

Empiricism and governance: Revisiting Hume's contributions to political philosophy and human nature



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ABSTRACT

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This study examines David Hume's political philosophy, focusing on his empiricist approach to governance, human nature, and justice. It highlights how Hume's ideas remain relevant to contemporary issues such as institutional trust, legitimacy, and governance challenges. A qualitative narrative literature review was conducted using primary sources (Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, *Essays*, *Moral*, *Political*, and *Literary*) and secondary literature. A thematic analysis identified key patterns in Hume's political thought. Hume's empiricism provides a pragmatic governance approach, emphasizing observation-based knowledge, skepticism of absolute authority, and adaptability. His conception of human nature, rooted in passions, customs, and social cooperation, offers insights into political legitimacy and social cohesion. His view of justice as a social construct remains applicable to modern governance and inequality debates. Hume's empiricist framework supports evidence-based governance, emphasizing adaptive political institutions. His insights help address challenges in political legitimacy and public trust. This study underscores the relevance of Hume's political philosophy in shaping contemporary governance, particularly in addressing institutional trust and justice.

Contribution/ Originality: This study uniquely applies Hume's empiricist political philosophy to modern governance challenges, emphasizing institutional trust and adaptive policymaking. Unlike previous works focused on his epistemology, this research explores Hume's relevance to contemporary political stability, offering new insights into pragmatic governance and justice as a social construct.

1. INTRODUCTION

Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume revolutionized political philosophy, human nature, and empiricism. Hume's argument challenged rationalism and provided an empirical basis for understanding human knowledge and conduct, marking a turning point in Western intellectual history. His *A Treatise of Human Nature* underpinned contemporary philosophy and influenced political theory, economics, and psychology (McAleer, 2024). Hume's empiricist view holds that all knowledge comes from sensory experience, with reason organizing and integrating these perceptions. His rejection of inherent conceptions and emphasis on experience as the source of all knowledge opposed rationalists, who believed reason could provide knowledge without sensory input (Martin, 2021). This technique reframed philosophical study and affected his political philosophy since he believed political and social systems should be founded on practical insights into human behavior, not abstract ideals or metaphysical notions.

Political philosophers and practitioners may study modern political institutions using their empiricist view of human nature and governance (Lusk, 2021).

Although his epistemology and ethics are more well-known, Hume's political philosophy sheds light on justice, political legitimacy, and government (Matson, 2021). Hume's governance theory holds that political institutions should be led by human nature's practical wants, habits, and emotions rather than abstract ideals or theoretical frameworks (McArthur, 2004). He believed political frameworks should be based on social norms and vast experience rather than academic abstractions. This empirical governance approach emphasizes pragmatism, adaptation, and basing political authority on human behavior and societal collaboration (Christiansen, 2020). Hume's rejection of idealistic concepts of justice and promotion of justice as an artificial virtue based on utility and social convention supports his contention that political institutions must be pragmatic and contextually appropriate. Hume's influence on modern political theory is overshadowed by Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose human rights and governance ideas dominate political debates (Schabas, 2021). Given modern democracies' growing problems of social disintegration, institutional distrust, and political polarization, Hume's political concepts are understudied in governance discussions.

Reassessing Hume's political theory is important since modern societies struggle with institutional trust, impartiality, and democratic legitimacy. Hume's pragmatic and empirical approach helps democracies worldwide address popular disenchantment, political fragmentation, and declining faith in government (Leffler, 2022). Hume's study of emotions, customs, and habits' influence on social and political behavior may explain political indifference and public mistrust (Klein, 2021). Reassessing Hume's claims on public trust and social cooperation may help improve democratic societies in a period of rising political polarization and scrutiny of institutional legitimacy. Hume's pragmatic, context-sensitive approach to economic uncertainty, social unrest, and inequality (Macfarlane, 2001). Hume's empirical insights into human behavior and social norms provide practical answers to governance issues, emphasizing adaptive, evidence-based policymaking informed by individual lived experiences.

This book shows how Hume's empiricist political theory might overcome the democratic institutions' legitimacy dilemma. Modern democracies must address public trust in government institutions as people become more skeptical of their political systems' impartiality and efficacy (Sagar, 2022). Due to these challenges, Hume's focus on political authority in human action and social cooperation is still crucial for understanding legitimacy dynamics (Modood, 2023). Hume's focus on social conventions, habits, and political stability undermines abstract, utopian frameworks. Hume's focus on public trust and the necessity for political systems to adapt to changing public expectations and behaviors presents a pragmatic and adaptive governance paradigm that may restore public confidence in political institutions. Hume's rejection of morality and his view of justice as a utility-based social construct have shaped nations' views on social justice, economic distribution, and inequality (Qu, 2023). Hume's focus on justice as a result of social customs and utility provides a pragmatic and adaptive framework for resolving these concerns in modern cultures, especially in a period of rising inequality and social division.

