

FREEDOM HOUSE* RATINGS' DISTORTION BY US ATTITUDE

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Abstract

Although studies have already found Freedom House's* Freedom in the World rankings to be geopolitically biased, the index remains in use by academia (including Russian academia) with surprising frequency. This article provides detailed and quantitative evidence that Freedom House* is essentially part of the US Government and US political establishment, and is thus in principle liable to issue moral judgements that are distorted by the US's attitude towards the states under judgement. The article then develops a more accurate formula for calculating a state's democraticness according to the Polity index, and also develops an improved method, based on arms transfers and UNGA voting, of approximating states' alignment with the US (and thus presumed US attitude towards states). It then uses these metrics to measure the effect of US attitude on Freedom House's* evaluations of states' freedom/democracy. This bias is found to be about half as powerful as the effect of actual regime type, approaching equal size in more recent years. Its magnitude is sufficient to, in some cases, completely transform a state's regime type, from very democratic to very authoritarian or (less commonly) vice versa. These findings cast grave doubt upon the validity of Freedom House* metrics and confirm the US's status as a universalistic state whose application of its own Cosmopolitan-Liberal ideology is deeply flawed, and they problematize political science in universalistic states as not only (or at all) a source of knowledge, but also (or instead) an important source of legitimization and motivation for such states' international behavior.

Keywords:

US; attitude; Freedom House; Polity; regime type; democracy; bias; alignment; arms; UNGA

Introduction

This article tests the *Freedom in the World* ratings of Freedom House (FH)* for bias resulting from US government (USG) attitude and associated with states' (non)alignment with the US.

Section by section, this article:

- Shows that FH's* (in)accuracy is important, *inter alia*, because FH* is cited with surprising frequency within Russian academia.
- Reviews the existing literature on FH's* possible bias, and outlines this article's contribution to the subject.

- Explains that FH* is functionally part of the USG and representative of the US political elite, and thus liable to be biased.
- Details why and how FH* judgements are incorporated into the analysis as a simple average of FH's* *Political Rights* and *Civil Liberties*.
- Evaluates various measures of regime type, selecting Polity as the best baseline measure against which FH* can be compared.
- Examines Polity's various components, selecting *Competitiveness of Executive Recruitment* and *Competitiveness of Participation*.

* Designated an undesirable organization in Russia by Ministry of Justice Order No. 619-R of 21 May 2024 and by decision of the Office of the General Prosecutor on 6 May 2024.

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- Details how they are transformed into a single measure of democracy.

- Explains why and how voting alignment in the UN General Assembly, and patterns of arms transfers, are used to create a measure of US relations/attitude vis-à-vis other states.

- Carries out the core analysis, regressing FH* judgements over actual regime type (Polity) and US attitude (UNGA and arms) in 1972–2018. Bias is most certainly found. US attitude has a p-value of .000 in nearly all models, and its effect is about half as large (coefficient 62%, fixed-effects coefficient 59%, effect size 47% as large) as that of actual regime type. It approaches or even exceeds the effect of regime type in 2014–2018 (coefficient 84%, fixed-effects coefficient 130%, effect size 67%). And these figures refer to average effects; in many categories of actual regime type, many or most US-hostility-afflicted states are greatly or even fully ‘downgraded’ by FH*.

- Discusses the results and concludes.

Russian academic literature’s citation of Freedom House’s* *Freedom in the World*

FH’s* (in)accuracy is an important matter, *inter alia*, because the index is relied upon with surprising frequency by respected Russian scholars in leading Russian journals. (Regarding English-language usage in 1973–2010, see Bush [2017: 718].)

Overall, within CyberLeninka’s database for the period 2011–2024, 152 Russian-language articles reference Freedom House’s* *Freedom in the World* index¹. The standout journals are

Political Science (*Политическая наука*), with eleven articles, and *Politeia* (*Полития*), with seven articles; all others have four or fewer.

Excluding predatory and student journals, 2020–2024 saw the publication of thirty articles that substantively engage with FH*, referencing its judgement of at least one country.

Across the reviewed corpus, six articles adopted a condemnatory, critical, or at minimum skeptical stance toward Freedom House (FH), treating it as a potentially biased source². Three articles were largely neutral and descriptive, or approached FH’s indicators instrumentally – emphasizing how states might “game” the metrics rather than treating them as objective measures of political reality³. By contrast, twenty-one articles employed FH’s* ratings without critical scrutiny⁴. In four of these cases, FH’s* ratings were used alongside *The Economist*’s Democracy Index⁵; in two cases, alongside Polity⁶; and in one case, alongside both Polity and V-Dem⁷.

Thus, the Russian literature utilizes FH* with substantial frequency and little skepticism. (Which would itself seem to contradict FH’s* definition of Russia as a “consolidated authoritarian regime” [Shushpanova 2022: 152].) Such uncritical usage is problematic because, as discussed in the next section, studies have repeatedly uncovered a political-strategic bias within FH’s* ratings.

The literature on FH* bias

FH* has repeatedly been characterized in the literature as a potentially biased source.

¹ Annually, the figures are 7, 9, 9, 9, 9, 9, 14, 15, 15, 18, 7, 16, 8, and 7. The search’s URL is <cyberleninka.ru/search?q=“freedom in the world” “freedom house” что&page=1 >.

² Лукашов, Лукашова, Латов 2021; Межевич 2020; Родионов 2022; Ткаченко 2024: 49; Травкина, Васильев 2023; Файнберг 2024: 74. For bibliographic information, see Appendix 1.

³ Власова 2023; Даукш, Парпинская-Сакович 2022: 60; Садченко 2020. See Appendix 1.

⁴ Алимов, Матяшева 2020: 22; Аргылов, Меньшиков, Шоботенко 2022: 145; Бабич, Батыков 2022: 193; Бедерсон, Семенов 2020: 100; Войтов, Журбей 2023: 160; Волков, Гончаров, Снеговая 2020; Елисеев 2020: 99; Жданов 2020: 65; Иншаков, Малинова 2020; Киртон, Уоррен 2022: 120; Коротаев et al. 2022; Крюкин 2020: 275; Летняков 2020: 377; Лудена Лопес 2022: 91; Малашенко, Нисневич, Рябов 2020: 91; Малашенкова, Харитоновна 2022: 258; Мамедов, 2023: 738; Пархоменко 2022: 133; Пашенцев, Базаркина, Кросстон 2022: 91; Шебеко, Шебеко 2024: 8; Шушпанова 2022: 152. See Appendix 1.

⁵ Елисеев 2020: 99; Иншаков, Малинова 2020; Летняков 2020: 377; Шушпанова 2022: 152. See Appendix 1.

⁶ Бедерсон, Семенов 2020: 100; Жданов 2020: 65. See Appendix 1.

⁷ Коротаев et al. 2022. See Appendix 1.

Much of this discussion has focused either on anomalies in the ratings of individual countries [Scoble, Wiseberg 2019; Hartmann, Hsiao 1988; Goldstein 1992; Mainwaring, Brinks, Perez-Linan 2001] or on how domestic (regional, ethnic, religious, etc.) characteristics of evaluated states relate to the ratings [Bollen 1993; Bollen, Paxton 1998; 2000].

Fewer studies have attempted to quantify whether FH* assessments are associated with US government (USG) attitudes. Two that have both report associations between FH* scores and alignment with the US. Steiner [2014: 18] finds that FH* ratings are positively and negatively associated, respectively, with alliance ties and antagonistic relationships with the US. Bush [2017: 722] similarly reports that states more closely aligned with the US in UNGA voting receive higher average ratings from FH* than from Polity.

Yet neither Steiner nor Bush directly estimate the magnitude of this association. In particular, Steiner models USG–state relations using multiple indicators whose coefficients do not always point in the same direction, complicating the calculation of their net effect. More generally, differences in how “actual democracy” and US–state relations are operationalized may affect the precision and comparability of the estimates.

This study seeks to advance the measurement strategy and scope of this line of inquiry in several respects. First, it extends the temporal coverage from 1972–2000 (Steiner) and 1972–2004 (Bush) to 1972–2018, ending before a subsequent methodological adjustment in FH*'s approach. Second, to capture regime characteristics, it replaces the Combined Polity Score used by Steiner and Bush with a measure derived from two Polity components that is intended to be more precise and closer to the construct employed by FH*. Third, for proxies of USG attitudes toward

other states, it retains UNGA voting alignment (as in Steiner and Bush) but excludes several additional indicators used by Steiner – US financial assistance⁸, overlap with the US alignment portfolio⁹, and repeated military conflict with the US¹⁰ – while incorporating an improved measure of arms transfers. Finally, the study focuses not only on whether an association between US alignment and FH* ratings is detectable, but also on estimating its approximate magnitude.

