

## Are Human Rights a Luxury or a Normal Good?

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*One of the most controversial and thorny issues in international politics is the issue of human rights violations. Governments are criticized for consistently and willingly violating human rights. This approach assumes that governments have the option to violate or respect human rights. However, many governments may face a different dilemma, namely the eradication of poverty or a war that threatens their existence as a nation. Thus, governments should not be judged solely on their human rights record but also on their performance in reducing the number of their citizens who live below the poverty threshold. As rightly pointed out by the UNDP (2023), “poverty is a denial of human rights”. All other indicators may be considered as luxury goods that will be pursued only when a country reaches a certain level of economic development (income per capita). The aim of this paper is to investigate the association between human rights indicators and per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and to examine whether human rights, deemed a commodity, can be considered a luxury good, a normal good, or a necessity. It is found in this paper that the income elasticity of human rights is positive but less than one and at very high levels of income, close to zero, indicating that the commodity human rights is a necessity. Based on this evidence, countries are classified according to whether, given their per capita income, their human rights record aligns with expectations. The evidence identifies overperforming and underperforming countries.*

**Keywords:** *human rights, per capita GDP, luxury goods, normal goods, United Nations, statistical analysis, income elasticity, politics*

### Introduction

According to a recent report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2024, p. 146), “Multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations, strive to uphold human rights, advance development and promote peace.” One of the great achievements of the so-called period of hyperglobalization is the unprecedented economic growth of per capita incomes and the reduction of poverty, as demonstrated by Papanikos (2024). This is also mentioned by the UNDP (2024, p. 48): “Most countries integrated into global value chains and opened their markets to foreign trade and financial flows, yielding some control over these flows for the promise of economic growth and poverty reduction. This period brought massive increases in standards of living for large numbers of people, but the gains from trade and economic integration were not evenly distributed. It also brought increases in within-country inequality in many high-income countries, often manifested in the emergence of or increase in large subnational inequalities, with declines in job opportunities concentrated in some areas and economic sectors. For some low- and

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middle-income countries hyperglobalization was sometimes characterized by unequal terms of trade and the implementation of policies that may have inhibited productivity growth and development progress”<sup>1</sup>.

The purpose of this paper is to examine one particular issue: the association between human rights and per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is assumed that causality runs from per capita GDP to human rights. Countries with higher per capita GDP than average are expected to be better performers in human rights. In this study, human rights are considered a commodity whose demand increases with income. The higher the per capita income of a country, the greater the “consumption” of human rights. The question of interest is whether human rights, as a commodity, are a normal or a luxury good. In the latter case, only the very rich countries can afford to consume such a “luxury good” as human rights. For the poor countries of the world, absolute poverty reduction is or should be a strong priority, and human rights are not on the list of immediate urgent priorities for these countries. As a matter of fact, in an earlier report, the UNDP (2003, p. iv), examining the relationship between poverty and human rights, rightly declared that “Poverty is a denial of human rights”. In other words, and this is important in empirical evidence, the provision of human rights as a good is zero in economies with very low per capita GDP. If per capita GDP is zero, then human rights must also be zero.

The practical policy implications are evident. Taken care of poverty (low per capita income) creates the necessary conditions to achieve better records in human rights achievement. Poverty requires the production of more material wealth as this is measured by per capita GDP. Richer countries have fewer people living in absolute poverty. Higher growth rates of output, higher than the population growth, provides the means to reduce poverty and therefore open up the area to improve on human rights. This is not done automatically and government policies are required so that the gains from higher output growth is directed towards those who need it most<sup>2</sup>. This political issue is further discussed in the following sections of this paper.

Including this introduction, the paper is structured as follows. In the next (second) section of the paper, the relationship between human rights and the economy is discussed from a theoretical point of view, considering what economic literature has to say on the nature of the association between human rights and economic performance. The third section reviews a few studies that emphasize various aspects of human rights. It is a convenience sample of the relevant literature published in various journals and books of the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER). This literature is more than sufficient to shed light on the various aspects of human rights. The fourth section discusses and employs two data sources of measuring human rights and presents the descriptive statistics of these two variables. Economic performance is measured by per capita GDP in Purchasing Power Parities (PPP) expressed in US dollars. Its descriptive statistics are also presented in this section. Finally, this section examines the association between human rights and per

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<sup>1</sup>Not all scientists and policymakers are in favour of globalization. For a radical critique of international law and radicalization, refer to Amin (2021) and Boehringer (2015).

<sup>2</sup>Countries or regions blessed with natural resources, such as oil, may be the cause of ethnic conflicts and war, resulting in extreme violations of human rights. This distributive injustice is examined by Folami (2022).

capita GDP by analyzing scatter the diagrams of the two variables: human rights and per capita GDP. The fifth section continues with the empirical analysis of the relationship between human rights and per capita GDP by estimating a simple nonlinear regression model. Many functional forms were tried, but the best in terms of goodness of fit is given by a semi-logarithmic relation between the human rights index and per capita GDP in PPP US\$ expressed in natural logarithms. This estimated equation is then used to produce estimates of the income elasticity of demand and a classification of countries between overperformers and underperformers in their human rights record. In addition, a log-log functional form is estimated for a second dataset, which includes only 87 countries, and the results are compared with the larger sample of 164 countries. The final section discusses the policy implications of these preliminary findings and summarizes the main conclusions of the study.

## Human Rights as an Economic Good

Human rights are defined by the United Nations (2024) as<sup>3</sup>:

...rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

Using economic jargon, one may consider human rights as a composite commodity or as a basket of commodities that includes a variety of goods. For example, it may include the right to work, the right to health<sup>4</sup>, the right to education and training<sup>5</sup>, access to water<sup>6</sup>, the right to security, the right to private property, and the right to freedom of expression, among others. However, the provision of all these rights is costly and is usually borne by governments<sup>7</sup>. It is a public good, even though it cannot be considered a pure public good. Table 1 classifies the economic goods in four types depending on two criteria: rivalry in consumption (one's consumption of a good precludes all others to consume it) and excludable (it is very costly to exclude someone from consuming it).

What type of good are human rights? This question can also be framed as: What kind of good should human rights be? If we accept that human rights are defined by respecting the principle of universality, then nobody should be excluded. Therefore,

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<sup>3</sup>See <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights>; (retrieved 2 April 2024).

<sup>4</sup>This also includes psychological health and sexual/gender orientations (Dermer et al. 2021). Similarly, Masullo et al. (2023) examine aspects of male identity and its relation to human rights. Roots (2022) examines LGBTI rights in the European Union. Şemi (2024) analyzes students' perceptions of sexual orientation.

<sup>5</sup>See Oberoi (2022).

<sup>6</sup>See Ştefan (2024).

<sup>7</sup>The provision of human rights by the government can be analyzed using Wagner's Law. Once a certain level of expenditure is allocated to providing the commodity of human rights, there can be no turning back. Only an increase can occur, assuming that this government spending is allocated effectively and efficiently, thereby leading to an increase in the supply of human rights.

they cannot belong to the category of excludable goods because, by definition, human rights are or should be a non-excludable commodity. Then the question arises as to whether human rights should be rivalrous or non-rivalrous in consumption. This is more difficult to determine. An example can illustrate the dilemma posed by this argument. It is or should be everyone's right to walk freely in a forest. However, there are two problems with the use of a forest. If all people use it, then forests may become crowded, and on a hot day, there is a danger of fire. In an emergency like this, governments may decide who will use the park to minimize the number of visitors or close it down to any visitors altogether.

**Table 1.** *A Taxonomy of Economic Goods*

	<b>Excludable</b>	<b>Non-Excludable</b>
Rival	Private Good (souvlaki)	Impure Public Goods- Common Goods (Forest, open sea, pavements, street walk, etc.)
Non-rival	Impure Public Goods-Club Goods- Natural Monopolies (Tennis clubs, private parks, Cable TV)	Pure Public Good (defense)

One may argue that the ideal is to consider human rights as pure public goods, i.e., everyone should benefit from the provision of this good. In this case, human rights as a commodity belong to the category of pure public goods. Governments should supply this public commodity without any discrimination to all their citizens. The nature of pure public goods is such that nobody can be excluded, as in the case of national defense. However, one of the most frequent violations of human rights occurs when governments violate the principle of universality in the 'consumption' of human rights. Some people are excluded based on various criteria such as ethnicity, religion, gender, age, etc.

