

MEASURES OF FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND THE 'FREEDOM IN THE WORLD INDEX'

by Giuseppe Ieraci and Angelo Paulon^(*)

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to show some inconsistencies in the Freedom in the World Index, annually released by Freedom House. It is not our goal to denounce such a measurement as pointless from the perspective of the social sciences, neither to claim that it is politically undesirable, but we would simply like to underline its serious theoretical and methodological limitations. Freedom House has been committed for decades to the enhancement of opportunities for the spread of democratic credo and for the establishment of democratic regimes all over the World. Supporting such a mission with scientific – or rather, as is the case, pseudo-scientific – arguments may reinforce and legitimate it vis-à-vis international public opinion. If it is assumed that in any regime the available *quantity* of freedom has an impact on the *quality* of life of the citizenship, than democracy as a political regime does not escape this truism and it could be said that the variable degree of freedom in any democracy is an indicator of its variable quality. Therefore we can derive from the above mentioned assumption that the Freedom in the World Index is a way of dealing with the problem of defining and eventually measuring the quality of democracy. Nonetheless, can we at the same time confidently assume that the degree of freedom among democratic regimes varies to such an extent to justify its selection as an indicator of quality of the democracy? Should we not adopt rather other indicators of the quality of democracy, since democracy *is* a regime of extended freedoms and therefore in methodological terms the variance of our variable (freedom) might reveal to be negligible?

^(*) Sections 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 are to be attributed to Giuseppe Ieraci, while sections 4 and 4.1 to Angelo Paulon.

In this article we address these questions and we will argue that the Freedom in the World Index may be suitable for distinguishing between “democracies” and “non-democracies” as political regimes, but inappropriate for evaluating the quality of the democracies. Moreover we will point out some methodological weaknesses of the Freedom in the World Index which make it a disputable measurement even of the *quantity* of freedom.

Assessing the quality of democracy is indeed a useful task, at least from the point of view of any democrat and it «has three broad motives: First, that deepening democracy is a *moral good, if not an imperative*; second, that reforms to improve democratic quality are essential if democracy is to achieve the *broad and durable legitimacy* that marks consolidation; and third, that long-established democracies must also reform if they are to attend to their own *gathering problems of public dissatisfaction and even disillusionment*»⁽¹⁾. This recent development of the democratic theory poses some questions. Does the shift towards “quality analysis” imply a new orientation of the concept of democracy? Has “quality analysis” any scientific foundation and validity? These two questions are strongly intertwined. In the second and third section of this article it will be argued that the researchers committed in the quality analysis of democracy have somehow abandoned its neutral conception as a procedure or “political method”⁽²⁾ in favour of its teleological (moral) conception. Quality analysts select a set of “democratic goals” or values towards which democracies should be moving (i.e., freedom, participation, equality, social justice, and similar). These goals are expressed in general and self-evident ways and they are not properly submitted to a conceptual inquiry. Democracy is therefore represented as an unequivocal political phenomenon with its normative dimensions clearly stated and the old question “What is Democracy?” is dismissed as trivial. Teleological orientation and lack of conceptual enquiry are revealed by many attempts to tackle the problem of the quality of democracy. It would be lengthy to give a complete account of all these efforts⁽³⁾, but

⁽¹⁾ Larry DIAMOND and Leonardo MORLINO (eds.), *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, p. ix (our italics).

⁽²⁾ Joseph A. SCHUMPETER, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1954.

⁽³⁾ See Mauro TEBALDI and Marco CALARESU, *Valutare la democrazia. Introduzione all'analisi della qualità democratica*, Roma, Aracne, 2009.

we thought fruitful nonetheless to address our attention to some concrete application of this kind of research. Therefore, the fourth section of the article provides an assessment of the *scientific quality* of one of the most influential rating agencies of the quality of democracy, Freedom House (FH). In the fifth section and in the conclusions, some suggestions will be put forward to overcome the conceptual puzzle posed by research on the quality of democracy.

2. From Procedural Democracy to Teleological Democracy. What is Democracy?

The shift from a procedural to a teleological definition of democracy implies a devaluation of the attributions of a democratic regime (its procedures) as mere instruments in the fulfilment of higher and final goals. As a consequence, the current working of any democracy becomes relatively irrelevant, or scientifically a-problematic, as long as the stated final goals are fulfilled. But if so, why bother with *democracy* as a procedure for the government of human affairs?

To develop our argument properly, let us start from the general problem of "What is democracy?". Normally this question is answered by listing a set of minimum requisites, such as: 1) universal adult suffrage; 2) recurring, free, competitive, and fair elections; 3) more than one party; 4) alternative sources of information⁽⁴⁾. It is easy to see that both conditions Three and Four are redundant taking into account what has already been stated by condition Two, because "free, competitive" elections imply more than one party or more than one faction involved in the struggle for the power, while no election could be defined as "fair" if there were not at least some "alternative sources of information". The competitiveness of a democracy is not increased by the number of parties exceeding the threshold of two, at least if we recognize that democratic competition has something to do with the search for the power to make decisions by the fractions of the political elite⁽⁵⁾: as long

(4) Leonardo MORLINO, *Democrazie e democratizzazioni*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003, p. 25; Larry DIAMOND and Leonardo MORLINO (eds.), *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*, pp. x-xi.

(5) Joseph A. SCHUMPETER, *op. cit.*

as somebody competes for power and the actual power incumbents are challenged, there we find democracy.

Similarly, if competition for power is admitted, and therefore there are now challengers to the political incumbents, the articulation of some different political positions by those challengers must be admitted, and that is all we need in terms of “alternative sources of information”. Once again and as in the case of the number of parties, it is not the quantity of sources of information which makes a difference but simply the fact that somebody is competing for power and that because she/he is allowed to compete her/his political positions are made known. In other words, in democracy the minimum but sufficient level of information we need to acquire is provided for us simply by the fact that somebody is allowed to stand up and challenge the power incumbents, and try to replace them. It is the fact that somebody is allowed to challenge the power the still nowadays astonishing feature of a democracy, rather than the plurality of media used to inform people about the challenge. It is the competition for power which makes possible the development of a plurality of sources of information rather than the latter being a pre-condition of competition. As argued by Hayek with regard to economic competition, the discovery of economic facts (i.e., level of prices, quality of goods, degree of customer satisfaction) and the gathering of information about them is mainly possible through the mechanism of competition⁽⁶⁾. Similarly, the circulation of political information (i.e., level of policy output, satisfaction of the public) is possible and meaningful as long as political competition is possible⁽⁷⁾.