Hume's political philosophy is often overlooked in favor of Enlightenment thinkers who valued democracy, natural rights, equality, and freedom (Habermas, 2022). Many modern political systems oppose Hume's skeptical, empiricist politics, which values human behavior and societal growth. This study reinterprets Hume's views on governance and justice to address current arguments on democracy, political power, and the role of political institutions in tackling modern difficulties (Perez, 2024). Hume's scientific and pragmatic approach to administration contrasts with today's ethereal and idealistic views of political order in a period of political fragmentation, economic instability, and societal unrest. Hume's work reveals the complex difficulties facing modern communities and supports pragmatic, responsive, and inclusive government (Sugden, 2021). This study shows that Hume's empirical governance approach may clarify current political issues, proving the relevance of his political philosophy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Empiricism in Hume's Political Philosophy*

David Hume's political philosophy is based on empirical evidence, rejecting rationalism's abstract principles and inherent notions. Hume believed that human thoughts and deeds, not idealized concepts of reason or divine will, were necessary to understand human conduct and government (Ezebuilo, 2020). In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), he claims that all ideas come from impressions, immediate sensory experiences, and that reason is a tool. According to Matson (2021), political institutions should be analyzed via history, tradition, and acts, not conceptions. His claim is supported by this evidence. Hume believed that political institutions are context-dependent and changeable and that social norms are formed by trial and error rather than dogma. Stability and value above theoretical idealism make this technique suitable for governance concerns. Hume rejected natural law notions because he believed intrinsic conceptions were founded on incorrect assumptions about human nature and morality (Asher, 2021). Hume believed that social and political institutions are based on human rules that control interactions and reduce resource conflict. *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (1741-1742) studied how governments maintain order and collaboration. Collective experience and observation, not divine decree or intrinsic rights, determine this process (Pavel, 2021). His view of justice, which he saw as a manufactured virtue created to address property distribution and fairness difficulties, likewise rejected natural morality. Hume's empirical approach showed that justice is a social construct affected by history and culture (Määttänen, 2023). Due to his emphasis on empiricism, Hume pushed for political institutions to adapt to society's needs and situations rather than enforcing inflexible ideological frameworks.

2.2. *Hume's Conception of Human Nature*

Human nature underpins David Hume's ethics, politics, and social philosophy. Since he contends in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) that reason should be submissive to passions, his research focuses on emotions and reason. Hume believed that emotions and wishes drive human behavior, placing reason in a secondary place (Hume, 2023b). Hume believed that morality comes from human connections and experiences, not abstract thinking. These feelings include acceptance and hate. His view of human nature emphasizes empathy, or "sympathy," as a way to build relationships and promote shared norms and standards that promote social cohesiveness (Russell, 2021). Hume questioned morality and government by focusing on empirical studies of human emotions and actions and their effects on society. Habit and custom influence Hume's perspective of human conduct and social traditions. He claimed that frequent interactions build expectations and direct behavior, thus people use habits to handle life's complexities (Demeter, 2020). In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume (1748) called habit the root of all learning and belief. This helps people make sense of their experiences and adapt. Social practices, which originated from communal acts to overcome common problems, also depend on tradition (Bakhurst, 2021). Hume saw justice as an artificial virtue based on the pragmatic requirement to control property and maintain social harmony. Hume emphasizes the importance of habits and conventions in maintaining social order and permitting gradual transformation. This idea aligns with his scientific approach to human nature, emphasizing shared learning and experience in creating institutions and behavior (Sugden, 2021).

2.3. *Hume's Governance Theories*

David Hume's governance ideas are founded on his belief that fairness is an artificial virtue used to resolve conflicts and structure communities. Hume wrote in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) that justice comes from managing finite resources since unfettered emotions and self-interest would cause anarchy. He believed justice was a social construct meant to foster stability and collaboration, not a natural or divine concept (Hume, 2023b). Hume believed that justice should offer solid laws and institutions to promote peaceful cooperation, especially in complex societies (Hume, 2021). Hume's utility-based approach set him apart from natural law theorists and provided a pragmatic framework for understanding legal and political institutions' growth (McArthur, 2004). Hume believed

property rights and institutional stability were fundamental to governance because they fostered trust and cooperation. He believed property norms develop spontaneously when communities set resource allocation and dispute resolution standards (Lindsay, 2021). Instead of abstract abstractions, these norms are based on custom and habit in human relationships. Hume wrote in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (1741-1742) that clear and consistent principles provide institutional stability and good government (Hume, 2021). He believed institutions should gradually adjust to changing situations to facilitate transformation while retaining community cohesion. Hume's governance ideas focus on balancing tradition and innovation in political institutions, informing current institutional design and policy (Dromelet, 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Approach

David Hume's political philosophy, including his views on human nature, governance, and empiricism, is examined using qualitative research. An interpretive analysis of Hume's views and their relevance to Enlightenment philosophy and current political thinking is the goal. First, to clarify Hume's philosophical framework and its implications for governance; second, to analyze critical perspectives and comparative interpretations; and third, to assess the relevance of Hume's ideas in modern political and ethical contexts. The research uses interpretive synthesis, critical comparison, and textual analysis to cover the issue thoroughly.

