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Indicating Power

A Foucauldian analysis of Freedom House's democracy index

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Abstract: *Indexes of democratic governance have become a standard tool for assessing the quality of democracy or regime transformations in countries around the world. While some scholars have voiced criticism regarding the methodologies of particular indexes, little attention has so far been devoted to the ways in which power and knowledge interact in the construction and use of democracy indexes and what the implications are for international power relations as such. This paper addresses these questions by offering a case study of Freedom House's index of political rights and civil liberties based on Foucault's concept of governmentality. The paper argues that through strategies such as reverse credibilisation as well as disciplinary and mechanical objectification the democracy index is constructed as a respected source of knowledge on democracy. Moreover, by monitoring, naming and shaming as well as by delivering expertise for democratic conditionality and international interventions, the index directs states to conform to the global norm of liberal democracy – a norm which it has helped to establish in the first place. Consequently, the democracy index can be considered as a global governmental technology to govern states without formally violating their sovereignty. It thus helps to solve the central problem of liberal governmentality in global politics, namely, how to reconcile the principle of national sovereignty with the recognition that domestic activities can have vital international implications.*

1. Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, the world was confronted with a wave of democratisation that held sway over Eastern Europe and parts of the Global South. With the end of the Cold War, many commentators have seen a new international order to be constructed upon the principles of human rights and democracy (e.g. Fukuyama, 1992). Under this impression, political scientists and governments sought techniques to systematically analyse and better comprehend the conditions of democracy and regime transformation (Munck, 2009: xi). As a result, the construction of instruments to assess the quality of democracy and processes of democratisation emerged as a priority in academia and politics (xii). However, the collection of data on this issue had until then been the prerogative of nation-states and there was little compatible data available.

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Different attempts were hence made to standardise data sets on domestic political developments and come to universal conclusions. One of the instruments developed in this effort is the quantitative index of democratic governance. A democracy index is constructed on the basis of empirical observations of the political affairs and institutions in countries around the world, which are represented in form of quantitative data and then aggregated into overall country scores (Munck, 2009: 1). Since its inception, the democracy index has met with enthusiasm. The democracy index seemed to finally enable the establishment of a standardised body of knowledge, based on the application of a permanent, unified world-scale method for measuring and comparing democracy in all places and at all times. The rising prominence of the democracy index has to be seen in the context of a general growth of governance indicators. In 2006, a survey commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) identified 178 indexes 'that rank or assess countries according to some economic, political, social or environmental measure' (Bandura, 2008: 6). The great majority of these indexes have been developed since the 1990s.

Some scholars have voiced criticism, mainly regarding methodological weaknesses (e.g. Munck and Verkuilen, 2009), the reliability of an index and its aggregation procedure (Landman and Häusermann, 2003: 10) as well as issues such as a lack of specificity and replicability of scales (Hadenius and Teorell, 2005: 17) in specific indexes. Others have criticised the factors influencing rating actors or the impact of governance indicators on decision making in the international system. By criticising various components of different measurement instruments, these scholars have usually intended to refine or adapt the applied method of democracy assessment. Next to these mostly methodological *criticisms* of specific democracy indexes, there is a considerably smaller body of research that offers a more fundamental *critique* of this kind of democracy measurement. According to Foucault, the difference between criticism and critique is that the former limits itself to brushing up and elaborating approved norms and standards, while the latter questions the ways in which the very knowledge claims inherent in the applied concepts, theories, and methods are constructed, legitimized, and naturalized as source of truth and guide for action (Foucault, 1996: 383).

It is within this second strand of research dealing with democracy indexes – that of critique – that this paper is located in. Using a Foucauldian conceptual framework, it offers a critical case study of Freedom House's index of political rights and civil liberties. More specifically, it will address the following question: How has Freedom House's index of political rights and civil liberties established itself as an authoritative source of knowledge on democracy and how does this knowledge (serve to) exercise power in the international arena? In terms of its theoretical framework, this paper is based on Foucault's concept of governmentality as developed further in the growing field of global governmentality studies.

While Foucault's studies of governmentality were principally concerned with the societies inside modern nation-states, scholars such as Larner and Walters (2004), Dean (2010), Joseph (2012), Kerner (2013) and others have shown that the concept can be fruitfully applied to issues beyond the state. Global governmentality studies draw on Foucault's concept of governmentality to better understand how the governmental technologies of neoliberalism shape international, transnational and supranational processes and phenomena. Larner and Walters, in their book *Global Governmentality: Governing International Spaces,* define global governmentality as 'a heading for studies which problematize the constitution, and governance of spaces above, beyond, between and across states' (Larner and Walters, 2004: 2).

Whereas different studies within this field might have their respective specificities, the question of the

power/knowledge nexus in the constitution of international relations takes centre stage in all of them. From a global governmentality perspective democracy indexes, as technologies of knowledge production, have become crucial to the exercise of power in the international arena. Leander and van Munster write: 'Within the scheme of neo-liberal governmentality the regulation of actors takes place through the employment of private sector technologies of performance such as benchmarking, best practice schemes, codes of conduct, performance indicators and auditing' (Leander and van Munster 2007: 209).

Among others, Davis *et al*. (2012), Joseph (2012), Evans (2005), Rosga and Satterthwaite (2009), Merry (2011), Zanotti (2005) and Löwenheim (2008) have pondered over this problem and provided us with analyses in which they conceptualised governance indexes as governmental technologies. Davis *et al*.'s *Governance by Indicators* (2012) aspires to be a seminal textbook on the issue. It combines both theoretical texts and empirical case studies on the normative, political and legal effects of indicators as an instrument of global governance. Joseph (2012), in turn, dedicates a section in his above-mentioned book on global governmentality to the role of indicators as technologies of power. Next to these rather general approaches to the topic there are others, which focus on a certain group of indicators or have an emphasis on particular processes at work when rating country performances.