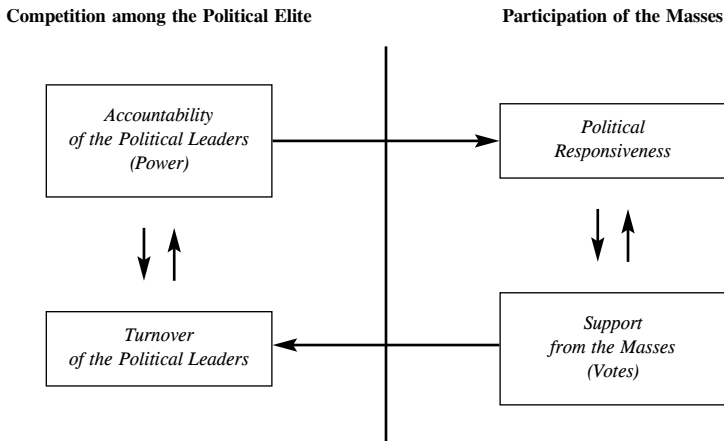
If we are searching for a minimal definition of democracy, conditions Three and Four of the definition by Diamond and Morlino are therefore implied by condition Two, because competition in itself implies more

⁽⁶⁾ Friedrich A. VON HAYEK, *The Meaning of Competition*, in *Individualism and Economic Order*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949, pp. 92-106.

⁽⁷⁾ For an extension of this argument, see Giuseppe IERACI, *Competizione politica, “lotta” per il potere e democrazia*, in Liborio MATTINA (ed.), *Studi politici*, Padova, Cedam, 1998, pp. 206-8. It has been very often remarked by scholars of non-democratic regimes that a dictatorship may tolerate a certain degree of scepticism and criticism circulating among public opinion and the social and political elites, but certainly not the formation of an internal opposition. A dictator may put up with or ignore negative or critical opinions, while the formation of an alternative political organization would move him to some drastic reactions. Opinions may be not too relevant if they are not spread by a challenging group. A non-democratic regime may be criticized but its leadership can not be challenged.

than one party or fraction in the power arena and because the discovery of such a plurality is the minimum information needed by the public opinion. If this argument is agreed upon, we can discharge those two conditions and concentrate on the two left: universal suffrage, that is *participation*, and recurring elections, that is *competition*. Differently stated, for a minimum definition of democracy a certain degree of *inclusiveness* (participation) and of *liberalization* (public contestation) suffices⁽⁸⁾. But if we are aiming at a more theoretically oriented description of a democracy, to list competition and participation as basic elements of a democracy is not enough and we ought to clarify the relations between these two dimensions of the democratic process.

Fig. 1 – The Democratic Political Process



Source: adaptation from Giuseppe IERACI, *Teoria dei governi e democrazia*, p. 35.

Such a relation can be stated in a very basic way, as in Fig. 1. Any democratic regime implies some degree of open competition over power

⁽⁸⁾ Robert A. DAHL, *Poliarchy. Participation and Opposition*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1971, pp. 5-7.

among the political elite, and this competition can be won by gathering as much political (electoral) support as possible from the masses. Therefore it is a sort of trade-off between political elite and the mass⁽⁹⁾. The political leaders search for power and they are made accountable for their actions as soon as they become the newly appointed office incumbents. Both their chances of winning the posts and of keeping them depend on their ability to respond sympathetically to the demands of the masses, promising policies during the competition or pre-electoral phase and eventually offering those policies if they become elected to the posts. Hence, the political responsiveness of the elite is a mere by-product of the struggle over political power in which the political leaders are committed. The political leaders are responsive because they are trying to gain political support in the struggle for power.

If we now change our perspective, we can assume that the masses may be relatively uninterested about the outcome of the political competition, as long as the ultimately appointed fraction of the political elite responds sympathetically to, at least, some of their demands. Therefore, in the pre-electoral phase the masses estimate the “responses” of the political elite and decide accordingly which fraction to support. By withdrawing their support from a certain fraction and directing it to another one, the masses determine the turnover of the political leaders. Therefore, the democratic turnover of the elite is a by-product of the offer of political support by the masses and of their satisfaction with the responses of the leaders to their demands.

Competition and accountability determine the turnover of the political leadership, while electoral participation and the distribution of political support generate responsiveness. Differently stated, responsiveness is a by-product of competition and political turnover is a by-product of participation. The peculiarity of democracy is not that it is a responsive regime, but rather that some political leaders are made accountable for their decisions, that is for their responses. The political leaders aim at becoming accountable and seizing power, but they have to be responsive to the demands articulated by their fellow citizens if they want to have any chance of being successful in the struggle for power. Political accounta-

⁽⁹⁾ Giuseppe IERACI, *Teoria dei governi e democrazia. Ruoli, risorse e arene istituzionali*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003, pp. 35-36.

bility is the necessary and sufficient condition of political responsiveness and hence a democracy can be defined as a *regime based on the institutionalization of political accountability*⁽¹⁰⁾.

A relatively high degree of institutionalization of political accountability can be achieved if two elementary conditions are acquired. Firstly, some effective political power or political authority must be attached to the offices gained through competition, so that the winners will be able to respond to the political demands of their supporters regardless of the level of dissatisfaction generated in their opponents. Only through some effective political authority will the office incumbents be able to generate political responses, and they may have a chance of maintaining their original support when entering the next electoral competition. In other words, an effective level of political authority is the condition *sine qua non* needed to become accountable for some decisions which, in turn, help to generate new political support or to maintain it. A (democratic) political authority which is not able to make any autonomous decision is by definition not accountable. Secondly, there must be at least the expectation of a political turnover among the political elite. This condition exercises its moderating effects both on the current office incumbents and on their opponents. The former perceive the possibility of losing their power as a realistic threat and therefore they will be induced to provide a political response as wide and "public" as possible. The latter perceive the current political situation as not irreversible, and consequently they will be inhibited in resorting to any illegal short-cut to seize power and they will moderate their opposition⁽¹¹⁾.