3.2. Data Sources

A well-selected set of primary and secondary sources provides a solid analytical foundation (Table 1). The main sources are David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and *Moral, Political, and Literary Essays*. These writings explain Hume's ideas on empiricism, justice, property, custom, and governance. The portions of the sources relevant to the study are carefully analyzed. The inquiry is based on Hume's research of human passions and moral feelings and his claims concerning the created nature of justice. Hume's ideas must be contextualized and understood through secondary sources. The research includes 21 JSTOR, Springer, and PhilPapers books, journal articles, and critical essays. These supplemental works were chosen for their intellectual rigor, relevance, and diversity of opinions. They cover historical and contemporary analyses of Hume's influence on philosophy and politics. Due to its numerous secondary sources, the research includes different interpretations of Hume's philosophy, including comparative evaluations.

Table 1. Sources analyzed in the study.

Type of source	Text/Article title	Author(s)	Year	Relevance to study
Primary	A treatise of human nature	Hume (1978)	1739	Foundational work outlining Hume's empiricism, views on human nature, and justice.
Primary	Essays, moral, political, and literary	Hume (1741)	1741	Explores Hume's thoughts on governance, justice, and political authority.
Secondary	Hume's political philosophy	Perez (2024)	2024	Provides an analysis of Hume's approach to justice and governance.
Secondary	The foundations of modern political thought	Russell (2021)	2021	Contextualizes Hume's ideas within the broader Enlightenment political landscape.
Secondary	Custom and habit in Hume's theory of mind	Dromelet (2021)	2021	Examines the role of habit and custom in Hume's concept of human nature and governance.
Secondary	Justice as utility: A reassessment of Hume	Macfarlane (2001)	2001	Revisits Hume's views on justice as a construct tied to societal utility.
Secondary	Trust in institutions: lessons from Hume	Schabas (2021)	2021	Connects Hume's principles to contemporary issues like the erosion of institutional trust.
Secondary	Empiricism in political theory	McAleer (2024)	2024	Highlights the relevance of Hume's empiricist approach in modern political and governance theories.

Scholarly evaluations comparing Hume's custom-based approach to Locke's natural rights theory or Rousseau's social contract demonstrate his unique approach. The data collection approach is extensive, incorporating both basic and contemporary scientific contributions. This study analyzes Hume's ideas and places them in a philosophical and historical perspective using primary and secondary sources. Integrating Hume's source writings with critical readings yields a fair and nuanced examination of his political theory.

3.3. Thematic Analysis

The research divides data into four themes: empiricism, human nature, governance, and current applications. These categories match the investigation's goals and provide a systematic framework for data categorization and assessment (Table 2). Empiricism studies Hume's epistemology, specifically how observation and experience impact his morals and politics. He examines human nature and the role of tradition and habit in determining behavior, as well as the relationship between emotions, intelligence, and morality. Hume's beliefs on legitimacy, property rights, fairness, public trust, and institutional stability impact governance (Beiboer et al., 2023). Current criticisms and interpretations of Hume's philosophy, including parallels to Rousseau and Locke, are examined in the fourth category. Each topic area shows persistent patterns and significant departures from previous information. Historians dispute whether Hume's emphasis on tradition shows a pragmatic understanding of social stability or a conservative stance that resists government reform. Modern applications demonstrate Hume's continued importance in institutional structure and equality disputes. By carefully distinguishing these parallels and variances, thematic analysis unites Hume's philosophical contributions with their intellectual and practical implications. This strategy ensures that the study explains and places Hume's ideas in current intellectual and cultural conflicts.

Table 2. Thematic categorization framework.

Theme	Description	Key findings from primary texts	Themes in secondary literature
Empiricism	Advocates observation-based knowledge; rejects innate ideas.	Governance should rely on practical experience rather than abstract principles (<i>Treatise</i>).	Seen as foundational to evidence-based policymaking (Asher, 2021).
Human Nature	Emphasizes the role of passions, customs, and social cooperation.	Passions dominate reason; habits and customs create social stability (<i>Treatise</i>).	Explored as essential for political legitimacy and behavioral cohesion (Pavel, 2021).
Governance	Governance must adapt to societal needs and reflect human behavior.	Stable governance requires legitimacy and institutional trust (<i>Essays</i>).	Discussed about modern challenges like declining public trust (Määttänen, 2023).
Justice	Justice is an artificial virtue based on utility rather than innate morality.	Justice evolves to protect property and sustain social cooperation (<i>Essays</i>).	Highlighted as a pragmatic but limited approach to addressing inequality (Diatkine, 2021).
Contemporary relevance	Hume's ideas applied to modern issues, including institutional trust and evidence-based governance.	Adaptive and practical frameworks for addressing instability (<i>Essays</i>).	Critiqued for limitations in tackling structural inequalities (Hume, 2021).

