

The Political Economy of Statistics

Spring Campus of the University Alliance of
Sustainability UAS
Freie Universität Berlin

Indicators

- Role of Indicators, Numbers and Statistics
- UN Resolution: Transforming our World (SDG)
- International Search for Indicators of Well-Being and Sustainability „Beyond GDP“
- **Assumption: Indicators are instrumental in politics**
- **J. Stiglitz: What we measures affects what we do...**
- **Contradictions / tensions**
- **Emerging and important field of research**



Agenda 2030

Transforming Our World:
the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development

Indicators

- Numbers packed into concepts that describe social life – vaguely defined, not consistently
- Statistik – Achenwall
- quantitative and qualitative techniques for ordering knowledge
- accountability – transparency – objectivity – accuracy
- Claim: above politics, offer rational, technical knowledge
- Role of the media: accurate descriptions of the world

Indicators – But.....

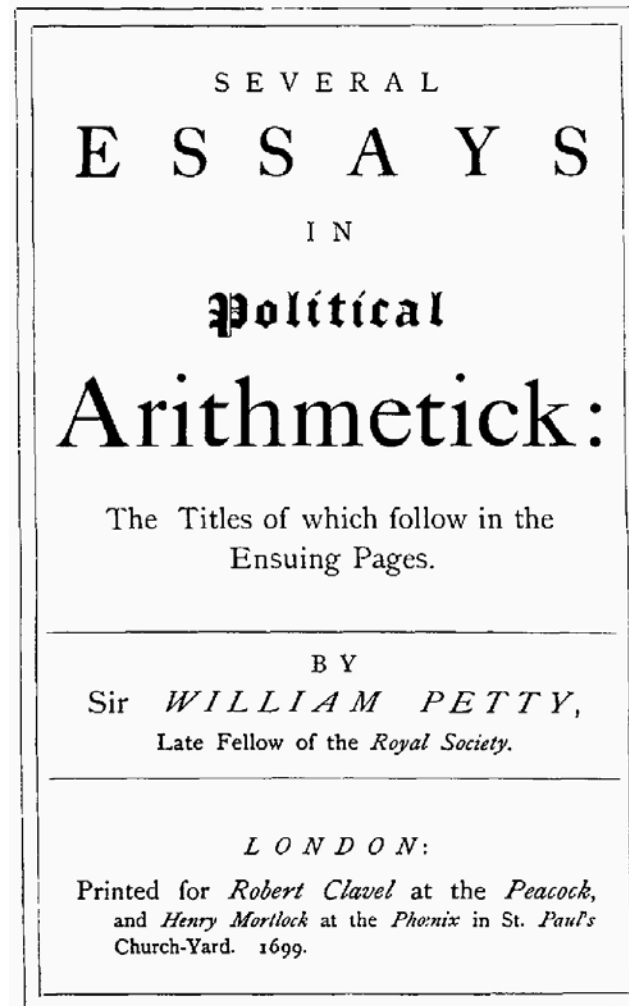
- expression of **power** – those who collect data, who represent data, who translate data into policies
- role of experts versus the affected
- indicators create truth – compromise, arbitrariness, generalizations, quest for universality
- missing: local knowledge, national knowledge, cultural, social and historical contexts, qualitative data
- Commensurability

Indicators...

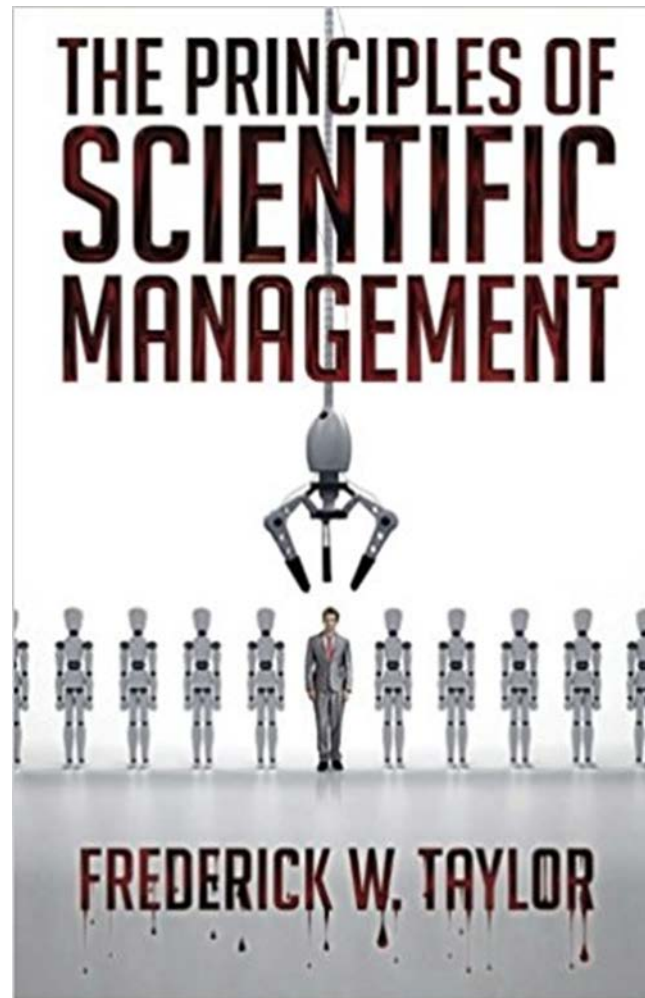
Those who create indicators ... create the world they are measuring