Przeworski defined democracy as a regime of «institutionalization of uncertainty», by which he meant that the good functioning of any democracy is always menaced by the conflict of interests between the power incumbents and their challengers⁽¹²⁾. In Przeworski's perspective, a democracy is a regime permanently on the verge of a revolutionary breakdown. On the contrary, in our perspective the institutionalization

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 26.

(11) *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28.

(12) Adam PRZEWORSKI, *Democracy as a Contingent Outcome of Conflict*, in Jon ELSTER and Rune SLAGSTAD (eds.), *Constitutionalism and Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 59-80; ID., *Democracy and the Market. Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 12-14.

of accountability fixes the boundary of political authority and makes reversible the political roles of government incumbents and opposition. Democracy makes the *temporary* exclusion from the handling of power more bearable for the political leaders and it fosters the hopes of eventually gaining power in those who are actually excluded and forced to compliance. The conflict of interests between the power holders and their opponents may be still there, but it is institutionally constrained and channelled. The realistic expectation of having their relative positions reversed, as an outcome of the political competition, moderates the actions both of the power incumbents and the opposition. Contrary to Przeworski, it could be said that a regime of institutionalization of political accountability prevents, rather than favours, a revolutionary breakdown. A consolidated democracy is based on a fully institutionalized political accountability.

3. Values, Political Regimes and the Puzzles of the Quality of Democracy

Our previous treatment of the concept of democracy aimed at identifying in an economic way its basic elements. It avoided the pitfalls of a teleological definition because it was founded on a procedural aspect or process: the open struggle for power among political leaders through elections (*competition*) generates, as by-products, the mobilization of some political support (*participation*) and some outputs or some political responses (*policies*). Which level of participation is actually guaranteed and which policies are actually produced are not central questions if a procedural definition of democracy is adopted, but they become crucial aspects of its teleological interpretation. *Should* we enhance the opportunity of direct participation? *Should* we make people happier and more satisfied with what they get?

It is obvious that in addressing the theme of the *quality* of democracy, the researchers consider democracy itself as a goal to reach and as a value to be fulfilled rather than as a political regime to be described in its working. Any political regime rests on a specific set of values. For instance, the *ancient regime* and the absolute monarchies in Europe during the XVI-XVII centuries were based on an ascriptive conception of society, characterized by hereditary social positions, and by a hierarchy which was not to be discussed. In those regimes the Monarch was

considered the epiphany of the divinity on earth, men and women were not equal, because the heritage of tradition and destiny had fixed their social positions in an immutable way. There was a stratification of social positions or classes which resulted relatively impermeable. Hierarchy and tradition were the values on which the *ancient regime* was based and the establishment could not be challenged. On the other hand, democracy is the political form of any achieving society, where there are virtually no acknowledged hierarchies and certainly the political leaders are not perceived or represented as epiphanies of the divinity. Men and women are equal, in the sense that any individual can try to climb the social ladder and may perhaps succeed in reaching the top. There is no destiny or tradition which frames our future and each individual is relatively free to try her/his luck, although this does not mean that there are not social constraints. Equality and freedom are the values on which democracy is based and in a democratic regime the establishment can be challenged.

What is then the relationship between the dominant values in any social context and the political regimes through which those values are expressed? In other words, how can we describe the connection between the values of democracy, namely equality and freedom, and its procedural aspects? To deal with this problem in a very general manner, let us recall briefly the way it was solved by Parsons who assumed that each individual acts according to a system of expectations, which may be revealed and channelled by symbols or by cultural traditions⁽¹³⁾. Such a system of expectations produces a complex set of motivations towards the action. This motivational orientation, as Parsons labelled it, can be broken down into three factors: satisfaction with regard to the content of the action (*reward*); knowledge or cognitive definition of the appropriate patterns of behaviour (*orientation*); and finally, selective evaluation of interests and patterns of behaviour (*value*)⁽¹⁴⁾. Parsons defined a value as any element of a system of symbols which can be used as a criterion in the selection of the alternatives opened to the agent. Therefore, some

⁽¹³⁾ Talcott PARSONS, *The Social System*, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1951.

⁽¹⁴⁾ There was indeed a fourth factor, namely the temporal dimension in which the agent places its interest. The temporal dimension helps in identifying the active-passive attitude of the agent and concerns all the factors included in its motivational orientation (reward, orientation, value).

values are used by any agent as criteria to support her\his cognitive judgements and when she\he is searching for rewards⁽¹⁵⁾.

It may seem all very abstract and theoretic, but we can try to make it more operational if we finally apply this schema to the problem of democracy. In democracy, equality and freedom are the values assumed by the agents when they are selecting a pattern of behaviour and searching for some reward. Equality implies that the ratio of the social exchange between two or more agents must be based on reciprocity and on extrinsic benefits⁽¹⁶⁾: «The basic principles underlying the conception of exchange may be briefly summarized. An individual who supplies rewarding services to another obligates him. To discharge this obligation, the second must furnish benefits to the first in turn»⁽¹⁷⁾. Freedom implies that any exchange and social relation among equal actors should be admitted, although some limitations are normally introduced through the judicial and administrative systems which fulfil the minimum function of preventing the disruption of the political community. Democracy is a political regime whose rules and structures of authority accomplish freedom and equality as values⁽¹⁸⁾. Its rules guarantee all the individuals and all the preferences as “political equals”, because such preferences can be freely formulated, openly signified and are not discriminated because of their content or source⁽¹⁹⁾. Its structures of authority are inherently opened to any challenger thanks to the eligibility for public offices, which depends on votes and other expressions of preference.