Freedom House* is part of the USG and representative of the US political elite, and thus liable to be biased

FH*'s position within US policy and political networks has been discussed in prior scholarship, including by Sarah Bush, who characterizes Freedom House as having an “ideological affinity” with the US government. She also notes a degree of personnel circulation between Freedom House and the USG, citing individuals such as David Kramer (FH* President 2010–2014; Assistant Secretary of State), Max Kampelman (FH* board member; US ambassador), Jeanne Kirkpatrick (FH* board member; US ambassador), Thomas Melia (FH* Deputy Executive Director; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State), and Jennifer Windsor (FH* Executive Director; USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator) [Bush 2017: 720]. In addition, Bush reports that, among the six FH* executive directors for whom biographical information was available, all had “worked for the [US] government or military,” as did Raymond Gastil, who developed the methodology of Freedom in the World and led the project in 1972–1989 [Ibid: 724]. For a further list and broadly similar conclusions, see Giannone [2010: 73–75].

To provide a descriptive estimate of overlap between FH* leadership and the broader US political establishment, I compiled a partial network diagram (Supplement: Establishment

⁸ Applicable only to low-income states.

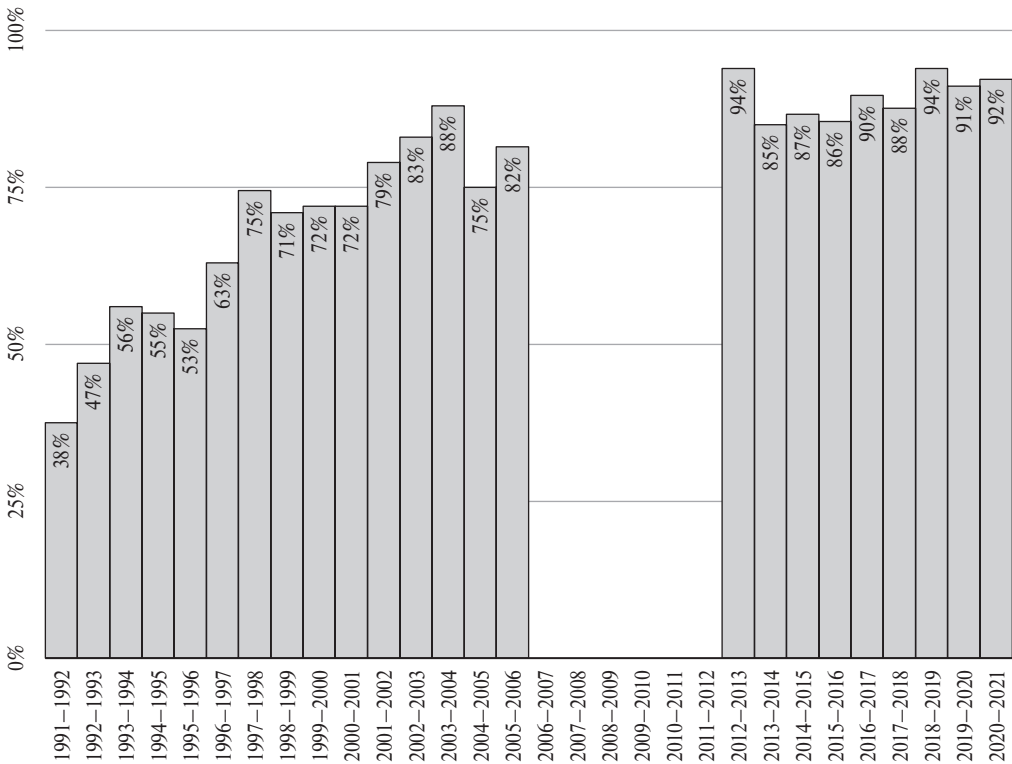
⁹ Entirely spurious, as nominal alliances (e.g. US-Cuba per the 1947 Rio Treaty) may be fictional, while real alliances (e.g. US-Israel) may not be formally enshrined. Hence the measure's unexpectedly negative association with FH* ratings [Steiner 2014: 15].

¹⁰ Relevant in only a very small number of cases.

Diagram)¹¹. Among 39 members of FH’s* senior leadership in 2000, 62% had previously served, were serving, and/or would later serve as officials within the US government and/or major US political parties, while an additional 23% appear institutionally proximate to these networks¹².

Moreover, FH* ratings are used by the USG as criteria “to determine whether countries qualify to receive economic aid via the Millennium Challenge Corporation” and “to evaluate its efforts to promote democracy in the developing world” [Bush 2017: 711; Giannone 2010: 75].

Figure 1
Proportion of Freedom House* financing provided by the USG, by fiscal year
(data for 2006–2007 through 2011–2012 missing)



Source: Author’s calculations ¹³.

¹¹ This analysis encompasses the USG, the US’s two governing parties, and various nominally-non-governmental organizations that are quite deeply enmeshed within the USG and with one another.

¹² Specifically, one appointed Donald Rumself to the board of his own company, one signed the *Statement of Principles* of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), one was the wife of the US Ambassador to China, two were members of the neoconservative quasi-political-party Social Democrats USA, two were members of the pro-separatist/pro-terrorist American Committee for Chechnya, and two were members of both the Social Democrats and the Committee.

¹³ Percentages for FY1991/1992 – FY2005/2006 approximated from Figure 4 in Bush [2017: 720]. USG and total funding for FY2012/2013 – FY2020/2021 is derived from: “Freedom House[*] Inc., Statement of Activities, Year Ended June 30, 2014”, <web.archive.org/web/20150910085258/>

Finally, FH* receives substantial funding from the US government (see Figure 1).

In sum, measured by personnel or by funding, FH* is functionally part of the USG.

Several factors suggest that its judgments may be affected by bias. The most salient among them is as follows: States¹⁴, especially ones that are morally-ideologically driven, tend to condemn those with which they come into conflict¹⁵. And for states that perceive the world through a universalistic identity-morality-ideology (IMI), general condemnation of another state leads to (or is equivalent to) condemnation per the universalist's IMI. In the case of the US, that means categorizing the state as lacking in democracy, which is (notionally) Cosmopolitan-Liberalism's fundamental value and absolute good. These categorizations may end up quite detached from reality¹⁶; FH* judgements may end up correlated not only with actual regime type, but also with states' relations with the US.

Investigating this requires measures of FH* judgements, of actual regime type, and of alignment with the US.

The measure of FH's* judgements

From 1972 through 2018, FH* issued judgements of states' *Political Rights* and *Civil Liberties*, each ranging from 7 ("least free") to 1 ("most free"). Since 2019, these have been replaced with a 0–40 PR scale and a 0–60 CL scale. This study analyzes the 1972–2018 data, although future work would probably benefit from incorporating the newer data as it becomes voluminous enough for robust statistical analysis.

FH* presented *PR* and *CL* as equally important, and calculated states' overall "freedom rating" (that is indeed the measure's actual name) by simply averaging *PR* and *CL*. And this average is FH's* final product, which would be most directly aligned with USG attitudes if those are indeed biasing the results.

https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FY14_Statement_of_Activities.pdf; "Freedom House[*] Inc., Financial Statements, Year Ended June 30, 2016", <projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display_audit/1078020161>, PDFp6; "Freedom House[*] Inc., Financial Statements, Year Ended June 30, 2018", <projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display_audit/1078020181>, PDFp6; "Freedom House[*] Inc., Financial Statements, Year Ended June 30, 2020", <projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display_audit/1078020201>, PDFp6; "Freedom House[*] Inc., Financial Statements, Year Ended June 30, 2021", <projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display_audit/1078020211>, PDFp6.

¹⁴ This article essentially black-boxes the state, treating its foreign-policy-making elite as a monolith that has roughly common opinions of foreign countries (just as it has a roughly common IMI). This is, obviously, a simplification. Every political elite contains a range of opinions, and holders of highly atypical views may occasionally acquire significant influence or power. This has arguably happened in the case of Trump, who is ideologically orthogonal to the US political elite, and outright hostile to FH* and related organizations. With that said, the degree to which apparent divergences represent actual change – let alone the degree to which any change is likely to be lasting – should not be overestimated. Insofar as any divergence does actually take place, and manifests in the arms sales and UNGA voting patterns of the US, this would drag US attitude as measured in this study away from the attitude of the broad political elite and towards that of the diverger affecting policy (in this case, Trump). However, this would only serve to distort measurement of the political establishment's attitude, and thus minimize its measured effect on FH* ratings, meaning that the actual effect is even greater than calculated. Furthermore, this analysis concludes in 2018, only two years into Trump's first administration, which was much more conventional than the second. Moreover, these two years provide almost no time for Trump to affect patterns of US arms transfers, which are generally a matter of years and even decades. In sum, any Trump-versus-establishment divergence is debatable, at most of limited significance to 2017–2018, and only going to understate this article's argument insofar as it has any effect at all.