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Insights from Primary Sources (Hume's Texts)

As seen in Table 3, Hume's main writings demonstrate the new use of empiricism for administration. Hume believed that political systems should reflect human behavior rather than abstract theoretical ideals, basing his ideas on practical facts rather than speculation. He opposed absolute authority in monarchies and republics and advocated for adaptive institutions that meet human inclinations and societal demands. Hume rejected the idea of intrinsic moral

or political truths and called for a governance system based on scientific facts and continuous development to balance individual interests with communal benefit (Asher, 2021). Hume's pragmatic approach allowed him to promote organic institutions that evolve from social interactions, ensuring stability and progress. Hume's emphasis on observation and experience as the basis for political power corresponds with present empirical methodologies in public policy and political science, making his work relevant to current issues (Ezebuilo, 2020).

Hume's study of human nature shows how emotion, reason, and habit maintain political stability. He believed that emotions drive human conduct, with reason serving as a tool to guide passions toward pragmatic aims (Asher, 2021). Hume is seen as a key figure in discussions of human behavior, criticizing Enlightenment ideas that emphasize reason in decision-making (Leffler, 2022). Hume also believed that custom and convention, which stem from collective experience, shape society. Community standards improve predictability, collaboration, conflict resolution, and trust through regular interactions and behaviors. Researchers cite this insight as a precursor to current theories of institutional evolution, which rely on informal norms and conventions to support formal governance (Matson & Dold, 2021). Hume's concept of habit and sociability, which underlie stability, shapes the debate on political institutions' behavior.

The findings clarify Hume's innovative concept of justice as an artificial virtue based on utility rather than innate morality. He argued that justice, including property rights and legal institutions, stems from the pragmatic necessity to foster social cooperation and communal prosperity. Hume (2021) argues that justice's moral authority comes from its ability to resolve conflicts and preserve order, making it a dynamic concept that changes with society. Hume believed property rules reduce resource scarcity and promote equality. Hume's pragmatic approach distinguishes him from natural rights and utopian equality, making him a precursor of utilitarian philosophy (Hutton & Ashton, 2023). Hume defined justice as a social concept that grows via human interaction, making political systems analysis context-dependent and changeable. Modern legal and ethical diversity perspectives match this definition (Klein, 2021). These findings demonstrate Hume's empiricism's enduring importance in justice and governance questions.

Table 3. Insights from Hume's texts.

Theme	Key passages from text	Interpretation	Implications
Empiricism	"All the materials of thinking are derived either from our outward or inward sentiment..." (<i>Treatise</i> , book I)	Emphasizes reliance on sensory experience over abstract reasoning.	Suggests policymaking should prioritize observation and evidence rather than theoretical ideals.
Justice	"Justice is not derived from nature but arises artificially, though necessary for society..." (<i>Essays</i>)	Justice is a construct born out of utility to ensure property and societal stability.	Justice frameworks should adapt pragmatically to societal needs, focusing on utility and cooperation.
Governance	"Public interest is the foundation of government... only authority grounded on utility will gain legitimacy." (<i>Essays</i>)	Governance must prioritize public welfare and adapt to societal changes.	Supports incremental policy changes to maintain legitimacy and address evolving public trust issues.
Human nature	"Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions..." (<i>Treatise</i> , book II)	Highlights the primacy of emotions and habits over pure rationality in human decision-making.	Policy design should account for emotional and habitual drivers of human behavior rather than idealized rationality.

4.2. Thematic Patterns from Secondary Literature

Secondary literature views Hume's empiricism as a precursor to evidence-based government, emphasizing the role of observation and experience in political decision-making (Table 4). Hume's concentration on empirical political institutions aligns with data-driven governance frameworks, according to several modern researchers (Määttänen, 2023). Hume's current demands for empirically based policies and demonstrable results reflect his mistrust of abstract goals and governance theory. The difficulties of using Hume's empiricism to solve modern society's structural

inequities are noted by critics. [Beiboer et al. \(2023\)](#) argue that empirical data can help policymakers, but they may not address the social and economic inequities that affect people's lives and needs. Observing behavior without understanding systemic pressures may reinforce power dynamics by ignoring the causes of inequality. This critique contrasts Hume's pragmatic approach to inequality and injustice with the need for political theories that address structural issues.

Hume's views on legitimacy and political authority have been extensively studied by historians. Many regarded his idea as legitimizing rulers based on public trust rather than divine authority ([McAleur, 2024](#)). Hume believes that custom and habit underpin political order, therefore, governance systems obtain legitimacy by following social norms, which boosts public trust in institutions. [Humes \(2023\)](#) and other scholars argue that legitimate authority comes from community consensus and that public confidence in institutions is essential for political stability. This emphasis on legitimacy based on trust rather than compulsion contrasts with top-down political authority theories like Hobbes or Rousseau, which idealized or fixed the social compact. Modern debate on political legitimacy, particularly public perception and institutional equity, draws on Hume's ideas. In modern political trust research, [Charette \(2023\)](#) uses Hume's insights to argue that democratic institutions need constant legitimacy. Credibility depends on faith in these institutions' impartiality, efficacy, and legal frameworks.