If any political regime is grounded on certain aspects of motivational orientation, that is rewards, patterns of behaviour and above all *values*, such as freedom and equality in democracy, how can we evaluate the

⁽¹⁵⁾ As we know, Parsons did not conceive the individual actions in isolation, but rather in relation with each other. The individual agents are integrated in four sub-systems of action, which are adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, and latency (A-G-I-L), with their distinctive processes and with their distinctive set of relations. Processes, exchanges and relations in each sub-system of action force the individuals to differentiate themselves, to form their own *egos*, and to identify with *social roles*.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Cf. Peter M. BLAU, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, New York, Wiley, 1964, pp. 312-13.

⁽¹⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Values, rules and authority structure are the basic elements in the definition of a political regime according to David EASTON, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, New York, Wiley, 1965.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Robert A. DAHL, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

quality and the performance of a given regime? It is with regard to this passage that the research on the quality of democracy shows some inconsistencies. The evaluation of the quality of democracy is indeed normally carried out on the same values which provide some foundation to the democracy itself. If equality and freedom are the values on which any democracy rests, saying that the higher the level of freedom and equality guaranteed by a given regime the more democratic it is, is tantamount to saying that «the more democratic a regime the more democratic it is». A regime which allows freedom and recognizes equality, as criteria for the selection of interests and for the patterns of behaviour, must be a democracy by definition assuming that in any democracy the motivational orientations are indeed set by values such as freedom and equality. Besides, it is a disputable research strategy to compare and to rank states which are fully democratic, because they guarantee freedom and equality, with states in which these are both lacking, as is common practice according to the indexes of FH. In other words, freedom and equality may be elected as values or criteria of identification of the democratic regimes versus the non-democratic regimes, but they would not serve properly the aim of evaluating the quality of the democracies because the latter *are* by definition regimes of freedom and equality.

We are not implying that there are not measurable differences among the democratic regimes in the way these two values or goals are achieved. Even if we assume that any democracy is based on freedom and equality, it is possible to register some differences among the democracies in the world when we attempt to measure these two values. Nonetheless, the variations in the degrees of allowed freedom and guaranteed equality will not significantly affect democracies if one adheres to the above recalled procedural or empirical definition and if one takes into account its core elements. If there are differences in the degree of freedom and equality allowed by contemporary democracies, these are bound to be minimal⁽²⁰⁾. Any regime who wants to be a democracy

(20) To clarify this point, let us recall for analogy the long lasting debate on the origin of the legislative outputs in parliamentary democracies. All research has pointed out that legislation in parliamentary democracies was mainly originated by the initiative of the governments rather than by the independent MPs. Parliamentary democracies do not show any remarkable variation from this point of view, notwithstanding that they vary a lot if, for example, one displays them according to the well-known "majoritarian-consensual" pattern. The reason why this is so is very simple: in any parliamentary demo-

indeed must allow its citizens at least to express their political preferences (freedom) and must weigh and consider them without any discrimination (equality). The free circulation of political opinions or preferences and the opportunity to test fairly the popular support for them are the two basic conditions of democratic competition. A political regime which fails to guarantee both conditions is simply not a democracy.

4. Freedom in the World Index

In summary, the main pitfall in the analyses conducted by FH consists in the selection of “freedom” as a goal of democracy instead of treating it properly as a value or a pre-condition of democracy. If the individuals are not free (and equal), democracy is simply not given and, therefore, it is not theoretically and methodologically plausible to design a general freedom index applicable both to democratic and non-democratic regimes. It would be, let us say, like comparing birds and snakes and becoming concerned because the latter do not fly. Snakes have no wings and they do not fly, and similarly the regimes analysed by FH which are not based on freedom and equality are not democracies.

The annual survey «Freedom in the World» aims at evaluating freedom as experienced by individuals in virtually all the countries of the World. The survey groups the countries into three main categories: «independent States», «related Territories», and «disputed Territories». «Related Territories» are colonies, protectorates and island districts of sovereign States, which are dependent on the motherland but which are not presently loci of political or international conflict. In the 2006 report two «related Territories» were evaluated: Hong Kong with regard to China, and Puerto Rico with regard to the USA. «Disputed territories» are geographical areas inside independent states, partially out of control of the central government, with relevant activity of independent and nationalist movements, and characterized by violent political conflict. In its 2006 report FH con-

cracy the legislation flows through the vote of a parliamentary majority which normally corresponds to the majority supporting the government. Therefore, only (or almost only) the government proposals get through successfully. Similarly in our case, because a democracy is unavoidably “freedom plus equality” we may confidently expect to find in any democracy more or less the same levels of freedom and equality.

sidered 11 of such territories (Nagorno-Karabakh, Tibet, North Cyprus, Abkhazia, Kashmir, Transnistria, Western Sahara, Chechnya, Kosovo, the territories under the National Palestinian Authority, and the territories in the West Bank occupied by Israel).

According to FH, freedom is «the opportunity to act spontaneously in a variety of fields outside the control of the government and other centres of potential domination». FH measures freedom along two broad dimensions: Political Rights (PR) and Civil Liberties (CL)⁽²¹⁾. While political rights allow the citizens to participate in the democratic process through the extension of the right to vote and the eligibility of the representatives and of the public officers, civil rights allow them to express their opinion, their political and their religious beliefs, establishing a “rule of law” which guarantees that there will be no interference from the State. The ratings awarded by FH are derived from a check-list of 10 questions related to the PR, grouped into three subcategories, and 15 questions related to the CL, grouped into four subcategories, for a total of 25 questions (see Tab. 1). These questions are submitted to some experts selected by FH for the editing of the *Country Reports* and to the FH’s reporters in the world⁽²²⁾. They may award from 0 to 4 points to each of these 25 questions, according to their opinions and estimates of the degree of rights or liberties in each country (0 indicating a minimum of PR and/or CL and 4 indicating a maximum)⁽²³⁾. An average is calculated on points awarded to each country by the experts.

(21) An analytic description of the survey methodology is available at FH website: see <http://www.freedomhouse.org>. The survey’s methodology is periodically reviewed by an Advisory Committee on Methodological Issues which, over the years, has made a certain number of methodological changes, in order to adapt to evolving ideas about PR and CL.

(22) These are economic and political analysts, historians, newspaper reporters and journalists, writers, academics, freelance researchers, and experts of international relationships and human rights. The complete list of the FH’s referees for year 2006 is available on: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=36&year=2005>.

