 5G) threats. Participants come from online panels in the Netherlands and United States (N=3500 participants in each country; power analysis: power of .95, alpha=.05, estimated effect size  $d=.2$ ). Conducting the experiments in two countries allows me to test the robustness of the findings because the political systems (multiparty vs. two-party) differ<sup>54,55</sup>. If people are political parrots, they report higher levels of threat in threat message (vs. control message) is endorsed by the in-party compared to the out-party condition (or some groups). If people are cool cucumbers, they report lower levels of threat when the in-party endorses the non-threat message (vs. control message) compared to the out-party condition (or some groups).

### WP 1.2: The lie detector study

*Goal:* To establish whether self-reported threats are, at least partly, expressive.

*Approach:* I designed a laboratory experiment – inspired by an established paradigm<sup>56</sup> – to assess whether self-reported attitudes and behaviours are expressive. First, participants are connected to the physiological equipment measuring arousal (skin conductance, picture A on page 3) and valence (facial Electromyography, picture B on page 3). Participants are randomly assigned to the lie-detector condition or control condition. In the **lie-detector condition**, participants receive detailed instructions that they are connected to a “lie-detector” capable of measuring their “true” responses to survey responses<sup>56</sup>. In the **control condition**, participants do not receive any information about the physiological equipment. While connected to the equipment, participants complete a survey where they report the extent to which they are threatened by societal (e.g., pandemics, terrorism, climate change, job security) and imagined (e.g., 5G) threats. 200 participants (based upon an a priori power analysis; power=.95, alpha=.05,  $d=.2$ ) will complete the study at the UvA laboratory. **If the self-reported threats are lower in the lie-detector condition compared to the control condition, then this would be evidence of expressive responding and support for the fact that people, to some extent, are political parrots.**

### WP 1.3: Threat frames causing political concordance, political parrots, cool cucumbers, or political ostriches

*Goal:* To establish whether politicians provide meaning to physiological responses using threat frames.

*Approach:* I will collect physiological and self-reported responses to a threat and expose people to different frames – a laboratory experiment is, therefore, the best design<sup>10,11</sup>. We will measure arousal (skin conductance) and negative valence (fEMG) to capture physiological responses to threat. In the experiment, participants will be exposed to a series of negatively valenced messages shown on a computer screen and read aloud by a voice actor, see<sup>10</sup>. The experiment consists of four steps in each round:

1. Participants learn that something aversive is going to happen (e.g., “A new study showed that the concentration of antibiotics in the Dutch groundwater is increasing.”)
2. Participants are randomly exposed to the threat frame (“this is threatening”), a non-threat frame (“this is not threatening”), or a control message (“this requires attention”)
3. Participants are asked to indicate how threatened they feel.
4. People’s attitudes (e.g., attitudes towards climate change) and behaviours (e.g., sign a petition, donate a small amount provided by researcher to cause, post a message on social media) to tackle the threat are measured.

This procedure is repeated for 10 political issues and interspersed between 10 positively valenced and 10 neutral messages. As a manipulation check, I will test whether the physiological reactions in response to the negatively valenced message are higher compared to the neutral messages. The study will be conducted among 200 participants (based upon a power analysis, see WP1.2) at the UvA and 200 participants in the partner laboratory of Stuart Soroka at the University of California in Los Angeles. My team and I will test the following expectations:

- Political concordant people show that the association between the physiological responses and the self-reported threat is stronger in the threat frame condition than in the control condition.
- Political ostriches have a physiological response but report that they are not threatened in the non-threat condition vs. the threat condition.
- Political parrots have no physiological response but report they are threatened in the threat frame condition compared to control.
- Cool cucumbers have no physiological response and report that they are not threatened in the non-threat condition vs. the threat condition.

**Project 2: To what extent do citizens regulate societal and imagined threats, and to what extent does the regulation of threat condition the threat politics-link? (months: 18-54, PI+PhD2)**

**WP 2.1: Exploring the regulation of threat in politics**

*Goal:* Explore when, why and how people regulate the threats they experience.

*Approach:* I will conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews<sup>57</sup>, which provide valuable information about the way people think about politics<sup>58,59</sup>. We will recruit a diverse group (N=50) of Dutch citizens at various public events: a museum, cultural festival, evangelical gathering and a fair (for a similar approach<sup>11</sup>). In a 30-minute interview, the interviewer (PhD1) will discuss the big societal and imagined threats people experience and how they regulate the experience of these threats. The interviewer will also discuss the attitudes and behaviours people adopt associate with the threats. The study will provide a unique insight in the regulation strategies people use and inform WP2.2.

**WP 2.2: Testing the regulation of threat in politics**

*Goal:* Test the strategies people use to regulate threats and whether different threats are regulated differently.