Rare resources must be used in the production of such rights which have alternative uses, such as the alleviation of poverty, with or without respect for human rights. An extreme example may demonstrate this. Suppose there is a natural disaster in a very poor and isolated country, threatening famine for a significant proportion of the population. A legitimate or non-legitimate government may decide to confiscate property and output from those who have it to cope with the immediate threat to lives. Sometimes violence may be used as well. Human rights are violated<sup>8</sup>, but this might be the only way to solve the problem of starvation and poverty in general. In many cases, it is also the only way that the political and social stability of the country can be preserved.

As mentioned in the introduction, the existence of poverty is a complete denial of human rights, regardless of how these rights are measured. The only way to solve the problem of poverty for very poor countries is through economic growth. This is a necessary condition but not sufficient. A country should implement policies so that economic growth benefits the poor more, helping them to escape what is known as the poverty trap. Of course, economic growth creates jobs, which are a necessary

<sup>8</sup>In this case, the right to property and privacy is violated.

condition for eradicating absolute (extreme) poverty. This should be the focus of economic science, and rightly so, the UN has made poverty the number one goal of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite what many economists have been brought up to believe, the objective of the science of economics is to eradicate poverty. National economies should be ranked according to their record of decreasing the number of people living below a certain threshold of income.

Alan O. Sykes, a law professor at Stanford, has argued what all economists know: the production of human rights is costly. There is an opportunity cost of providing these services, and not every country in the world can afford to supply a minimum level of human rights services. In his own words, Sykes stated (2003, pp. 3–4):

In turn, the growth in real income that results from more open trade will promote human rights to the degree that the demand for human rights is likely “income elastic.” There are good reasons to believe that this will be true for many rights. Note that almost all human rights are, in one manner or another, costly. The protection of rights generally requires a legal system that is effective and credible, and such systems do not come free. Moreover, many rights require some additional sacrifice of other human wants—minimum wages, rights to unionize, environmental standards, and social security systems, for example, all come at the price of an increase in the cost of goods and services, or an increase in taxation. The latter creates its own human rights violation when people evade taxes without any reoercussion (Papanikos 2015). At some level, therefore, human rights must be “financed” by a reduction in other consumption expenditures that would be made in their absence. Human rights are in this sense akin to ordinary goods and services—they cost money, and because of the budget constraint that all individuals and societies ultimately face, an increase in “expenditures” on human rights must be accompanied by a decrease in expenditures on other things that people desire. The expenditures necessary to create and enforce human rights will tend to be less burdensome, other things being equal, in wealthier societies. For in such societies, basic human needs for food, clothing, shelter and the like are more likely to have been met, and more resources will be available for other things. We might therefore expect that wealthier societies will tend to expend more resources (proportionally) on the creation and protection of human rights—that is, we might expect that human rights will tend to be “normal goods” in the language of economics. Anecdotal evidence hints at the correctness of this hypothesis.

The objective of this paper is to provide concrete, non-anecdotal evidence that permits the direct testing of a hypothesis: as income rises, a country has the resources to provide more human rights (both quantitatively and qualitatively). Additionally, this paper aims to test the hypothesis regarding the type of human rights: are they luxury or normal goods? This can be verified by estimating the income elasticity of demand for the commodity “human rights”. It is expected that as income increases, the demand for human rights will also rise. If the increase in demand for human rights surpasses the increase in income (measured in percentages), economists refer to these commodities as “luxury” goods. This measurement is called the income elasticity of demand. If the elasticity falls between zero and one, then the demand for human rights is considered a “normal” good. There is also the possibility that the income elasticity is negative, in which case goods are considered “inferior”.

The above analysis is more static. It is possible that the income elasticity of human rights does not remain constant across incomes. In some cases, in order to achieve economic growth, a country may proceed by restricting the provision of human rights, in which case, as per capita income rises, the demand for human rights decreases. At this stage, human rights can be considered “inferior” goods. However, as income increases, then, *ceteris paribus*, the country can afford to provide more human rights, and actually proportionally more than the income growth. Later, at much higher incomes, less than proportional increases in human rights can be consumed, in which case, human rights as a commodity are considered “normal” goods or even necessities, as later defined in this paper.

The measurements of human rights use indices that have an upper bound, say 100% achievement in human rights. Further increases in per capita income will not lead to further increases in human rights. Human rights cannot exceed 100%, which is the highest possible score that can be achieved. Higher incomes will not increase human rights. Thus, there is a threshold of per capita income at which a further increase will not lead to higher provisions of human rights. One approach of verifying these hypotheses is by developing a simple nonlinear model that allows testing them. As mentioned, the best fit is provided by a semi-log functional form without a constant. The first database includes 164 countries, and the second includes 87 countries. These data are collected by different agencies following different methodologies, which enhances the robustness of the findings of this paper. More information on the data source is provided below.

Human rights are considered here as a commodity with many dimensions that relate to law, politics, sociology, anthropology, health, education, business, and many other disciplines<sup>9</sup>. This explains why per capita income may not be the sole explanatory factor for the provision of human rights. This divergence is demonstrated in the two empirical sections of the paper. However, in the next section, a selected literature review is presented based on papers published in various journals of ATINER, primarily in the *Athens Journal of Law* and the *Athens Journal of Social Sciences*.

## A Selected Literature Review of Human Rights

How can large disparities in human rights among countries be explained, even when per capita income differentials are taken into consideration? A look at the literature may shed some light on this issue. There are many reasons that can explain deviations from the mean other than per capita GDP. Further discussion on this issue is included in the empirical section of this paper, where we categorize countries into overperformers and underperformers. Each country requires a separate analysis, but some explanations can be generalized. How can variations in human rights be explained?

As mentioned in the introduction, in a state of emergency that can occur because of man-made wars or natural disasters (such as earthquakes, fires, floods, climate changes, etc.), human rights violations may become the norm rather than the exception.

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<sup>9</sup>Some of these issues are examined in a series of excellent books published by ATINER; see the books edited by Professor Frenkel (2013, 2014, and 2017) and Stivachtis and Georgakis Abbott (2014).

Zumpani (2014) examines these exceptions within the context of civil war. As the author suggests, in a state of emergency where the survival of a nation is at stake, human rights become a secondary issue. Kashmir is an example where the human rights of individual citizens were brutally violated because of the war. There were human rights violations of international law, and UN resolutions were not of any help, as explained by Akhtar (2023). Similar to wars, terrorism poses a significant threat to extreme human rights violations, as demonstrated by Choram (2022) in the case of Ethiopia. In regions plagued by wars and systematic violations of international law, including human rights, conducting business and promoting economic growth might be the only solution out of the stalemate. Creating an environment of ethical business behavior is examined in the case of Myanmar by Christie and Hanlon (2014). Additionally, regional cooperation and agreements may promote human rights, as demonstrated by Hadad (2019) in the Arab world.

Respect for human rights is not only a government responsibility but also becomes a moral obligation for all institutions and organizations, such as business enterprises. Workers have rights and responsibilities. How they are monitored may conflict with human rights, violating workers' and consumers' rights, as demonstrated, for example, by Lockwood (2018) in the case of care homes in Britain. Discrimination in the workplace may result from differences in religion, as examined by Lockwood et al. (2023). Nartey (2023) analyzes the legal and ethical obligations of corporations in respecting human rights and the environment.

Wars bring about migrations, which again explains why human rights indices are so low in some countries. Wars threaten the physical existence of human beings, and according to the definition of human rights, the life of any individual must be respected. In many cases, apart from killing civilians, wars also force people out of their country or region<sup>10</sup>. These migrants face two types of human rights violations. The first violation occurs when people are forced to leave their homes, and the second violation occurs when the host country, willingly or unwillingly, does not protect their human rights as refugees. This issue has been examined by Valois de Amorim and Vargas del Puppo Romanelo (2022) in reference to Syrian refugees in Brazil. Brazil has its own human rights problems, with many allegations of violating the human rights of indigenous people (Burckhart 2023). Roots (2017) examines the rights of asylum seekers within the European Union, while Tiwari (2024) examines the treatment and protection of refugees in India.