¹⁵ The various mechanisms by which this can occur are listed in the Theory of Particularism/Universalism [Royce 2025], but include the Egocentric Bias in Moral Judgement, due to which one's enemies are emotionally disliked [Epley, Caruso 2004: 178-182], the Fundamental Attribution Error, due to which disliked behavior is attributed to fundamental attributes of the actor [Gawronski 2007], and universalistic manichaeism, due to which one's own state is seen as morally-ideologically good, and its enemies as morally-ideologically bad [Kennedy 2013].

¹⁶ Royce [2025] cites various examples of this [Samuels 1991; Owen 1993; Oren 1995; Peceny 1997; Oren 2005].

Therefore, I construct *FHTotal*, the measure of FH's* judgements to be used in this analysis, as the (unweighted¹⁷) average of *PR* and *CL*. It is transposed onto a scale from 0 (entirely undemocratic) to 100 (entirely democratic). Since both *PR* and *CL* are 7-step scales, *FHTotal* has 14 total steps, each separated from the next by 7.69 points.

Various measures of states' levels of democracy

We now require a measure of actual regime type with which to compare *FHTotal*. Superficially, there is a plethora of measures from which to choose, but most are actually unsuitable. For instance, of the measures listed in one recent review [Grundler, Krieger 2021: 4]:

The Boix-Miller-Rosato and Bjornskov-Rode indices are dichotomous, and thus insufficiently precise for our purposes. (They are also beset by more complex problems.)

The Vanhanen index has the advantage of more or less total objectivity, but it also has very low validity. It does not consider political competition's freedom/fairness *per se*, instead relying entirely on turnout and on non-ruling parties' share of the vote. (In both cases, higher values are more democratic.) It is thus unable to distinguish between e.g. a genuinely popular ruling party vs. a rigged election, or artificially-suppressed turnout vs. the electorate's normal

apathy. Indeed, the index will perversely penalize governments that enjoy wide support from the *demos*, and perversely reward those that coerce mass turnout.

The Acemoglu-Naidu-Restrepo-Robinson and Pemstein-Meserve-Melton indices are derived from combinations of the above-listed indices (thus inheriting their limitations), from Polity (which I will shortly argue for using in isolation), and from FH* itself (thus being unsuitable as baselines with which to compare FH*).

Finally, *V-Dem* [Coppedge et al. 2025] and the *Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy* [Skaaning 2021] are manifestly inaccurate, at least partly due to an apparent US bias¹⁸.

Two other measures, not considered by Grundler and Krieger, are the Economist Intelligence Unit's *Democracy Index* and the *Bertelsmann Transformation Index*. But the EIU covers only 2006, 2008, and 2010–2018, while the BTI covers only 2006–2018 (or less, for many countries) and does not evaluate the OECD. (Once again, this does not even touch on more complex problems with these two indices.)

Therefore, *Polity* is the most suitable measure of freedom/democracy, with which to compare FH*.

It is true that, in the late 1990s, Polity joined the State Failure Task Force [Marshall, Gurr 2020: 1], which is “funded by the Central Intelligence Agency”¹⁹. However, Polity began

¹⁷ Alternative weightings would have negligible effect on the results: within the full sample's 6414 country-years analyzed in the regressions below, *PR* and *CL* have a correlation of .932.

¹⁸ For instance, according to V-Dem, as of 2024, “liberal democracy” is supposedly greater in the absolute monarchy of Qatar (8/100) than in Russia (6), greater in Israel (62) than in Hungary (32), greater in Montenegro (48) than in Serbia (22). Of course, Qatar, Israel, and Montenegro are US allies, while Russia and Serbia are not, and Hungary has become the great bugbear of Cosmopolitan-Liberals in the US-Led Bloc. Actually, even the US in 1789 – when slavery flourished and only propertied white men could vote – is considered to be more liberal-democratic (28/100) than modern-day Russia or Serbia. Also telling, in 2024, Slovakia was punished for electing Robert Fico, with a sharp downgrade from 73 to 58, while Poland was rewarded for voting out its national conservatives with a similarly-sharp upgrade from 45 to 62. As for the LIED, consider that Russia is classified as lacking competitive elections beginning in 2004, and as completely lacking multiparty legislative elections beginning (probably not by coincidence) in 2022. Both claims are false, but the latter's objective inaccuracy is particularly indisputable; non-ruling parties have 27.3% of seats, with the largest at 12.7%. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan is classified as “multi-party”, the next step up, even though all non-ruling parties collectively hold 10.4% of seats in parliament, with the largest at a mere 2.4%. And Ukraine is an “electoral democracy”, the second-highest category, even though its non-ruling parties (last elected in 2019) won 29.2% of seats, with the largest at 10.1%, figures that barely differ from Russia's. (For parliamentary data, see: IPU Parlaine. URL: <https://data.ipu.org> (accessed 08.12.2025)).

¹⁹ Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2013 // Center for Systemic Peace. URL: <https://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm> (accessed: 08.12.2025).

well earlier, in the 1970s [Marshall, Gurr 2020: 3–4], and its methodology was thus developed and applied for many years by just a few American scholars, seemingly with little influence from the US political establishment.

More importantly, Polity does not present itself as a freedom index or even a democracy index, as it describes aspects of political systems that are broader than just democracy/autocracy.

Polity's work thus appears to be more fact-based, and less susceptible to US Cosmopolitan-Liberal bias, than FH* and many of the other indices considered above²⁰. This analysis uses, specifically, the Polity V dataset²¹.

Selecting Polity's applicable indicators

However, precisely because Polity is not intended to be a freedom index, not all of its indicators are directly comparable to FH's* *Political Rights (FHPR)* and *Civil Liberties (FHCL)* scores.

Competitiveness of Executive Recruitment (henceforth *ExecCompet*) is best understood as the extent to which “chief executives are...chosen in...competitive elections” [Marshall, Gurr 2020: 22]. *Competitiveness of Participation (ParticCompet)* is “the extent to which alternative preferences for policy and leadership can be pursued in the political arena” [Ibid: 26]. Together, they directly or indirectly address all (except possibly the last) of *FHPR*'s eight components (see Appendix 2). As for *FHCL*'s fourteen components, four are so broad, vague, complex, and/or contested that measurement is essentially impossible (see Appendix 3), six are covered by *ExecCompet* and/or *ParticCompet*

(Appendix 4), one is both incoherent and covered (Appendix 5), and only three are neither of those things (Appendix 6). Thus, insofar as *FHCL* is coherent, it too is largely incorporated into *ExecCompet* and *ParticCompet*²². Confirming this, within the data's 6,414 country-years, a compound of Polity's *ExecCompet* and *ParticCompet*²³ correlates with *FHPR* alone at a rate of .878, but with the average of *FHPR* and *FHCL* at a negligibly higher rate of .881.

On the other hand, Polity's other four components are generally not directly related to democracy, *FHPR*, or *FHCL* (see Appendix 7). Nevertheless, Polity uses them (except for *Regulation of Chief Executive Recruitment*), along with *ExecCompet* and *ParticCompet*, to calculate the *Institutionalized Democracy Index*, the *Institutionalized Autocracy Index*, and in turn the *Combined Polity Score* (as *Democracy* minus *Autocracy*). Yet, along with the disconnect between democracy and three of the *CPS*'s five components, the *CPS* is also problematic (in general, and especially as a measure of democracy for use here) because of its components' nonsensical weighting, which is most evident if the components' effects on the *CPS* are transposed from the *CPS*'s additive scale of -10 to 10, onto an additive scale of 0 to 100 (see Table 1).

Several problems with the *CPS* are now evident. First, *Constraint on Chief Executive* has been given the greatest weight – 35% – seemingly by accident, just because it has the largest number of distinct categories²⁴. Second, the quantitative distinction, made between the “transitional” (25 points) and “election” (30 points) categories of *ExecCompet*, is inex-

²⁰ Insofar as Polity is still subject to some degree of US bias – it is, after all, an American product – this would partly conceal the effect of that bias upon FH*, meaning that the true effect of USG attitude upon FH* judgements is even larger than estimated in this analysis.

²¹ Polity V dataset // Center for Systemic Peace. 7 February 2021. URL: web.archive.org/web/20220728195009/https://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/p5v2018.xls (accessed: 08.12.2025).