Evans (2005), Rosga and Satterthwaite (2009) as well as Merry (2011) focus on indicators charting the compliance of countries with Human Rights treaties and approach the problem from a legal and legal anthropologist perspective, respectively. Zanotti (2005) examines the 'good governance' discourses and resulting practices within the United Nations (UN) as elements of global governmentality. Löwenheim's *Examining the State* (2008) compares the making of governance indicators to an examination and looks more closely at how governance indicators 'responsibilise' the assessed states and at the same time obscures the responsibility of powerful states and international organisations for economic, political, and social problems in countries of the Global South.

In an effort to illustrate and flesh out the rather abstract theories advanced by these authors, my paper aims to present a detailed empirical analysis of the processes at work from the construction to the use of one prominent democracy index. The case under scrutiny will be Freedom House's index of political rights and civil liberties *Freedom in the World (FiW)*, which has become the most widely used source of data on democratization (Merkel, 2004: 34). I will suggest that *Freedom in the World* is made possible by the building of a particular institutional-technological complex in which the standard of liberal democracy is embedded. By making this liberal standard quasi-obligatory, *Freedom in the World* imposes a certain norm of conduct regarding correct governance. Consequently, the democracy index can be considered as a global technology of power that disciplines governments around the world by monitoring, standardizing, quantifying and comparing democracy and thereby contributes to the establishment of liberal democracy as global norm of governance. Beyond contributing to a better understanding of FiW itself, it is hoped that this analysis will point to some more general mechanisms that further research could establish to be at work across various democracy indices.

I will structure my argument as follows. First, I will introduce my conceptual framework based on Foucault's concept of power and especially his idea of governmentality. Second, I will shortly present the organisation Freedom House and its democracy index *Freedom in the World*. In a third step, I will analyse the strategies and mechanisms that have established *Freedom in the World* as an authoritative source of knowledge on democracy. Finally, I will investigate the different ways in which the production and the results of the

quantitative-comparative index (serve to) exercise governmental power. The separation of my analysis in two chapters is not meant to purge the production of knowledge from its inherent power effects. Rather, by doing this I try to dissect the different elements and processes inherent in the ratings in a way that I hope brings to the fore more clearly both the implicit and explicit mechanisms at the stages of construction and use of the index.

2. Governmentality: Governing a population by knowing it

2.1 The development of governmentality as a modern form of power

To describe the form of power characteristic of modern liberal societies today, Foucault coins the term 'governmentality' - a concept which he develops in his lectures at the Collège de France in the academic years of 1977-1978 and 1978-1979. In these lectures, he does not present a ready-made concept but rather still thinks it through himself (Joseph, 2012: 24).

According to Foucault, governmentality has its origin in the eighteenth century when through demographic expansion, an increase in money, and an expansion of agricultural production the problem of population arises. The aim of government is now the population, implying a range of more particular aims such as 'the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, and so on' (Foucault, 2000a: 216-217). In order to reach these aims, government now addresses the population at two levels: at the level of the consciousness of each individual and at the level of the interest of the population as a whole. These two levels of interest now constitute the new target *and* main instrument of the government of population (Foucault, 2000a: 217).

However, Foucault does not only conceive of 'government' in the sense of the administration of modern nation-states. Instead, he draws on the broad meaning the term had in the Middle Ages. Previously, the word did not only designate political or state structures, but more generally 'the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed' (Foucault, 2000b: 341). The concept of government, thus, allows us to analyse power relations as 'the conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 1994: 237) and thus distinguish this notion of power from others which understand power in terms of law or war. Based on his historical derivation of government, Foucault defines the concept of 'governmentality' as '[t]he ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population' (Foucault, 2000a: 219-220).

For Foucault, the concept, which combines the French terms 'gouverner' (to govern) and 'mentalité' (mentality), becomes an important analytic tool for the study of the 'power/knowledge complexes' that are central to his work (Lemke, Krasmann and Bröckling, 2000: 8). From the viewpoint of governmentality, it becomes possible to see how governing implies specific representations, knowledges and expertise as to 'that which is to be governed'. Through these technologies of power, 'the governed' is constructed and the political, social, and economic circumstances are shaped in a direction that enables the best possible implementation of the government's goals and policies (Mayhew, 2004: 224). Although governmentality targets population, I will show below that in the context of international politics, the subjects of governmentality can also be states rather than individuals.

2.2 The power of scientific knowledge

According to Foucault, the discursive formation of scientific knowledge about the behavior of populations is at the core of modern governmentality. This brings about a transition from the art of government to a political science and the creation of knowledge and scientific truths about the behavior of populations becomes a crucial element of government (Foucault, 2000a: 217). The primary producer of governmental knowledge are the human sciences – 'those disciplines which purport to scientifically produce knowledge of, and the truth about, people' (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000: 25).

Scientific discourses and the knowledge they produce are tied to power by the way in which they regulate and normalise individuals (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000: 26). Because discourse determines what is true and what is false, what is 'normal' and what is 'abnormal', who counts as an expert and who as a madman, it has a regulatory or normalizing function. Normalisation makes the deviance of individuals from the norm visible (Rouse, 2003: 101). Individuals are being tested as to their relation to the norm through a multitude of examinations and tests and deviances from the value set as norm can lead to exclusion or treatment (Mangion, 2011: 80). These differentiations and exclusions can be institutionally reinforced.

The normalizing function of the human sciences is what makes the latter so interesting for those involved in governing or managing people. This is due to the emergence of liberalism, which delegitimised the arbitrary exercise of state power and emphasised the freedom of citizens under the law. The central problem of liberal governmentality has since then been to reconcile the principle that the political domain must be constrained with the recognition that formally private activities can have vital political implications. Liberalism made a shift to more moderate governmental technologies necessary, which would govern these private realms without destructing their formal autonomy (Rose and Miller, 1992: 180).