*Approach:* I will conduct an experience sampling study, an intensive study involving participants to report their threats, attitudes and behaviours on multiple occasions throughout multiple days<sup>60</sup>, which is a common strategy to study emotion regulation<sup>44,61</sup>. Two weeks long, samples of Dutch and American citizens (N=1000 in each sample recruited from online panels) will on a daily basis reflect upon situations related to politics that made them experience threat. We will also ask participants what strategy they used to regulate these threats<sup>42</sup> and to describe whether they took any actions to tackle the threat (e.g., commented on social media, signed a petition, started a discussion about the topic, searched for information about the topic).

**WP 2.3. The effects of regulation of threat on attitudes and behaviours to tackle the threats**

*Goal:* Test whether emotion regulation strategies condition whether threats turn into attitudes and behaviours that address the threat.

*Approach:* Survey experiments allow me and my team to randomly assign participants to vignettes that stimulate the adoption of different emotion regulation strategies or not (see for instance<sup>43</sup>). In these experiments, participants will be exposed to a threat (for instance a message about climate change) and randomly assigned to different emotion regulation strategies (suppression, reappraisal) or a control condition. The dependent variables are the self-reported attitudes to the political issue and actual behaviours (e.g., donation of money, sign petition). The experiments will consist of different rounds that focus on different societal threats (crime, unemployment, pandemic, etc.) and imagined threats (5G). The experiments will be conducted using online samples (N=3500 in each country based upon power analysis  $b=.95$ ,  $\alpha=.05$ ,  $d=.2$ ) in the Netherlands and the United States. Suppose, for instance, that a threat regulation strategy hampers the

effect of a threat on behaviour to tackle the threat. In that case, we should find that in the threat regulation condition, compared to control, the behaviours to tackle the threat are lower compared to the control condition.

Project 3: how do elite cues and regulation strategies produce particular attitudes and behaviours that address the threat. (months 47-60, PI)

**WP 3.1: Test of the theoretical model**

*Goal:* provide a test of the overarching model (Figure 1).

*Approach:* I will conduct an experience sampling study. At multiple moments throughout the day, participants will be exposed to a series of elite cue experiments (informed by the findings in WP1.1 and 1.3) and experimental interventions to manipulate the threat regulation strategies (informed by WP 2.3). Table 1 provides some key features of the design. The study is **unique because we will follow the self-reported threats, attitudes and behaviours as well as affective physiological responses over a number of days in their natural environment**<sup>60</sup>.

Via a smartphone app we will collect self-reported threats and political attitudes and behaviours throughout the day and deliver the experiments. The EDA4move - a valid and reliable wearable device part of my Mobile Lab - continuously measures physiological arousal<sup>62,63</sup> (see picture C). On day 1, participants take the equipment home and **data collection runs for 5 days while participants are at home and engage in their regular activities**. 200 Dutch participants from the broader Amsterdam population (see als<sup>9</sup>) will participate in the study (power analysis:  $b=.95$ ,  $\alpha=.05$ ,  $d=.2$ ). The study's design will allow me and my team to get **a unique, ecologically valid<sup>64</sup>, test of my theoretical model outside of the laboratory**.



**Table 1. Design of the study in WP3.1**

	Start Day 1	Day 1-4 (between 8.30 am and 21.00 pm)	Day 5
Location	Behavioural Science Lab (BSL) of the UvA	At home	BSL of the UvA
Tasks	<p><b>Informed consent</b></p> <p><b>Survey:</b> socio-economic background, political attitudes &amp; behaviours</p> <p><b>Training:</b> connect EDA4move</p>	<p><b>5x times per day:</b> 2 minute survey about threats and political attitudes and behaviours</p> <p><b>Multiple times per day:</b> elite cue (derived from project 1) and threat regulation (derived from project 2) experiments</p> <p><b>People feel they are threatened:</b> they can tap the EDA4move and app will why they are threatened.</p>	<p>Final survey</p> <p>Debriefing</p>
Time	30 minutes	Total of 60 minutes over 5 days	30 minutes

**WP 3.2: Synthesis of results and a updated theoretical model**

*Goal:* integrate the findings of this project with the broader threat-politics literature in different disciplines.

*Approach:* There is limited space to provide a detailed and in-depth discussion of the theoretical model in empirical research articles. Therefore, I will write a theoretical paper to offer a new theoretical model of the threat-politics link. This paper will integrate the findings of this project (projects 1-3) with the state-of-the-art in political science, psychology, and neuroscience on the threat-politics link. A journal like Advances in Political Psychology could be an outlet.

**2a2. Research plan**

I advocate open and transparent social science research<sup>65</sup> and work following an open science workflow. My team and I will:

1. **Preregister our studies:** hypotheses, design, sample size (including power analysis) and analysis plan will be preregistered and we aim to publish registered reports (see<sup>10</sup>).
2. **Make materials available:** all materials (e.g., surveys, stimuli) will be placed on a public Open Science Framework (OSF).

3. **Make papers reproducible:** the data and replication files belonging to all papers will be publicly available.
4. **Open access:** working papers will be placed on preprint servers (psyArxiv) and we will publish papers in open access journals.

My team will consist of one PI (me) and two PhD candidates (three years each). PhD1 is involved in project 1 and will have expertise in political science and trained in survey-experiments. PhD2 is involved in project 2 and will have expertise in psychology or neuroscience. Both PhD students can attend a summer school for advanced training in the methods central in their projects.