²² Despite *FHCL*'s superficial distinction from *FHPR*, Gastil himself came to see FH's* ratings, in their entirety, as “essentially a survey of democracy” [Gastil 1990: 26]. Other research has similarly cast doubt on whether *FHPR* and *FHCL* are actually “indicators of distinct aspects of democracy” [Coppedge, Alvarez, Maldonado 2008: 645].

²³ Specifically, *PolityDem*, calculated as $(ExecCompet + ParticCompet + ParticCompet) / 3$ and described in the next section.

²⁴ In fact, it has long been recognized that this component “virtually determines” states' democracy/autocracy as measured by Polity [Gleditsch, Ward 1997: 380], although this may now be less the case than it was for the Polity III data that was available in 1997.

Table 1
CPS components' values, transposed to a 0–100 scale

<i>ExecCompet</i>	<i>Openness of Executive Recruitment</i>				
selection	'closed' OR 'dual (designation)'	†	-3	→	0
selection	open		-2	→	5
unregulated	unregulated		0	→	15
transitional	'dual (election)' OR 'open'	†	+2	→	25
election	open		+3	→	30
					(These pairs of ExecCompet and Openness of Executive Recruitment are their only possible combinations. Values indicate the two components' joint effect on the Combined Polity Score.)
	<i>Constraint on Chief Executive</i>				
	unlimited authority		-3	→	0
	intermediate category		-2	→	5
	slight-moderate		-1	→	10
	intermediate category		+1	→	20
	substantial		+2	→	25
	intermediate category		+3	→	30
	parity or subordination		+4	→	35
	<i>Regulation of Participation</i>				
	restricted		-2	→	0
	sectarian		-1	→	5
	'unregulated' OR 'multiple identity' OR 'regulated'	†	0	→	10
	<i>ParticCompet</i>				
	repressed		-2	→	0
	suppressed		-1	→	5
	unregulated		0	→	10
	factional		+1	→	15
	transitional		+2	→	20
	competitive		+3	→	25
					† These categories are scored identically.

Source: Author's calculations based on Marshall and Gurr [2020: 15–16].

plibly small compared to their major substantive difference. Third, given that (as explained above) *ParticCompet* is one of the only two measures directly related to democracy, and is by far the more wide-ranging of the two, it seems to be severely underweighted. In short, despite its popularity, the *CPS* is not suitable for our purposes.

Calculating the measure of democracy

To produce a better measure of democracy that is maximally comparable to FH*, we should use only *ExecCompet* and *ParticCompet*²⁵.

Their contributions to the CPS transpose onto individual 0–100 scales (lowest value = 0, “unregulated” midpoint = 50, highest value = 100) as detailed in Table 2²⁶:

²⁵ Gleditsch and Ward note that, among the five components of the *Combined Polity Score*, it is *ExecCompet* and *PolitCompet* that correlate most strongly with other (non-Polity) measures of democracy – and it is thus strange that *PolitCompet* plays such a “minor role” in the determination (as calculated by the authors) of states' *CPS* values [Gleditsch, Ward 1997: 379]. And this diminishment of *PolitComp*'s effect makes “popular participation in selection of leaders” – widely seen as a defining feature of democracy – either “totally absent or relatively unimportant” in determining the *CPS* [ibid: 376].

²⁶ This transposition does not affect the actual data, but merely eases interpretation of regression results by bringing the variable onto a 0–100 scale. The one instance of substantive transformation is the compression of the highest three categories of *ParticCompet*, such that 1 point on the *CLS* becomes worth 16.67 points on the transposed 0–100 scale (rather than 25 as is the case for *ParticCompet*'s

Table 2
ExecCompet and ParticCompet, transposed
to 0–100 scales

<i>ExecCompet</i>			
selection	-2	→	0
unregulated	0	→	50
dual/transitional	+1	→	75
election	+2	→	100
<i>ParticCompet</i>			
repressed	-2	→	0
suppressed	-1	→	25
unregulated	0	→	50
factional	+1	→	66.67
transitional	+2	→	83.33
competitive and open	+3	→	100

Source: Author's calculations based on Marshall and Gurr [2020: 15–16].

The overall democraticness of a state (henceforth *PolityDem*) is then calculated by averaging its transposed *ExecCompet* and *ParticCompet* values, with *ParticCompet* weighted twice as heavily:

$$PolityDem = \frac{ExecCompet + ParticCompet + ParticCompet}{3}$$

ParticCompet is doubly weighted because *ExecCompet* relates exclusively to the election (or other form of selection) of the chief executive, whereas *ParticCompet* encompasses nearly all other aspects of the political system: “the extent to which alternative prefer-

ences for policy and leadership can be pursued in the political arena”; the inclusiveness of the political process; the existence and free operation of political parties and an opposition; the integrity of elections; the regularity of voluntary power transfers; etc. [Marshall, Gurr 2020: 26–27]. Additionally, as noted above, *ParticCompet* explicitly overlaps much more than *ExecCompet* does with FH's* *Civil Liberties*. Finally, many of *ParticCompet*'s components are also relevant to the selection of the executive, and are thus implicitly included within *ExecCompet*, too. There should accordingly be little difference between *ParticCompet* and *ExecCompet*, in any case, and they indeed correlate at a rate of .812 within the full sample's 6,414 country-years.

USG attitude toward other states

As for USG attitude toward other states, this analysis estimates it based on (1) voting alignment in the UN General Assembly and (2) arms transfers.

Both are here assumed to be determined by a state's relations (degree of alignment or nonalignment) with the US, which is in turn assumed to be (in the long run) roughly equivalent to the USG's attitude toward that state (since relations determine USG attitude, and vice versa)²⁷. See Figure 2.

first three categories and all of *ExecCompet* categories). However, this is necessary to preserve “unregulated” as the component's middle value — as that category's name, neutral/vacuous description (merely “political participation is less than fully regulated”), and null value on the *CPS* indicate it is meant to be — and to keep the negative and positive sides of the *ParticCompet* scale corresponding to 0–50 and 50–100, respectively.

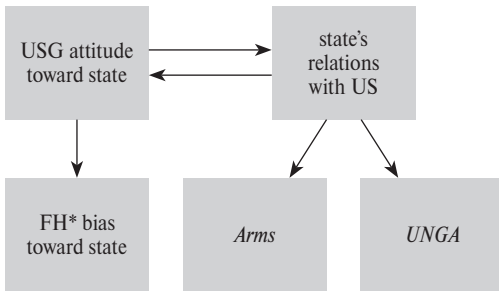
²⁷ According to Royce [2025], the US's moralistic-ideological attitude toward other states is both distorted by their submission/resistance to the US and itself determinative of US behavior. However, for the purposes of this analysis, one need only accept that the USG's attitude toward a state, and that state's relations with the US, generally converge in the long run for one reason or another.

Actually, one may disagree even with that. But, in any case, this study's statistical analysis (see below) does find a state's relations with the US to have a quite strong effect upon FH's* judgement of that state. And if this effect is not mediated through US/FH* attitude, resulting in unconscious bias, then some other explanation is required.

The most obvious alternative is **conscious** bias. FH* does not think better (worse) of states that have good (bad) relations with the US, let alone consider them to be more (less) democratic. But it nevertheless deliberately raises (lowers) their assessed levels of democracy, either voluntarily or by order of the US Government, presumably for the purpose of political propaganda targeting US and/or global audiences.

I consider such an explanation to be significantly less plausible than the unconscious-bias explanation. But it is not ruled out by the study, and some readers may prefer it as an explanation for the study's findings.

Figure 2
Hypothesized influence of this analysis's variables
on one another



Source: Author.

Therefore, *Arms* and *UNGA* can serve as rough proxies for USG attitude, for the purpose of measuring its influence on FH* judgments.

UNGA voting – crude and rather superficial, yet easily quantified – is a very popular measure of states' international positions. For this analysis, I use states' alignment with the “US-led liberal order”, in their *UNGA* voting, as calculated by Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten [2017]. To construct the *UNGA* measure used in this analysis, the Bailey-Strezhnev-Voeten values, originally running from -2.57 (maximally distant) to +3.08 (maximally aligned with the US), are converted to a 0–100 scale.

This analysis's second measure, arms transfers, is far less popular, and is calculated here from scratch.

Fearon and Hansen [2018] have argued for arms transfers as a measure of state alignment

[Ibid: 6], and find that arms transfers align almost perfectly with paradigmatic foreign policy pivots such as those of Egypt or Iran [Ibid: 12–17], that states with diverging arms-transfer patterns are more likely to fight one another [Ibid: 3], and that arms transfers plausibly illustrate states' alignment both during and after the Cold War [Ibid: 24–25].

For this analysis, I construct a measure of arms transfers that improves upon Fearon and Hansen.