Even in countries where war is not a problem, such as in the case of the European Union, the right to private property and remaining in one's land is recognized as a human right, which may not be respected by all member states. Allegranti (2022) examines the Italian constitution and concludes that these rights are not always protected, including in situations of emergencies such as natural hazards. The emphasis is on the right to private life and includes issues of the psychological wellbeing of the individual. Human rights related to private life might be violated as part of normal business relations, such as the relationships of individuals as consumers. Jelisejevs (2021) examines the human rights of consumers when dealing with banks.

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<sup>10</sup>The use of force and violence in the context of international law on human rights and the UN conventions and declarations is examined by Khan (2017).

Similarly, in the health sector, consumers are the patients, and their medical records should be protected, as highlighted by Lytvynenko (2020a and 2020b).

However, this is a general matter of legal protection and, more generally, of legal culture. Hamaiunova (2023) examines differences in European legal cultures, which might explain the divergence in human rights records between countries of relatively similar levels of development. The European Court of Human Rights also permits individuals to sue governments for violations of human rights. Jafari (2024) surveys such cases against Turkey.

Another issue that might explain the dispersion of data in the two scatter diagrams presented below is violations of human rights based on gender or age. This issue is examined, among many others, by Abdurraheem (2018) in the case of Nigeria, who looks at women's participation in the political process from a post-colonial historical perspective. However, in advanced countries, violations of human rights based on gender are ubiquitous, as observed by Caragnano (2018) and Picchi (2022) within the context of the European Union, and by Kundu and Tabassum (2023) for women journalists in Bangladesh. In another important context, Jahan and Razib (2023) look at the role of media in Bangladesh in violating children's human rights as victims of sexual assaults. Similarly, Khangala (2024) studies children's socioeconomic rights in South Africa, and Mashego (2024) looks at the enforcement of socioeconomic rights in the same country. Türkoğlu (2023) inspects domestic violence and the protection of women's rights in the Turkish courts. Access to justice is a concern for people, especially those with certain disabilities, as discussed by Umegbolu (2021) in the case of Nigeria.

Human rights include language rights. Are people allowed to speak and be educated in the language of their preference? Alam (2022) analyzes the freedom of language along with women's right to education. As the author claims (p. 2), "A number of experts on minority language problems, for example, have advocated for a human rights framework for language rights".

Democracy and political rights, in general, are considered human rights. The issue of democracy, its meaning, and modern applications are examined by Papanikos (2022a and 2022b), Meydani (2022), and Petratos (2022). The right of assembly within the context of the European Convention on Human Rights is examined by Černý (2020). Democracy is usually associated with freedom of speech or, in general, with freedom of expression. The latter is a multidimensional concept and may include the freedom to dress, as demonstrated by Latino (2023). This issue has been hotly debated even in advanced countries regarding the dress code of Muslim children attending public schools.

The final strand of the literature on human rights relates to the important issue of the effects of new technology and artificial intelligence on human rights. López (2023) studies these issues, particularly the use of technology in the judiciary process. As stated in the paper (p. 525), "Algorithms may contain serious errors or go against human rights". Artificial intelligence applied to the judiciary process may solve the problem of the independence and objectivity of judges, as well as the process of their dismissal. Ally (2016) compares the constitutional frameworks for the removal of judges in Kenya and South Africa. Technology has brought forward new ways of freedom of expression, relating to social media and fake news accusations, as



discussed by Smith and Perry (2020) and Smith and Smith (2022) regarding fake news legislation and human rights violations in Thailand and Myanmar.

In conclusion, from the above short and selected literature review on various human rights issues, two conclusions emerge. First, the commodity of human rights is multidimensional, including many aspects, and each one can be used to overemphasize or underemphasize the provision of human rights. Second, the concern for adequately providing human rights cuts across all countries and continents. Thus, the use of a cross-sectional dataset that includes all countries of the world provides the necessary information and variability to test the main hypotheses of this paper. The next section presents the sources of data and their summary statistics.

### **Data Sources and Descriptive Statistics**

This study uses two data sources that measure human rights by applying various criteria. Both indices are composite indexes and include many other variables. These indices have generated their own literature. The purpose of this study is not to review this literature. For economists, the problem with these indices is that they are based on people's opinions. Even if they are the best experts in this field, by definition, their judgments are subjective. Human rights are not bought and sold in the market, so their prices and volume of transactions cannot be directly observed.

These indices have also been criticized for not incorporating important aspects of the rights dimension, such as the right to education, health, etc. In my opinion, the crudest index of human rights is poverty, which in its extreme manifestation occurs when people are dying from starvation or very simple curable diseases. The number of people in extreme poverty is an objective indicator of how well a society treats its citizens. I have examined this issue in more detail and provided empirical evidence in Papanikos (2024). Despite their disadvantages, the subjective indices of human rights have their own merit and, in some cases, are effective in exerting pressure on national authoritarian regimes by both national and international agents to improve the provision of human rights. If these indices serve this purpose, then subjective or not, they should be more than welcome.

The first index is provided by V-DEM (Varieties of Democracy), which reports data for 164 countries. More information on their methodology is available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/vdem-human-rights-data>. The data are collected by the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and funded, among other agencies, by the Swedish Research Council and the European Commission. V-DEM's human rights index is actually a civil liberties index, which is decomposed into three subindices: physical integrity rights (people are free and no torture or killings by the government occur); private civil liberties (no forced labor, property rights exist, freedom of movement and religion); political civil liberties (political parties and civil society organizations are formed and operate freely, and media are free). This index has certain shortcomings, but the most important one is that it does not account for absolute (extreme) poverty, and the basic needs of the population are not met, such as the rights to food, health, education, welfare, etc.

Countries are ranked between zero and one, but in this study, we transform the measurement by multiplying each score by 100. Thus, countries with a zero score have no provision of human rights, while countries with a score of 100 have reached the maximum possible provision of human rights. No country has scored either of these two extremes.

The second index is supplied by U.S. News & World Report. Professor David Reibstein from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania is overseeing the entire project. The methodology of the index is available at <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/methodology>, which is based on a survey of 17,000 people. It is interesting to note that this index uses 73 country characteristics grouped into 10 categories, which are then correlated with the expected income as reported by the International Monetary Fund. In any case, this index reports data only for 87 countries and is used here to test the robustness of our findings based on the V-DEM index.

Tables 2-5 present summary statistics of the two variables used in this study. Table 2 displays the geographical distribution of the 164 countries included in the V-DEM index. Africa and Europe each account for 25% of the total number of countries used in the index. The maximum number of countries (51) comes from Asia, representing 31% of the total. North and South America together account for 15% of the countries, and Oceania is represented by six countries, or 4% of the total. Overall, the geographical distribution is well-balanced. A table in the appendix of the paper provides all countries of the data set, their ranking and score of human rights, and their per capita GDP of 2021 and 2022. We use the 2021 per capita GDP because data for three countries were not available for the 2022 per capita GDP, but the results, not reported here, were not different from what was found using the 2021 data.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the two variables of interest to this study. The range of the index is between 4 and 97, with a mean value of 69 and a median value of 80. Table 3 also reports various measures of dispersion of the data on human rights. The average value of per capita GDP is \$23,595, taking into consideration PPP differences between the 164 countries. The median is much lower at \$15,135. The data are skewed to the right, as expected for an income distribution. The minimum per capita GDP was \$788 (Burundi), and the maximum was \$131,511 (Luxembourg), showing the unequal distribution of per capita GDP across the globe.

**Table 2.** *Geographical Distribution of Countries by Continents*

<b>Continent</b>	<b>Number of Countries</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>
Africa	41	25%
Asia	51	31%
Europe	41	25%
North America	14	8%
South America	11	7%
Oceania	6	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics**

Statistic	Human Rights (2022)	GDP per capita in PPP US\$ (2021)
Mean	69	23,595
Standard Error	1.94	1,907
Median	80	15,135
Standard Deviation	25	24,423
Kurtosis	-0.53	3.59
Skewness	-0.85	1.73
Range	93	130,723
Minimum	4	788
Maximum	97	131,511

**Table 4. Distribution of Human Rights Performance (2022)**

Value	Count	Percent	Cumulative Count	Cumulative Percent
[0-10)	1	0.61%	1	0.61%
[10-20)	6	3.66%	7	4.27%
[20-30)	10	6.10%	17	10.37%
[30-40)	15	9.15%	32	19.51%
[40-50)	8	4.88%	40	24.39%
[50-60)	7	4.27%	47	28.66%
[60-70)	18	10.98%	65	39.63%
[70-80)	17	10.37%	82	50.00%
[80-90)	42	25.61%	124	75.61%
[90-100)	40	24.39%	164	100.00%

Table 4 shows the distribution of the human rights performance of the 164 countries. Half of the countries (82 in total) scored more than 80. If this is the expected “consumption” of human rights, then one may conclude that the world is doing very well. On the other hand, 28.66% of the countries scored less than 50 in their human rights record. In many of these countries, but not all, wars and political instability may explain why they lag behind in the provision of human rights. However, the most important reason, as argued in this paper, is poverty, which is the main factor preventing these countries from keeping up with others in the provision of “acceptable” human rights. The level of poverty is related to per capita GDP. The latter variable is considered and empirically tested here as an important determinant of the supply of human rights.