(23) The only exception is the Additional Discretionary Question *b*) in the PR check-list (see above, Tab. 1), for which 1 to 4 points may be subtracted, depending on the severity of the analysed situation.

Tab. 1 – Political Rights and Civil Liberties Check-list

Political Rights	Civil Liberties
<p>A. Electoral Process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the head of state and/or head of government or other chief authority elected through free and fair elections? 2. Are the legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 3. Are there fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, fair polling, and honest tabulation of ballots? 	<p>D. Freedom of Expression and Belief</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression? 2. Are there free religious institutions, and is there free private and public religious expression? 3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free of extensive political indoctrination? 4. Is there open and free private discussion?
<p>B. Political Pluralism and Participation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 2. Is there a significant opposition vote, de facto opposition power, and a realistic possibility for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group? 4. Do cultural, ethnic, religious, and other minority groups have reasonable self-determination, self-government, autonomy, or participation through informal consensus in the decision-making process? 	<p>E. Associational and Organizational Rights</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion? 2. Is there freedom of political or quasi-political organization (this includes political parties, civic organizations, ad hoc issue groups, etc.)? 3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalent, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?
<p>C. Functioning of Government</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do freely elected representatives determine the policies of the government? 2. Is the government free from pervasive corruption? 3. Is the government accountable to the electorate between elections, and does it operate with openness and transparency? 	<p>F. Rule of law</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there an independent judiciary? 2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Are police under direct civilian control? 3. Is there protection from police terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? 4. Is the population treated equally under the law?
<p>Additional Discretionary PR Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) For traditional monarchies that have no parties or electoral process, does the system provide for consultation with the people, encourage discussion of policy, and allow the right to petition the ruler? b) Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favour of another group? 	<p>G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there personal autonomy? Does the state control travel, choice of residence, or choice of employment? Is there freedom from indoctrination and excessive dependency on the state? 2. Do citizens have the right to own property and establish private businesses? Is private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, or organized crime? 3. Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family? 4. Is there equality of opportunity and the absence of economic exploitation?

Therefore, each expert may award a maximum of 40 points to the PR check-list, if a country receives 4 points for each of the 10 questions, and similarly a maximum of 60 points to the CL check-list, if a country receives 4 points for each of the 15 questions. The point averages awarded to the PR and CL check-lists are arranged in brackets which determine the PR and CL ratings, from 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest and 7 the lowest degree of PR and CL respectively (see Tab. 2).

Tab. 2 – Political Rights (PR) and Civil Liberties (CL)

Total raw points	PR Rating	Total raw points	CL Rating
36-40	1	53-60	1
30-35	2	44-52	2
24-29	3	35-43	3
18-23	4	26-34	4
12-17	5	17-25	5
6-11	6	8-16	6
0-5	7	0-7	7

Source: FH, <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

Finally, these two ratings are combined together in the simple formula

$$(\text{PR rating} + \text{CL rating}) \div 2$$

to determine the overall status of *Free*, *Partly Free* or *Not Free* in each case. Countries and territories whose ratings are included between 1.0 and 2.5 are considered *Free*; those whose ratings are included between 3.0 and 5.0 are considered *Partly Free*; and those whose ratings are included between 5.5 and 7.0 are labelled *Not Free* (see Tab. 3).

Tab. 3 – Country Status

Combined average of PR and CL ratings: (PR+CL)/2	Country Status
1.0 to 2.5	Free
3.0 to 5.0	Partly Free
5.5 to 7.0	Not Free

Source: FH, <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

It should appear that the reduction of the two point systems to a seven-scale rating (see Tab. 2) and the subsequent manipulation of the two ratings into a status index (see Tab. 3) force cases which may vary drastically among each other into a single class. Let us take, for instance, the *Free* status and consider that countries in this class may register a combined rating of PR and CL swinging from 1.0 to 2.5. Consider furthermore two countries (A and B) both *Free*, but one (A) obtaining rating 1 in both PR and CL, and the other (B) obtaining rating 3 in PR and rating 2 in CL. If we take into account the “raw points” collected by the two countries we might find out that one country (A) was awarded averages of 40 and 60 points with regard to respectively PR and CL, for a total average of 100 points, while the other (B) was awarded averages of 24 and 44 points with regard to respectively PR and CL, for a total average of 68 points. The two countries would therefore register a variation of 32% in the average acquired points and yet would be considered as belonging to the same class.

Finally, «Freedom in the World» qualifies as an *Electoral Democracy* any country which meets certain minimum standards⁽²⁴⁾:

1. the presence of a competitive, multi-party political system;
2. the guarantee of universal adult suffrage;
3. the organization of regularly contested elections held in conditions of ballot secrecy or reasonable ballot security, and in the absence of electoral frauds;
4. the effective access of the major political parties to public opinion and to the electorate through the media and through fair political campaign.

As it was previously stated, with regard to the definition of democracy by Diamond and Morlino, conditions 1 and 2 are necessary and sufficient to define a democracy and in itself the concept of “Electoral democracy” is a tautology and a truism, similarly, let us say, to the hypothetical concept of “Winged Bird” which no zoologist would accept. The democratic process is basically open political competition whose pay-off is the electoral support, that is votes. A bird must have wings, a democracy must have some sort of electoral competition⁽²⁵⁾.

(24) This judgement is based on the fairness and the competitiveness of the last major national elections. A country cannot be considered an Electoral Democracy if it has been dominated by a single party or movement over numerous national elections, nor if there is some unelected power holder responsible for national decisions, whether a monarch or a foreign international authority.

(25) Notice that none of the questions grouped under the title «Political Pluralism and

4.1. Measurement rules and index calculation

These weaknesses have not passed unnoticed. Munck and Verkuilen claim that the FH index includes many theoretically irrelevant attributes⁽²⁶⁾. Hoffman argues that the usefulness of the index is limited because of the inclusion of measures such as “socio-economic rights”, “freedom from gross socio-economic inequalities”, “property rights”, and “freedom from war”, which may or may not be associated with democracy⁽²⁷⁾. Other political scientists and researchers do not agree with these criticisms. Li and Reuveny, for instance, suggest that the data used by FH capture aspects (such as the de facto power of the opposition, freedom from foreign domination, minority rights, freedom of expression and belief, human rights and personal economic rights) that other measures tend to ignore⁽²⁸⁾, but that cannot be excluded while assessing the democratic quality of a regime.

