

## Self-assessment exercise: Debating universality

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**Instructions:** In this activity, you will first identify the sentences which best summarize that argument. Then find the counter argument.

### Summarization of the argument:

States from diverse legal, cultural and religious traditions have ratified human rights treaties, and having done so cannot defer to local traditions where these conflict with the treaty guarantees.

The basic values found in international human rights law (tolerance, protection of the weak, justice, and the accountability of the ruler) – are found in most cultural and religious traditions, and documents like the UDHR were assembled drawing on diverse traditions.

The language of human rights appeals across very diverse cultures, and struggles for justice all over the world have used the language of human rights. The worldwide growth of the human rights movement is undeniable.

Culture is not immutable, traditions and so-called fundamental beliefs alter over time. To defend uncritically local culture against universal values assumes local culture is timeless and transcendent.

### Counter argument

States ratify human rights treaties; it doesn't signal popular acceptance, and in any case they often place broad reservations on contentious provisions of the treaty.

To agree that justice and tolerance are universally valid doesn't mean all cultures agree that the best way to uphold these is through the declaration of individual human rights, protected by law. One could promote tolerance by stressing duties on individuals to act with compassion.

Human rights NGOs often represent elite opinion and are not broadly representative. Funding for the promotion of human rights has come for the most part from western countries.

Cultures should change through an internal process, not through external imposition. Asserting universal human rights are may even be counter-productive.

The argument	Summarization of the argument	Counter argument
The change argument		
The popularity argument		
The commonality argument		
The legal argument		

**Answer:**

The argument	Summarization of the argument	Counter argument
The change argument	Culture is not immutable, traditions and so-called fundamental beliefs alter over time. To defend uncritically local culture against universal values assumes local culture is timeless and transcendent.	Cultures should change through an internal process, not through external imposition. Asserting universal human rights are may even be counter-productive.
The popularity argument	The language of human rights appeals across very diverse cultures, and struggles for justice all over the world have used the language of human rights. The worldwide growth of the human rights movement is undeniable.	Human rights NGOs often represent elite opinion and are not broadly representative. Funding for the promotion of human rights has come for the most part from western countries.
The commonality argument	The basic values found in international human rights law (tolerance, protection of the weak, justice, and the accountability of the ruler) – are found in most cultural and religious traditions, and documents like the UDHR were assembled drawing on diverse traditions.	To agree that justice and tolerance are universally valid doesn't mean all cultures agree that the best way to uphold these is through the declaration of individual human rights, protected by law. One could promote tolerance by stressing duties on individuals to act with compassion.
The legal argument	States from diverse legal, cultural and religious traditions have ratified human rights treaties, and having done so cannot defer to local traditions where these conflict with the treaty guarantees.	States ratify human rights treaties; it doesn't signal popular acceptance, and in any case they often place broad reservations on contentious provisions of the treaty.