Table 5 illustrates the distribution of per capita GDP in PPP US\$. Almost half of the countries (48.78%) had a per capita GDP less than \$15,000. About 25% of the countries had a per capita GDP of more than \$35,000.

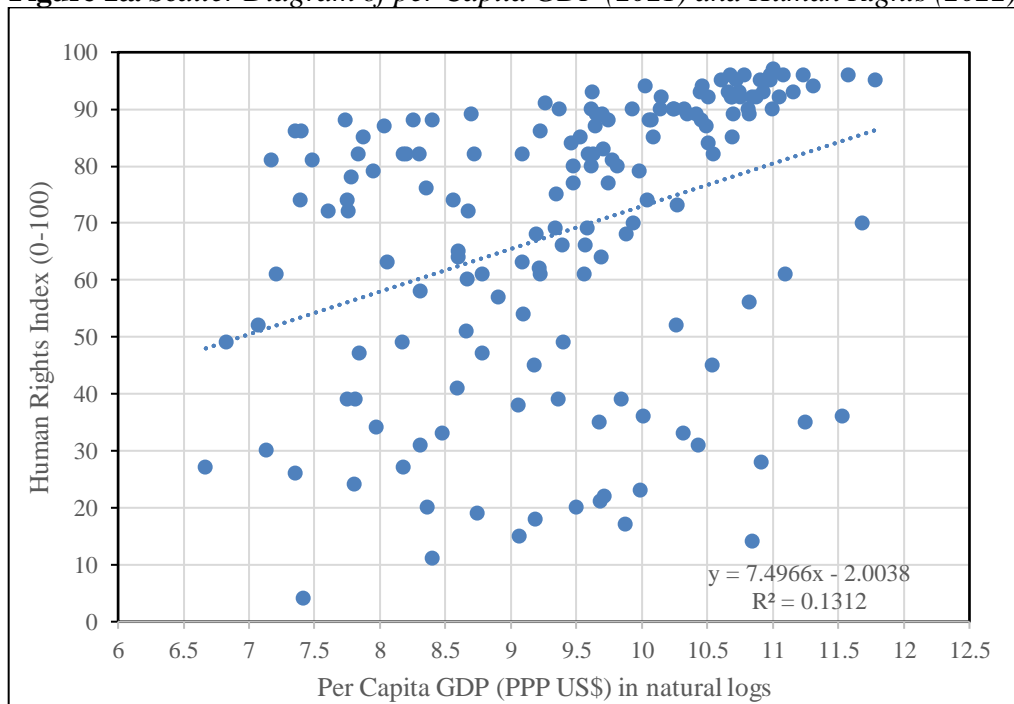
**Table 5. Distribution of Per Capita GDP in PPP US\$ (2021)**

Value	Count	Percent	Cumulative Count	Cumulative Percent
[0-5000)	40	24.39%	40	24.39%
[5000-10000)	21	12.80%	61	37.20%
[10000-15000)	19	11.59%	80	48.78%
[15000-20000)	19	11.59%	99	60.37%

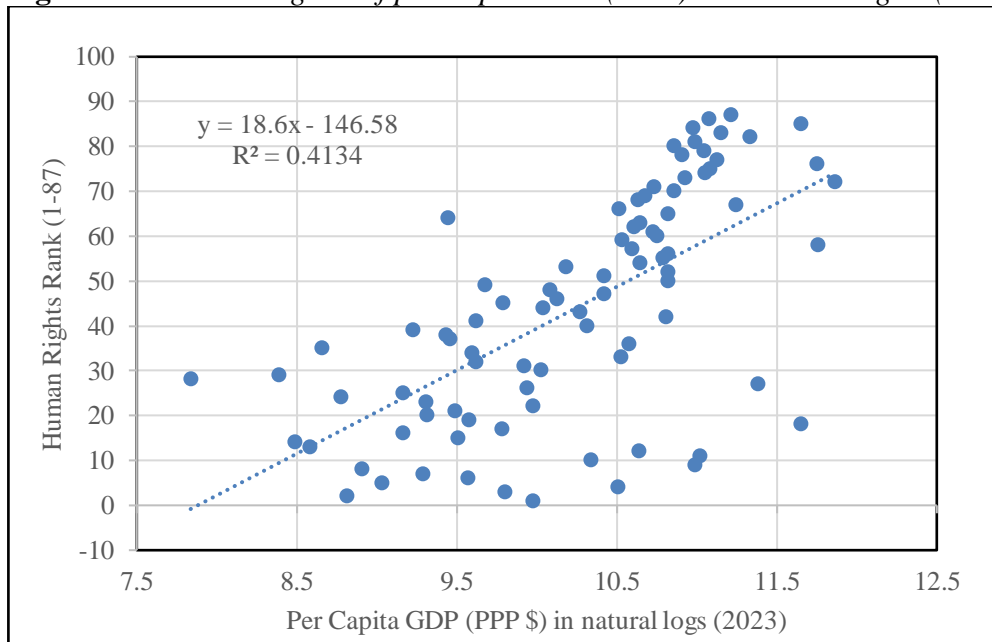
[20000-25000)	10	6.10%	109	66.46%
[25000-30000)	6	3.66%	115	70.12%
[30000-35000)	7	4.27%	122	74.39%
[35000-40000)	6	3.66%	128	78.05%
[40000-45000)	7	4.27%	135	82.32%
[45000-50000)	5	3.05%	140	85.37%
[50000-55000)	7	4.27%	147	89.63%
[55000-60000)	5	3.05%	152	92.68%
[60000-65000)	3	1.83%	155	94.51%
[65000-135000)	9	5.49%	164	100.00%

The question asked in this study is: what is the association between human rights and per capita GDP? Figure 1a is a scatter diagram between the human rights index and per capita GDP in natural logs. Figure 1a shows a positive relationship, but there is very high dispersion of human rights around the regression line. Figure 1b shows the same scatter diagram and the regression line using the second database of the 87 countries. Both pictures look the same. The type of data dispersion might be the result of the existence of heteroscedasticity. In the estimation of the regression line, we correct for heteroscedasticity.

**Figure 1a.** Scatter Diagram of per Capita GDP (2021) and Human Rights (2022)



Note: 164 countries are included. The human rights index has been rescaled from 0-1 to 0-100. Source: The human rights data were retrieved from V-DEM, and the data for per capita GDP in PPP US\$ were retrieved from the World Bank.

**Figure 1b.** Scatter Diagram of per Capita GDP (2023) and Human Rights (2023)

Note: 87 countries are included.

Source: <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/rankings/cares-about-human-rights>.

The two scatter diagrams are the first step in visually examining the relationship between human rights and per capita GDP. The purpose of this study is to find the income elasticity of demand for human rights, and this can be observed by examining the scatter diagrams. The next section estimates the parameters of a simple empirical model, which will permit the identification of whether human rights, as a commodity, are a luxury or a normal good.

### The Empirical Evidence

Economic theory treats human rights as a commodity, typically supplied by the government. In this simplistic approach, it is assumed that human rights depend on the level of economic development, measured by per capita output (per capita GDP). This study utilizes cross-sectional data from countries with different purchasing parities measured in US dollars. Additionally, alongside economic development, several other variables may play crucial roles in the provision of human rights. These variables are accounted for using a dummy variable representing the continent to which each country belongs. It is assumed that this dummy variable serves as a suitable proxy for other variables such as cultural differences, religions, languages, and political systems.

