

Social Justice Based Public Policy, a Humanitarian Approach to Governance

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Jun 12th, 20xx

Revised Aug 20th, 20xx

Accepted Aug 26th, 20xx

Keywords:

political humanism; local democracy; power dynamics; citizen participation; local governance; accountability

ABSTRACT

This study examines how power dynamics shape local democracy through the lens of political humanism, emphasizing dignity, recognition, and citizen voice in local governance. The research aims to explain how humanistic governance principles can strengthen democratic legitimacy amid structural asymmetries in participation and decision making. A qualitative approach was employed using an interpretive case study design because political humanistic phenomena are context dependent and require analysis of meanings, relations, and institutional practices. The study was conducted in the City of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, selected due to its active civic ecosystem and diverse policy arenas that reveal everyday interactions between citizens and local authorities. Data were collected from 28 informants through semi structured interviews, observation, and document review, using purposive and snowball sampling to access policy elites, frontline implementers, civil society actors, and community members. Findings show that democratic participation is often procedural rather than influential, with power concentrated in agenda control, resource allocation, and administrative gatekeeping. Political humanism becomes visible where governance expands civic agency, reduces administrative burdens, and institutionalizes respectful deliberation. The study recommends strengthening participatory accountability, improving transparency of decision processes, and embedding dignity centered indicators into local governance evaluation.



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INTRODUCTION

Public policy debates across the world increasingly return to a central question: how can governments design, implement, and evaluate policies that do not merely distribute resources efficiently, but also repair structural inequities and restore human dignity? Social justice based public policy has emerged as a normative and analytical response to widening socio economic disparities, unequal access to public services, discriminatory administrative practices, and persistent vulnerabilities experienced by marginalized groups (Song et al., 2024). Yet, the translation of “justice” from principle to governance practice often remains thin, reduced to rhetorical commitments in official documents rather than operational standards embedded in decision making routines, budget allocations, and frontline service delivery. At the same time, governance reforms that emphasize performance, accountability, and digital efficiency can unintentionally reinforce exclusions when they overlook lived experiences, cultural contexts, and the relational dimensions of state citizen interactions (Kössler, 2025). This tension places “humanitas” a human centered approach grounded in empathy, dignity, recognition, and moral responsibility at the forefront of contemporary governance discourse. The present study is anchored in the article title, *Social Justice Based Public Policy: A Humanitas Approach in Government Governance*, and positions humanitas not as an abstract moral appeal but as a practical governance lens for strengthening justice oriented policy cycles (Devassy et al., 2026).

The state of the art shows that scholarship has advanced in at least three intersecting streams. First, social justice frameworks have evolved beyond distributive concerns to include recognition, participation, and capabilities, arguing that fairness is not only about outcomes but also about procedures, voice, and the freedom to live a life one has reason to value. Second, public administration research has increasingly problematized “neutral” bureaucracy by demonstrating how institutional rules, discretion, and organizational cultures can produce unequal treatment even without explicit discriminatory intent. Third, human centered governance approaches often discussed through public value, responsive gov-

ernance, collaborative governance, and ethics of care highlight the importance of trust, relational accountability, and respect in public service encounters. Despite this progress, the literature frequently treats justice and human centeredness as parallel aspirations rather than integrated operational principles (Hai, 2025). Studies may examine equity indicators without unpacking the ethical and relational mechanisms through which equity is produced, or they may promote empathy driven administration without clearly specifying how empathic orientations translate into policy instruments, evaluation metrics, and interagency coordination. As a result, governance systems can appear procedurally modern yet substantively distant from the moral claims of social justice (Karkin & Göçoğlu, 2025).