Indicators exist within power and governance – creation and functioning

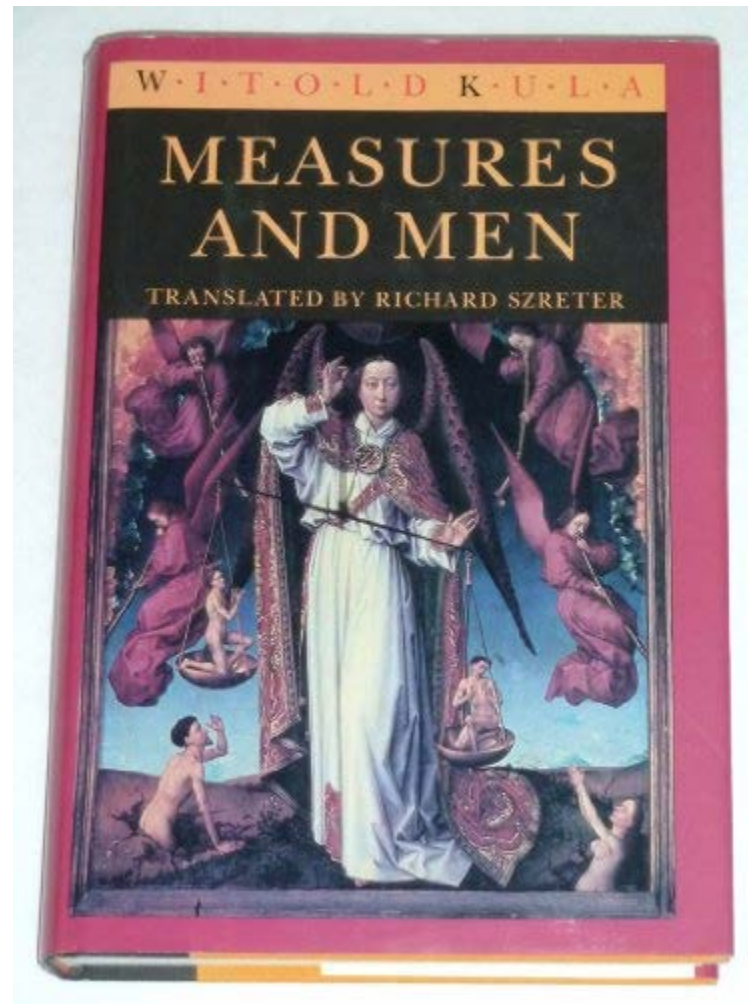
Numbers....in Politics



Numbers as Performance Measurement



Kula

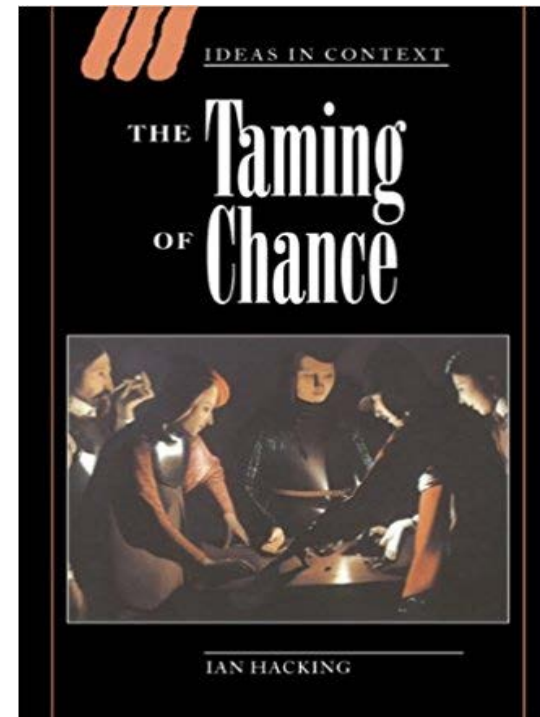