More doubts are raised by some methodological solutions adopted by FH. Each of the questions listed in the check-list generates a score measured on an ordinal 5-point scale. This choice seems to be driven by a concern with symmetry rather than by consideration for the structure of the data⁽²⁹⁾. Furthermore, FH does not publish the disaggregate data, therefore there is no way of knowing if a certain question has received 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 points and why. In the end, the aggregate data offered by FH must be «accepted largely on faith»⁽³⁰⁾. As for the aggregation procedure, we have pointed out that PR and CL scores are generated by

Participation» refers explicitly to the *universal suffrage* nor to the *adult right to vote* (see Tab. 1), a core element of any empirical definition of democracy.

⁽²⁶⁾ Gerardo L. MUNCK and Jay VERKUILEN, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices*, in «Comparative Political Studies», XXXV, 2002, pp. 5-34, p. 28; see also Gerardo L. MUNCK and Richard SNYDER, *Mapping Political Regimes: How the Concepts We Use and the Way We Measure Them Shape the World We See*, American Political Science Association (APSA), Chicago, September 2-5, 2004: <http://www.asu.edu/clas/polisci/cqrm/APSA2004/MunckSnyder.pdf>.

⁽²⁷⁾ Amanda L. HOFFMAN, *Political Parties, Electoral Systems and Democracy: a Cross-National Analysis*, in «European Journal of Political Research», XLIV, 2005, pp. 231-43, p. 235.

⁽²⁸⁾ Quan LI and Rafael REUVENY, *Economic Globalization and Democracy: an Empirical Analysis*, in «British Journal of Political Science», XXXIII, 2003, pp. 29-54, p. 50.

⁽²⁹⁾ Gerardo L. MUNCK and Jay VERKUILEN, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy*, p. 21.

⁽³⁰⁾ *Ibid.*

adding up the scores assigned to each of the respective questions (10 for PR and 15 for CL). This operation, apparently simple, is as a matter of fact extremely ambiguous. FH defines the status of a country assigning scores to questions related to the PR and the CL, adding these scores, determining consequently the ratings of PR and CL, and finally combining the averages of the ratings.

Two main faults undermine this sequence of operations. Firstly, PR and CL scores are assigned through expert judgements. Experts and scholars answer the questions and award scores which cannot be tested, because disaggregated data are not made public. The whole survey somehow relies on subjective judgements. Secondly, by adding them, the scores may hypothetically annul each other. If a country scored 40 PR points and 0 CL points, its ratings would be 1 and 7, respectively. Then, FH index would be $(1+7) / 2 = 4$ [index = $(PR+CL) / 2$]. As a consequence, a country with virtually no civil liberties would be awarded the *Partly Free* status. In other words, the aggregating procedure may distort the evaluation of those countries where high levels of PR compensate the lack of CL, or vice-versa.

The procedure adopted by FH implies that the two dimensions of freedom (PR and CL) are independent. But this in turn would mean that *both* of them must be empirically detected, and if only one of them is lacking, that regime would be not democratic. It seems quite logical, in fact, to assume that if a country totally lacks PR *or* CL, it cannot be labelled as a democracy⁽³¹⁾.

5. A possible way to escape the fallacies of the quality research

«Freedom in the World» brings into focus PR and CL but, quite surprisingly, it forgets a third type of rights. In fact *social rights* are totally ignored by the survey. There are no questions addressed to these kind of rights, such as the right to health, to assistance and to social security,

⁽³¹⁾ A solution could be opting for a multiplication of the factors, rather for their addition. A low (or nought) value for either of the two variables would be enough to keep the final index low (or nought) in like manner. This solution would immediately show the extremely low quality of democracy (if the index is next to zero) or its overall absence (index = 0). Multiplication is used by Tatu VANHANEN, *Polyarchy Dataset. Measures of Democracy, 1810-2002*, <http://www.prio.no/cscw/datasets/PoliarchyDataset-MeasuresofDemocracy1810-2002.pdf>.

the right to strike, to work, to study and to an education, the right to housing, the right to a clean and healthy environment. Social rights are connected to the Welfare State, and their enactment requires a positive action from the political institutions. As a consequence, there are also great dissimilarities in the way different constitutions and laws formally acknowledge and guarantee them⁽³²⁾, as shown for example by the opposite conceptions of the role of the state in Europe and in the USA.

The above remarks have been not introduced as final pretexts against FH. They rather suggest a possible escape lane from the tautologies and the inconsistencies of this approach to the study of democracy. Our main argument is that freedom and equality are the pre-conditions of any democratic regime. Therefore, stating their effectiveness or their level is not conducive to any assessment of the quality of a given democratic regime, but it is rather a way of expressing an ontological judgement on its existence. A democracy exists only *and only if* freedom and equality are guaranteed. Freedom and equality are necessary and sufficient conditions of democracy.

The quality of democracy could be better assessed by focusing on other objects rather than freedom and equality. For example, if we accept that equality and freedom are the fundamental values on which any democracy rests, we could start asking a basic question: What guarantees those fundamental values in a democratic regime? The answer is not so difficult since we know that in democracy freedom and equality are guaranteed by a variety of *political and social institutions*. Therefore a meaningful research on the quality of democracy could address political and social institutions such as parliaments, governments, parties, groups and associations, bureaucracy and so on. The analysis of the performance of these institutions could be a second stage in the quality research design: what do political and social institutions do in a given democracy? Generating social and political rights through a variety of policies is the answer, therefore research on the quality of democracy could address the *social and political products* of the democratic process such as the right to health, to assistance and to social security, the right to strike, to work, to study and to an education, the right to housing, the right to a clean and healthy environment, and so on.

(32) Larry DIAMOND and Leonardo MORLINO, *The Quality of Democracy*, in «CDDRL Working Papers», no. 20, 2004, pp. 25-26.