**Table 2 shows the planned work and the tasks.** My team and I will produce eight papers and submitted to general science (e.g., Nature Human Behaviour), high-end general political science journals (e.g., American Political Science Review), psychology (e.g., Psychology Science), and specialized journals (e.g., Political Psychology) for publication.

#### Collaboration

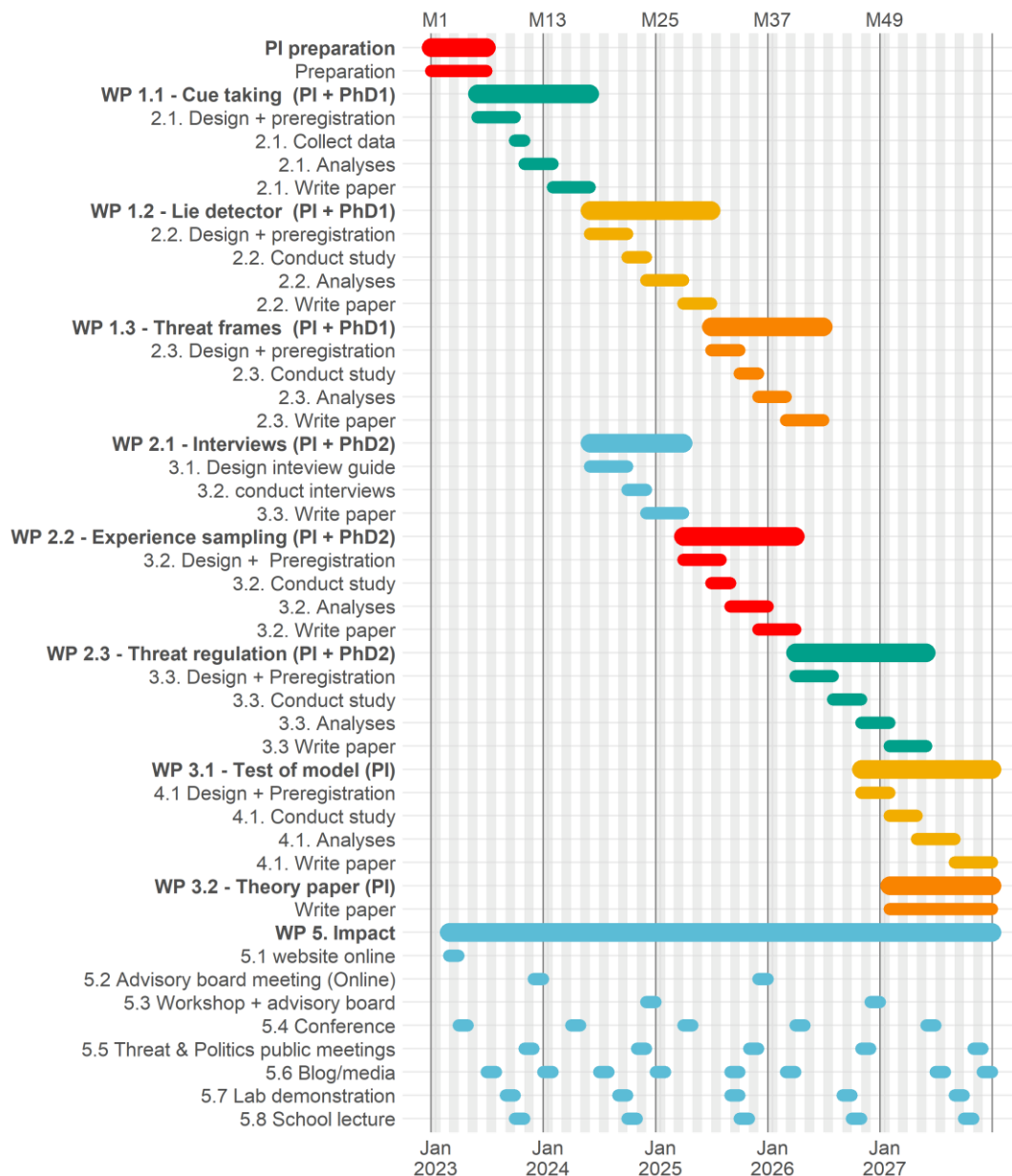
**A collaborative work environment** is created by embedding the project in the **Hot Politics Lab: an interdisciplinary, inter-university, international research group that I co-founded and co-direct**. My team and I co-organize the weekly Hot Politics team meetings and speaker series. Moreover, we will attend joint conferences and workshops and work on co-authored publications. **I have established a partnership with Professor Stuart Soroka at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) for this project: the laboratory experiments in the United States will be conducted in the UCLA laboratory facilities.**

I established a **board of advisors** for this project consisting of experts in psychophysiology (Soroka [UCLA, US], political science (Arceneaux [Sciences Po Paris, France] and Aarøe [Aarhus University, Denmark]), psychology (Brandt [Michigan State University, US]) and neuroscience (Tsakiris [Royal Holloway, United Kingdom]). The board will provide feedback on the project at different stages of the project.