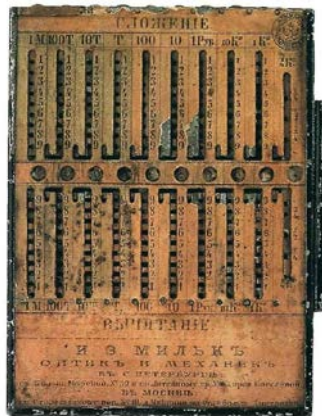


Derosières and Hacking

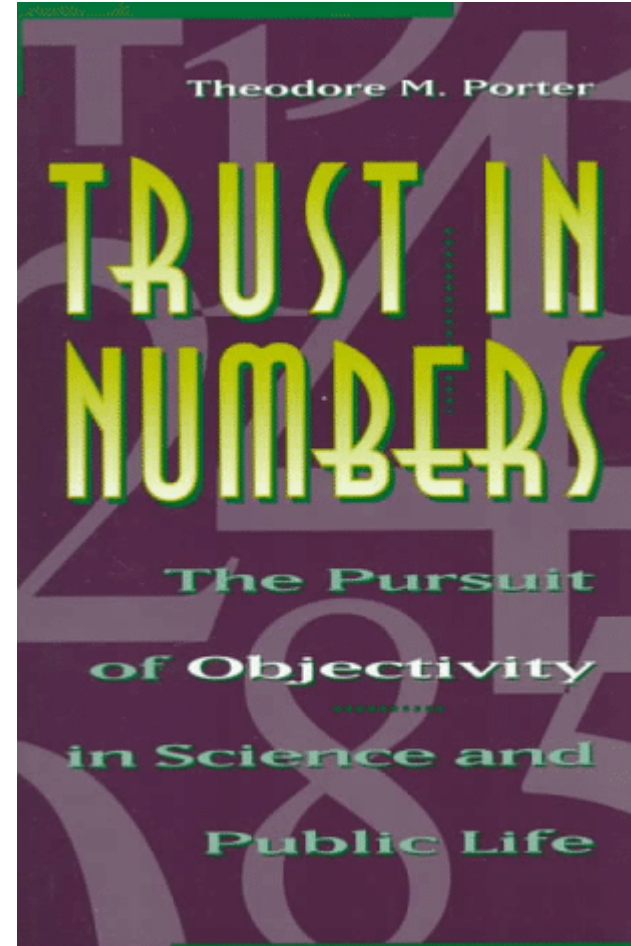
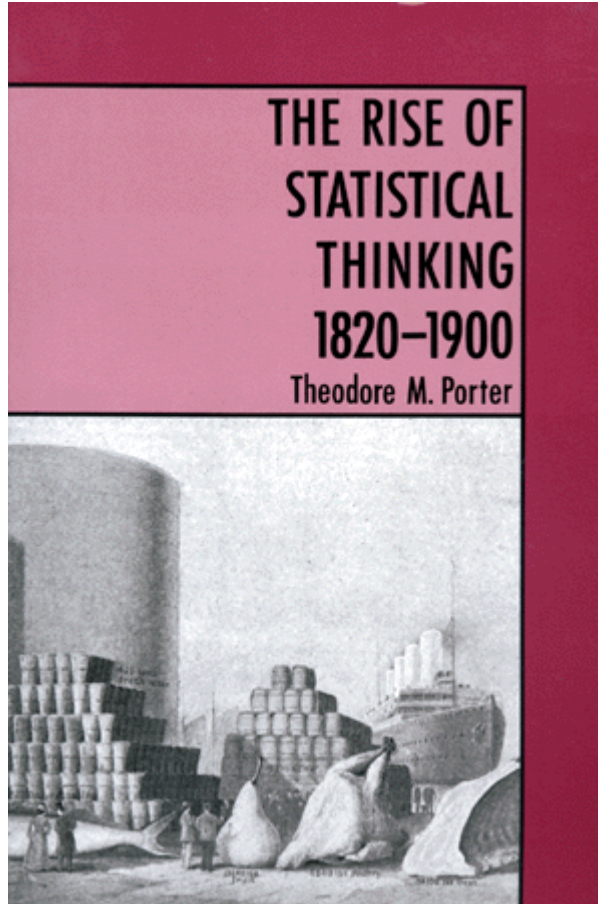
Alain Desrosières
**La politique
des grands nombres**
Histoire de la raison statistique