It is important to underline that although social and political institutions, on one hand, and rights as social and political products, on the other hand, are particularly developed and widespread in democracy, they are not identical to the fundamental values (freedom and equality) on which the democracy is based. Indeed, social and political institutions may work differently in various (democratic) regimes, while social and political rights may be performed and offered differently by various democracies. An inquiry about the institutions and the socio-political products or goods provided by the democracies of the world to their citizens would go to the heart of their quality much better than any investigation into freedom and equality, and it would also legitimize a comparison between democratic and non-democratic regimes.

It is obvious that a democracy offers freedom and equality to an extent unknown to any other political regime, simply because freedom and equality are the foundations or the pre-conditions of democracy. Therefore, freedom and equality are not dimensions capable of generating any appreciable degree of variance among the democracies. A regime lacking both freedom and equality or even only one of the two “qualities” should be simply dismissed from the sample of the democracies. On the other hand, the socio-political institutions and the set of goods or policies provided by the democracies are bound to be an excellent subject of investigation. The degree of variance among the democratic states in terms of institutions and of level and quality of the policies offered may be high. Moreover, a similar enquiry would better justify a comparison between democracies and non-democracies, because the production of a set of policy outputs is a generalized systemic function, regardless of the type of political regime, and some socio-political institutions are admitted by any political regime. In comparison with the non-democratic regimes, the type of socio-political institutions and the quantity and quality of the policies offered to the citizens by the democracies would result overwhelmingly higher, so as to leave little doubt about the fact that the democratic world is a better place where to live.

Any researcher opting for the study of government performances in terms of institutions and of policies and rights offered should be aware that she\he is entering a new and different research field. Consequently, she\he should not try to combine in a general index the evaluation of the meta-criteria of democracy (freedom and equality), which define the ontological status of a regime (being or not being a democracy) with the evaluation of the regime performance. As stressed by Plattner, «democracy is a form of government that must not only be democratic but also

effectively govern»⁽³³⁾. An *ineffective* democratic government is not therefore a government insufficiently democratic but rather a weak, inefficient or feckless although *still democratic* government. In other words, the defining features or meta-criteria which identify a democracy are analytically and empirically distinct from its performance: «History is filled with examples of democracies that lost popular support because of their failure to satisfy their citizens»⁽³⁴⁾. Nor it is necessarily true that good levels of effectiveness are associated with high degrees of legitimacy of the political regimes, according to the well-known argument by Lipset⁽³⁵⁾. Freedom and equality can not discriminate among democracies but they may serve as values or meta-criteria to distinguish normatively between democracies and non-democracies. Performance, government effectiveness, policy outputs, and similar, may not say anything about a regime being democratic or not but they may serve to signal the “quality” of various regimes and of the democracies among them.

In the last hundred years, democracy has enhanced our “capabilities”⁽³⁶⁾ to an unimaginable extent and people who are eager to acquire democracy are aiming at this sort of development. It is important to underline that such capabilities can not be assessed regardless of the political context in which they are expressed. Since its establishment, the *democratic* political method based on certain socio-political institutions and on the diffusion of rights has been bettering our capabilities. In terms of normative goals (promoting democracy), it is hence possible that an enquiry on the institutions and on the rights offered by various political regimes would do democracy a better turn than extolling abstract and ethnocentric values such as freedom and equality.

6. Conclusion. Is the quality research possible?

One of the most appreciable aspects of the survey «Freedom in the World» lies in the extent of the sample of countries scrutinized⁽³⁷⁾. The

(33) Marc F. PLATTNER, *A Skeptical Perspective*, in Larry DIAMOND and Leonardo MORLINO (eds.), *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*, pp. 77-81, p. 78.

(34) *Ibid.*, p. 80.

(35) Seymour Martin LIPSET, *Political Man*, London, Heinemann, 1959, p. 81.

(36) Amartya SEN, *Development as Freedom*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.

(37) In the 2006 survey, 192 Independent Countries, 2 Related Territories and 12 Disputed Territories, for a total amount of 206.

Polyarchy index devised by Vanhanen takes into account 187 countries, while Polity IV is limited to 161 cases⁽³⁸⁾ [Munck and Verkuilen 2002, 6]. «Freedom in the World» focuses its attention on virtually all the world, including small nations, colonies, protectorates and disputed territories, trying to draw an accurate picture of the global situation of freedom as experienced by individuals. Secondly, «Freedom in the World» captures aspects that other measures ignore or do not consider in depth: power of the opposition, freedom from war or from foreign domination, minority rights, freedom of expression and belief, human rights and personal economic rights. Thirdly, «Freedom in the World» has been in progress since 1972 and it has constantly checked some variables expected to be linked to the degree of individual freedom. It has allowed opinion makers, journalists, and sometimes even academic scholars⁽³⁹⁾, to compare the process of democratization in various areas of the world and to assess the defence of human rights in the World.

Nonetheless, one can not refrain from applying to the rating system of FH the same causticity exhibited by R.A. Dahl over forty years ago with respect to similar attempts to evaluate political systems: «Yet a recipe for instant political evaluation – add quantitative data and stir for ten minutes – is, surely, illusory»⁽⁴⁰⁾. Dahl underlined that «in order to judge how well a political system performs, one needs three elements:

(38) Gerardo L. MUNCK and Jay VERKUILEN, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy*, p. 6.

(39) Fish uses the FH ratings to measure the level of democratization of some countries [M. Steven FISH, *Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies*, in «Journal of Democracy», XVII, 2006, pp. 5-20, p. 9]. Gilley relies on the FH scores in a quantitative analysis of the state political legitimacy in the late 1990's and early 2000's [Bruce GILLEY, *The Meaning and Measure of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries*, in «European Journal of Political Research», XLV, 2006, pp. 499-525, p. 507]. Diamond argues there is not much consensus on what makes a country “democratic”, and nonetheless the FH ratings are the only measure of democracy he widely utilizes [Larry DIAMOND, *Elections without Democracy: Thinking about Hybrid Regimes*, in «Journal of Democracy», XIII, 2002, pp. 21-35]. Landman recognizes that global comparative and quantitative studies on the protection of human rights rely heavily on «various standards-based measures [...], in particular [...] the FH scales of civil and political liberties» [Todd LANDMAN, *The Political Science of Human Rights*, in «British Journal of Political Science», XXXV, 2005, pp. 549-72, p. 556]. Finally Kwon uses FH scores in his research on the effects of the economic reforms on democratization [Hyeok Yong KWON, *Economic Reform and Democratization: Evidence from Latin America and Post-Socialist Countries*, in «British Journal of Political Science», XXXIV, 2004, pp. 357-68, p. 360].