My team and I will collaborate with my long-term collaborators<sup>9,10,66,67</sup> and Hot Politics co-founders Gijs Schumacher and Matthijs Rooduijn (Department of Political Science, UvA) and we will continue my interdisciplinary collaboration<sup>54,68,69</sup> with Yphach Lelkes (Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania), and Ariel Malka (Department of Psychology, Yeshiva University).



Table 2: Workplan overview



**2a3. Motivation for choice of host institute**

My project will be hosted at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR) the research institute of the Department of Communication Science at the University of Amsterdam. Communication Science at the UvA is the number 1 institute in the QS World Rankings 2021. ASCoR is a vibrant research community and consists of researchers who have studied the role of emotions in politics (Schuck, Otto) and emotions in general (Scholz). ASCoR researchers also have methodological expertise when it comes to intensive panel studies (Vliegenthart, Valkenburg, Araujo), laboratory experiments (Kruikemeier, Scholz), survey experiments (de Vreese, Bos), and in-depth interviews (van der Goot, Hameleers). Other departments hosts experts on threat and emotion regulation (Fischer, Sauter & Kindt in Department of Psychology) and political attitudes and behaviour (van der Brug, van der Meer in Department of Political Science). Scholars from these and other UvA departments regularly participate (attending and presenting) in my weekly Hot Politics Lab speaker series. To conclude, the UvA offers an interdisciplinary environment to which my project will contribute and benefit.

## 2b. Scientific and/or societal impact of the proposed project (Knowledge utilisation)

*Specify which kind of impact the proposal focusses on:*

Scientific and societal impact are of comparable focus

*Please elaborate on the scientific and/or societal impact of the proposed project:*

### **Scientific impact of the project**

By the end of this project, I have integrated different political science, psychology, and neuroscience theories of threat into a new theory on the threat-politics link. Project 1 bridges discussions in political science<sup>9,9,14,47,49</sup>, psychology<sup>24,48</sup>, and neuroscience<sup>21,22,34</sup> by addressing the question whether elite cues are the intervening variable that cause people to see issues and events as threatening or not. The role of threat regulation strategies in responses to threats and the consequences for political attitudes and behaviours (project 2) has the potential to open a new line of research in political psychology.

The findings of this project will impact different fields via conference presentations and publications and via four additional strategies:

1. The **project will be embedded in the Hot Politics Lab**: an interdisciplinary research group that I co-direct, and studies the role of psychological processes in politics. Fellows, PhD students, visitors and interns come from different disciplines, with different theoretical and methodological backgrounds. The Hot Politics Lab has two meetings each week that facilitate interdisciplinary exchanges:
  - **Internal meetings** where lab members present and discuss research designs, pre-analysis plans and draft papers. Meetings are interdisciplinary and attended by Hot Politics Lab members from different departments within the UvA.
  - **Hybrid speakers series** where experts in political science, psychology and neuroscience present their work. Scholars from around the world (via Zoom) and local faculty in Amsterdam attend the talks. My team and I will co-organize both meetings and frequently present our work.
2. I will **organize interdisciplinary meetings**. Twice a year, I will co-organize the Dutch Political Psychology Meetings. I will also organize conference-in-a-conferences during the Midwest Political Science Association Meetings as I have done in 2018 and 2020. The organized meetings will provide excellent opportunities to present our findings and connect the work coming out of this project with an interdisciplinary academic audience.
3. I will **hire PhD students with different backgrounds**. PhD1 will be a student with a background in political science, while PhD2 will be a student with a background in psychology or neuroscience. The international advisory board contains experts in political science (Aarøe<sup>32,70</sup> & Arceneaux<sup>13,14</sup>), communication (Soroka<sup>7,8</sup>), psychology (Brandt<sup>18</sup>), and neuroscience (Tsakiris<sup>21</sup>). The diverse background of the team and advisory board safeguards the interdisciplinarity of the project.
4. I will **follow an Open Science workflow that facilitates collaboration**. All data, software code, and materials will be publicly available. Other researchers can verify our findings<sup>71</sup>, replicate our studies and use the data and materials for meta-analyses as well as tests of novel hypotheses.

### **Societal impact of the project**

My research emotions and politics (4b1-2, 4b4) has received much attention from the public (via laboratory demonstrations), stakeholders (workshops for politicians organized by the Robert Bosch Stiftung, policymakers at the ministry of education), and media (for instance, an item in the Kennis van Nu – the leading Dutch science communication television program). With a central focus on threats, the proposed project will be of interest to a diverse audience. The strategy discussed below has **three goals: people experience the study (#1 & #2), gain knowledge about the outcomes of the project (#1-#5), and reflect on the role of threat in their life (#1-#5)**. Five different activities will reach **specific groups (#1 & #2)** and **broad audiences (#3-#5)**