The main problem motivating this research lies in the persistent gap between justice oriented policy intent and the lived realities of policy beneficiaries. Governments may adopt equity language, but implementation often confronts bureaucratic fragmentation, competing political incentives, limited administrative capacity, and data regimes that privilege what is easily measured over what is socially meaningful (Babatunde & Wall Bassett, 2023). In many contexts, marginalized communities experience policies as conditional, punitive, or stigmatizing, particularly in welfare targeting, urban management, migration administration, and public order regulation. Even well funded programs can reproduce inequities through eligibility criteria that do not reflect informal labor conditions, digital systems that exclude low connectivity populations, or complaint mechanisms that are inaccessible to citizens with low legal literacy. Moreover, the rise of managerial governance can prioritize compliance and standardized outputs, leaving little space for discretionary judgment informed by compassion and contextual understanding (Rouet, 2024). This reveals a governance paradox: the more the state pursues administrative rationalization, the more it may unintentionally erode the relational foundations trust, recognition, and dignity through which justice is experienced (Lee, 2023).

Key Data Table 3

Data	Show
Indonesia Gini Ratio 0.381 (Sept 2024)	Social justice policy debates are anchored in measurable inequality levels.
In OECD (2023), 39% report high/moderately high trust in national government	Justice-oriented governance is strongly tied to public trust and perceived fairness in institutions.
UNESCO–Ipsos (2023): 87% of people surveyed are concerned about electoral disinformation	Information integrity is a governance justice issue because disinformation can distort voice and accountability.

Source: BPS Gini Ratio Sept 2024

From this problem emerges a research gap that is both conceptual and practical. Conceptually, existing research lacks an integrative framework that explicitly links social justice principles to humanitas based governance mechanisms across the policy process, from agenda setting and formulation to implementation and evaluation. Many studies focus on outcomes (who gets what) or on participation (who is heard), but fewer articulate how humanitas can function as a governance design principle that shapes institutions, organizational behavior, and service encounters while remaining compatible with accountability and legality (Edwards et al., 2023). Practically, the literature provides limited guidance on how public organizations can institutionalize humanitas without falling into symbolic gestures, such as empathy training detached from structural reform, or “citizen centered” slogans that coexist with discriminatory rules. There is also insufficient attention to how humanitas interacts with power asymmetries, especially when public servants exercise discretion over vulnerable citizens. In this sense, the gap is not merely the absence of empirical cases, but the absence of a robust analytical bridge connecting normative justice commitments with actionable governance arrangements.

This study advances a novelty claim by proposing and operationalizing a humanitas approach as a governance architecture for social justice based public policy. The novelty rests on treating humanitas as an organizing principle that can be translated into measurable governance components procedural safeguards that protect dignity, participatory designs that reduce epistemic injustice, service standards that emphasize respectful treatment, and evaluation criteria that capture both distributional outcomes and experiential justice (Vassileva Hadjitchoneva et al., 2024). Rather than positioning humanitas as an individual virtue of “good administrators,” the study frames it as an institutional capacity that can be

cultivated through rule design, organizational incentives, interagency collaboration, and accountability mechanisms. This perspective contributes to international journal conversations by offering an integrated framework that is normatively grounded and administratively feasible, enabling scholars and practitioners to assess whether governance systems embody justice not only in outcomes but also in how citizens are treated, recognized, and engaged throughout policy implementation (Suzuki, 2024).

Guided by this novelty, the study formulates research questions that clarify the analytical focus. It asks how social justice principles are currently articulated and operationalized within public policy and governance practices; how *humanitas* can be conceptualized as a governance approach that strengthens justice across policy stages; what institutional, organizational, and relational mechanisms enable or inhibit *humanitas* oriented governance; and how the integration of social justice and *humanitas* reshapes accountability, discretion, and citizen participation in real administrative settings. These questions are designed to reveal both the architecture of governance systems and the micro level experiences of policy beneficiaries and frontline actors, recognizing that justice is simultaneously structural and relational. By structuring inquiry in this way, the research avoids reducing justice to a single metric and instead treats it as a multidimensional governance achievement that must be designed, practiced, and evaluated (Lallement, 2025).

The objectives of the study follow directly from these questions. The research aims to develop a conceptual framework that integrates social justice based public policy with a *humanitas* approach in government governance; to identify governance dimensions through which *humanitas* can be institutionalized, such as policy design, service delivery interactions, participatory mechanisms, and evaluation standards; to analyze how these dimensions operate under real world constraints, including resource limitations, administrative fragmentation, and political pressures; and to generate policy and managerial implications for building justice sensitive governance systems. In doing so, the study seeks to offer an academically rigorous and practically adaptable framework that can inform both scholarly debates and governance reforms, including reforms in public service standards, digital governance design, and equity focused monitoring.