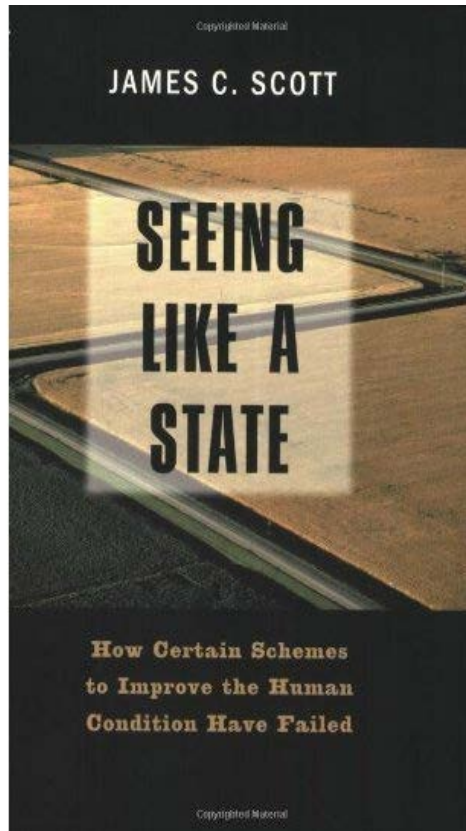
La Découverte/Poche



Theodore Porter



James Scott and Foucault



MICHEL FOUCAULT

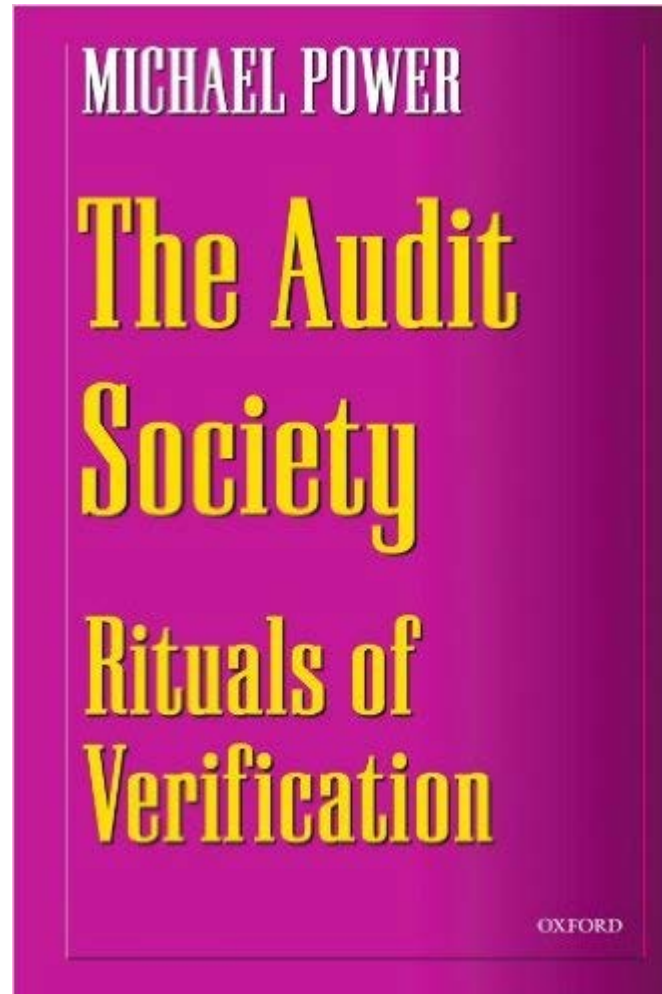
**SÉCURITÉ,
TERRITOIRE,
POPULATION**

Cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978