The choice of functional form for the equation to be estimated is also significant. Five common functional forms were tested: linear, hyperbolic, quadratic, logarithmic, and semi-logarithmic. The coefficient of determination adjusted for degrees of freedom was employed as a criterion for selecting the best functional form. The semi-log specification yielded the best fit for the largest dataset, as reported in Table 6.

Another point to consider is the role of the constant term. While it is customary to include a constant term in a simple regression model like the one presented here, in the context of this study, the constant term holds no significance. When per capita income is zero, there is no supply and demand for human rights. Even at very low levels of per capita GDP, the supply of human rights is severely limited, rendering the constant term effectively zero. As evident from the scatter diagram in the preceding section, there seems to be no significant issue of heteroscedasticity. Nonetheless, the standard errors of the regression parameter estimates reported in Table 6 are adjusted for heteroscedasticity.

The theoretical functional form is provided as follows:

$$e^{HR} = e^{\beta_0 Y^{\beta_1} e^{DV}}$$

Where  $e$  represents Euler's number (approximately 2.71828),  $HR$  denotes human rights,  $Y$  stands for per capita GDP,  $DV$  signifies dummy variables, and  $\beta_0$  and  $\beta_1$  represent the coefficients to be estimated. By taking the natural logarithms, the function described above can be estimated using a linear regression method. The equation in natural logs becomes:

$$HR = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln(Y) + DV(\text{Dummy Variables})$$

The theoretical arguments presented above assume that  $\beta_0$  is not statistically different from zero. Furthermore, the parameter  $\beta_1$ , representing the coefficient of the natural logarithm of per capita output, can be utilized to estimate the income elasticity of demand for the commodity "human rights." The income elasticity is given as follows:

$$E_{HR} = \beta_1 / HR$$

We distinguish three ranges of possible values of the income elasticity of demand for human rights:

1. If  $0 < E_{HR} < 1$ , then human rights are a "normal" good. If it tends to zero then it is a normal good that can be considered a "necessity".
2. If  $E_{HR} > 1$ , then human rights are a "luxury" good.
3. If  $E_{HR} < 0$ , then human rights are an "inferior" good.

This issue then becomes an empirical question. Table 6 presents three specifications of the same semi-log functional form.

**Table 6.** Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Human Rights)

Variables	Specification	(1)	(2)	(3)
Constant		-2.00 (0.15)	28.72 (1.66)	---
Per Capita GDP in logs		7.5*** (5.34)	5.49*** (3.27)	8.27*** (56.59)
ASIA		---	-30.64*** (7.27)	-28.93*** (-7.23)
AFRICA		---	-13.12*** (-2.55)	-7.51** (-2.27)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		0.1258	0.3557	0.3494
F-statistic		24.46***	30.99***	---

\*\*\*significant at 1%. \*\*significant at 5%. Note: t-statistics of the estimated parameters in parentheses. HAC standard errors and covariances.

Specification (1) includes a constant term and per capita GDP in natural logs. The hypothesis that the constant term is zero cannot be rejected, which supports the argument made earlier that the constant term should not be included in the regression of human rights. This is because if per capita GDP is zero, human rights provision is also zero, signifying dire circumstances such as people starving to death. Regardless of how the indices of human rights are constructed, in situations like these, human rights are essentially nonexistent.

The variable per capita GDP is statistically significant at the 1% level of significance. However, this specification exhibits a very low coefficient of determination. The model explains only 12.58% of the variations in human rights.

Specification (2) retains both variables from specification (1) but adds the two dummy variables for Asia and Africa. If a country belongs to a specific continent, it takes the value of one; otherwise, it is zero. Dummy variables for other continents, either alone or in combination with others, were tested. However, only the dummy variables for Asia and Africa were statistically significant. The t-statistic for the constant term increased, but it remains statistically insignificant at a level of significance less than 10%. Per capita GDP remains statistically significant. Notably, there's an increase in the coefficient of determination in this specification. Now, the model can explain 35.57% of the variance in human rights. This suggests that geographical variables, represented by continent dummy variables, play a significant role in the provision of human rights. Continents, as dummy variables, encompass various country characteristics such as culture, religion, and political systems.

Specification (3) drops the constant term. Now, all variables are statistically significant. This is the specification that will be used in the remainder of this paper to estimate elasticities, the number of countries that overperform in the provision of human rights, and the number of countries that underperform in human rights achievements when considering the effect of economic development.

The effect of per capita GDP is positive, implying that human rights are not an inferior good. A quadratic functional form was also estimated, which would have allowed for testing of an inferior good. While human rights were found to increase at a decreasing rate with income, per capita GDP squared was not statistically significant at the 7% level, and the coefficient was very small (0.00000000289). Even with these estimates, a negative income elasticity was not observed within the

range of per capita incomes in the dataset. Mathematically, a negative elasticity was obtained only when per capita income exceeded one million US dollars. It is worth noting that the maximum per capita income in the dataset was 131,511 US dollars.

The coefficients of the dummy variables are statistically significant at the 1% level. A significance test of the two coefficients for Asia and Africa shows that this difference is statistically significant, implying that the effect of Asia's countries differs statistically from the effect of African countries.

It is interesting to note that in the Bangkok Declaration on human rights in 1993 (see UNESCO 1994, p. 44), the ministries and representatives of Asian countries "recognize that while human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds".

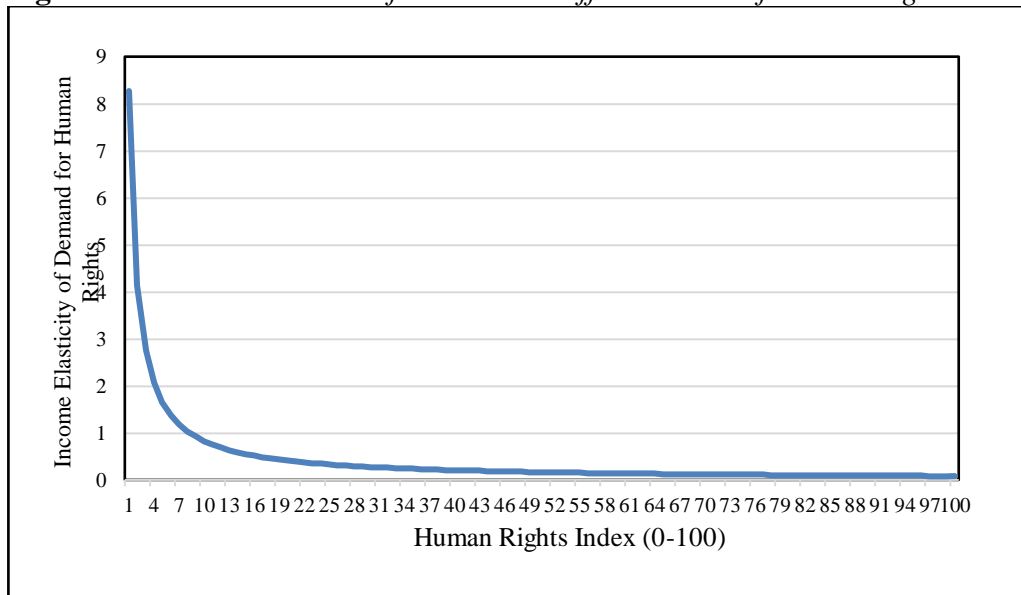
This may offer an explanation for the underperformance in human rights achievement in the Asian continent, as indicated by the coefficient of the Asian dummy variable and as demonstrated in the analysis below (see Figure 3). Similar results are observed for Africa, although the negative effect is much lower than that of Asian countries. The values held by African countries regarding what constitutes human rights may differ from those of countries on other continents. Their philosophy might be different, and this has deep historical roots, as explained by Nicolaidis (2022).

What is the income elasticity of demand for the commodity human rights? Using the formula ( $E_{HR} = \beta_1/HR$ ) and evaluating the elasticity at the average value of human rights (69), the income elasticity for demand was estimated to be equal to +0.22. However, the income elasticity for human rights, like many other goods, depends on per capita income. For some goods considered necessities, the income elasticity is higher at low levels of income but decreases as income rises. This is because the percentage increase in income is not followed by a proportional increase in the demand for human rights. Figure 2 illustrates the demand for human rights and the income elasticity, while Table 7 categorizes them into three values: greater than one, between zero and one, and very close to zero.