Finally, morality and social cohesion are important in secondary literature. Hume's assertion that emotions rather than logic drive human action has been widely studied in connection with political stability and social trust. [McAleur \(2024\)](#) has expanded Hume's moral emotions to imply that a communal moral framework is essential for community trust. Political polarization and ideological divisions highlight this idea as they weaken society. Hume's theory that morality comes from social interactions and shared experiences rather than abstract reasoning offers a unique perspective on trust beyond politics. Hume's emphasis on community and shared emotions helps reconcile conflicts and strengthen society. [Asher \(2021\)](#) has investigated whether Hume's ideas can address political disagreement. [Hume \(2021\)](#) believes that repairing trust in dispersed societies requires moral emotions like empathy and care. These readings of Hume show how important his concepts are in modern administration when trust and social cohesiveness are essential for political stability.

Table 4. Recurring themes in secondary literature.

Theme	Common perspectives	Divergent interpretations	Relevance to modern governance
Empiricism	Hume's observation-based approach influenced modern evidence-based policymaking.	Some argue empiricism undervalues normative ideals needed for addressing structural inequalities.	Supports data-driven policymaking while highlighting the risk of ignoring moral and ethical considerations.
Justice	Justice as an artificial virtue emphasizes utility and social cooperation.	Critics see Hume's utilitarian approach as too conservative and unable to address systemic inequities.	Encourages justice frameworks tailored to utility but needs adaptation for diverse, pluralistic societies.
Governance	Legitimacy is grounded in public trust, custom, and institutional stability.	Disagreements on whether Hume's reliance on custom is overly restrictive for progressive reform.	Suggests focusing on rebuilding institutional trust but highlights challenges in applying Hume's ideas cross-culturally.
Human nature	Passions and habits as central to behavior rather than reason.	Diverging views on whether Hume's theories fully capture modern psychological and sociopolitical dynamics.	Emphasizes emotional and habitual considerations in policymaking but needs updates to reflect modern complexities.

4.3. Relevance to Modern Governance

The growing relevance of institutional trust, especially in democracies where public confidence in government institutions has declined in recent decades (see [Table 5](#)), makes Hume's political philosophy pertinent to the current administration. Hume's emphasis on human nature, particularly the interplay of passions, reason, and custom, lays

the groundwork for comprehending institutional confidence. Hume's ideas about social norms and practices preserving stability are useful as modern democracies struggle with political polarization, corruption, and institutional inefficiency. Hume believed that faith in government is based on society's lasting collective habits and expectations, which are constantly changed by political experiences and institutional efficacy. Recent scholars and lawmakers have emphasized that deteriorating common standards, compounded by perceived administrative inefficiency or unresponsiveness to public concerns, may reduce faith in democratic institutions (Hume, 2023a). Hume believed that gradual policy improvements that match public expectations might restore confidence. Institutions can gradually regain credibility without drastic changes. Hume's focus on adapting government to practical realities and human behavior calls for more openness, public engagement, and institutional adaptation to meet society's evolving needs.

Hume's findings on human nature and government flexibility apply to inequity, social discontent, and economic instability. His emphasis on empiricism knowledge gained through observation and experience supports the idea that an efficient administration must adapt to changing conditions. Hume favored systems that promote individual experiences over abstract goals and universal administration (Hume, 2021). This strategy helps modern managers confront complex issues like economic inequality and societal discontent. Schabas (2020) argues that traditional policy frameworks cannot handle the dynamic and linked nature of modern economies, which often worsen social inequality. Hume's empiricism suggests that policymakers should prioritize data-driven, pragmatic solutions that correctly represent disadvantaged people's daily lives for long-term efficacy. Hume's governance structure adjusts to society's demands to reduce economic inequality and social unhappiness.

Hume's pragmatic administration, which adapts policies to changing conditions, may also handle the political stability-social equality dilemma. Hume's theory can reduce inequality in the face of growing social disillusionment, notably economic and political. Hume (2023) felt justice was an artificial virtue based on social necessity rather than morality. Thus, his work is crucial to understanding and overcoming social inequality and justice issues. He believes that reducing inequality requires prioritizing fairness in social goals above abstract parity. Määttänen (2023) advocates realistic, forward-thinking justice measures that promote equality and social wellbeing. This facilitates economic volatility mitigation. Hume's emphasis on institutional legitimacy, human nature, and real actuality helps governments adapt.

Table 5. Application of Hume's insights to modern governance challenges.

Governance challenge	Hume's insight	Suggested application	Anticipated outcome
Institutional trust	Public trust is essential for governance and arises from legitimacy and utility (<i>Essays</i>).	Implement incremental policy changes that visibly address public concerns.	Strengthened public trust and increased engagement with political institutions.
Inequality	Justice is an artificial virtue that adapts to societal needs (<i>Treatise</i>).	Design flexible justice systems that balance utility with equitable access to resources.	Improved social cooperation and reduced perceptions of injustice.
Political polarization	Passions and habits dominate over reason, requiring shared customs to foster unity (<i>Treatise</i>).	Promote shared cultural initiatives and rituals to build a sense of collective identity.	Enhanced social cohesion and reduced political fragmentation.
Economic instability	Utility-based governance ensures stability through practical solutions (<i>Essays</i>).	Implement empirically driven economic policies responsive to local conditions.	Greater economic resilience and public confidence in policy measures.
Erosion of social cohesion	Custom and convention foster long-term societal stability (<i>Treatise</i>).	Encourage community-driven conventions and participatory governance.	Increased grassroots support for governance systems and stronger societal bonds.

