

# Do human rights require democracy?

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## DO HUMAN RIGHTS REQUIRE DEMOCRACY

**Abstract:** Controversy rages about whether human rights promote global justice. Even if they do, debate also persists on the question: do human rights require democracy? Some experts note that the states with the best human rights records are all democracies. For sceptics, however, imposing democracy just reinforces worldwide neo-liberalism and Eurocentrism. A philosophical method cannot wholly resolve those queries, but can contribute a crucial element. In this presentation, it will be conceded from the outset that human rights are not in any plausible sense universal, nor do they irrefutably hold any keys to a better world. However, given the recent prevalence of human rights discourses, a more modest, 'hypothetical' claim is certain: *if* human rights are desired, *then* democracy is indeed compulsory. I call that claim 'certain', and yet it patently contradicts the dominant approaches among today's human rights specialists and practitioners. It will be argued that human rights conceptually presuppose democracy, as a matter of sheer definition. Accordingly, without democracy there can never be human rights, but only, at best, human goods. And that distinction is not sheer semantics or tricky word play. In fact, it makes all the difference.

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