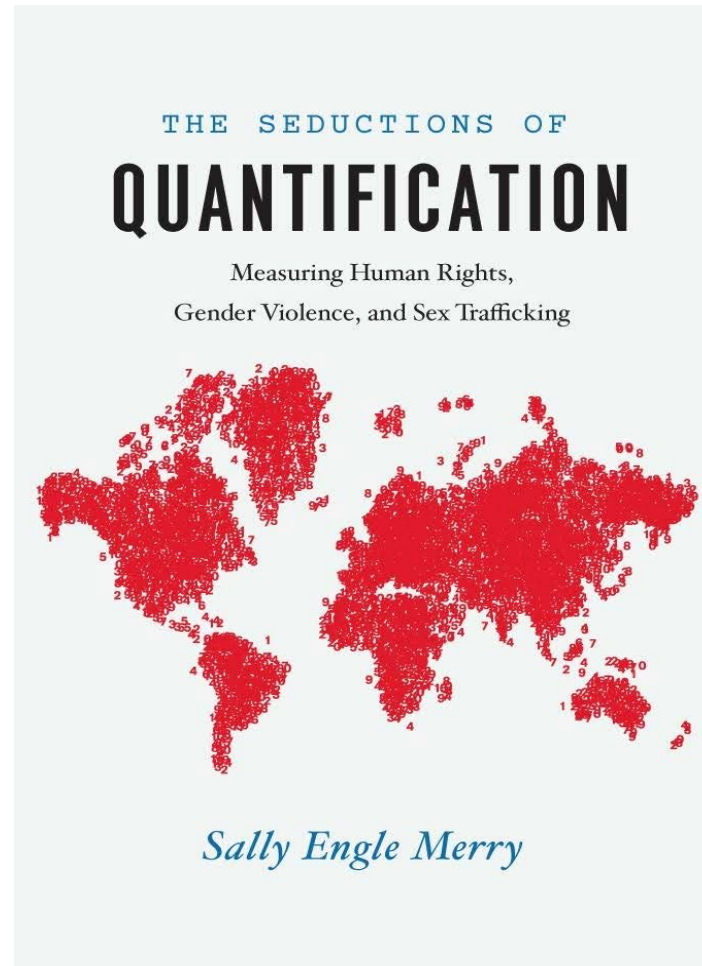
HAUTES ÉTUDES

EBESS
GALLIMARD
SEUIL

Michael Power -



Sally Engle Merry 2016



Wendy Espeland - Emmanuel Didier

The Sociology of Quantification



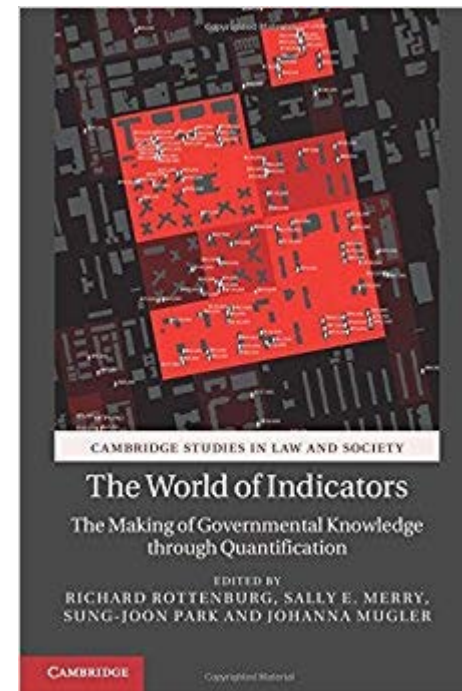
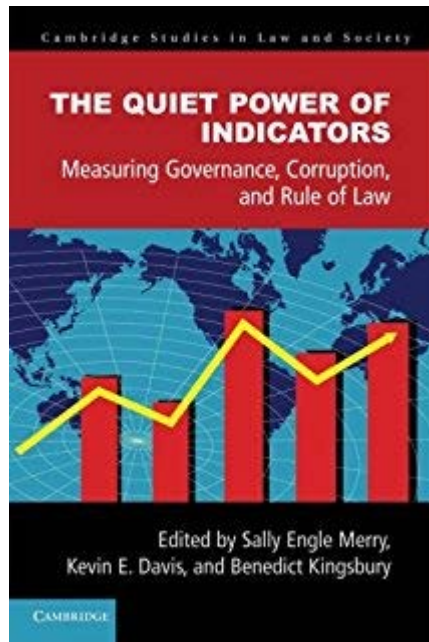
Institutionalization