**Table 7.** *Types of Demand for Human Rights Based on Income Elasticities*

Human Rights is ...	Consumption of Human Rights ranges ...	The Elasticity ranges...
... a Luxury Good	...from 1 to 8	...from 8.27 to 1.03
... a Normal Good	...from 9 to 87	...from 0.99 to 0.1
... a Necessity	...from 88 to 100	...from 0.09 to 0.0



**Figure 2.** *Income Elasticities of Demand at Different levels of Human Rights*

The shape of this curve has a sound economic interpretation and can be considered as parallel to the Kuznets curve. At low levels of economic development, the percentage increases in human rights are substantial. For example, an increase from 1 to 2 corresponds to a 100% increase, from 2 to 3 a 50% increase, from 3 to 4 a 33% increase, and so on. Income at low levels of economic development may rise at a very high rate but cannot match these rates of increases in human rights achievement. Given that the income elasticity of demand is the ratio of percentage increases in the "consumption" of human rights over the percentage change in per capita income, the elasticity at these low levels of economic development is higher than one. As income rises, the elasticity decreases. It can even become negative, but this is only the case if human rights as a commodity were an inferior good.

Depending on the value of the elasticity, human rights as a commodity can be a luxury good, a normal good, or an essential good. Table 7 shows the ranges of human rights consumption and the corresponding income elasticity. At a very low level of economic development, human rights as a commodity become a luxury good. As economic development picks up, the demand for human rights is, percentage-wise, below the percentage increase in per capita income. The elasticity is below one but above zero. In this range, two types of goods are distinguished: normal goods and necessities. A good becomes a necessity when an increase in income does not lead to an increase in the demand for the good. No matter how rich one becomes, their demand for souvlaki, for example, will not increase. In this case, the income elasticity is zero or very close to zero. In the table, we assume that this low number is below 0.1. Values between 0.1 and less than one characterizes a normal good.

The estimation of specification (3) permits the grouping of countries into overperformers and underperformers in human rights. The demarcation point is the regression line and the difference between what is expected from their current level of per capita GDP and what is the actual number obtained from the survey of experts and reported in the V-DEM database.

Table 8a lists the overperformers and Table 8b all those which were underperformers. Most countries (103) had an actual human rights record above what one would predict from their level of per capita GDP. On the other hand, Table 7b lists the countries which underperformed. In total, 61 countries had a human rights achievement below what one would have expected from the level of their per capita GDP. It goes beyond the purpose of this paper to analyze country-by-country cases, but every year the organization Human Rights Watch publishes an extensive report on human rights by country. The most recent one (2024) is available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024>.

**Table 8a. Overperformers in Human Rights**

Rank	Country Name	HR(2022)	Fitted Log Linear	Residual	Y(2021)
1	Armenia	89	50.96	38.04	15662
2	Georgia	88	51.68	36.32	17089
3	Nepal	76	40.18	35.82	4252
4	Mongolia	84	49.34	34.66	12876
5	Japan	93	59.29	33.71	42834
6	Liberia	86	53.37	32.63	1570
7	Malawi	86	53.75	32.25	1645
8	Gambia	88	56.49	31.51	2291
9	Niger	81	51.86	29.14	1309
10	South Korea	92	63.03	28.97	46875
11	Indonesia	77	49.48	27.52	13086
12	Senegal	88	60.84	27.16	3875
13	Sierra Leone	81	54.41	26.59	1782
14	Sao Tome and Principe	88	62.02	25.98	4471
15	Israel	85	59.52	25.48	44065
16	Lesotho	82	57.31	24.69	2530
17	Ghana	89	64.45	24.55	5998
18	Kyrgyzstan	65	42.22	22.78	5444
19	Zambia	82	60.17	21.83	3572
20	Benin	82	60.38	21.62	3665
21	Burkina Faso	78	56.89	21.11	2405
22	Tanzania	79	58.30	20.70	2851
23	Vanuatu	87	66.47	20.53	3090
24	Madagascar	74	53.71	20.29	1636
25	Solomon Islands	85	65.19	19.81	2645
26	Sri Lanka	69	50.39	18.61	14622
27	Mali	74	56.67	17.33	2340
28	Bhutan	66	48.79	17.21	12036
29	Namibia	86	68.81	17.19	10161
30	Malaysia	73	56.08	16.92	29058
31	Maldives	70	53.27	16.73	20707
32	Guinea-Bissau	72	55.45	16.55	2021
33	Lebanon	66	50.23	15.77	14331
34	Togo	72	56.73	15.27	2358
35	Jamaica	91	76.67	14.33	10601
36	Jordan	61	47.38	13.62	10155
37	Barbados	93	79.64	13.36	15178
38	Papua New Guinea	82	68.71	13.29	4050
39	Ecuador	90	77.54	12.46	11773
40	India	57	44.73	12.27	7368
41	Seychelles	90	77.91	12.09	30503
42	Costa Rica	94	82.95	11.05	22643
43	Kenya	74	63.33	10.67	5237
44	Moldova	90	79.55	10.45	15010

45	Botswana	83	72.80	10.20	16449
46	South Africa	82	71.86	10.14	14689
47	Honduras	82	72.16	9.84	6149
48	Gabon	82	72.17	9.83	15244
49	Mozambique	61	52.14	8.86	1354
50	Suriname	89	80.22	8.78	16294
51	Pakistan	51	42.71	8.29	5773
52	Uruguay	92	83.98	8.02	25663
53	Dominican Republic	90	82.15	7.85	20553
54	Cote d'Ivoire	72	64.27	7.73	5866
55	Philippines	54	46.32	7.68	8933
56	Estonia	96	88.34	7.66	43477
57	Latvia	94	86.55	7.45	35018
58	Spain	95	87.79	7.21	40662
59	Albania	87	79.83	7.17	15533
60	Bolivia	82	75.21	6.79	8885
61	New Zealand	96	89.24	6.76	48444
62	Slovakia	93	86.44	6.56	34529
63	Czechia	95	88.74	6.26	45630
64	Peru	85	78.87	6.13	13831
65	Trinidad and Tobago	90	83.90	6.10	25421
66	Sweden	97	91.03	5.97	60127
67	Bulgaria	90	84.74	5.26	28113
68	Chile	90	84.80	5.20	28337
69	Tunisia	75	69.82	5.18	11471
70	Belgium	96	90.85	5.15	58841
71	Portugal	92	86.93	5.07	36638
72	Montenegro	88	83.23	4.77	23440
73	Finland	95	90.24	4.76	54706
74	Argentina	88	83.34	4.66	23754
75	Denmark	96	91.65	4.35	64884
76	Iceland	95	90.75	4.25	58195
77	Germany	95	90.84	4.16	58799
78	Italy	93	88.94	4.06	46705
79	Lithuania	92	88.40	3.60	43797
80	Slovenia	92	88.44	3.56	43974
81	Greece	89	85.62	3.38	31295
82	Bangladesh	47	43.72	3.28	6523
83	Switzerland	96	92.96	3.04	75980
84	Panama	89	86.20	2.80	33564
85	Australia	93	90.43	2.57	55947
86	France	92	89.72	2.28	51364
87	Singapore	70	67.73	2.27	118888
88	Canada	92	89.99	2.01	53023
89	Kosovo	80	78.43	1.57	13114
90	Croatia	88	86.48	1.52	34722
91	Guyana	85	83.49	1.51	24194
92	Democratic Republic of Congo	52	51.04	0.96	1185
93	United States	93	92.31	0.69	70219
94	Netherlands	92	91.46	0.54	63369
95	Malta	90	89.50	0.50	49975
96	Cyprus	89	88.52	0.48	44405
97	Norway	94	93.58	0.42	81867
98	Paraguay	80	79.59	0.41	15091
99	Nigeria	64	63.63	0.37	5432
100	Ireland	96	95.76	0.24	106570
101	Romania	87	86.85	0.15	36277
102	Bosnia and Herzegovina	81	80.91	0.09	17706
103	Central African Republic	49	48.98	0.02	924