1. **Lectures in high schools**: I believe researchers should engage young people in scientific research. In the 2016 and 2020 elections, I co-organized a tour of academics around dozens of high schools throughout the Netherlands, where we talked about the foundations of voting behaviour. **I will give a series of lectures at high schools throughout the Netherlands about threats and ways to regulate threat**. The talks will demonstrate the relevance of social science research. Moreover, if young people learn how to deal with threats effectively, then the next generation of young people is well prepared for the threats that they will face in the future.
2. **Laboratory demonstrations**: I will **bring science to the people via laboratory demonstrations and data collection outside of the university**. People can participate in a study and get informed about our studies' methods, theories, and outcomes. I have successfully demonstrated my psychophysiological research at different events (2016 President's Night, UvA events, European Parliament events). Moreover, I have

collected data using laboratory-in-the-field studies at a cultural festival (Lowlands), a film festival (InScience), fair (Tilburgse kermis), museum (Beeld & Geluid), evangelical gathering (EO Jongerendag), and a biker event (TT Assen).<sup>10,11</sup> This project will engage in similar demonstrations and data collections.

3. **Public events:** I have much experience organizing events where campaigners, journalists, and politicians connect social science findings with current affairs. Together with **the UvA's Centre for Politics and Communication (with which I am affiliated), I will organize an annual public event on "threat and politics" in Spui 25** – the venue for public events of the UvA. I expect well-attended events as past events on emotions and politics were also well-attended.
4. **Blogs:** I will **regularly blog about this project** and have much experience doing this for a wider audience. More than **110,000 people read a blog I wrote for Slate.com**. I am also a frequent contributor to the Dutch political science blog Stuk Rood Vlees, the US political science blog *The Monkey Cage* and the London School of Economics blogs.
5. **Media appearances:** I will **actively disseminate my research in national and international media**. I have experience with media appearances and a network of journalists. I have been interviewed by television programs (like *NOS Jeugdjournaal*, *de Kennis van Nu*, *EenVandaag* in NL and *CNN*, *BBC* and *Al Jazeera* internationally), newspapers (like *NRC Handelsblad*, *Volkskrant*, *Telegraaf*, *AD* in NL and *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Guardian* internationally), radio programs (*NPO Radio 1 shows*; *BNR Nieuwsradio*) and online sources (like *NOS.nl*, *Vice.nl*, *AD.nl*).

## 2c. Number of words

Section 2a: Wordcount: 3946 (max. 4,000)

Section 2b: Wordcount: 960 (max. 1,000)

## 2d. Literature references

1. threat noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced American Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com.  
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## 2e. Data management section

Please see the Explanatory Notes for further information.

1. Will data be collected or generated that are suitable for reuse?

Yes: Then answer questions 2 to 4.

No: Then explain why the research will not result in reusable data or in data that cannot be stored or data that for other reasons are not relevant for reuse.

2. Where will the data be stored during the research?

The data will be stored on OneDrive. For the survey-experiments we will use Qualtrics. For the Experience Sampling studies we will use the EDA4move software. For the laboratory experiments we will use Acknowledge and Eprime. Upon completion of the data collection all data will be placed in OneDrive and removed from other storage places.

3. After the project has been completed, how will the data be stored for the long-term and made available for the use by third parties? To whom will the data be accessible?

We will make all, fully anonymized, data, code to reproduce the results and all materials available on the Open Science Framework. Each study will have its own repository and data will be stored on servers located in Europe.

4. Which facilities (ICT, (secure) archive, refrigerators or legal expertise) do you expect will be needed for the storage of data during the research and after the research? Are these available?

We only need OneDrive and OSF. OneDrive is the standard data storage of the University of Amsterdam, while OSF is publicly available.

## 3. Budget

← Expand for Explanatory Notes on section 3

### 3a. Budget

The maximum amount of a Vidi grant is € 800,000, to be spent over a period of five years. If the proposed research is of shorter duration, the maximum grant amount will be reduced accordingly.

\* WP = Scientific staff; NWP = Non-scientific staff; please also list the nature of the post (for example PhD student or postdoc researcher)

\*\* Please list the time you will spend on your Vidi, including any FTE percentage that your host institution will pay of your salary for your work on this Vidi project. If your host institution pays for (part of) the time you spend on your Vidi, please include this information in section 3b.

### 3b. Contributions 'in kind'

Contributing party	Description	Estimated value in euros
..	..	..
..	..	..

### 3c. Contributions 'in cash'

Contributing party	Description	Value in euros
..	..	..
..	..	..

### 3d. Totals

Please calculate the total budget and the total amount requested from NWO. These amounts follow from 3a, 3b, and 3c.

Grand total	799.975 (=3a)
Requested budget	799.975 (=3a minus 3b and 3c)

### 3e. Additional grants for this project

Please include details of any additional (application for) funding for (part of) this research project, whether from NWO or from any other institution (e.g. ERC).

Have you applied for any additional grants for this project either from NWO or from any other institution, and/or has the same idea been submitted elsewhere? yes/no (If yes, please provide details).