4.4. Limitations and Critiques of Hume's Approach

Hume's empiricism provides a pragmatic and practical foundation for political theory, but it has been criticized for failing to address moral principles necessary to solve systematic inequalities, as seen in Table 6. Hume's emphasis on cultural traditions and observable behavior may downplay moral principles and universal rights, which are crucial to eliminating structural disparities (Pavel, 2021). Critics say Hume's emphasis on history and historical practice in defining government may overlook progressive, normative frameworks that challenge social institutions, especially those that perpetuate injustice and inequality. Hume's denial of inherent notions and dependency on norms may explain his ineffectiveness lack tackling systemic concerns like racial discrimination and gender inequity (Diatkine, 2021). Hume's empiricism helps explain human behavior, but critics say it may not be enough to promote moral improvement in entrenched inequality. His view differs from modern political ethics, which often require breaking tradition and challenging the status quo.

The emphasis on tradition and custom in Hume's political philosophy may hinder progressive changes. Hume believed that natural social rules and practices shape society. While helpful for understanding the stabilizing effects of social norms, this perspective may be too conservative. By stressing existing norms, Hume's worldview may obstruct the transformative changes needed to address present issues. Hume's focus on historical practices and incremental change may not be sufficient to guide prompt and effective reforms in today's rapidly changing world, where climate change, global inequality, and technological disruptions require audacious policy interventions (Määttänen, 2023). Even though Hume provides a solid framework for understanding stability, his emphasis on customs and practices may hinder his ability to change deeply entrenched social, economic, and political systems.

Another objection is Hume's adaptation to current governance arrangements, particularly his 18th-century philosophy to today's complex political circumstances. According to Diatkine (2021), Hume's political theory was built on the social and economic realities of his day and does not adequately handle current society's rapid cultural, technical, and economic developments. Hume's paradigm, based on relatively homogenous and confined civilizations, may not be sufficient to meet the complexity of current political life, when international networks, technological advancement, and expanding social variety affect government. Hume's skepticism of abstract aims and dependence on incremental empirical development may not address global issues like climate change and authoritarianism (Demeter, 2020). Hume's emphasis on pragmatism and adaptation remains vital, but global interconnection and the rapid growth of modern administration may require reform. Hume's empiricism is useful for understanding human behavior and administration, but it struggles to apply to current political circumstances that differ from the 18th century.

Table 6. Critiques and limitations of Hume's approach.

Critique/Limitations	Scholarly source	Key argument	Counterarguments or mitigations
Overreliance on custom and tradition may hinder reform	Diatkine (2021)	Hume's emphasis on custom restricts the progressive changes needed for addressing structural issues.	Custom evolves, and reforms can be introduced gradually to maintain stability.
Empiricism undervalues normative principles.	McAleer (2024)	Focus on observation neglects ethical frameworks necessary for addressing injustices.	Complement empirical approaches with ethical deliberation to balance practicality and morality.
Justice as utility risks ignoring minority needs	Beiboer et al. (2023)	Hume's utilitarian approach to justice may marginalize smaller or less powerful groups.	Incorporate inclusive policymaking strategies to ensure minority perspectives are considered.
18th-century context limits modern relevance	Määttänen (2023)	Hume's theories were developed in a socio-economic context vastly different from today.	Adapt Hume's core principles to contemporary challenges, incorporating technological and cultural advances.
Insufficient attention to structural inequalities	McArthur (2004)	Hume's framework focuses more on cooperation and stability than on actively reducing inequalities.	Use Hume's insights as a foundation while addressing gaps through complementary modern theories.

5. DISCUSSION

Hume's political philosophy illuminates the complex link between human nature, government, and society. His empirical study has influenced political theory. This study highlights Hume's views on fairness, artificiality, human nature's role in political stability, and empiricism in governance. The empiricist belief that all knowledge comes from sensory experience underpins Hume's political theory. Unlike philosophers who focus on abstract reasoning or underlying moral truths, Hume stressed human behavior-based political structures. Hume believed that empirical research into human nature was necessary to understand political institutions since it allowed for the creation of governing frameworks adapted to each individual. He distrusted human reason and believed governmental systems should be based on human conduct; hence, he attacked Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau's social contract ideas. Current political practices emphasize data-driven decisions and evidence-based policies, which support this focus on governance's practical and empirical grounding. Policymakers use empirical evidence to solve societal challenges like climate change and economic injustice. Hume's governance method, based on human experience and observation, produces reality-based, evidence-based policies that represent citizens' lives.