Through the discursive construction of reality, the human sciences allow for a very efficient form of social and political control which is compatible with liberalism: The knowledge, which is internalised by the subjects (individuals and collectives), enables them to govern themselves, to auto-regulate and auto-correct themselves. In this way, 'the governed' is constructed and the political, social, and economic circumstances are shaped in a way that allows the best possible implementation of the government's goals and policies (Mayhew, 2004: 224). Hence, liberal governmentality, rather than bringing freedom from regulation as such, is itself 'a specific form of regulation of conduct' (Joseph, 2012: 28) in which the power/knowledge of the human sciences eventually makes the exercise of violence unnecessary.

2.3 Governmentality beyond the state

While Foucault's studies of governmentality were principally concerned with societies inside modern nation-states, a number of scholars have shown that the concept can be fruitfully applied to issues beyond the state. The transferal to the global sphere is possible because governmentality analytically de-centres the state as universal point of reference for the study of power relations (Kerner, 2013: 10). The way power is exercised in multiple relations does not presuppose the state as a given unitary entity (Foucault, 2000b: 345). Hence, even though the cases studied by Foucault himself are located *inside* nation-states, they go *beyond* the state as reference point. Accordingly, the concept of governmentality should also lend itself to the study of the modalities of power

beyond national borders.

However, an important question poses itself when researching governmentality in global politics: If it is characteristic of governmentality that it targets population, how are we to understand technologies like the democracy index that target states? Joseph argues with Fougner that governmentality is not just concerned with how governments act on populations, but also with how international institutions act on states and national governments (Fougner in Joseph, 2012: 250). States are conceived as subjects in the sense that they are deemed capable of acting and making responsible choices. They are seen as responsible for what happens within their borders and at the same time constitute objects of research and examination (Löwenheim, 2008: 258). In this sense, states are subjected to a form of neoliberal governmentality which manages their behaviour at a distance through technologies such as democracy indicators, benchmarking and targets. This view adds a second level of analysis to governmentality research since the assessment of state performance is in turn based on the assessed states' ability to manage their populations or, as Joseph puts it, 'this way of regulating state behaviour takes place *through* the targeting of populations' (Joseph, 2012: 250).

It is thus expedient to reframe the central problem of liberal governmentality stated earlier: On the first level of analysis, the problem is how to reconcile the principle of the autonomy of individuals with the recognition that formally private activities can have vital political implications. The second level of analysis, which concerns us here, can be rephrased as follows: How to reconcile the principle of the sovereignty of nation states with the recognition that formally domestic activities can have vital international implications? In the remainder of this paper I will show how Freedom House's index of political rights and civil liberties helps to solve this dilemma of global liberal governmentality.

2.4 Governmentality and discipline in the examination of states

It remains to be said that while governmentality has been the prevalent form of power since the eighteenth century this does not mean that it fully replaced other forms of power which predated it such as sovereignty and discipline. In fact, sovereignty is still relevant and regarding discipline Foucault even argues that it was never more valorized than when it became the task of government to manage a population (Foucault, 2000a: 218-219). Although Foucault himself is not very consistent in his use of the term government and does not clearly define the relations between governmentality and these other forms of power, it is possible to conclude from his texts that there is no instance of pure governmentality or pure discipline. Rather, they should be seen as interconnected, complimentary techniques of power involved in the conduct of society.[1] In order to understand the modalities of power at work in a specific case, it is therefore wise not to neglect entirely possible elements of these other forms of power.

One example which is central to my analysis is the question of how the mechanism of panoptic surveillance might fit within a governmental rationality. In my analysis of Freedom House's democracy index, I will make use of the image of the panopticon to describe the mechanism of surveillance involved in the gathering of information for the ratings. Foucault himself speaks of surveillance largely as a technique of disciplinary power. In his book *Surveiller et punir* (*Discipline and Punish)* (Foucault, 1995), he uses the example of the

1 At one point, Foucault uses the image of the triangle to describe the interconnectedness of these three forms of power – sovereignty-discipline-government – in the conduct of society (2000a: 219).

panopticon, a prison in which the interior of each cell is visible from a central tower without the prisoners being able to see the interior of the tower in turn. Institutional and non-institutional members can take part in the exercise of surveillance, which increases the efficacy of the disciplinary technology.

Looking at governance indicators through the lens of governmentality, Löwenheim argues convincingly that the technology of examination, and the mechanism of panoptic surveillance which it presupposes, can also be considered as technologies of governmental power (2008: 258). As we know, disciplined conduct is the outcome of three processes: '1) training individuals in various routines; 2) putting them under panoptic surveillance; and 3) punishing them for proscribed or deviate behaviour' (Löwenheim, 2008: 258). While the strategies of routine and surveillance can serve different rationalities of power, the difference is, that discipline is usually exercised by formal and restrictive hierarchies such as the school, the prison, or the military with the aim to form docile individuals. Contrarily, governmentality works through auto-correction and self-optimisation under the paradigm of freedom of choice (Löwenheim, 2008: 258).

According to Joseph, it is this distinctively liberal character of governmentality which operates under the paradigm of 'free conduct, self-awareness and self-limitation' (Joseph, 2012: 26) that distinguishes it from other types of power. Additionally, discipline involves the immediate punishment of deviate conduct by a designated authority responsible for improving or correcting a problem with the aim of guaranteeing social order. In contrast, under governmentality, the logic of 'responsibilisation' (Burchell, 1996) makes the object of examination and surveillance 'responsible both for its own negative classification in the examination as well as for future improvement' (Löwenheim, 2008: 258).

Applied to the practice of international democracy measurement and rating, this shows that surveillance and examination operate here in service of a governmental rationality. Since in international politics hierarchies are less formalised, states are not officially required to be surveyed by the producers of democracy indicators. As sovereign states, they can object to being investigated by the producers of FiW.[2] Moreover, while a low position in the ratings can well have a range of negative consequences, this cannot be attributed to an international punishing authority. Rather, a poor performance in the index will be framed as a lack of capacity on the part of the rated state for which it is responsible alone.

