

BRIEF MAPPING

Comparative Research on Fundamental Values in Higher Education

Fundamental Academic Values such as academic freedom, university autonomy, and teacher and student participation in the governance of higher education institutions (HEI) have accompanied the Bologna Process since the very beginning and are currently increasingly coming to the fore in higher education policy debates. Hence, the Rome Ministerial Communiqué puts particular emphasis on the protection of “fundamental values of higher education and democracy and the rule of law” and commits to upholding institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education. Therefore, the BFUG Working Group on Fundamental Values was asked to develop a coherent framework for measuring and monitoring the degree of academic freedom and violations. The reference to fundamental values is also in line with the European Commission’s strong commitment on this topic and supported by the new Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027. In addition, the role of universities for democratic societies and the education of critical thinking is more strongly addressed.

Within the framework of the DAAD project **bologna hub**, the DAAD was asked by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) to do a brief mapping of existing comparative research and surveys on Fundamental Values in Higher Education (not comprehensive).

1. Academic Freedom Index (AFi):

[Katrin Kinzelbach, Ilyas Saliba, Janika Spannagel, Robert Quinn \(2021\): *Free Universities: Putting the Academic Freedom Index Into Action.*](#)

The Academic Freedom Index (AFi) is a dataset first published in March 2020 (updated annually) that looks at different dimensions of academic freedom in a time series from 1900 to 2019. The AFi was developed by researchers at FAU Erlangen-Nuremberg, the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) at the University of Gothenburg and the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in Berlin. The aim of the AFi is to gain a better understanding of academic freedom worldwide and the factors that support or threaten it. The index is aimed at decision-makers in academia and politics, and its developers provide various recommendations for action to use and thus protect and promote academic freedom.

The data used in the AFi (and other indices published by V-Dem) are based on assessments by 3,200 scientists worldwide, so-called Country Experts (CE). These CEs are recruited by the V-Dem Institute through an open call and receive an expense allowance for their support (for the AFi questionnaire, for example, this would be 75 dollars). Once a year, the CEs are then asked by the V-Dem Institute to rate different indicators on the country for which they are responsible. In total, 450 indicators are collected with the help of 17 different, thematically sorted questionnaires, e.g. on the topics "Elections", "Political Equality" or "Civic and Academic Space".

2. Qualitative Study on the Scientific Investigation of Academic Freedom, December 2020

[Kinzelbach, Kartrin \(Hg.\) \(2020\): *Researching Academic Freedom. Guidelines and Sample Case Studies.* FAU Studien zu Menschenrechten, Band 5. Erlangen: FAU University Press.](#)

In December 2020, a publication by Katrin Kinzelbach, Professor of Human Rights at FAU Erlangen-Nuremberg (ed.) was published: "Researching Academic Freedom. Guidelines and Sample Case Studies". This is intended to complement the Academic Freedom Index as a quantitative instrument for measuring academic freedom with qualitative case studies. In order to enable more in-depth studies on the realisation as well as on the restriction of academic freedom, the study guidelines developed are presented, as well as four case studies to which these guidelines were applied.

While the overall AFI scores provide robust quantified measures of academic freedom, they do not provide detailed information - for example on sub-national variations - nor the necessary contextual information to interpret the quantitative results and changes over time. The case studies shed light on these developments and offer a more nuanced perspective than the quantitative AFI figures can provide. As such, these case studies not only complement the Academic Freedom Index. They also serve to validate or challenge AFI scores on a case-by-case basis, which can further our understanding of the state of academic freedom in different countries.

The anthology is divided into four parts: (1) Introduction to Academic Freedom Research; (2) "Research Guidelines for Country Case Studies on Academic Freedom"; (3) Case Studies on Brazil, Egypt, Ireland and Russia; (4) Inventory: "The Perks and Hazards of Data Sources on Academic Freedom: An Inventory".

The inventory of data sources on academic freedom reviews the most important data types and sources on academic freedom available today. It distinguishes five main data types available for academic freedom analyses: (1) expert assessments, (2) opinions and lived experiences, (3) events data, (4) institutional self-assessments, and (5) de jure assessments. The inventory highlights their respective advantages and limitations, and discusses how they can best be put to use as a resource for country case studies.

3. Autonomy Scoreboard of the European University Association

[EUA University Autonomy in Europe \(university-autonomy.eu\)](#)

The University Autonomy Tool of the EUA concerns the relationship between universities and the state. It measures how flexibly universities can take decisions in the context of the rules and regulations that shape their higher education system. The Tool lets you compare university autonomy in 29 higher education systems. It provides detailed information on organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy and ranks countries according to the level of autonomy they have in each of these dimensions. The data presented in the Autonomy Scoreboard of the European University Association was provided by the national rectors' conferences, the representative organisations of universities, in the 27 European countries covered by the University Autonomy Tool. The Tool uses 38 indicators, which are categorised into four autonomy dimensions: Organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy. The scoring system used by the tool is based on deductions. Each

restriction on university autonomy was assigned a deduction value based on how restrictive a particular rule or regulation was seen to be.

