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## **Politics Q2**

David Hume celebrated the wisdom of "unlettered men". In a democracy, do the votes of the unlettered tend to protect a country against the bad ideas of the lettered or do the votes of the lettered tend to protect a country against the bad ideas of the unlettered?

### **Recommended Readings**

#### David Hume's Works

1. "Of the First Principles of Government" (1741)

Examines how government power ultimately rests on public opinion

Argues that even absolute monarchies depend on the consent of the governed

Emphasizes the natural equality of human understanding on basic moral matters

2. "Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary" (1758)

"That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science" discusses whether good governance depends on systems or individuals

"Of the Origin of Justice" examines how ordinary people develop moral standards

Contains his references to the wisdom of "unlettered men" in moral reasoning

3. "Of the Origin of Government" (1777)

Argues that government arises from people's recognition of its utility

Discusses how public interest is understood differently across social classes

Suggests that government originates from practical needs, not theoretical ideals



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4. "A Treatise of Human Nature" (1739-1740)

Book III discusses moral sentiments common to all people regardless of education

Argues for the universality of basic moral judgments across social classes

Provides foundation for understanding both "lettered" and "unlettered" reasoning

5. "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" (1748)

Examines the limitations of human reason and the role of experience

Discusses how custom and habit often guide behavior more than abstract reasoning

Suggests skepticism toward intellectual systems detached from practical experience

John Locke's Works

1. "Two Treatises of Government" (1689)

Establishes consent of the governed as the basis for legitimate authority

Discusses natural rights all individuals possess regardless of education

Chapter XIX examines how the people retain ultimate judgment over government

2. "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding" (1689)

Book IV examines the nature and degrees of knowledge and opinion

Chapter XVI discusses the degrees of assent people give to propositions

Provides framework for understanding how all people form beliefs, educated or not

3. "Some Thoughts Concerning Education" (1693)

Discusses the purpose and methods of education in forming good citizens

Distinguishes between education and natural understanding



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Relevant for examining the effects of education on political judgment

4. "The Reasonableness of Christianity" (1695)

Argues that core religious and moral truths are accessible to ordinary people

Suggests complex theological arguments aren't necessary for basic understanding

Parallel to political arguments about complicated vs. simple reasoning

5. "Of the Conduct of the Understanding" (1706)

Examines how people reason and how reasoning can be improved

Discusses natural abilities versus trained thinking

Relevant for examining capabilities of differently educated citizens

Other Historical Resources

1. Plato's "Republic"

Advocates rule by "philosopher kings" with extensive education

Presents argument against democracy as rule by the uninformed

Provides classical counterpoint to Hume's views on common wisdom

2. Aristotle's "Politics"

Discusses virtue of the "collective wisdom" of citizens (Book III)

Argues that groups can sometimes make better decisions than individuals

Suggests mixed constitution balancing different social elements

3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "The Social Contract" (1762)

Introduces concept of the "general will" reflecting collective interests



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Distinguishes between common good and educated opinion

Contemporary of Hume with both similarities and differences

4. John Stuart Mill's "Considerations on Representative Government" (1861)

Proposes plural voting giving more electoral power to educated citizens

Worries about "tyranny of the majority" in democracy

Contrasts with Hume's respect for common understanding

5. Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America" (1835)

Observes functioning of early American democracy

Discusses both wisdom and limitations of common citizens

Examines tension between expertise and popular control

6. Edmund Burke's "Reflections on the Revolution in France" (1790)

Defends traditional wisdom against abstract intellectualism

Critiques political theories detached from practical experience

Shares Hume's skepticism of political rationalism

Contemporary Resources

1. Bryan Caplan's "The Myth of the Rational Voter" (2007)

Argues voters have systematic biases affecting democratic outcomes

Examines how education correlates with certain economic views

Research suggests both educated and uneducated voters have different blind spots

2. Michael Sandel's "Democracy's Discontent" (1996)



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Examines civic participation across different social classes

Discusses how technical expertise has replaced public deliberation

Relevant to tension between expert guidance and democratic control

3. Jason Brennan's "Against Democracy" (2016)

Proposes "epistocracy" (rule by the knowledgeable) as alternative to democracy

Critiques universal suffrage based on voter competence

Directly addresses the question of educated versus uneducated voting

4. Thomas Sowell's "Intellectuals and Society" (2009)

Critiques the role of intellectuals in policymaking

Argues specialized knowledge doesn't necessarily translate to good governance

Examines historical failures of intellectual elites

5. Helen Pluckrose & James Lindsay's "Cynical Theories" (2020)

Examines how academic theories can become politically problematic

Discusses gap between academic discourse and public understanding

Relevant to considering negative effects of certain intellectual trends

6. Jonathan Haidt's "The Righteous Mind" (2012)

Explores moral intuitions across educational and political divides

Discusses how education affects moral reasoning styles

Provides psychological framework for understanding different voting patterns