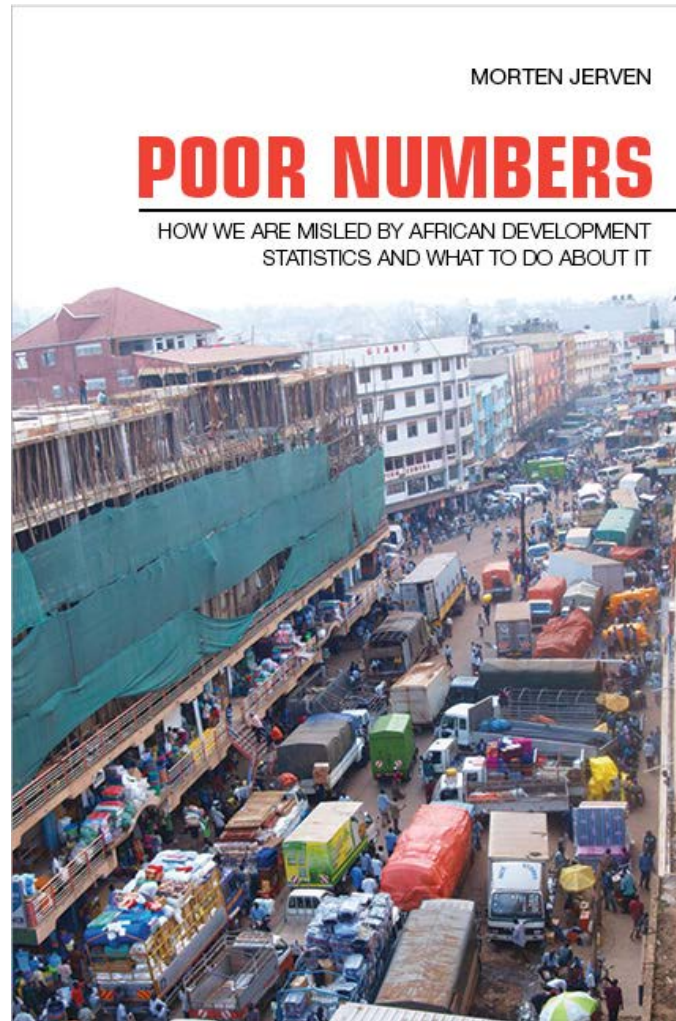
- Topic Group on Quantification Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin
- Fellow Group on Quantification at the Institute for Advanced Study in Nantes
- Fickle Formulas Group in Amsterdam (Chair in Political Arithmetic)
- MP-Institute for Anthropology Halle