- No  
 Yes (please provide details)

## 4. Curriculum Vitae

← Expand for Explanatory Notes on section 4

### 4a. Academic profile

I study the psychological roots of citizens' political beliefs with the most attention to the role of personality (4b3-4, 4b6-8, 4b10) and emotions (4b1-2, 4b4). In two research lines, my work focuses upon contemporary issues such as polarization (4b1-6, 4b10) and populism (4b7-8). **First, I study how political communication interacts with personality in shaping political preferences.** I found, for instance, that the reliance on elite cues differs upon the level of reflection (see 4b10) and the level of attachment to the party (see 4b6). **My second research line explores the affective physiological responses to politics** (4b2, 4b4). In both lines of research, I take inspiration from my training in political science (MSc [UvA] & PhD [University of Southern Denmark]) and psychology (MSc [UvA]) as well as communication science and neuroscience research. I also use methodologies from different disciplines and used laboratory experiments with physiological measures (4b1-2, 4b4) and panel studies (4b3) to survey experiments (4b6, 4b8, 4b10) and surveys (4b5, 4b7, 4b9).

**I like to innovate and integrate insights from other disciplines in my research.** I started a research line on the physiological responses to political communication without having received any formal training in designing, conducting, and analysing physiological data. A **Marie Curie Global Fellowship** allowed me to spend one year (2017-2018) at the Behavioural Foundations Laboratory of Professor Arceneaux (Temple University, US). Here I deepened and broadened my theoretical knowledge and methodological skills to study physiological responses to politics. We published a preregistered replication study which, contrary to the original research, showed that liberals and conservatives have similar reactions to threat (4b1). Another paper showed that political



communication causes both physiological and self-reported emotional responses, and these responses have independent effects on attitude change (4b2).

I **adopted an open science workflow** in 2017 because science needs to be open, transparent, and reproducible. I conduct replication studies (4b1, 4b8), preregister hypotheses, design and planned analyses (4b1, 4b3-4, 4b6, 4b9), use the registered report format (4b4), and make the data, code, and materials publicly available (all papers in 4b). As an **Associate Professor for Good Research Practices**, I serve as the **Open Science Coordinator of ASCoR** and organize workshops, advise colleagues and implement open science. Outside the UvA, I spread open science practices as the **Paul Lazarsfeld Professor at the University of Vienna** and talks at other universities (e.g., Leuven, Mannheim).

I like to facilitate interdisciplinary exchanges. I **founded the Dutch Political Psychology Meetings**: an international network of political psychologists that meets twice a year since 2014. I also **co-founded the Hot Politics Lab**, which is an interdisciplinary group studying the role of emotions and personality in politics. We organize a weekly hybrid seminar series with speakers from different fields and from all over the world.

I **contribute to the academic climate in the Netherlands**. I do this as a member of the Law and Public Administration "table" of the Dutch Science Foundation (NWO), which advises the NWO on their ongoing policies. I am also a member of the Amsterdam Young Academy (2021-2024), where talented young scientists from different disciplines meet to develop views on science, scientific policy, and how to build bridges between science and society.

I **value outreach**. I have contributed to episodes of the Kennis van Nu - the leading science communication television program - on the role of personality and emotions in politics. My research appeared in national (NOS, Volkskrant, AD, Telegraaf) and international media (New York Times, BBC, Guardian). I write about my research for a broader audience on national (Stuk Rood Vlees) and international (LSE blogs, Monkey Cage) weblogs. I bring science closer to citizens via laboratory demonstrations at public events (Europe Day at European Parliament, President's Night in Paradiso) and collect data at public events, giving me the unique opportunity to bring laboratory research to citizens. Finally, the weekly Hot Politics Lab speaker series talks are available on YouTube and Spotify for a wider audience.

My **teaching reflects my interdisciplinarity**. I teach a master course on the psychology of political communication which combines insights from communication and political science with insights from psychology and neuroscience. Moreover, I teach survey and experimental methods and statistics courses in the Bachelor and Research Master. Recently, I developed a trajectory for our two-year Research Master program consisting of workshops, lectures, and assignments to foster a culture of open and transparent research practices.

I **am an experienced supervisor**. I currently supervise two PhD students (Homan and Pipal), successfully supervised two visiting PhD students (Hoes [European University Institute] and Kohout [TU Braunschweig]), and evaluated 5 PhD theses (Georgarakis [Columbia/Sciences Po], Widmann [European University Institute], Peresman [University of Essex], Hameleers [UvA] and Powell [UvA]). I have also supervised 10 Research Master's and 15 Master's students writing their thesis and supervised 10 research internships. My students went on to do their PhD at the UvA (Brosius, Lin, Kelsall), University of Pennsylvania (Fasching), and the University of Vienna (Boyer). Furthermore, I actively engaged my students in my research and co-authored with some of them (4b4, 4b9).

I **have developed management and leadership skills**. Apart from directing the Hot Politics Lab, I founded and currently direct the **Mobile Lab – funded by an NWO Investment Grant Medium** – a unique infrastructure to conduct social science studies in the field. I initiated and coordinated a five-wave panel study among a representative sample of the Dutch population during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic for ASCoR researchers. I am the co-editor of two peer-reviewed journals: Journal of Experimental Political Science and Tijdschrift Communicatiewetenschap and co-edited a special issue in Personality and Individual Differences. I have also served in multiple best paper and best book award committees for the American Political Science Association.