It is based on SIPRI's *Trend Indicator Values* (TIVs), which estimate the production cost and military utility of transferred arms, regardless of their sale price.

The seven largest arms exporters in the 1962–2024 period²⁸, collectively accounting for 88% of all exports in that period, are *a priori*²⁹ classified as:

- US-aligned: the US, UK, France, (West) Germany, and Italy.
- neutral: China (1972–1989).
- US-adversarial: USSR/Russia (all years)³⁰, China (1990–2018).

A state's *Arms* value is then calculated on a 0–100 scale³¹ as:

$$Arms = \frac{USaligned + (0.5 \times neutral)}{USaligned + neutral + USadversarial}$$

However, unlike *UNGA* voting, arms transfers can be sporadic and low-volume. Therefore, a state's *Arms* value for a given year is not calculated solely on the basis of transfers in that year³². Instead, *Arms* is calculated on the basis of the year in question, the preceding

²⁸ Given the procedure for constructing *Arms* (described below), the measure for 1972–2018 should actually use data from 1962–2028. But SIPRI data are presently only available through 2024.

²⁹ Fearon and Hansen [2018: 17] similarly base their measure on the axiomatic classification of certain arms-exporters. However, they do not classify Italy as ‘Western’, they do not consider China to be a US adversary at any point in time, and they conflate China and all other arms exporters in a third, ‘Other’ category.

³⁰ It may not strictly be accurate to classify US-Russian relations as adversarial in much of the 1990s, but the assumption is nevertheless functional, since the buyers of Russian arms in this period were still mostly states whose relations with the US were poor (indeed, worse than those of Russia itself): e.g. Algeria, Belarus, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Laos, Libya, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Sudan, Syria, and Vietnam.

³¹ Fearon and Hansen [2018: 18] do not calculate a continuous alignment variable. Rather, they simply classify a state as either “Western”, “Eastern”, or “Other”, depending on which of the three camps provided the largest volume of arms in the given year.

³² Fearon & Hansen [2018: 18] also take measures to deal with zero-volume and low-volume years, but these are more drastic than my own procedure, as they discard small volumes altogether and allow a country's categorization to be determined entirely by transfers that are up to 20 years out of date.

Table 3
Linear regression of *FHTotal* over *PolityDem* and *Att*

ind. var.	coef.	st. err.	p-value	effect size (η^2)
<i>PolityDem</i>	.646	.007	.000	.763
<i>Att</i>	.399	.010	.000	.360
constant	-4.779	.503	.000	

Source: Author.

year, and the following year. Then, if the total volume of arms transfers (US-aligned, neutral, and US-adversarial) is less than one billion TIV, the measurement's window is enlarged by one year in both directions until a volume of one billion TIV is reached. If that level is still not reached even with a 21-year window (the year in question, plus the 10 preceding and 10 following years), then no *Arms* value is assigned for that country-year. (Thus, depending on data availability, *Arms* is variously based on 3 to 21 years of data.)³³

In the resulting *Arms* variable, a score of 0 indicates total nonalignment with the US, 50 indicates a neutral or mixed position, and 100 indicates total alignment with the US.

This analysis's summary measure of USG attitude (*Att*) is then calculated as the (equally-weighted³⁴) average of *UNGA* and *Arms*³⁵.

The effects on FH* scores of actual regime type and USG attitude

With *FHTotal*, *PolityDem*, and *Att* established, we can now turn to the core analysis. The central question is whether, and to what extent, *Att* has a significant effect – controlling for *PolityDem* – on *FHTotal*. A substantial such effect would indicate that FH* judgements indeed reflect, and are biased by, USG attitude³⁶.

The available data contain 2,864 state-year observations in 1972–2018 that have values for *FHTotal*, *PolityDem*, and *Att*³⁷.

If *FHTotal* is regressed over the independent variables of *PolityDem* and *Att* in these observations, both IVs have definite statistical significance ($p=.000$), and *Att* is estimated to have a coefficient and effect size that are 62% (.399/.646) and 47% (.360/.763), respectively, as large as those of *PolityDem*. See Table 3.

In other words, on average, FH* judgements are determined roughly half as much by USG attitude as they are by actual regime type.

And if the sample is split into historical periods, the effect of *Att* only strengthens over time; see Table 4.

In sum, *Att*'s effect is statistically significant, at least half as large as *PolityDem*'s, and growing over time, to the point of almost equaling *PolityDem*'s effect in 2014–2018.

³³ If a second variable, *ArmsLeft*, is calculated based only on the current year and up to ten preceding years, and *UNGA* is regressed over both, *Arms* has a coefficient of .519, while *ArmsLeft* has a coefficient of negative .238. This confirms that *Arms* is better calculated symmetrically, rather than only to the left on a timeline.

³⁴ If *UNGA* and *Arms* actually determined *Att* or a state's relations with the US, then weighting them by substantive importance might be desirable. But they merely reflect relations and proxy for *Att*, and there is no clear reason to expect that *UNGA* or *Arms* would be more accurate in reflecting it. The two measures should, therefore, be equally-weighted.

³⁵ Note that *Att* is not a perfect measure of relations with the US, let alone of USG attitude, and insofar as it is inaccurate (in a presumably random manner), its true effect on *FHTotal* will only be understated in the following analysis.

³⁶ This analysis assumes that the (simplified) formula of the regression, $PolityDem + Att = FHTotal$, essentially represents $actual\ democracy + US\ alignment = democracy\ measurement\ that\ is\ biased\ towards\ US-aligned\ states$. Mathematically, there is one alternative interpretation: $democracy\ measurement\ biased\ against\ US-aligned\ states + US\ alignment = actual\ democracy$. However, this is substantively implausible. There are no grounds for suspecting Polity of anti-US bias, and its position within the US (not to mention years of CIA funding) suggest that it may be itself subject to a US bias – simply one not nearly as large as FH's*. If anything, then, FH's* bias is even larger than assessed in this analysis, since the control for actual democracy is itself partially affected by that bias and is thus 'eating' some of it.

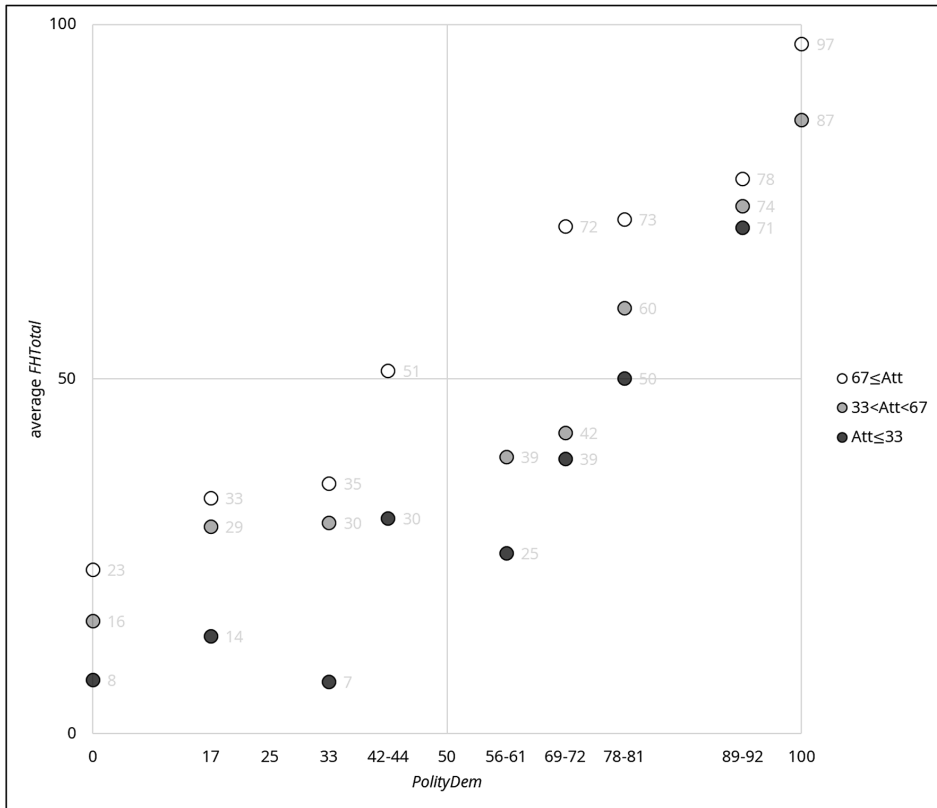
³⁷ Excluding microstates whose populations were under one million in 2018, and excluding observations that are coded by Polity as instances of occupation, anarchy, or regime change.