**Table 8b. Underperformers in Human Rights**

Rank	Country Name	HR(2022)	Fitted Log Linear	Residual	Y(2021)
104	United Kingdom	89	89.51	-0.51	50056
105	Austria	90	91.00	-1.00	59963
106	North Macedonia	80	81.21	-1.21	18344
107	Mauritius	74	75.59	-1.59	23064
108	Hong Kong	61	62.89	-1.89	66249
109	Iraq	45	47.00	-2.00	9696
110	Luxembourg	95	97.50	-2.50	131511
111	Hungary	84	86.96	-2.96	36773
112	Cameroon	58	61.27	-3.27	4083
113	Serbia	79	82.57	-3.57	21647
114	Colombia	77	80.63	-3.63	17105
115	Haiti	63	66.71	-3.71	3179
116	Kazakhstan	52	56.01	-4.01	28812
117	Angola	61	65.15	-4.15	6523
118	Mauritania	60	64.26	-4.26	5857
119	Kuwait	56	60.63	-4.63	50375
120	Morocco	63	67.71	-4.71	8892
121	Poland	82	87.26	-5.26	38135
122	Uzbekistan	38	46.01	-8.01	8608
123	Guatemala	68	76.06	-8.06	9851
124	Cambodia	33	41.19	-8.19	4805
125	Fiji	69	77.29	-8.29	11431
126	Vietnam	39	48.57	-9.57	11728
127	Ethiopia	47	57.41	-10.41	2559
128	Comoros	49	60.15	-11.15	3563
129	Oman	45	58.26	-13.26	37843
130	Thailand	39	52.50	-13.50	18855
131	Mexico	68	81.74	-13.74	19578
132	El Salvador	62	76.30	-14.30	10143
133	Azerbaijan	35	51.10	-16.10	15927
134	Brazil	64	80.21	-16.21	16260
135	Zimbabwe	39	56.65	-17.65	2334
136	Uganda	39	57.14	-18.14	2479
137	Ukraine	61	79.14	-18.14	14289
138	Tajikistan	20	40.30	-20.30	4315
139	Burundi	27	47.66	-20.66	788
140	Algeria	49	70.31	-21.31	12170
141	Somalia	30	51.51	-21.51	1254
142	Djibouti	41	63.62	-22.62	5421
143	Turkiye	33	56.46	-23.46	30452
144	Guinea	34	58.48	-24.48	2914
145	Chad	26	53.38	-27.38	1573
146	Afghanistan	4	32.47	-28.47	1674
147	United Arab Emirates	35	64.13	-29.13	76948
148	Iran	22	51.42	-29.42	16557
149	Myanmar	11	40.55	-29.55	4450
150	Sudan	31	61.27	-30.27	4084
151	Qatar	36	66.50	-30.50	102470
152	Laos	15	46.06	-31.06	8659
153	Rwanda	24	57.11	-33.11	2469
154	Congo	27	60.16	-33.16	3569
155	Bahrain	28	61.34	-33.34	54902
156	China	17	52.77	-35.77	19484
157	Libya	36	75.34	-39.34	22371
158	Saudi Arabia	14	60.79	-46.79	51407
159	Eswatini	18	68.49	-50.49	9773
160	Egypt	20	71.13	-51.13	13441

161	Equatorial Guinea	21	72.65	-51.65	16151
162	Nicaragua	19	72.34	-53.34	6281
163	Russia	31	86.32	-55.32	34043
164	Belarus	23	82.68	-59.68	21929

The regression results indicate that human rights achievement depends on the geographical area of the country. It was found that it is more challenging to achieve high rates of human rights in Asia than in Africa. The dummy variables for other continents were not statistically significant. One way to compare the three curves is to keep the level of per capita income constant and evaluate the performance in human rights. This is depicted in Figure 3. For example, if per capita GDP is \$50,000, an Asian country is expected to score 60 on the human rights index, an African country 82, and a non-African and non-Asian country close to 90.

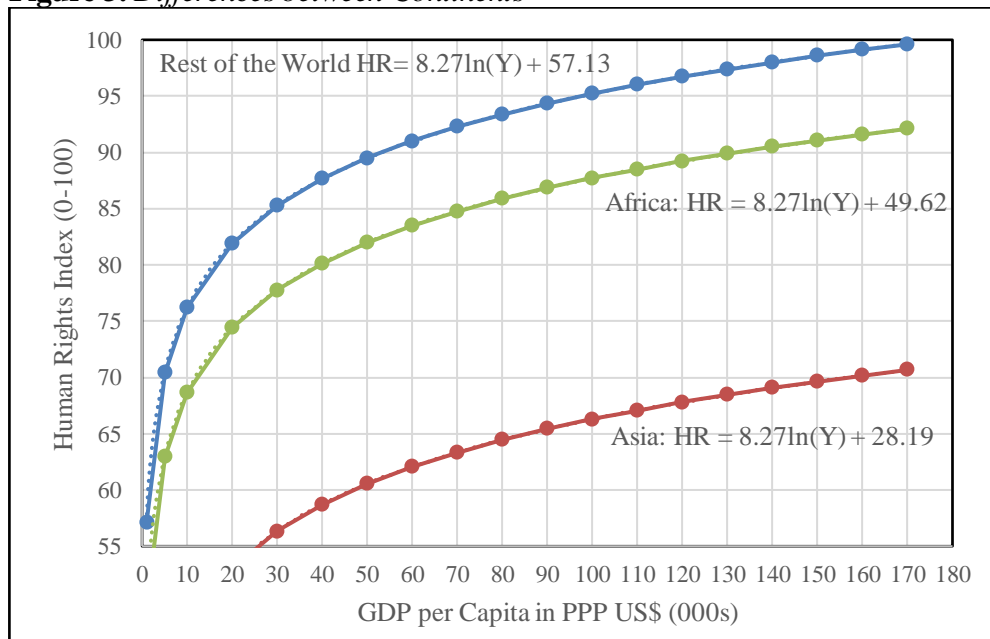
Further research will explore how these differences might be explained on a country-by-country case study.

As mentioned above, there is a second database with fewer countries (87 in total). The same estimations were applied to this database as well. Table 9 reports the estimation parameters using the database of the 87 countries.

Applying the same criterion as previously in selecting the best functional form, i.e., the one that maximizes the coefficient of determination (the best fit), the log-log function yielded the highest  $R^2$  and this is reported in Table 9. This is a more convenient functional form because the income elasticity of demand for the commodity human rights is equal to the coefficient of per capita GDP.

Similar to the previous database, the constant term is not statistically significant. When per capita GDP is zero, human rights "consumption" is zero. Even though both databases produced a non-significant constant term, the sign is different. The second database gives a negative sign.

**Figure 3.** Differences between Continents



**Table 9.** Regression Results of the 87 Countries (Dependent Variable: Natural Log of Human Rights)

Variables	Specification	(1)	(2)	(3)
Constant		-1.94 (1.36)	-0.16 (-0.15)	---
Per Capita GDP in logs		0.53*** (4.00)	0.37*** (3.40)	0.36*** (27.299)
ASIA		---	-0.87*** (-4.34)	-0.86*** (-7.23)
EUROPE		---	0.30*** (2.01)	0.32** (2.14)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		0.2450	0.5081	0.5137
F-statistic		28.91***	30.60***	---

\*\*\*significant at 1%. \*\*significant at 5%. Note: t-statistics of the estimated parameters in parentheses. HAC standard errors and covariances.

The dummy variable for Africa was not statistically significant as in the first database, but the dummy variable for Europe has a positive effect. A European country is expected to have a more positive effect on human rights “consumption” than what would have been predicted by the country’s per capita GDP. Asia has a negative impact as in the previous database. An Asian country is expected to have, on average, less demand for human rights than what one would have expected from its per capita GDP. The coefficient of determination is higher than in the first database, as was also reported in the scatter diagram of Figure 1b. The variations of the explanatory variables account for 51.37% of the variations in human rights.

As mentioned above, the elasticity of income demand for human rights is simply the coefficient of per capita GDP, which is 0.36. In the previous regression, it was estimated to be equal to 0.22. In this second database, a 10% increase in per capita GDP will increase the demand for human rights goods by 3.6%. The good “human right” is a normal good. In the case of the log-log estimation, the elasticity is constant and is restricted not to vary with income.

In concluding this empirical section of estimating income elasticities of demand for human rights, the evidence does not reject the hypothesis that the human rights commodity becomes a normal good. At relatively high per capita incomes, human rights become a necessary good.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Human rights can be considered an economic good, as explored in this paper. Economic goods utilize scarce resources, meaning resources with an opportunity cost. However, human rights differ from private commodities like souvlaki, possessing characteristics of impure or even pure public goods. The responsibility for supplying human rights lies with the government, whose policies determine the extent of provision through political processes, whether through free elections or the prevailing political system.