3. Freedom House and the measurement of democracy

Arguably the most influential democracy index is the index of political rights and civil liberties published annually by the American organisation Freedom House (FH) (Merkel, 2004: 34). FH describes itself as 'an independent watchdog organization' (FH, 2013a). According to its website, FH is 'dedicated to the expansion of freedom around the world' (FH, 2013a). The organisation is convinced that '[f]reedom is possible only in democratic political environments in which the governments are accountable to their own people; the rule of law prevails; and freedoms of expression, association, and belief, as well as respect for the rights of minorities and women, are guaranteed' (FH, 2013a).

Not only in its own words, FH's flagship publication *Freedom in the World (FiW)* is 'the standard-setting comparative assessment of global political rights and civil liberties' (FH, 2013d). In its 2013 volume, the report

2 Some states have indeed hindered the investigations connected with international governance ratings. Löwenheim reports that in 2003 Algeria denied visas to Freedom House associates, and demanded from the organisation to get governmental approval for its activities in advance (2008: 261).

classifies 195 countries and 14 related and disputed territories according to their level of political rights and civil liberties (FH, 2013d). First published in 1972 by Raymond Gastil, FiW was conceived in order to produce 'an orienting discussion of variation in levels of freedom' (Gastil, 1990: 25). Freedom is defined by FH as 'the opportunity to act spontaneously in a variety of fields outside the control of the government and other centers of potential domination' (FH, 2013e). Although the survey keeps using the term 'freedom', over the years its founder himself understood 'that the survey was essentially a survey of democracy' (Gastil, 1990: 26).

The instrument is based on two checklists to assess the aggregate state of political rights and civil liberties on a scale from 1 (highest degree of freedom) to 7 (lowest degree of freedom) respectively. What constitutes political rights and civil liberties is specified in seven subcategories. According to FH, these subcategories 'represent the fundamental components of freedom' (FH, 2013b). They 'include an individual's ability to:

- Participate freely in the political process;
- Vote freely in legitimate elections;
- Have representatives that are accountable to them;
- Exercise freedoms of expression and belief;
- Be able to freely assemble and associate;
- Have access to an established and equitable system of rule of law;
- Enjoy social and economic freedoms, including equal access to economic opportunities and the right to hold private property' (FH, 2013b).

In each of these subcategories, countries and territories are scored from 0 to 4 on a number of questions. The aggregate score then determines their position in the world-wide rankings and their belonging to one of three groups of countries labeled 'free', 'partly free' and 'not free', respectively (cf. Table 1).

Until today, the checklists conceived by Gastil in the early 1970s saw only few amendments so that the methodological framework and the underlying logic of the survey have substantially remained unchanged (Giannone, 2010: 77). The annual report and in particular the resulting democracy index and country ratings have been used widely by politicians, scholars, inter- and non-governmental organisations as well as the media to judge the quality of democracy and success of transition in countries around the world (90).

Freedom in the World 2013: Table of Independent Countries				
Country	**Freedom Status**	**PR**	**CL**	**Trend Arrow**
...				
France	Free	1	1	
Gabon	Not Free	6	5	
The Gambia	Not Free	6	6 ▼	
Georgia	Partly Free	3 ▲	3	
Germany	Free	1	1	
Ghana	Free	1	2	
Greece	Free	2	2	↓
Grenada	Free	1	2	
Guatemala	Partly Free	3	4	
Guinea	Partly Free	5	5	↑
...				

Table 1: "Table of Independent Countries". Excerpt (alphabetical order) from the table "Independent Countries", Freedom House, 2013: 13.

4. Constructing credibility: Becoming an authoritative source on democracy

The status of a specific discourse as one of knowledge and the credibility of an author or text as authoritative source on a particular topic are not given by nature. The present section will offer an analysis into the first part of my central research question: How have the truth claims made by *FH* reached the status of scientific knowledge so that the democracy index *Freedom in the World* could establish itself as an authoritative source of knowledge on democracy?

4.1 Networks of expertise

In today's knowledge society, expertise has come to play a significant role in mapping out the possibility and legitimacy of government. The personality of the expert, representing neutrality, authority, and skill, promises that regulatory problems can be shifted from the controversial field of politics to the convincing champ of truth (Rose and Miller, 1992: 188). However, as Porter suggests, we cannot simply understand expertise as the outcome of 'solitary thinking and experimenting' (Porter, 1995: 6). Instead, we should imagine it as a network or 'complex of actors, powers, institutions and bodies of knowledge' (Rose and Miller, 1992: 188).

As Rose and Miller have pointed out, expertise in this sense is a governmental technology. It emerged as a solution to the central problem of liberal government: How to reconcile the principle that the political domain must be constrained with the fact that formally private activities can have vital political implications? (Rose and Miller, 1992: 187). Given the framework of the international political arena, this question can be usefully paraphrased as follows: How to reconcile the principle of the sovereignty of nation states with the recognition of the vital international implications of formally national activities?

FH can count on an extensive network of expertise, from the authors annually compiling FiW and the sources they refer to, to the wide range of scholars and policy-makers using FiW in their work. The FH website

declares that its research and rating procedure involved '52 analysts and 18 senior-level academic advisers – the largest number to date' (FH, 2013). The survey team includes 'regional experts' and 'scholars', who work together to produce the survey findings in a 'multilayered process of analysis and evaluation' that stresses 'intellectual rigor and balanced and unbiased judgments' (FH, 2013). The personality of the expert as characterised by Rose and Miller (1992) immediately comes to mind.

In addition to the expertise of the research team, FH mobilises an impressively 'broad range of sources of information' demonstrating ties with very different networks, including the media ('foreign and domestic news reports') academia ('academic analyses'), civil society ('nongovernmental organizations, think tanks') as well as local contacts on the ground ('individual professional contacts, and visits to the region') (FH, 2013). All these agents and their particular knowledge were mobilised for the preparation of FiW. This leaves no question unanswered regarding the width and depth of analysis that informed the country ratings and accompanying reports.