Table 4
Characteristics of *Att* in different time periods

	full data	First Cold War (1972–1991)	Inter-Cold-War (1992–2013)	Second Cold War (2014–2018)
<i>Att</i> 's coefficient as % of PolityDem 's	62%	41%	70%	84%
<i>Att</i> 's effect size as % of PolityDem 's	47%	30%	57%	67%
<i>Att</i> 's p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000

Source: Author.

Figure 3
Average *FHTotal* (y-axis) assigned to states with each combination³⁸ of *PolityDem* (x-axis) and *Att* (shading)



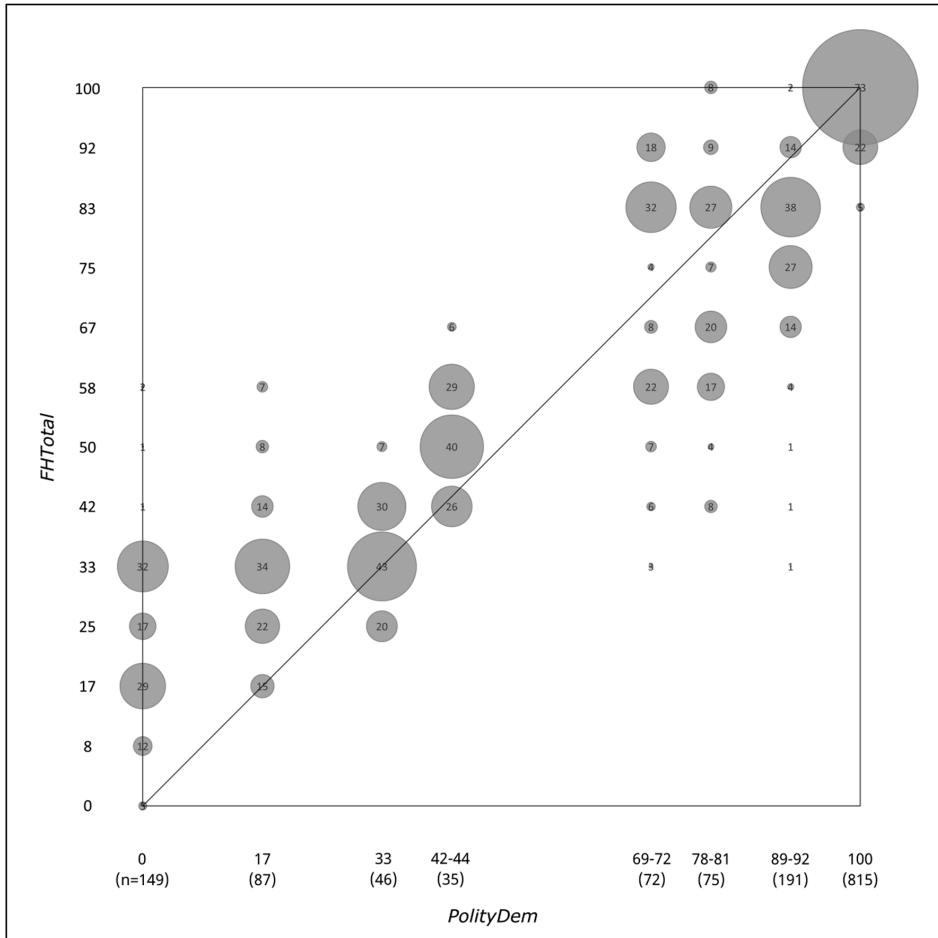
Source: Author.

But the average effect of *Att*, naturally, does not convey the extent of the distortion affecting certain states. Figure 3 below begins to give a sense of that distortion, by indicating the aver-

age score given by *FH** to recipients of each *PolityDem* score, depending on whether the USG is negatively, neutrally, or positively disposed towards them.

³⁸ Combinations with $n < 20$ not shown.

Figure 4
FH* treatment of states towards which the US is positively disposed³⁹:
 percent of states, within each value of *PolityDem*⁴⁰ (x-axis), that are assigned each value of *FHTotal* (y-axis)



Source: Author.

How to interpret diagram: For instance, of the 149 observations with a *PolityDem* value of 0, an *FHTotal* value of 58 is assigned to 2%, of 50 to 1%, of 42 to 1%, of 33 to 32%, of 25 to 17%, of 17 to 29%, of 8 to 12%, and of 0 to 5%.

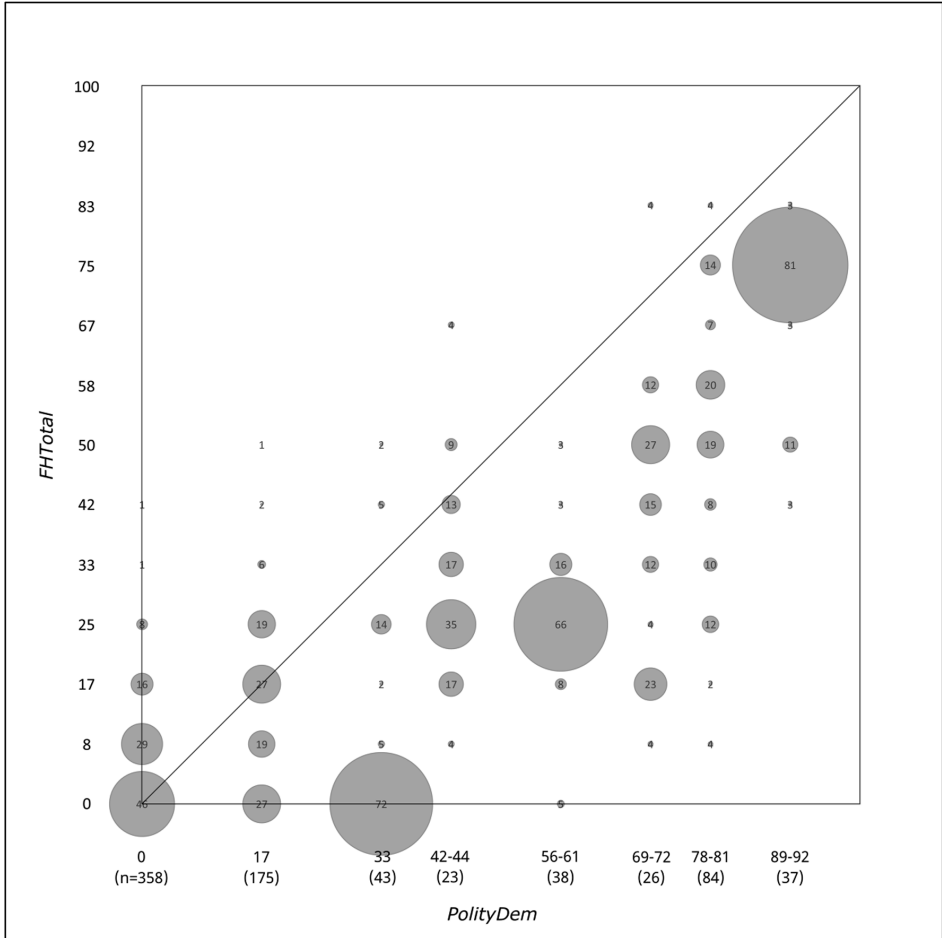
As one can see, there are large gaps, varying from 7 to 33 points in width, between average *FHTotal* for states towards which the USG is negatively disposed (*Att* ≤ 33) and for states towards which the USG is positively disposed (*Att* ≥ 66).

And these averages include some cases in which the effect of bias is near-total, as evident in the following diagrams, fully detailing how FH* alters Polity's evaluations depending on positive (Figure 4) or negative (Figure 5) *Att*.

³⁹ 1475 observations (52% of total) for which *Att* > 66.67.

⁴⁰ Categories with n < 20 not shown.

Figure 5
 FH* treatment of states towards which the US is negatively disposed⁴¹:
 percent of states, within each value of *PolityDem*⁴² (x-axis), that are assigned each value of *FHTotal* (y-axis)



Source: Author.

For instance, of states whose *PolityDem* is about 80 (either 77.77 or 80.55) and towards which the USG is positively inclined ($Att \geq 66.67$), 63% receive roughly the same score (67–92) from FH*, while 8% are upgraded (to 100) and 29% are downgraded (to 58, 50, or 42). However, of states with the same

PolityDem value, but towards which the USG is negatively inclined ($Att \leq 33.33$), 25% are relatively unchanged, 0% are upgraded, and a full 75% are downgraded to anywhere between 58 and 8. Thus, the USG’s negative attitude is driving FH’s* scoring of some states almost the entire way down the regime-type spectrum.

⁴¹ 784 observations (27% of total) for which $Att < 33.33$.

⁴² Categories with $n < 20$ not shown.