To conclude, this project will allow me to further deepen and broaden my profile as an interdisciplinary social scientist. Moreover, it will help me do the things I enjoy:

- Explore new and exciting ideas.
- Rely upon cutting-edge methods.
- Conduct open and transparent research and train the next generation of researchers.



Wordcount: 995

## 4b. Key output

Publishing articles in international peer-reviewed journals is the norm in my field. Working in teams of 2-5 research is common. **The first author of an article is the person who devoted the most time to publication and was involved in all stages in the research process.**

### International scientific

- 1) **Bakker, B.N.**, Schumacher, G., Gothreau, C., & Arceneaux, K. (2020). Conservatives and liberals have similar physiological responses to threats. *Nature Human Behaviour* 4, 613-621.  
url: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0823-z>
  - i) **This article appeared in an interdisciplinary journal** and reports a preregistered and well-powered direct replication of a seminal political neuroscience paper showing that, contrary to the original claim, conservatives and liberals have similar physiological responses to threats. As such, **the dominant neuroscientific perspective on the threat-politics link is not replicable. The article calls for more research that addresses how physiological responses link to politics.** The proposed project addresses this question.
- 2) **Bakker, B.N.**, & Schumacher, G., & Rooduijn, M. (2021). Hot politics? Affective responses to political communication. *American Political Science Review*, 115(1), 150-164. **O**  
url: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000519>
  - i) We establish that political rhetoric causes physiological responses and that some people have stronger physiological responses than others. We theorize and show that self-reported and physiological responses to political rhetoric have different consequences for attitude polarization. This paper shows the importance of relying on both self-reported and physiological instantiations of threat in the proposed project.
- 3) **Bakker, B.N.**, Lelkes, Y., & Malka, A. (2021). Reconsidering the relationship between personality and political preferences. *American Political Science Review*, 1-17. **O**  
url: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000605>
  - i) The paper challenges the common conceptualization that personality only causes politics. We show that the relationship between personality and political preferences is bidirectional in multiple preregistered panel studies and preregistered survey experiments. **This paper is relevant for the project as it provides evidence that the influence of politics on threat is a plausible effect.** Moreover, it shows the value of the preregistration of both panel studies and survey experiments.
- 4) **Bakker, B.N.**, & Schumacher, G., & Homan, M.D. (2020). Yikes! Are we disgusted by politicians? *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 39(2), 135-153.  
url: <https://doi.org/10.1017/pls.2020.16>
  - i) Politics causes self-reported and affective psychological responses, but the explicit (self-reported) and implicit (physiological) responses are independent. The paper illustrates the importance, like 4b3, for the proposed project to rely upon both self-reported and physiological instantiations of threat. This study is also my first registered report in which the theory, design, and planned analyses were peer-reviewed before data collection. I learned how to conduct a registered report which I will use in this project.
- 5) De Vries, C.E., **Bakker, B.N.**, Hobolt, S.B. & Arceneaux, K. (2021). Crisis signalling: How Italy's Coronavirus lockdown affected incumbent support in other European countries. *Political Science Research and Methods*. 9(3), 451-467. **O**  
url: <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2021.6>
  - i) The nationwide corona-lockdown in Italy boosts incumbent support in other European countries (France, Germany, Poland, and Spain). It is a demonstrator study for the proposed project: a threat (the lockdown in another country) affects citizens' political attitudes. I am the second author and was involved in the conceptualization of the paper, conducted the analyses, and contributed to the paper's write-up.