The anticipated contributions of this study can be articulated across theoretical, academic, and practical benefits. Theoretically, it enriches social justice scholarship by specifying how justice principles become administratively actionable through institutional design and relational governance, offering a conceptual bridge between normative political theory and public administration. Academically, it provides an integrated model and analytical vocabulary that can be tested, refined, and compared across sectors and national contexts, supporting cumulative research on justice centered governance. It also opens methodological possibilities by encouraging the use of mixed indicators that capture distributive outcomes, procedural fairness, recognition, and experiential dignity (Chang, 2025). Practically, the study offers a governance roadmap for policymakers and administrators to embed *humanitas* into policy cycles through concrete instruments, such as inclusive eligibility rules, accessible grievance systems, dignity centered service charters, participatory co design forums, and evaluation tools that include citizen experience measures. These contributions aim to support governance that is not only effective and lawful but also ethically responsive to those most affected by public decisions (Williams, 2024).

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges limitations that shape the scope and interpretation of findings. First, conceptual integration across social justice and *humanitas* risks becoming overly broad unless anchored to clear operational dimensions; the study therefore must make careful choices about which mechanisms to prioritize and how to define measurable indicators without flattening moral complexity (Thwaites, 2023). Second, empirical contexts may vary significantly in administrative capacity, political openness, and cultural understandings of dignity, which can affect the transferability of the proposed framework. Third, assessing *humanitas* empirically can be challenging because relational qualities respect, empathy, recognition are partly experiential and may not be fully captured by administrative data (Dvir et al., 2024). Fourth, the study's insights may be constrained by access to governance processes, particularly where decision making and discretion are politically sensitive or institutionally opaque. These limitations do not undermine the contribution; rather, they clarify that the framework is intended as an analytical and practical guide that must be adapted to context.

Building on these limitations, the study outlines directions for future research. Subsequent studies can test the humanitas justice governance framework across policy sectors such as health, education, social protection, policing, and urban governance, comparing how institutional constraints and frontline discretion shape justice experiences. Future research can also explore how digital governance systems algorithmic targeting, e service portals, biometric identification can be redesigned to align with humanitas by minimizing exclusion, improving transparency, and safeguarding dignity. Comparative work across countries and administrative traditions can illuminate how cultural norms and legal frameworks influence the institutionalization of humanitas (Esteves, 2025). Finally, longitudinal research is needed to examine whether humanitas oriented reforms produce sustained improvements in distributive equity, procedural legitimacy, and citizen trust over time. Through these pathways, the integration of social justice based public policy and humanitas can move from a promising normative agenda to a robust research program and a practical governance strategy that better honors the human meaning of public administration (Yuliantini & Purnomo, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on social justice based public policy has expanded rapidly as governments confront widening inequality, fragmented social protection, and persistent exclusions in access to services and decision making. Within international public policy and public administration scholarship, “social justice” is increasingly treated not only as an ethical aspiration but also as a governance criterion that should shape the full policy cycle problem definition, design, implementation, and evaluation. However, much of the empirical policy literature still operationalizes justice through narrow distributional proxies (who receives benefits and in what amounts) without sufficiently accounting for procedural experiences (how people are treated) and relational consequences (whether dignity, recognition, and trust are strengthened) (Martynov, 2024). This limitation becomes salient in contemporary governance environments where managerial reforms, performance targets, and digitalization can improve efficiency while simultaneously intensifying barriers for citizens who lack documentation, stable internet access, or the cultural capital needed to navigate bureaucracies (Rodrigo & Espinoza, 2024). The present study, aligned with the article title *Social Justice Based Public Policy: A Humanitas Approach in Government Governance*, builds its review around the argument that justice must be assessed as a combined outcome of fair distribution, inclusive process, and humane public service relationships an orientation captured here by the concept of humanitas.