Discussion

Our findings suggest that FH* perceptions of a state's regime type are partially determined by the USG's attitude towards that state.

On average, this bias is about half as strong as the effect of actual regime type (coefficient 62% as large, effect 47%), although it has become almost as powerful as reality (84%, 67%) amidst the great-power conflict of recent years (2014–2018).

Moreover, those average effect sizes contain within themselves massive bias in the cases of many states, especially those that have *PolityDem* scores between 33 and 81. The lack of absolute clarity regarding such regimes likely leaves more room for the operation of (conscious and/or unconscious) bias. Furthermore, mathematically, there is significant space for such states to be dragged upwards or downwards by that bias.

Accordingly, the four intermediate *PolityDem* categories (33, 42–44, 69–72, and 78–81), that have sufficient observations to compare states towards which the US is negatively ($Att \leq 33$) and positively ($67 \leq Att$) inclined, feature 28-, 21-, 33-, and 23-point gaps between the average scores of $Att \leq 33$ and $67 \leq Att$.

For many individual states, the effect of bias is larger still, completely altering ascribed regime type relative to its reality. The following states have been 'downgraded' by 53–72 points for periods of at least three consecutive years: Russia (2004–2018); Iran (1997–2003); Cambodia (1995–2000, except 1997); Chad (2007–2018); Central African Republic (2016–2018); Democratic Republic of the Congo (2006–2015); Somalia (2012–2018); Kenya (1997–2001); Zimbabwe (2009–2012). Russia stands out for the length and depth of its downgrade, by 11 points in 1992, 22 in 1993–1997, 31 in 1998, 39 in 1999, 47 in 2000–2003, 56 in 2004–2013, 64 in 2014–2015, and an unprecedented 72 (nearly the entire scale) in 2016–2018.

And, as mentioned in various footnotes throughout this article, the results of this study

are, if anything, underestimates. Any shortcomings of *Att* as a measure of US attitude will only muddle and suppress its assessed effect on *FHTotal*. And *Polity* itself may be subject to some of the bias affecting FH*. (And it certainly could not plausibly be systematically biased in the opposite direction.)

Conclusion

Most directly, this article's findings mean that FH* may be inaccurate and should not be used as a measure of democracy. This does not necessarily warrant any additional measures by the Russian government; the Ministry of Justice has already designated FH* as an Undesirable Organization. But this certainly ought to prompt Russian academia – and actually all academia, especially within states towards which the US is hostile – to reject FH* as an indicator of what it ostensibly measures (democracy/'freedom'). It should instead be used only for unorthodox purposes that explicitly account for and utilize its bias. (For instance, comparing it to *Polity* as a means of estimating USG attitude towards other states.)

In fact, caution is warranted regarding all democracy indices (maybe even *Polity*) that are produced within the US-led bloc or under its influence. Such indices may (FH* certainly does) essentially amount to projections of the US's friend-enemy distinction under the guise of a (factually inaccurate) division of states into the democratic and undemocratic.

Insofar as Russian political science retransmits these projections, it perpetuates the US's ideological hegemony, lionizing the US-Led Bloc while (not coincidentally) deprecating Russia and many states whose friendliness or at least neutrality is important to Moscow. For instance, while the Russian-language literature cited at the beginning of this article does, in 2020–2024, twice note FH's* claim that the US is becoming less democratic under Trump⁴³, the articles also focus on FH's* positive categorizations of the US-led bloc (twice)⁴⁴, and on FH's* negative categorizations of Venezuela (once)⁴⁵,

⁴³ Жданов 2020: 65; Пашенцев, Базаркина, Кросстон 2022: 91. See Appendix 1.

⁴⁴ Аргылов, Меньшиков, Шоботенко 2022: 145; Иншаков, Малинова 2020: 46. See Appendix 1.

⁴⁵ Лудена Лопес 2022: 91. See Appendix 1.

Turkiye (twice)⁴⁶, China (once)⁴⁷, Vietnam (once)⁴⁸, and Russia (six times)⁴⁹.

Beyond FH*, this study has made two methodological contributions. It has developed an improved (UNGA- and arms-based) method for roughly estimating states' (non) alignment with the US. (Although, as suggested above, the FH*-Polity gap is likely to indicate USG attitudes with even greater accuracy.) And this study has also developed a more accurate formula for calculating a state's democraticness according to Polity.

The study also suggests, more generally, that states' regime type should not be analyzed by – or based upon information from – entities that ascribe any normative value to regime type, or that are under the control or influence of any government, society, or other institution that does so. Only the avoidance of such entities can minimize the risk of information and analysis being consciously or unconsciously shaped so that normative judgements of states are matched by equally normative judgements of their regime types. (More methodologically complicated approaches, such as V-Dem, do not actually address this risk, if all their infor-

mation and analysts are systematically biased in the same direction.) These criteria will tend to rule out people and groups from universalistic societies (e.g. the Cosmopolitan-Liberal US and Western Europe in the present; the Communist bloc in the past). But nationality itself should not be used as a criterion, as dissenters from universalistic societies will actually be some of the best-inoculated against universalism, while even those originating from beyond those societies may still ascribe to their worldview – particularly given the influence/dominance of US-origin Cosmopolitan-Liberalism within the global intelligentsia (academia, journalism, etc.).

Finally, this study also supports the contention that a universalistic state's general attitudes towards other states will substantially determine its judgements of the degree to which the other states conform to its own identity-morality-ideology. The US appears to be a universalistic state, whose political elite (in the form of FH*) believes itself (presumably sincerely) to be judging others in accordance with its Cosmopolitan-Liberal IMI, but whose judgements are in fact quite distorted from reality.

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⁴⁶ Иншаков, Малинова 2020: 46; Мамедов 2023: 738. See Appendix 1.

⁴⁷ Аргылов, Меньшиков, Шоботенко 2022: 145. See Appendix 1.

⁴⁸ Войтов, Журбей 2023: 160. See Appendix 1.

⁴⁹ Аргылов, Меньшиков, Шоботенко 2022: 145; Бедерсон, Семенов 2020: 100; Волков, Гончаров, Снеговая 2020: 155; Иншаков, Малинова 2020: 46; Летняков 2020: 377; Шушпанова 2022: 152. See Appendix 1.

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Appendix 2

Polity: *Competitiveness of Executive Recruitment (ExecCompet)*

(0) Not Applicable / Unregulated: Power transfers are coded Unregulated...in the Regulation of Executive Recruitment.

(1) Selection: Chief executives are determined by hereditary succession, designation, or by a combination of both, as in monarchies whose chief minister is chosen by king or court. Examples of pure designative selection are rigged, unopposed elections; repeated replacement of presidents before their terms end; recurrent military selection of civilian executives; selection within an institutionalized single party; recurrent incumbent selection of successors; repeated election boycotts by the major opposition parties, etc.

(2) Dual/Transitional: Dual executives in which one is chosen by hereditary succession, the other by competitive election. Also used for transitional arrangements between selection (ascription and/or designation) and competitive election.

(3) Election: Chief executives are typically chosen in or through competitive elections matching two or more major parties or candidates. (Elections may be popular or by an elected assembly.)

[Marshall, Gurr 2020: 21–22]

Polity: *Competitiveness of Participation (ParticCompet)*

(0) Not Applicable: ...polities that are coded as Unregulated, or moving to/from that position, in Regulation of Political Participation...

(1) Repressed: No significant oppositional activity is permitted outside the ranks of the regime and ruling party. Totalitarian party systems, authoritarian military dictatorships, and despotic monarchies are typically coded here. ...

(2) Suppressed: Some organized, political competition occurs outside government, without serious factionalism; but the regime systematically and sharply limits its form, extent, or both in ways that exclude substantial groups (20% or more of the adult population) from participation. ... Examples of 'suppression' are: i. Prohibiting some kinds of political organizations, either by type or group of people involved (e.g., no national political parties or no ethnic political organizations). ii. Prohibiting some kinds of political action (e.g., Communist parties may organize but are prohibited from competing in elections). iii. Systematic harassment of political opposition (leaders killed, jailed, or sent into exile; candidates regularly ruled off ballots; opposition media banned, etc.). This is evidence for either Factional, Suppressed, or Repressed, depending on the nature of the regime, the opposition, and the persistence of political groups.

(3) Factional: Polities with parochial or ethnic-based political factions that regularly compete for political influence in order to promote particularist agendas and favor group members to the detriment of common, secular, or cross-cutting agendas.

(4) Transitional: Any transitional arrangement from Restricted [i.e. Repressed], Suppressed, or Factional patterns to fully Competitive patterns, or vice versa. Transitional arrangements are

accommodative of competing, parochial interests but have not fully linked parochial with broader, general interests. Sectarian and secular interest groups coexist.

