



## Evaluation of Democracy research group

Project holders:

Lou SAFRA



Lou Safra is Assistant professor in political psychology at the CEVIPOF (Sciences Po) and an associate researcher at the *Institut d'Études Cognitives* of *École Normale Supérieure* of Paris. She is interested in the cognitive mechanisms underlying social and political behaviour.

Cyrille THIEBAUT



Cyrille Thiébaud is an associated researcher at Sciences Po (CEVIPOF & LIEPP). Her research interests focus on the influence of information and communication on people's political opinions, especially on European and defence issues.

Friederike RICHTER



Friederike Richter is a research associate at the Universität der Bundeswehr München and is an associate researcher at the CEVIPOF (Sciences Po). She works on agenda-setting, with a particular focus on strategic issues.

Further information:



# PUBLIC OPINION, DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION OF DEFENCE

Defence is a key public policy of our modern states. Yet, we do not know much about the perceptions, preferences and expectations of the public about it. The consequences of such data scarcity are twofold. First, it prevents scholars from understanding how attitudes towards defence are structured. Second, it prevents them from assessing the alignment between defence policies and citizens' preferences. This is problematic for a domain already characterised by a lack of democratic scrutiny. Combining insights from public policy, public opinion studies and cognitive sciences, we conduct a series of small-scale survey experiments to fill this gap.

## Research objectives

This project seeks to **improve the quality of how we measure opinions on defence-related issues** as well as **our understanding of how citizens form their attitudes on issues that are often said to be remote from their daily preoccupations**. In particular, we argue that defence is a multidimensional policy that cannot be restricted to its most sensational component, that is the use of force. We investigate the variations of attitudes towards different aspects of defence and analyse the relationship between those attitudes and broader political values through experiments conducted in France but also in Germany and in the United Kingdom. These countries vary in their military power, the professionalisation of their armed forces, their participation in multilateral operations, etc. The third objective is hence to examine the influence of what one might call a national "strategic culture" on attitudes towards defence policies.

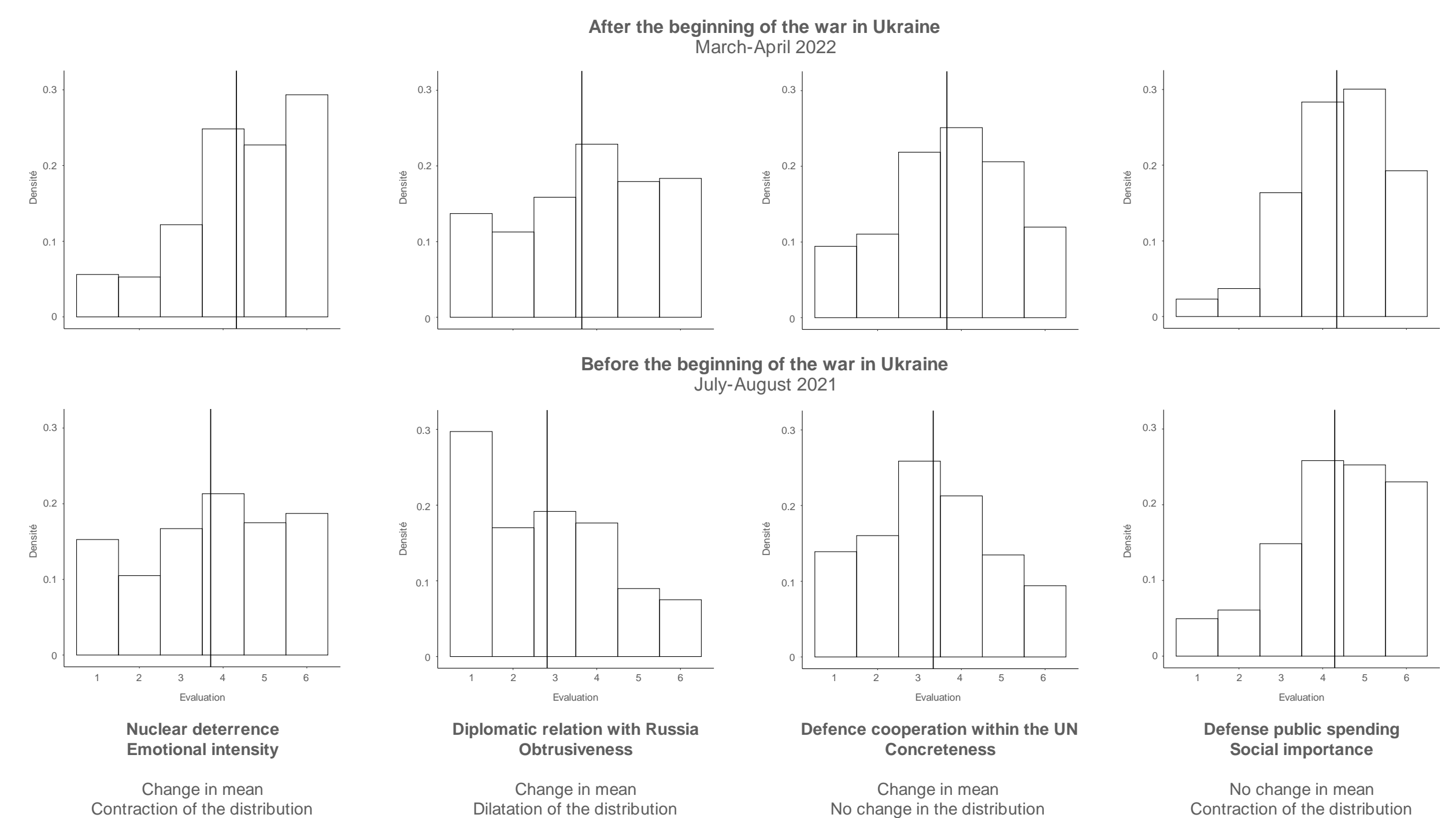
## Study 1: Multidimensionality of defence issues in France, Germany and the UK



Our analyses revealed **variability** across defence issues in the three countries for each of the four issue attributes considered (concreteness, emotional intensity, obtrusiveness and relevance). In particular, our initial analyses confirmed that some defence issues were perceived as being as emotionally intense, concrete, important, and relevant as some issues from two other key policy areas, namely education and the environment. More specifically, in all three countries, **at least one defence-related issue was rated as or more concrete than the highly debated topic of educational inequality**.

## Study 2: Heterogeneity in the change in the perception of defence issues after the beginning of the war in Ukraine

The beginning of the war in Ukraine was associated with different changes in the perception of defence issues on the four issue attributes we studied. These changes were not limited to changes in the mean perception. To the contrary, we also found changes in the distribution of responses highlighting the importance of analysing both means and distributions when assessing the impact of a specific event or policy on public opinion or when comparing different populations.



## Study 3. Characterising attitudes towards defence in France, Germany and the UK: analysis of the individual characteristics associated with different profiles

## Study 4. Influence of choice context on budget preferences and the *guns vs. butter* trade-off

## Study 5. Influence of military, defence and security framing on the perception of and preferences on defence issues