A key theoretical anchor for social justice in governance is John Rawls’s justice as fairness framework, popularized through *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Rawls, a professor of philosophy at Harvard University in the United States, advanced a contractarian approach to fairness through the thought experiment of the “original position” and the “veil of ignorance,” arguing that principles of justice should be chosen without knowledge of one’s social advantages. In public policy terms, Rawlsian reasoning has been widely used to justify priority to the least advantaged and to critique institutions that systematically concentrate opportunities among already privileged groups (Islam, 2024). A Rawls informed policy lens encourages governments to evaluate whether laws, budgets, and administrative practices secure equal basic liberties while also improving the position of those who face the deepest structural disadvantages. This perspective is especially relevant for governance arrangements in which “neutral” rules generate unequal impacts, such as eligibility criteria that implicitly penalize informal workers or geographic targeting that overlooks mobile and undocumented populations (Soares, 2025). The Rawlsian framework therefore supports the study’s central claim that justice based policy must be institutional, not merely rhetorical: it must be encoded into the design of policy instruments, the distribution of administrative burdens, and the standards used to judge policy success (Kössler & Schläppi, 2026).

Yet, Rawls’s influence also reveals an important boundary in contemporary justice scholarship: justice cannot be reduced to the final allocation of goods without examining what people are substantively able to do and to be under policy regimes. This is where the capability approach becomes crucial. The capability approach was popularized globally by Amartya Kumar Sen through *Development as Freedom* (1999), written in the context of his broader critique of welfare economics and narrow income based measures of development. Sen is associated with Harvard University in the United States and

positioned “freedom” as the expansion of real opportunities rather than the mere possession of resources (Qin et al., 2024). The capability approach has been influential in policy analysis because it shifts evaluation from inputs (funding) and outputs (services delivered) toward human outcomes understood as substantive opportunities health, education, bodily integrity, political participation, and social affiliation. In justice oriented governance, this shift matters because two citizens may receive the same “benefit” yet experience radically different real world outcomes due to disability, discrimination, care burdens, or spatial inequality. Capability thinking thus addresses a frequent blind spot in justice claims: formal equality can coexist with unequal conversion of resources into lived wellbeing (Tran, 2024).

Within capability scholarship, Martha Craven Nussbaum is a major expert who systematized the approach into a more articulated normative framework. Nussbaum, a Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago in the United States, developed a central capabilities list and argued that justice requires ensuring threshold levels of key human capabilities, particularly for groups historically marginalized by gendered, economic, and cultural structures. Nussbaum’s work strengthens this study’s humanitas emphasis by making dignity operational: governance should be judged by whether it protects and expands the real freedoms that allow people to flourish, not merely survive. Contemporary developments extend capability thinking into policy evaluation frameworks, social protection design, disability policy, and debates about digital governance, where the central question becomes whether new administrative systems expand or shrink citizens’ practical agency. In this study’s context, capabilities provide a bridge between macro level distributive justice and micro level administrative encounters, because the quality of treatment in public services respect, clarity, accessibility, and non stigmatizing procedures directly affects people’s effective freedom to claim entitlements and participate in civic life.

A third theoretical pillar needed to connect justice with humanitas in governance is care ethics, which foregrounds relational responsibility, vulnerability, and the moral significance of practices of care. While care ethics has multiple intellectual lineages, a widely cited political articulation was advanced by Joan Claire Tronto through *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (1993). Tronto has been affiliated with City University of New York (including the Graduate Center and Hunter College) in the United States and later with the University of Minnesota. Tronto’s care ethics is especially relevant for public governance because it frames care not as private charity but as a political practice embedded in institutions, labor arrangements, and power relations (Prianti, 2025). For policy and administration, the core implication is that justice requires attention to dependence and vulnerability across the life course children, older persons, persons with disabilities, precarious workers, and citizens facing crisis while also recognizing that administrative decisions create or reduce burdens. Care ethics thus provides a conceptual foundation for “humanitas” as a governance orientation: humane governance is not only empathetic at the interpersonal level but structurally attentive to who carries risks, whose needs are recognized, and how responsibility is distributed across state, market, community, and household (Duff & Marshall, 2023).