(5) Competitive: There are relatively stable and enduring, secular political groups which regularly compete for political influence at the national level; ruling groups and coalitions regularly, voluntarily transfer central power to competing groups. Competition among groups seldom involves coercion or disruption. Small parties or political groups may be restricted in the Competitive pattern.

[Marshall, Gurr 2020: 26–27]

FH*: *Political Rights*

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 ?
4. Are the voters able to endow their freely elected representatives with real power?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. Are the people free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?
8. 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?

Appendix 3

The components are as follows:

- 3.4. “Is there freedom from extreme government indifference and corruption?”
- 4.3. “Are property rights secure? Do citizens have the right to establish private businesses? Is private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, or organized crime?”
- 4.4. “Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family?”
- 4.5. “Is there equality of opportunity, including freedom from exploitation by or dependency on landlords, employers, union leaders, bureaucrats, or other types of obstacles to a share of legitimate economic gains?”

There are several clear problems.

Opinions differ greatly regarding what counts as: “extreme government indifference” vs. the proper restraint of government; “undue influence” by the government over the economy vs. the government’s proper intervention/management on behalf of the public good; “personal social freedoms” vs. degenerate behavior that is penalized by government and/or society; and “exploitation by...landlords, employers, union leaders, [and] bureaucrats” vs. the legitimate exercise of those figures’ rights/authority in a free market, social democracy, or modern administrative state.

And the potential scope of each of these components is so great that things’ inclusion and weighting would inevitably be arbitrary. To take one example from the US itself, does a government’s failure to provide public healthcare qualify as “extreme indifference”? Or alternatively,

would such a provision qualify as “dependency on...bureaucrats”? How do the government’s material resources affect the answer? If it expands taxation in order to acquire the necessary material resources, does that violate property rights or deprive individuals of their “share of legitimate economic gains”? If the government instead mandates that businesses provide health insurance, does that make “private business activity unduly influenced by government officials”? And if the state-provided healthcare does not cover procedures considered immoral/unnatural, does that impinge upon “personal social freedoms”? This is just one issue, yet it has already become hopelessly complicated: the question of which things count as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ – let alone how they should be quantified and weighted relative to one another – is unclear and politically-ideologically contested.

Appendix 4

FH* CL component	covered by Polity <i>ExecCompet</i> and/or <i>ParticCompet</i> because...
1.1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression?	Is an attribute of a democratic political system, i.e. <i>ExecCompet</i> and <i>ParticCompet</i> . E.g. “opposition media banned” is “evidence of either Factional, Suppressed, or Repressed” <i>ParticCompet</i>
2.1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion?	Is necessary for a democratic political system, i.e. <i>ExecCompet</i> and <i>ParticCompet</i> . E.g. “prohibiting some kinds of political action” is evidence of ‘Suppressed’ <i>ParticCompet</i> , and in ‘Repressed’ systems, “no significant oppositional activity is permitted outside the ranks of the regime and ruling party”
2.2. Is there freedom of political or quasi-political organization? (...civic organizations, ad hoc issue groups, etc.)	Is necessary for a democratic political system, i.e. <i>ExecCompet</i> and <i>ParticCompet</i> . E.g. “prohibiting some kinds of political organization” is evidence of ‘Suppressed’ <i>ParticCompet</i>
3.1. Is there an independent judiciary?	Is necessary for a democratic political system, i.e. <i>ExecCompet</i> and <i>ParticCompet</i> . E.g. “leaders...jailed” and “candidates regularly ruled off ballots” are “evidence of either Factional, Suppressed, or Repressed” <i>ParticCompet</i>
3.3. Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies? ...	Such protection is necessary for a democratic political system, i.e. <i>ExecCompet</i> and <i>ParticCompet</i> . E.g. “totalitarian” systems have ‘Repressed’ <i>ParticCompet</i> , and the “systematic harassment of political opposition” is “evidence of either Factional, Suppressed, or Repressed” <i>ParticCompet</i> . As for “freedom from wars and insurgencies”, if a country is sufficiently disrupted by internal or external adversaries, the country-year is simply not coded by Polity
4.1. Is there open and free private discussion?	Is necessary for a democratic political system, i.e. <i>ExecCompet</i> and <i>ParticCompet</i> . E.g. “totalitarian” systems have ‘Repressed’ <i>ParticCompet</i>

Appendix 5

FH* CL component	covered by Polity <i>ExecCompet</i> and/or <i>ParticCompet</i> because...
4.2. 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?	The absence of “totalitarianism” (incorporated in <i>ParticCompet</i>) should equate to greater “personal autonomy” and “freedom from indoctrination”. “Excessive dependency on the state” is an impossibly broad/vague/complex/contested idea

Appendix 6

- 1.2. Are there free religious institutions and is there free private and public religious expression?
- 2.3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?
- 3.2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Is the population treated equally under the law? Are police under direct civilian control?

Appendix 7

Regulation of Chief Executive Recruitment: “The extent to which a polity has institutionalized procedures for transferring executive power.” [Marshall, Gurr 2020: 20] Such procedures might be democratic, undemocratic, or anywhere in between. For instance, the ‘regulated’ category includes both “hereditary succession” and “competitive elections”.

Openness of Executive Recruitment: “The extent that all the politically active population has an opportunity, in principle, to attain the [executive] position through a regularized process.” [Ibid: 22] This process might be democratic, undemocratic, or anywhere in between. All non-hereditary systems – not only those employing “competitive election”, but also those employing “elite designation” or some “transitional arrangement” between the two – are given the highest score of ‘open’.

Constraint on Chief Executive: “The extent of institutionalized constraints on the decisionmaking powers of chief executives, whether individuals or collectivities. Such limitations may be imposed by any ‘accountability groups.’ In Western democracies these are usually legislatures. Other kinds of accountability groups are the ruling party in a one-party state; councils of nobles or powerful advisors in monarchies; the military in coup-prone polities; and in many states a strong, independent judiciary.” [Ibid: 24] This is indeterminate regarding democracy. Some degree of constraints (at least from the judiciary) is arguably **necessary** for a full democracy. But constraints are not **sufficient for or indicative of democracy**, since many constraints (including some listed in the above definition) can also exist within nondemocratic systems.

Regulation of Participation: The lowest ‘democracy score’ (see Table 1) is assigned to **restricted** regulation, which indeed excludes “significant groups...from the political process”. Yet the next-lowest category is sectarian regulation, which is defined not by a political system’s level of democracy, but by a society’s high level of identity-based or ideological fractiousness. And the other three categories – **unregulated**, **multiple identity**, and **regulated** – are all scored equally, and are all defined by lower degrees of social fractiousness, yet are not indicative of regime type: **multiple identity**, for instance, features “political groups” that are “stable and enduring” but “not necessarily elected”. [Ibid: 25–26]

ИСКАЖЕНИЕ РЕЙТИНГОВ FREEDOM HOUSE* В ЗАВИСИМОСТИ ОТ АМЕРИКАНСКОГО ОТНОШЕНИЯ К СТРАНАМ

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Резюме

Хотя ряд исследований уже фиксировал внешнеполитическую предвзятость рейтинга «Свобода в мире» организации Фридом Хаус* (Freedom House), данный индекс с заметной регулярностью продолжает использоваться в академических работах (в том числе в российской научной среде). В статье представляется количественное исследование в пользу того, что Фридом Хаус* институционально связан с политико-административным истеблишментом США, вследствие чего его оценки (претендующие на универсальную внешнеполитическую нормативность) могут быть подвержены систематическим искажениям, коррелирующим с внешнеполитическим отношением США к оцениваемым государствам. Далее предлагается уточнённая формула измерения «демократичности» на основе индекса Полити (Polity), а также усовершенствованный способ аппроксимации близости государств к США (и, соответственно, предполагаемого отношения США к ним) на базе данных о трансфертах вооружений и голосованиях в Генеральной Ассамблее ООН. В статье эти показатели используются для измерения эффекта американского отношения к стране на оценку её типа режима. В статье делается вывод, что отношение оказывает эффект, равный половине эффекта от реального типа режима. И эти эффекты почти уравниваются в последние годы. Искажение в отдельных случаях достаточно для того, чтобы переклассифицировать режим от демократии к авторитаризму и наоборот. Полученные результаты ставят под сомнение валидность индекса Фридом Хаус*, а также проблематизируют роль политической науки в универсалистских государствах как источника не только знания, но и легитимации и мотивации внешнеполитического поведения.

Ключевые слова:

США; отношение; Freedom House*; Polity; политический режим; демократия; искажение; отношения государств; поставки оружия; Генеральная ассамблея ООН

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