However, FH's network of expertise is also extended in another direction, which is especially relevant for the establishment of FiW as an authoritative source of knowledge on democracy. The process that is at work here is what I will call 'reverse credibilisation'. While usually we think that the credibility of an author depends – next to his professional training – primarily on the authority of his *sources*, what we observe in the case of FiW is the opposite: FiW gains its credibility first and foremost from the authority of its *users*. One such user group is made up of social scientists. The results of FiW are widely used by scholars in the fields of transition and development studies, by authors writing on democratisation, the quality of democracy as well as Human Rights.[3] All these authors use the index by FH as a fact to back up assumptions and a background against which to construct an argument (Giannone, 2010: 76). By citing FiW, these authors sanction it as a scientific source of information on the conditions of democracy and political developments around the world and they accept the organisation FH as a member of the scholarly discursive community.

A second group of users is arguably even more crucial to the position of FH as 'global pattern-setter of democracy' (Giannone, 2010): several influential government agencies and international organisations base their policy decisions on the ratings produced by FH. For one, there is USAID, a U.S. government agency with the two-fold purpose of advancing U.S. foreign policy interests and enhancing the lives of people in the developing world (USAID, 2013). USAID uses the ratings to assess the democratisation progress in the countries receiving its aid (Finkel *et al*., 2006 in Giannone, 2010: 75). Another user of FiW is the foreign aid agency Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) which evaluates the eligibility of countries applying for aid with the help of the FiW indicators (MCC, 2013, Selection Indicators).

However, according to Giannone, the authoritativeness of FH 'receives its seal' from the fact that the United Nations and the World Bank utilise its ratings (2010: 76). In its 2002 Human Development Report, which was specifically dedicated to democracy, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) draws on FiW for

3 Giannone (2010: 94) provides the following indicative list of publications using the results of FiW: Acun˜a-Alfaro, 'Measuring Democracy in Latin-America; Bacher, 'Oil and Dictatorship'; Barro, 'Determinants of Economic Growth'; Burkhart, and Lewis-Beck, 'Comparative Democracy'; Fish and Kroenig, 'Diversity, Conflict and Democracy'; Foweraker and Krznaric, 'Constitutional Design and Comparative Democratic Performance'; Grassi, 'La globalizzazione della democrazia'; Hadenius and Teorell, 'Cultural and Economic Prerequisites of Democracy'; Huntington, 'The Third Wave'; Inglehart, 'La societa` postmoderna'; Knack, 'Does Foreign Aid Promote Democracy?'; Merkel and Croissant, 'Conclusion: Good and Defective Democracies'; Mungiu-Pippidi, 'EU Enlargement and Democracy Progress'; Neumayer, 'The Determinants of Aid Allocation'; Sano and Lindholt, Human Rights Indicators.

three of their eleven subjective indicators of democratic governance (UNDP, 2002: 37). In a similar vein, the World Bank uses the FH indicators as one the sources on which they build their good governance indicators (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2009). These international organisations are an important source of information on international topics and their respective governance indicators are widely used in the scientific and policy-making communities.

Hence, not only is FiW itself a popular reference in political and academic discourses, but by forming a part of these other indicators, its ratings are even further dispersed and find their way into all kinds of newspaper articles, analyses, reports and policy documents dealing with democracy and development. Moreover, the sheer reputation of these international organisations 'rubs off' on FH itself – the significance of 'reverse credibilisation' becomes apparent. That FH puts so much emphasis on communicating the expertise mobilised by FiW indicates that the organisation is aware of the power of such a network. It *stages* its network of expertise and thus constructs credibility. The overall effect is (reverse) credibilisation: By forming an integral part of both academic and political discourses and by counting the U.S. Government, the United Nations and the World Bank among its users, FH avails of a powerful network that bestows upon it an authoritativeness and credibility that cannot be explained with the validity of its indicators alone.

4.2 Objectification strategies

Democracy is arguably one of the most contested concepts in political philosophy. Nonetheless, the prevalent utilisation of FH's democracy index, and thus the acceptance of the underlying definition of democracy by a diversity of actors, seems to suggest the opposite. How did FH reach this state of consensus which allows it to speak from a position of objectivity?

As described above, FH understands democracy as essentially synonymous with freedom. Freedom, for them, comprises two categories of rights: political rights and civil liberties. FH maintains that this idea of freedom is universal: 'Freedom House does not maintain a culture-bound view of freedom' (FH, 2013e). According to the organisation, the political rights and civil liberties addressed by its survey are 'basic standards ... derived in large measure from relevant portions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (FH, 2013e). Accordingly, they 'apply to all countries and territories, irrespective of geographical location, ethnic or religious composition, or level of economic development' (FH, 2013e). Also for the realisation of freedom they have a clear recipe in mind: 'freedom for all peoples is best achieved in liberal democratic societies' (FH, 2013e).

These quotations make apparent a belief in freedom and democracy as 'settled norm[s]' (Evans, 2005: 1051) on the part of FH. As such, freedom is portrayed as a 'neutral' value 'to which all reasonable people should subscribe' (Evans, 2005: 1052). The authors of FiW, as much as their followers, seem to believe that all relevant elements of freedom have been identified and what remains to be done is simply their implementation in form of the advancement of the institutions of liberal democracy (Evans, 2005: 1053). By drawing a line under philosophical and political discussions about the nature of freedom and democracy and the relations between these two values, FH suggests 'disciplinary objectivity': the ability to reach consensus in the disciplinary community at stake (Megill cited in Porter, 1995: 4).