National governments are not entirely free to determine their human rights provision due to international legal and political obligations. Pressure from international organizations, such as the European Union, compels adherence to specific human rights rules. Even isolated countries face pressure to respect basic human rights provisions.

In addition to political constraints, countries face economic limitations, where the level of economic development may influence human rights provision. This study examines the economic constraints on human rights provision, using per capita GDP in US dollars as a key determinant. Basic economic theory is applied, and a simple empirical model is estimated using two well-known databases: V-DEM and US News. The former includes 164 countries, while the latter includes 87.

The study's main findings suggest that per capita GDP positively affects human rights provision within the income and human rights ranges of the sample. On average, human rights are considered a normal good, with an elasticity of 0.22 in the larger dataset and 0.36 in the smaller dataset. This implies that a 10% increase in per capita income leads to a 2.2% or 3.6% rise in demand for human rights, depending on the dataset. Dummy variables for continents reveal significant differences, with Asian countries showing a negative impact on human rights provision, while European countries exhibit a positive effect.

An important conclusion is that the income elasticity of demand for human rights varies with per capita income, with elasticity initially greater than one at lower income levels, increasing as income rises, and eventually tending toward zero at higher incomes. Further research could explore country-specific variables to better explain variations in human rights provision, although the fundamental argument remains that economic development determines human rights.

In summary, the policy implication is clear: governments should aim for high GDP growth trajectories to increase per capita income, thereby enhancing the supply of human rights. However, it's acknowledged that additional research may refine these findings, but the core argument remains unchanged: there is a strong statistical relation between economic development and human rights provision.

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## Appendix

Table A1. Human Rights Measurement and Per Capita GDP

Country	Rank	HR(2022)	GDPCAP2021(PPP)	GDPCAP2022(PPP)
Sweden	1	97	60127	64578
Estonia	2	96	43477	46697
New Zealand	3	96	48444	51967
Belgium	4	96	58841	65027
Denmark	5	96	64884	74005
Switzerland	6	96	75980	83598
Ireland	7	96	106570	126905
Spain	8	95	40662	45825
Czechia	9	95	45630	49946
Finland	10	95	54706	59027
Iceland	11	95	58195	69081
Germany	12	95	58799	63150
Luxembourg	13	95	131511	142214
Costa Rica	14	94	22643	24923
Latvia	15	94	35018	39956
Norway	16	94	81867	114899
Barbados	17	93	15178	17837
Slovakia	18	93	34529	37459
Japan	19	93	42834	45573
Italy	20	93	46705	51865
Australia	21	93	55947	62625
United States	22	93	70219	76399
Uruguay	23	92	25663	28842
Portugal	24	92	36638	41452
Lithuania	25	92	43797	48397
Slovenia	26	92	43974	50032
South Korea	27	92	46875	50070
France	28	92	51364	55493
Canada	29	92	53023	58400
Netherlands	30	92	63369	69577
Jamaica	31	91	10601	11822
Ecuador	32	90	11773	12822
Moldova	33	90	15010	15238
Dominican Republic	34	90	20553	22834
Trinidad and Tobago	35	90	25421	27778
Bulgaria	36	90	28113	33582
Chile	37	90	28337	30209
Seychelles	38	90	30503	35228
Malta	39	90	49975	55928
Austria	40	90	59963	67936
Ghana	41	89	5998	6498
Armenia	42	89	15662	18942
Suriname	43	89	16294	17620
Greece	44	89	31295	36835
Panama	45	89	33564	39280
Cyprus	46	89	44405	49931
United Kingdom	47	89	50056	54603
Gambia	48	88	2291	2510
Senegal	49	88	3875	4209
Sao Tome and Principe	50	88	4471	4738
Georgia	51	88	17089	20113
Montenegro	52	88	23440	26984
Argentina	53	88	23754	26505
Croatia	54	88	34722	40380

Vanuatu	55	87	3090	3289
Albania	56	87	15533	18552
Romania	57	87	36277	41888
Liberia	58	86	1570	1725
Malawi	59	86	1645	1732
Namibia	60	86	10161	11206
Solomon Islands	61	85	2645	2654
Peru	62	85	13831	15048
Guyana	63	85	24194	40642
Israel	64	85	44065	49509
Mongolia	65	84	12876	14230
Hungary	66	84	36773	41907
Botswana	67	83	16449	18323
Lesotho	68	82	2530	2695
Zambia	69	82	3572	3894
Benin	70	82	3665	4056
Papua New Guinea	71	82	4050	4447
Honduras	72	82	6149	6741
Bolivia	73	82	8885	9684
South Africa	74	82	14689	15905
Gabon	75	82	15244	16471
Poland	76	82	38135	43269
Niger	77	81	1309	1505
Sierra Leone	78	81	1782	1931
Bosnia and Herzegovina	79	81	17706	20377
Kosovo	80	80	13114	14723
Paraguay	81	80	15091	15977
North Macedonia	82	80	18344	20162
Tanzania	83	79	2851	3097
Serbia	84	79	21647	23911
Burkina Faso	85	78	2405	2546
Indonesia	86	77	13086	14653
Colombia	87	77	17105	20287
Nepal	88	76	4252	4725
Tunisia	89	75	11471	12490
Madagascar	90	74	1636	1774
Mali	91	74	2340	2517
Kenya	92	74	5237	5764
Mauritius	93	74	23064	26906
Malaysia	94	73	29058	33434
Guinea-Bissau	95	72	2021	2190
Togo	96	72	2358	2608
Cote d'Ivoire	97	72	5866	6538
Maldives	98	70	20707	24772
Singapore	99	70	118888	127565
Fiji	100	69	11431	14125
Sri Lanka	101	69	14622	14405
Guatemala	102	68	9851	10818
Mexico	103	68	19578	21512
Bhutan	104	66	12036	
Lebanon	105	66	14331	
Kyrgyzstan	106	65	5444	6133
Nigeria	107	64	5432	5860
Brazil	108	64	16260	17822
Haiti	109	63	3179	3305
Morocco	110	63	8892	9519
El Salvador	111	62	10143	11096
Mozambique	112	61	1354	1468
Angola	113	61	6523	6974

Jordan	114	61	10155	11003
Ukraine	115	61	14289	12671
Hong Kong	116	61	66249	69049
Mauritania	117	60	5857	6424
Cameroon	118	58	4083	4408
India	119	57	7368	8379
Kuwait	120	56	50375	58056
Philippines	121	54	8933	10133
Democratic Republic of Congo	122	52	1185	1337
Kazakhstan	123	52	28812	30810
Pakistan	124	51	5773	6437
Central African Republic	125	49	924	967
Comoros	126	49	3563	3832
Algeria	127	49	12170	13210
Ethiopia	128	47	2559	2812
Bangladesh	129	47	6523	7395
Iraq	130	45	9696	10862
Oman	131	45	37843	41724
Djibouti	132	41	5421	5893
Zimbabwe	133	39	2334	2531
Uganda	134	39	2479	2694
Vietnam	135	39	11728	13457
Thailand	136	39	18855	20672
Uzbekistan	137	38	8608	9533
Libya	138	36	22371	23375
Qatar	139	36	102470	114648
Azerbaijan	140	35	15927	17764
United Arab Emirates	141	35	76948	87729
Guinea	142	34	2914	3187
Cambodia	143	33	4805	5349
Turkiye	144	33	30452	37274
Sudan	145	31	4084	4216
Russia	146	31	34043	36485
Somalia	147	30	1254	1364
Bahrain	148	28	54902	61228
Burundi	149	27	788	836
Congo	150	27	3569	3791
Chad	151	26	1573	1668
Rwanda	152	24	2469	2792
Belarus	153	23	21929	22591
Iran	154	22	16557	18075
Equatorial Guinea	155	21	16151	17396
Tajikistan	156	20	4315	4885
Egypt	157	20	13441	15091
Nicaragua	158	19	6281	6875
Eswatini	159	18	9773	10782
China	160	17	19484	21476
Laos	161	15	8659	9384
Saudi Arabia	162	14	51407	59065
Myanmar	163	11	4450	4870
Afghanistan	164	4	1674	