(40) Robert A. DAHL, *The Evaluation of Political Systems*, in Ithiel DE SOLA POOL (ed.), *Contemporary Political Science*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1967, p. 176.

criteria of value, worth, goodness, excellence, desirability; data about the behaviour of the system; and ways of applying the criteria to the behaviour of the system in order to measure the degree of value, worth, goodness, excellence, desirability»⁽⁴¹⁾. As we have argued, the FH index is rather unsatisfactory with regard to all the three elements. The values to be scrutinized are selected among the pre-conditions of democracy and they can say very little about the effects or the products of the democratic process. There is no reason why such values as freedom and equality were chosen instead of others, such as social rights, for instance, which are more immediately connected to the “capabilities” of individuals. The data are never from primary sources and they are not verifiable, because they are derived from the judgements of some experts about each country. Moreover, data are collected with no clear comparative strategy, in that all the political regimes of the world are treated as comparable cases with no distinctions according to regime types. Finally, the methods of measurement somewhat resemble the «stir for ten minutes» idea which Dahl complained of. The scores arbitrarily determined by the experts for each country are reduced to averages and added together, regardless of the referred dimensions, so that a general ranking is obtained. The average scores are then aggregated to generate a rating system based on a seven-interval scale. All the scores are blurred in this final picture, which is then so often presented with great emphasis by the media and even more frequently used by scholars.

It has to be said that we would be faced with tough hurdles even if we decided to tackle the problem of the quality of democracy in a more rigorous and “academically correct” way. The analyses of the democratic performance conducted by Lijphart, Rogowski and Weaver, by Lijphart and Crepez and by Lijphart do not mistake the pre-conditions of democracy with its qualities⁽⁴²⁾. They select a set of characteristics of

(41) *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

(42) Arend LIJPHART, Ronald ROGOWSKI and R. Kent WEAVER, *Separation of Powers and Cleavage Management*, in R. Kent WEAVER and Bert A. ROCKMAN (eds.), *Do Institutions Matter? Government Capabilities in the United States and Abroad*, Washington, Brookings Institution, 1993, pp. 302-42; Arend LIJPHART and Marcus M.L. CREPAZ, *Corporatism and Consensus Democracy in Eighteen Countries: Conceptual and Empirical Linkages*, in «British Journal of Political Science», XXI, 1991, pp. 235-46; Arend LIJPHART, *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999.

democratic systems⁽⁴³⁾ and treat them as “qualities” of two types of democracy, the majoritarian and the consensus. The different characteristics of the majoritarian democracies and consensus democracies are then statistically correlated to a set of dependent variables drawn mainly from the macro-economic system⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Can we trust these evaluations of the quality of democracy based on the macro-economic performance of the system? They certainly correspond better to the need to focus on some substantial results and achievements of democracies, rather than speculate on meta-values such as freedom and equality. Nonetheless, some major difficulties still persist⁽⁴⁵⁾. Firstly, the problem of the selection on dependent variables, with regard to which the democratic performance is measured, can not be neglected. Consider, for instance, the emphasis on budgetary control which is often regarded as one of the indicators of performance of the various type of democracy⁽⁴⁶⁾. We can easily imagine two opposite, radical views on this matter. On one hand, a conservative would attach a top value to such a target and he would be dissatisfied with any democracy which did not perform well in terms of public expenditures. On the other hand, a progressive would be more prone to disregard budgetary control as a priority, because he may be more concerned with the actions of the government for the enactment of social policies which involve public expenditure. Values are hence irreconcilable.

Secondly, in the research on democratic performance some statistical correlations are established between features of the democratic system and macro-economic performance. Here we encounter a major difficulty. Indeed, the performance of a system at the macro level might be affected by some intervening variables which obviously are not directly controlled by the political institutions of the democracies under scrutiny. This is even more evident in a worldwide integrated economic system, where – for example – the decision of any supra-national institution affects the economic results achieved by the single governments, or any crisis trig-

(43) According to Lijphart [*Patterns of Democracy*]: party system, executive power, executive-legislative relation, electoral system, interest representation.

(44) According to Lijphart [*Patterns of Democracy*]: economic growth, GNP, unemployment rates, level of strikes, budgetary deficit, economic freedom.

(45) Cf. Giuseppe IERACI, *Teoria dei governi e democrazia*, pp. 217-47.

(46) Arend LIJPHART, *Patterns of Democracy*.

gers multiple foci of crises as a domino effect. The *policy outputs* of a democratic government, which are the individual decisions made by the political institutions and by their incumbents, are evaluated on the base of some *macro-systemic outcomes* not directly determined by the policy decisions at stake. The causal links between policy decisions at the institutional or democratic level and the outcomes in the economic environment are too remote or simply doubtful, as Lijphart himself has to admit: «[...] the overall results are relatively weak and mixed; when controls were introduced and outliers were removed, few statistically significant correlations were found. Hence, the empirical results do not permit the definitive conclusion that consensus democracies are better decision-makers and better policy-makers than majoritarian systems»⁽⁴⁷⁾.

The very limited and questionable results reached by research on the quality and on the performance of democracies should induce us to take some cautious actions: to abandon the claim to measure some general performance level or quality level of the democracy; to define carefully the units of analysis to be investigated and the properties of the democratic system we are studying; to limit the analysis to the most immediate consequences of the actions of the units selected, refraining from attributing some general and systemic outcomes to them; to avoid over stretching the causal links between our independent variables and dependent variables. The findings may prove modest, but at least the quality of our research would improve.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