Consequently, when democracy can be easily identified and observed – it can also be measured objectively. Here, 'mechanical objectivity' comes into play and adds a second layer to the objectivity of FH's

democracy gauge. Mechanical objectivity means 'following the rules'. It has a powerful appeal to the wider public since it seems to foreclose that personal bias or interests affect the result of an investigation (Porter, 1995: 4). Quantification has become a prevalent instrument of mechanical objectivity and thus a powerful tool of objectification. Indeed, '[s]trict quantification, through measurement, counting, and calculation, is among the most credible strategies for rendering nature or society objective' (Porter, 1995: 74).

With its quantitative approach to democracy, FH profits from the objectifying power of numbers. In the belief that its quantitative-comparative methodology results in objective, predictable and impartial results, the authors of FiW claim that '[a]lthough there is a*n element of subjecti*vity inherent in the survey findings, the ratings process emphasizes intellectual rigor and balanced and unbiased judgments' (FH, 2013e). These can be achieved through 'a multilayered process of analysis and evaluation by a team of regional experts and scholars' (FH, 2013e), hence the combination of expertise (disciplinary objectivity) and statistics (mechanical objectivity). The scholarly discourse focusing on 'brushing up' the indicator supports exactly this form of objectification

The standardisation that comes along with quantification suggests that Albania's score of 3 in 'political rights' is comparable with Bangladesh's score of 3 in the same domain. Basic arithmetic also allows us to assume that Bangladesh's final rating (3 in 'political rights' and 4 in 'civil liberties') should be comparable to the one of Mozambique (4 in 'political rights' and 3 in 'civil liberties'), since both appear to have a sum of 7 points in total (Landman and Häusermann, 2003; figures taken from FiW 2013 (FH, 2013: 14ff). Only by assuming this, can FiW provide a table of all assessed countries, rated according to a single numerical system and located in the same ascending scheme of 'not free', 'partly free' and 'free'. Indeed, according to Porter, quantification is such a powerful agency of standardisation precisely because it neglects or reconstructs large parts of what is difficult or unclear (Porter, 1995: 85).

Especially interesting is the end product of FH's measurement: a democracy index. Porter relates the historical origin of statistical indexes as follows: In the 1870s, statisticians contended that statistics required 'careful comparison of these facts, to determine their significance and bearing' - an activity that could only be perfomed by few (Loua, 1874: 57-59 cited in Porter, 1995: 81). Unmistakably, André Liesse declared in 1927 that '[s]tatistical problems are not questions of elementary arithmetic for the common crowd' (Liesse, 1927: 57 cited in Porter, 1995: 81). However, transparency could not just be abandoned, since the public, until today a relevant audience for social statistics, could not be simply bypassed in the late 19th and early 20th century. The solution was to be statistical indexes calculated from a range of aggregated raw data. Indexes satisfied the public hunger for information, while keeping the 'real' statistics to the professionals. According to Porter, it were the close ties of social numbers with public action rather than the demands of statistical science itself that led to the fabrication of indexes and standardised measures in statistics (Starr, 1987 cited in Porter, 1995: 81). Indexes, therefore, embody the public aspect and social function of objectivity (Porter, 1995: 81).

FiW, as index of democracy, can profit from the air of objectivity that its statistical character imparts on it, without really having to justify the decisions made in its construction or to ensure the replicability of its scales. FH provides neither disaggregated data nor a set of coding rules to the public. However, the free availability of the aggregated ratings, enriched with reassurances and reviews, seems to suffice to convince people of the objectivity and authoritativeness of FiW as a gauge of democracy around the world. Eventually, the index seems to lead a life of its own, relatively independent of the underlying analysis.[4] In a nutshell, in this section I have

4 A similar thing is happening to the Human Development Index (HDI). Regarded by its authors as the weakest

argued that FH employs a two-fold strategy of credibilisation. The combined authority of its extensive network of expertise and its objectification strategies bestows an impressive credibility on the publication and constructs its scientificity. The next section is meant to address the second part of my research question: In what ways does the knowledge on democracy generated by FiW exercise power?

5. Governing governments: Measuring democracy around the world

Measuring instruments can be considered as discursive methods of knowledge creation (Giannone, 2010: 70). Hence, just like other tools of discourse, they 'systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). In the following, I will argue that *Freedom in the World,* as a quantitative-comparative measuring instrument of democracy, can be seen as a governmental technology in the context of global politics. Moreover, I will suggest that FiW stands in a long tradition of social statistics as governmental technology.

5.1 Statistics as governmental technology

Social statistics has a legacy as technology of modern liberal government. From the sixteenth century onwards, the theory of the art of government was linked to a kind of analysis that came to be called 'statistics' or 'science of state' (Foucault, 2000a: 212). Since then, European conceptions of government promoted an idea of statistics in which the accumulation and calculation of facts about the domain to be governed enabled the operation of government. Statistics is indispensable for modern liberal government because it makes 'the domain in question susceptible to evaluation, calculation and intervention' (Latour, 1987 in Rose and Miller, 1992: 185). More precisely, figures change the realm on which government is exercised. They make possible that events can be aggregated across time and space and uncover and construe norms and developments. Statistics, thus, enables the government to act upon and to oblige those far removed from it in time and space to pursue its policy goals without diminishing their freedom (Rose and Miller, 1992: 187). Hence, the growing authority of quantification during the last two centuries not only paralleled the rise of liberal governance in Europe and America (Porter, 1995: 74). Quantification also embodies this change in political culture and governmental technologies (Porter, 1995: 86).

Disciplinary power replaces violence with surveillance. Surveillance continues to play an important role in the exercise of governmental power relations. It is apparent that FH exercises governmental power through its measuring activity. It does so in two ways. Firstly, it exercises a new kind of global political surveillance and thus confers a new form of visibility onto the assessed countries. Secondly, it enables democratic conditionality and the justification of international interventions in the name of democracy. Both mechanisms pressure those countries scoring low in FiW to bring their behavior in line with the norm of liberal democracy.