- 6) **Bakker, B.N.**, Lelkes, Y. & Malka, A. (2020). Understanding partisan cue receptivity: Tests from predictions from the bounded rationality and expressive utility perspectives. *The Journal of Politics* 82(3), 1061-1077. url: <https://doi.org/10.1086/707616>
- i) We tested competing models of opinion formation in a series of survey experiments. This paper received **the best paper award from the International Communication Association Political Communication Division in 2019**. This paper illustrates my skills in designing, analysing, and reporting (preregistered) survey experiments I will use in the proposed project.
- 7) **Bakker, B.N.**, Rooduijn, M., & Schumacher, G. (2016). Personality traits and voting for populist parties: Evidence from the United States, the Netherlands and Germany. *European Journal of Political Research*. 55 (2): 302-320. url: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12121>
- i) This article was the first to establish the link between support for populist parties and personality traits. The paper has set the agenda for the study on personality and populism and is a standard citation in this literature (**201 scholar google citations**). The article shows that I can connect insights from psychology with political science: one of the central goals of the proposed project.
- 8) **Bakker, B.N.**, Schumacher, G., & Rooduijn, M. (2021). The populist appeal. Personality and anti-establishment communication. *The Journal of Politics*, 83(2), 589-601. url: <https://doi.org/10.1086/710014>
- i) We broaden and deepen the preliminary finding reported in 4b7. We conducted direct replications of paper 4b7 with data from eight countries and supplemented this with an advanced conjoint experiment. This study shows my scientific approach: first replicating, then extending a finding. It also shows that I can conduct, analyse and report complex survey experiments. A skill I will use in the projects.
- 9) **Bakker, B.N.**, Jaidka, K., Dörr, T., Fasching, N., & Lelkes, Y. (accepted for publication). Questionable and open research practices among quantitative communication researchers. *Journal of Communication* **O** url: <https://psyarxiv.com/7uyn5/>
- i) A survey among 1000 communication researchers shows many respondents are optimistic about open science practices but don't use them themselves. It illustrates the importance of adopting an open science workflow in this project and training my students in this. The article is also a collaboration with two UvA Research Master students (Dörr and Fasching). I enjoyed mentoring them throughout all stages of the research process.
- 10) **Bakker, B.N.** & Lelkes, Y. (2018). Selling ourselves short. How abbreviated measures of personality change the way we think about personality and politics. *The Journal of Politics*, 80(4), 1311-1325. url: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/698928>
- i) The paper has been agenda-setting in political science by raising awareness that the measurement of psychological constructs matters. We document that very brief measures of personality can influence the conclusions people draw. The paper illustrates that I value rigorous measurement of constructs: something that I will also do in the proposed project.

Wordcount: 639

## 5. Administrative details

← Expand for Explanatory Notes on section 5

### 5a. Personal details

Title(s), initial(s), surname(s):	Dr. B.N. Bakker
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### 5b. Master's degree ('doctoraal')

University/College of Higher Education:	University of Amsterdam
Main subject:	Political Science (cum laude) and Psychology

### 5c. Doctorate

University/College of Higher Education:	University of Southern Denmark
Starting date (dd/mm/yy):	01/02/2011
Date of PhD award (dd/mm/yy):	23/05/2014
Supervisor(s) ('Promotor(es)'):	Prof. dr. R. Klemmensen, Prof. dr. S. Slothuus
Thesis title:	Personality and Politics: The Direct and Indirect Associations between the Five Factor Model and Political Attitudes

### 5d. Prospective host institution

Host institution:	University of Amsterdam
Research group:	Political Communication & Journalism

### 5e. Work experience since completing your (first) PhD

List your appointments chronologically. The bottom row should contain your current position.

Position	Period (date-date)	FTE	Position type (fixed term/permanent/tenure-track/other)	Institution
Postdoctoral researcher	1/3/2014 – 31/5/2015	1	Fixed term	University of Amsterdam
Assistant professor	1/6/2015 – 31/5/2021	1	Tenure-track, tenured after 2 years	University of Amsterdam
Associate professor	1/6/2021 –	1	Permanent	University of Amsterdam

### 5f. Months spent since completing your (first) PhD (include a calculation)

Experience	Number of months
Research activities	(10.5 + 10.8 + 12 + 9.6 + 10.4 =) 53.3
Education	(4.2 + 16.2 + 0 + 2.4 + 15.6 =) 38.7
Leave	
Management tasks	
Others (please specify):	

If applicable: You may mention special circumstances (e.g. due to COVID-19) that account for a reduction in productivity (max. 100 words):

I took care of my three children (0, 2, 4 at the time) during the COVID-19-related closure of Dutch nurseries and primary schools in the periods March 2020-June 2020 and December 2020-February 2021.

## Statements by the applicant

### Use of extension clause

If 'yes', (only) add the date of the confirmation e-mail ([talent@nwo.nl](mailto:talent@nwo.nl), previously: [vi@nwo.nl](mailto:vi@nwo.nl)) that the extension was granted. An extension is only necessary if you exceed the year limit on the reference date.

- No  
 Yes, my extension was confirmed on: [date]

### Ethical aspects

	Not applicable	Not yet applied for	Applied for	Received
Approval from a recognised (medical) ethics review committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approval from an animal experiments committee	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Permission for research with the population screening Act	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If your grant application is successful, all applicable ethical approval documents will need to be sent to NWO before the start of your Vidi.

### By submitting this form I declare that:

*By submitting this form, I endorse the code of conduct for laboratory animals and the code of conduct for biosecurity/possibility for dual use of the expected results and will act accordingly, if applicable.*

- I have completed this form truthfully

By submitting this document, I declare that I satisfy the nationally and internationally accepted standards for scientific conduct as stated in the [Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity 2018](#).

- I have submitted the completed and signed embedding guarantee

- If applicable: I have submitted non-referees.\*
- If applicable: I have included one or more authorised letters from the prospected host institution and/or a third party, guaranteeing to meet part of the costs of this research project.

Name\*\* : B.N. Bakker

Place: Hilversum

Date: 30/10/2021

\* You may indicate a maximum of three non-referees **in ISAAC or MijnZonMw**. The non-referees will NOT be asked to assess your application. Please do **not** incorporate the names of your non-referees in this application form.

\*\* Please refrain from using your first name to reduce gender effects.

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