Hume's empiricism has significant limitations, notably in handling systemic inequities, according to the research. Hume's empirical observation technique is useful for political theory, but it lacks the normative tools to address persistent social inequities. Critics say Hume's method favors custom and tradition above universal moral truths, which can entrench the current quo, especially when it encourages unequal power relations. Slavery and colonialism were ingrained in Hume's society. Hume's empiricism and support of established standards may legitimize these immoral practices by portraying them as socially acceptable. McAleer (2024) criticized Hume's argument for ignoring systemic differences. They argue that Hume's pragmatic, empirical political philosophy lacks the moral tools to address persistent inequities. When normative values like justice, fairness, and equality involve deconstructing entrenched traditions, Hume's empiricism may not be enough to reshape society.

The importance of human nature in Hume's political philosophy shows his method's pros and cons. Hume famously believed that emotions drive people, with reason functioning as a tool to control and lead them (Beiboer et al., 2023). This perspective of human nature, which values emotion above logic, affects government. Political systems must account for emotional and habitual behavior, it says. Human sentiments, biases, and emotions impact politics more than reasoning. Hume's focus on emotions over reason leads to a more pragmatic perspective of political activity. Modern democracies use emotional appeals and populist language to influence public opinion and politics. Hume's observations into how emotions and passions affect political behavior help populist movements emerge when leaders employ their followers' fears, anxieties, and aspirations instead of logical policy debate. Global political division and the growth of radical ideologies and political groupings demonstrate Hume's theory's influence on human nature. Hume's work shows that emotions drive political activity, not rationality. This accords with political behavior research that emphasizes the emotional component of voting and engagement (Hume, 2020).

Hume's concept of justice as an artificial virtue based on social advantage rather than morality critiques the political order. Hume (2021) believed justice was a social construct meant to promote cooperation and reduce conflict, unlike Kant and Rousseau, who saw it as a universal virtue. When social norms decide justice, a universal moral grounding is questioned. Hume's justice prioritizes institutions and legal processes above abstract moral principles, like modern interpretations. Modern political theorists like Määttänen (2023) describe justice as social cooperation and distributive equality, not universal morality. Hume felt justice is molded by society's desire to resolve conflicts, distribute resources, and preserve order. This pragmatic view of justice affects modern political systems, which must build equitable distribution mechanisms while addressing economic inequality, healthcare access, and social justice. Hume's reasoning shows how social norms and obligations may achieve justice, not a universal moral law. Critics say this definition of justice fails to address power dynamics that perpetuate injustice and maintain the current quo, making it ineffectual at resolving structural inequalities.

This inquiry emphasizes Hume's view of custom and convention as the foundation of social order. Hume believed that social order arose from persistent habits and customs, rather than from a social compact or logical agreement (Pavel, 2021). Social order dominates government today. Cultural standards regarding political behavior, public policy, and institutional trust shape modern political systems. Hume argued that political institutions should be based on natural social norms and practices. This theory analyzes both formal laws and regulations as well as informal social norms, making it useful for assessing the legitimacy of political institutions. Modern democracies evaluate political institutions based on public ideals. Hume's emphasis on custom illustrates how governmental legitimacy influences community norms. Hume believes that political regimes connect society through social norms, legal frameworks, and administrative systems. Contemporary social capital theories suggest that political stability depends on trust and collaboration (Stuart-Buttle, 2020).

Given current challenges to democratic legitimacy and institutional confidence, Hume's focus on custom and convention is relevant. Political disengagement and disappointment have increased in many democratic nations as public faith in political institutions has deteriorated. Hume's work explains how groups build and retain trust by following shared standards. Hume felt that political institutions are legitimate because of their legal foundation and the norms and expectations that govern their interactions. Hume's insights on social norms and conventions assist in explaining current political institutions' issues in democracies with low public trust. Civic involvement and social trust have deteriorated, indicating a loss in political order-sustaining norms. The restoration of basic social norms that foster collaboration and collaborative action may be needed to restore faith in democratic institutions since Hume believed that political order is based on shared traditions rather than theoretical notions. Hume's political theory reveals the administration but also undermines problems. His reliance on tradition, reason, and empiricism may not solve global concerns like authoritarianism, inequality, and climate change. Hume's worldview, which rejects abstract morality and supports the status quo, may seem too conservative when faced with social injustices. Despite these limits, Hume's work is essential for understanding human nature, government, and social order. His pragmatic approach to political systems is based on practical data and human behavior, unlike utopian or abstract ideas. His view of justice as a social construct allows for flexible social problem-solving. Finally, Hume's political philosophy influences governance, equity, and legitimacy debates today.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Contemporary political thought on governance, legitimacy, and justice is affected by research. Hume's empirical observation underpins governance. According to this view, modern political institutions must base their policies and choices on empirical evidence and human behavior, not theoretical frameworks. Hume's empiricism helps data-driven societies create policies that reflect people's lives. Modern governance emphasizes public opinion polls, behavioral insights, and data analytics, supporting Hume's claim that governments should mirror human emotions and behavior. This affects the creation of more adaptive and agile governance structures that can better manage modern society's complex issues, including economic inequality, social unrest, and public health crises. Hume's empiricism may help lawmakers promote pragmatic governance, which puts people's needs before idealized ideas that ignore differences. This study emphasizes the importance of Hume's human nature theory in political stability and governance. Hume's insights on political emotions, norms, and feelings may help polarized and fractured democracies overcome these challenges. Hume's claim that political action is more influenced by emotion and habit than logic runs contrary to democratic ideals. Modern political systems must encourage emotional and habitual political involvement since disenchantment, fury, and dissatisfaction may affect public opinion and election results. Hume's focus on human sociability and traditions in social order shows that political stability comes from community ideals, norms, and behaviors, not formal institutions. Restoring social cohesiveness and political fragmentation may involve more than institutional improvements; it may also require reestablishing common habits and norms. This affects the public, political institutions, and leaders. Hume's view of human nature promotes empathy and trust to foster political