5.2 Surveillance and shaming

element of the annual Human Development Reports, the HDI is nevertheless the most cited part of the Reports and has developed a status of autonomy with regard to the latter (Arat, 1999, in Thede, 2001: 260). The phenomenon that obtains in the cases of the HDI and FiW seems to be that 'once a quantitative measure is created, it will be used independently from the analysis that originally generated it' (Thede, 2001: 260). As a result, this 'autonomy of figures' can lead to a situation in which they are given much significance even when no one is really convinced of their validity (Keyfitz, 1987 in Porter, 1995: 8).

First of all, the production of the annual ratings is based on surveillance in the very literal sense of the word. The authors of the survey monitor closely all relevant events and developments in the countries allocated to them. They collect data, quantify and interpret them as to their implications for the 'democraticness' of the countries. The events that count as relevant are defined by a checklist of questions that serves as guideline for the analysts so that they know 'what issues are meant to be considered' (FH, 2013c). Questions in the category of political rights ask, for instance, whether the legislative representatives are elected through free and fair elections and if the government is free from pervasive corruption; questions in the domain of civil liberties ask whether there are independent media and a right to private property.

Whereas once all these issues were treated as exclusively domestic affairs, today the dominant discourse sees democracy, next to human rights and environmental protection, as legitimate interests of all human beings (Evans, 2005: 1048). Consequently, whether a state counts as a full member of the international community depends on its professed respect for these norms (1047). It is this normative order that allows FH to survey the conduct of states and their governments around the world. But FH's surveillance efforts also contribute actively to the maintenance of this order: It makes the violations of the norm visible (1055). This form of visibility constitutes the basis for the normalisation process, since norms are enforced via the 'calculated administration of shame' (Rose, 1999: 73) and shame requires anxiety for the external appearance the self.

The internationalised norm of liberal democracy is, I argue, partly being enforced via democracy measurement. This form of international political assessment confers a particular kind of visibility on the assessed states and their governments and it inculcates shame by symbolically punishing those countries most distant from the norm of liberal democracy with a low score and the label 'not free'. This arouses anxiety in these countries for their external appearance or standing in the international community. Shame is increased if the survey is well known and often consulted by friends and foes alike because this results in peer pressure.[5]

Moreover, shame is exacerbated by creating a setting in which countries can continuously compare their own performance over time and with the one of their friends and foes. They might even get the impression that they compete with fellow countries for high scores. FiW enables the direct comparison of country scores and thus of 'democraticness' and deviance around the world. It does so by assembling all countries in one table and by rating them according to the same single scoring system, with the highest score and the label 'free' awaiting the 'ideal' or 'normal' democracy – a status which is not necessarily reached by any existing country. The resulting simple numbers invite to compare Afghanistan with Andorra, Peru with Poland, or Canada with Congo – otherwise arguably strange bedfellows.

But FH does not keep the task of surveillance in the name of democracy to itself. The free availability of the ratings diffuses surveillance to everyone in the global public sphere. As we know from Foucault's account of the panopticon, this does not reduce the effectiveness of surveillance. On the contrary, it actually makes the disciplinary machinery work more effectively:

> It does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine…Similarly, it does not matter what motive animates him: the curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of a child, the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying and punishing. The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater

5 '[T]he disciplines, which are within the domain of global civil society, exert collective pressure by legitimating particular customs, modes of thought, and ways of acting' (Evans, 2005, 1055).

> the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed (Foucault, 1995: 202).

In the same vein, FH's analysts are supported in their surveying task by uncountable other agents. Because all ratings and judgements are available on the internet, every individual and each organisation can become a guard of democracy and engage in surveying, reporting, comparing, and shaming countries and governments for not living up to the standards of liberal democracy as specified by FH. The assessed countries can monitor their own performance neatly summarised in numbers and trend arrows. The visibility created motivates the assessed countries to self-discipline their own behavior. Foucault summarises this mechanism as follows: 'He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection' (Foucault, 1995: 202-3).

Hence, without any violence or direct intervention, FiW stimulates political transformation. It regulates governments by making the norm of liberal democracy quasi-obligatory. If transformation in the direction of liberal democracy really happens as a *direct* consequence of the visibility conferred by FiW is of course much more difficult to verify than is the effect of surveillance in the controlled setting of the prison. However, the 'naming and shaming' of states deviating from global norms is not an unfamiliar disciplinary instrument in international relations. The more important the international standing of a state becomes for the latter to achieve its economic and political objectives in a globalised world, the more effective this mechanism of calculated shaming will potentially become. One could argue that at this point, discipline and governmentality meet.

5.3 Conditionality and intervention

As we have seen, the visibility brought about by surveillance stimulates auto-correction through psychological incentives. In the case of FiW, this immaterial form of disciplinary power is accompanied by material mechanisms which have a decisive potential to change the individual incentive structures of the addressed states: FiW, as a convenient and straight-forward tool for democracy assessment, enables democratic conditionality as well as lends itself rhetorically to justify international interventions in the name of democracy. Conditionality refers to the practice of attaching conditions to bilateral aid, loans, debt relief or membership in International Organisations; typically, it is employed by donor countries, international financial institutions and regional organisations. Conditionality is an effective instrument of global disciplinary government because it changes the incentive structures of the addressed countries. This motivates them to bring their behaviour in line with external interests without external actors formally encroaching upon their national sovereignty and self-determination.

A particular form of conditionality is 'democratic conditionality' which requires the fulfilment of certain criteria of democratic governance in return for international rewards. Democratic conditionality depends on the measurability of democracy in two ways. On the one hand, it requires that it is possible to objectively measure who is eligible for the aspired reward and who is not. On the other hand, the impact of the conditionality instrument itself on the 'democraticness' of the addressed country must be evaluated. This is even more relevant

if the spending of public money has to be justified.[6] Many of the actors employing democratic conditionality, including USAID, UNDP, the World Bank and the European Union, choose to partly build their conditionality instruments on the ratings produced by FH. Moreover, it seems likely that also a number of less prominent actors such as NGOs providing development assistance also use FiW as a basis for their policy and investment decisions.