4. Study on Strategies regarding Research Cooperation and Exchange with Non-Democracies, October 2020

[Baykal, A. and Benner, T. \(2020\): *Risky Business. Rethinking Research Cooperation and Exchange with Non-Democracies. Strategies for Foundations, Universities, Civil Society Organizations, and Think Tanks.*](#)

The study calls for a rethinking of foundations, universities, civil society organisations and think tanks in international research cooperation. The paradigm of positive systemic change through exchange as an automatism can no longer apply. Organisations would have to rethink their values and red lines that underlie their cooperation with partners in so-called "non-democracies". The study aims to contribute to this reflection process. At the same time, it highlights the values and achievable goals of international cooperation: mutual understanding, education, social connections in times of rising tensions and the urgent need for cooperation in times of Covid-19 and climate emergency. The authors use examples from China, Russia and Turkey to exemplify their findings.

The main part of the study is divided into three parts: (1) values and red lines as the basis of cooperation, (2) risks, (3) strategies and instruments. "Human rights", "academic freedom", "research integrity" and "diversity" are defined as fundamental values in collaborations, which are described as a basis for clarifying one's own goals in collaborations and key to defining red lines. Red lines in collaborations and thus reasons for breaking off collaborative efforts or existing projects are for the authors of the study: endangering individual security, self-censorship, discrimination, compromises in research ethics, cooperation with non-civil actors.

5. Additional Datasets on Academic Freedom¹

[Freedom House: Freedom in the World Report 2021. Democracy under Siege.](#)

One very prominent comparative assessment of global political rights and civil liberties is **Freedom House's** flagship publication **Freedom in the World (FIW)**. Freedom House is a U.S.-based independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world. It produces research and reports on a number of core thematic issues related to democracy, political rights and civil liberties. Freedom in the World (FIW) contains 10 political rights indicators and 15 civil liberties indicators, which take the form of questions. One of these indicators focuses specifically on academic freedom (indicator D3: "Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?"). It covers some 210 countries and

¹ Information in this chapter is derived from the cited institutions' websites and especially from Janika Spannagel, "The Perks and Hazards of Data Sources on Academic Freedom: An Inventory", in: Kinzelbach, Kartrin (Hg.) (2020): *Researching Academic Freedom. Guidelines and Sample Case Studies*. FAU Studien zu Menschenrechten, Band 5. Erlangen: FAU University Press, pp. 175-221.

territories, is available for 2013 through 2021, and is being updated annually. This indicator could offer insights or starting points for more in-depth analyses.

The FIW data are freely available on the Freedom House website. While the FIW report is politically highly visible, the methods of data gathering and handling are not uncontested, as Freedom House does not provide disaggregated information on the composition of its final scores. Critics lament the lack of confidence intervals and a lack of diversity among the participating experts.

[Scholars at Risk: Free to Think 2020. Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project.](#)

A dataset that focuses on events/incidents of violation of academic freedoms is **Scholars at Risk (SAR)'s Academic Freedom Monitoring Project**. Scholars at Risk is an international network of institutions and individuals whose mission it is to protect scholars and promote academic freedom. SAR's Academic Freedom Monitoring Project focuses on developing a greater understanding of the volume and nature of attacks on higher education communities in order to develop more effective protection responses. It provides data since 2013 and is being updated regularly. SAR sources its cases from a global network of volunteer researchers who identify and verify cases, mostly based on media and local NGO reports. Prior to publication, SAR secretariat staff review these incidents again; only sufficiently corroborated events are included in the database. The raw dataset can be obtained for research purposes upon inquiry. SAR publishes an annual **Free to Think report**, which lists all the recorded incidents in a table and examines selected country situations in more detailed narrative reports.

[Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack: Education under Attack 2020.](#)

Another source for incidents of academic freedom violations is the **Education under Attack data** collected by the **Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)**, an inter-agency coalition of three UN organizations and five international NGOs. This data includes a subset of attacks on higher education and is released in periodical reports – the latest, published in June 2020, covers the period from 2015 to 2019. The aggregated data can also be accessed in an online interactive map. GCPEA's data are sourced from relevant reports, conflict datasets, media searches, and direct reporting by organizations working in affected countries. The dataset focuses on (the threat of) physical violence and excludes other academic freedom violations below this threshold, such as dismissals, censorship, travel bans, or revocation of citizenship. Due to the sensitive nature of this data, GCPEA does not share its raw data; only certain highly aggregated country-year counts are available, and these do not currently distinguish higher from primary and secondary education.