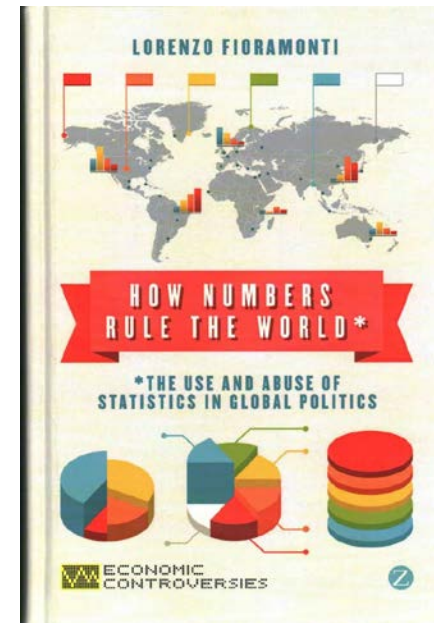
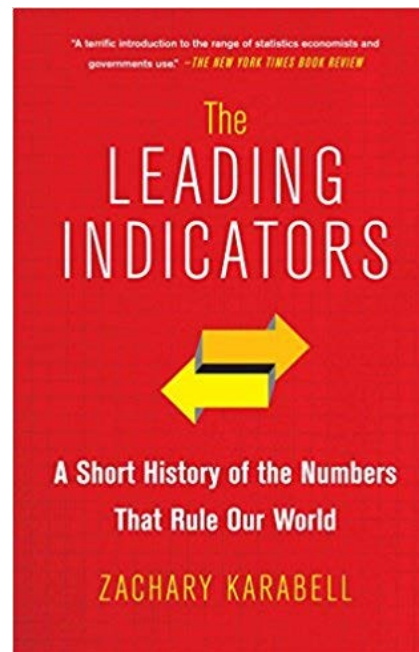
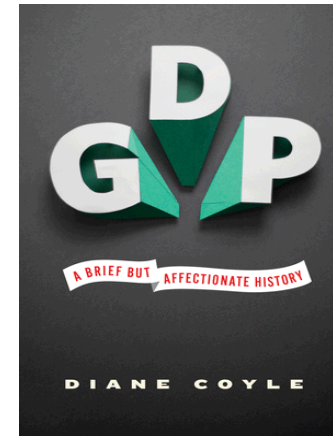
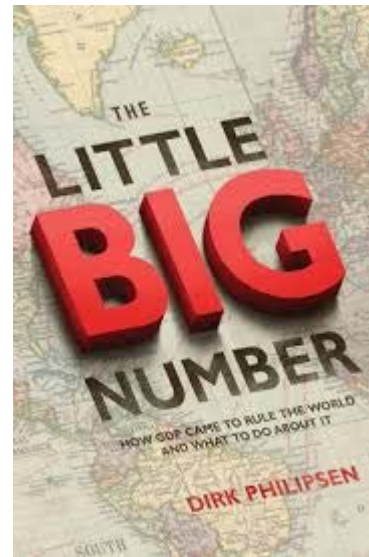
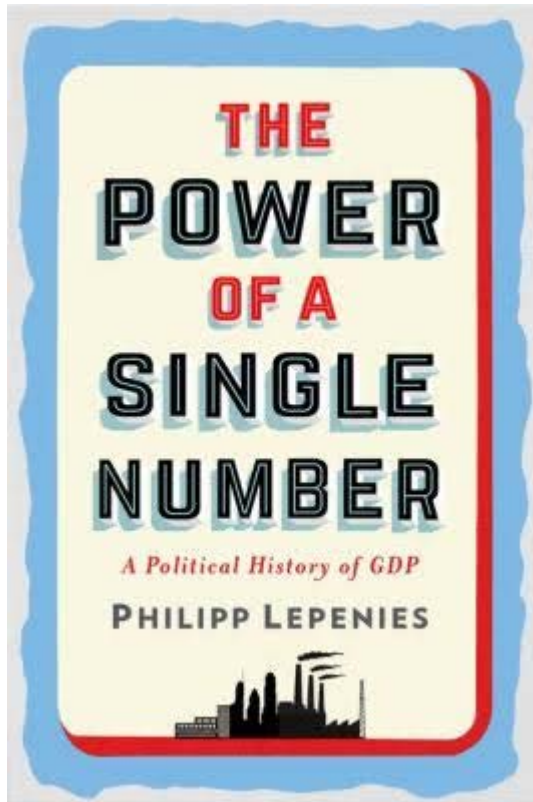
Sally E Merry et al. 2015



Morten Jerven 2013



GDP



[illegible]

www.gut-leben-in-deutschland.de



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OECD - 2007



Measuring the Progress of Societies World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy

A culture of evidence-based decision making has to be promoted at all levels, to increase the welfare of societies. And in the “information age,” welfare depends in part on transparent and accountable public policy making. The availability of statistical indicators of economic, social, and environmental outcomes and their dissemination to citizens can contribute to promoting good governance and the improvement of democratic processes. It can strengthen

Stiglitz Commission – Lack of Confidence in Statistics - 2009

However, there often seems to be a marked distance between standard measures of important socio economic variables like economic growth, inflation, unemployment, etc. and widespread perceptions. The standard measures may suggest, for instance that there

large and so universal that it cannot be explained by reference to money illusion or to human psychology. In some countries, this gap has undermined confidence in official statistics (for example, in France and in the United Kingdom. only one third of citizens trust official figures, and these countries are not exceptions), with a clear impact on the way in which public discourse about the conditions of the economy and necessary policies takes place.

The Guardian....January 2017

The long read

How statistics lost their power – and why we should fear what comes next

The ability of statistics to accurately represent the world is declining. In its wake, a new age of big data controlled by private companies is taking over – and putting democracy in peril
by William Davies

Alternative Facts – The Post-factual Age?



Summary

- general power and political issues involved regarding indicators (political economy of statistics)
- quantification in the Social Sciences (take data as „real“) - sensitize
- transformation will be based on indicators (Sustainable Development) – Beyond GDP
- democracy is under threat through bad statistics
- democracy can be improved by good statistics – and citizen participation
- Big Data
- Post-Factual skepticism
- Need for multidisciplinary cooperation in academia