In principle, there are no restrictions on the use of FiW for such purposes. All government agencies, NGOs and international organisations can use the democracy index as orientation guide when deciding about their engagement focus or loan policies. An incentive to do so might be to profit from the data collection service provided for free by FH. This otherwise tends to be a laborious and expensive endeavor, which not all actors wishing to employ democratic conditionality are willing or able to afford. Moreover, many organisations rely on? FH as an 'independent' or 'external' data provider in order to increase the perceived objectivity and legitimacy of their policy tools. For instance, the MCC states as one of the selection criteria of their indicators that it should be developed by a third party (MCC, n. d., Selection Indicators). Thus, in addition to psychological pressure through 'naming and shaming' of the countries with low scores in the ratings, quantitative democracy indexes such as FiW enable material pressure when development aid or international loans are made conditional on high scores in the rating.

A third effect of quantitative democracy indexes is that they lend themselves well for the justification of international interventions in the name of democracy. Drawing on Robert Cox, Evans asserts that international interventions are an example for those instances in which global disciplinary power breaks down. When the normalising power of democracy measurement, of humanitarian and development assistance proves inappropriate to achieve political transformation or to avert political destabilisation, then the international community resorts to the use or threat of military force (Evans, 2005: 1056). However, this rather pre-modern mode of power still has to be justified in modern terms, also in the light of international law which formally guarantees the self-determination of all nations and the absence of external compulsion or interference (United Nations, 1945).

This is increasingly done with reference to the violation of global norms such as human rights or the idea of democracy as legitimate interest of everyone. If a state fails to protect these rights, so the discourse, the international community is responsible to take 'whatever action is necessary' to guarantee the rights of 'those threatened by tyrannical and illegitimate governments' (Evans, 2005: 1047). Indeed, Evans observes a rising number of instances in which human rights, including political rights and civil liberties as assessed by FH, are cited as a justification for intervention (Evans, 2005: 1047). Since international interventions are sensitive issues when it comes to public opinion, there is a demand for authoritative expert judgments to assess the situation and evaluate the necessity of intervention (Evans, 2005: 1057). This is where FH, as a credible and objective expert on democracy, can step in. Its definition of freedom places the autonomy of the individual above the nation-state and thus helps to justify interventions that aim to restore the rights of those who are deemed to be suffering from illiberal regimes. In short, the failure to fulfil the international duty to protect the democratic rights of one's citizens can lead to delegitimisation, to exclusion from the international community, and in some cases to being threatened with military intervention. Thus, in addition to psychological punishment through surveillance and

6 A study produced by Finkel and associates commissioned to evaluate the effect of USAID came to the conclusion that the $10 million invested by USAID between 1990 and 2003 led to an average increase of 0.25 points in FH's ratings for the respective countries (Finkel *et al*., 2007).

the calculated administration of shame, FiW also allows for material incentives and even military threats to induce behavioral change in the countries identified as deviant from the norm of liberal democracy.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have embarked upon an exemplary critique of *Freedom in the World*, currently the most influential democracy index. With the help of a Foucauldian conceptual framework, I first tried to deconstruct how the truth claims made by the measurement instrument are turned into accepted knowledge about the state of democracy in the world. In a second step, I shed light on the more explicit ways in which this knowledge (serves to) exercise(s) power in the global political arena.

First, I investigated the mechanisms that earned FiW its present position as authoritative source of knowledge on democracy. I argued that the democracy gauge is *credibilised* by an extensive network of expertise, including the authors of the survey, their sources, and above all notable users and reviewers. The endorsement of the index by all these actors establishes FH as an accepted member of the scientific-political discursive community and the credibility and authority of this community 'rubs off' on FiW. Next to its network of expertise, a two-fold strategy of *objectification* serves to assure the scientific objectivity of the index. On the one hand, FiW naturalises its conceptualisation of democracy as freedom so that it appears to be a neutral concept. In doing this, it draws a line under philosophical and political discussions about the nature of and relation between freedom and democracy, which suggests consensus and thus *disciplinary objectivity*. On the other hand, the statistical methods employed by FiW embody *mechanical objectivity* and thus convey that democracy can be quantified and calculated without personal bias or interests affecting the results.

Secondly, I argued that the production procedure of FiW as well as the knowledge generated both serve to exercise governmental power. For one, the production of the annual ratings involves the surveillance of political affairs in the assessed countries. This confers a particular form of global visibility upon governments and thus allows for *normalisation*. Moreover, the quantitative-comparative method of the democracy index contributes to the establishment of liberal democracy as the only rational form of political organisation, while marginalising alternatives as illiberal, unreasonable or heretic. Finally, by symbolically rewarding some and punishing others, the public index disciplines governments around the world. This normalising power is aided by the fact that the index enables conditionality instruments and lends itself well to justify international interventions in the name of democracy.

In short, Freedom House's index of political rights and civil liberties exercises governmental power by urging those countries that receive a low score in the ratings to bring their mode of government in line with the global norm of liberal democracy – a norm which the index has helped to construct in the first place. Consequently, the democracy index can be considered as a global technology of power that conducts the conduct of governments around the world without formally encroaching upon their national sovereignty. In other words, FiW performs 'government through measurement' and thereby helps to solve the central problem of liberal governmentality in international relations. Further research could establish if the mechanisms under scrutiny here are of a more general nature and can be observed across various democracy indexes. Additionally, it might be interesting to study the (potentially legitimating) effect of these mechanisms on those countries with high ratings.

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Tables

Table 1: Table of Independent Countries, excerpt (alphabetical order) reproduced from Freedom House, 2013. Freedom in the World 2013. Democratic Breakthroughs in the Balance, p. 15.