stability. Political language and communication should reflect public emotions and social dynamics. The study's interpretation of Hume's justice as an artificial virtue based on social utility is pertinent to distributive justice and equality arguments. Hume's approach to social fairness and economic injustice is more flexible since he views justice as a social construct based on utility and rejects natural law. Hume argues that justice should be defined via society's practical needs and social circumstances, not abstract moral principles or universal equality. Distributional justice involves a deep understanding of social behaviors, traditions, and institutional frameworks, especially in light of economic inequality, systematic racism, and healthcare access. Policymakers and researchers can use Hume's emphasis on institutions and norms in defining justice to address gaps more appropriately. Hume's view of justice as a product of social collaboration implies that governments, organizations, and people must work together to achieve justice. This highlights the necessity to link emerging cultural norms and traditions with institutions' role in encouraging or inhibiting social cooperation to overcome structural inequality. The study concludes that justice must be pragmatic and culturally informed, taking into consideration the political order's social behaviors and people's daily circumstances.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This work has made significant contributions; however, its findings must be evaluated within boundaries. Its restricted focus on Hume's empiricism and ideas on human nature may not effectively portray his political theory. This study examined Hume's ideas on governance and justice without examining his views on religion, epistemology, or societal structure. Hume's writing covers several topics. Hume's skepticism about religion in public affairs and his consideration of reason's limits in political decision-making impacted his political philosophy. These components need greater study. This method may have ignored Hume's political views and philosophical framework by focusing on specific topics. Further research may expand the analytical scope to include these other aspects of Hume's work, helping us understand his political philosophy and its implications for modern administration. This study's reliance on secondary literature to adapt Hume's theories to present governance concerns is another drawback. Secondary sources provide helpful insights but may influence interpretation, especially regarding Hume's empiricism and human nature. Philosophical and political paradigms unknown to Hume in the 18th century may influence the present applicability of his political theory. The ideological biases of researchers interpreting Hume's theories influence their applicability to current politics. Hume's emphasis on justice's social value may be seen as progressive, while his endorsement of custom and tradition may seem conservative. Due to interpretations, Hume's ideas' impact on modern administration is unclear. Further textual studies of Hume's writings, covering a wider range of opinions, and more sophisticated and critical engagement with contemporary political difficulties may address these concerns.

Despite exploring Hume's ideas' applicability to modern government, this research does not fully address the challenges of translating his 18th-century philosophy to 21st-century politics. Hume's political thought was shaped by the British Empire, capitalist economy, and governmental institutions of his day. He faces new challenges when applying his ideas to the digital era, climate change, and global economic systems. As technology and globalization quickly change societies and institutions, Hume's emphasis on tradition and custom as social order may no longer be applicable. Hume's emphasis on pragmatic administration and mistrust of abstract reasoning may need to be reconsidered given modern political institutions' complex legal and bureaucratic structures. Future research may examine how Hume's political philosophy may be adapted to 21st-century social, cultural, and technical conditions. This requires an in-depth investigation of how Hume's empirical governance technique may be applied to present issues, offering new insights into how his ideas might shape political and policy discussions. Future research on AI, social media governance, and climate change politics should use Hume's thesis. These issues require new political participation and governance methods that Hume could not have predicted.

8. CONCLUSION

It addressed David Hume's political philosophy, particularly his ideas on government, human nature, and empiricism. The research concluded that Hume's emphasis on practical governance, skepticism, and observation enriches political discourse, notably in human conduct, political legitimacy, and justice, using both primary and secondary sources. Hume's view of justice as an artificial virtue based on social utility, his belief that human nature is governed by passions, conventions, and habits, and his belief that political institutions should be based on reality rather than ideals still influence political theory and practice. In today's fast-changing environment, these principles improve governance, institutional trust, and social cohesion, according to the study. It acknowledged the difficulties of applying Hume's 18th-century paradigm to modern politics, particularly given governance issues, and recommended further research. Hume's political philosophy of empiricism, pragmatism, and social collaboration in stable and equitable political institutions continues to impact political legitimacy and governance debates.

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