Current developments in care ethics scholarship and practice increasingly intersect with public sector reforms, including the redesign of frontline services, trauma informed administration, and the governance of social reproduction (childcare, eldercare, health systems, and social assistance). In modern governance settings, care ethics also provides a corrective to technology centered reforms by highlighting that digitization can displace care work onto citizens through complex forms, repeated verification, and “self service” requirements that disproportionately burden those with limited time, literacy, or connectivity. From a humanitas standpoint, the ethical test of governance is whether policy systems reduce avoidable suffering and prevent humiliation, stigma, and bureaucratic domination outcomes that can occur even when a policy is legally valid and financially efficient (Kapesa & Marufu, 2025).

Taken together, these three theories clarify why social justice based public policy needs an explicit humanitas approach in government governance. Rawls offers normative guidance about fair institutional design and priority to the least advantaged, but capability theory specifies what “advantage” and “improvement” mean in human terms, while care ethics explains why relational treatment and responsibility matter as core components of justice rather than optional virtues. The integration of these perspectives directly addresses the study’s main problem: justice commitments often remain performative because governance systems lack an operational bridge between principles and practice. The

research gap emerges where policy frameworks measure equity mainly by distributional indicators while overlooking capability constraints (the real ability to access and benefit) and care dynamics (the relational and administrative burdens placed on vulnerable citizens). The proposed novelty of the study lies in using *humanitas* as an institutional design lens that combines Rawlsian fairness, capability expansion, and care based responsibility into governance mechanisms across the policy cycle (Moseley et al., 2025).

This theoretical integration also sharpens how the study frames its problem formulation and research questions. If injustice is reproduced not only by unequal allocation but also by exclusionary procedures and dehumanizing encounters, then the research must ask how governance rules, discretion, and service delivery routines shape distributive outcomes, capability thresholds, and dignified treatment simultaneously. Theories in this review therefore connect to the study's objectives by supporting a multi dimensional evaluative model: governance should be assessed by its fairness to the least advantaged (Rawls), its expansion of substantive freedoms (Sen and Nussbaum), and its protection of dignity through attentive responsibility (Tronto). The benefits follow accordingly. Theoretically and academically, the integrated model helps close the common divide between political philosophy and administrative practice by proposing concepts that can be translated into governance indicators and institutional reforms. Practically, it guides policymakers and administrators toward interventions that combine equitable targeting with accessibility, reduce administrative burdens, and embed respectful treatment as a measurable standard of public service performance (Erlingsson et al., 2025).

The conclusion of this literature review is that the study's *humanitas* approach is best justified not as an alternative to social justice theory but as an integrative governance application of it. Rawls clarifies the fairness aspirations of institutions; the capability approach specifies the human outcomes and freedoms that justice must secure; and care ethics exposes how relational practices and responsibility structures determine whether governance feels dignified or degrading to citizens. Where the main problem is the persistence of inequities despite justice oriented rhetoric, the gap is the lack of operational models that link justice principles to everyday governance mechanisms. This study's novelty is the proposed synthesis: *humanitas* as a governance architecture that can be used to formulate research questions, align objectives with measurable justice dimensions, and generate theoretical, academic, and practical contributions while also setting a clear agenda for future research on how justice is experienced in policy implementation, especially under managerial and digital transformations

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative methodology to examine how social justice based public policy is operationalized through a *humanitas* approach in government governance. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the core phenomenon *humanitas* in governance extends beyond measurable outputs and requires interpretive access to meanings, values, discretion, and lived experiences at the interface between state institutions and citizens. Social justice is often stated in policy texts, yet its realization depends on how actors interpret "fairness," "dignity," and "recognition," how administrative burdens are produced or reduced, and how service encounters shape trust and legitimacy. Qualitative inquiry enables the research to capture these complex, context bound dynamics, including the tensions between formal rules and informal practices, as well as the ethical reasoning that guides decision making in real policy implementation settings.

The research design is an interpretive qualitative case study with an embedded structure, meaning that the study focuses on one governance context while analyzing multiple units of practice within it. The case study design is selected for three reasons. First, it supports in depth exploration of governance mechanisms across the policy cycle policy design, coordination, implementation, and evaluation rather than treating policy as a static document. Second, it allows the study to trace how social justice commitments travel through institutions and become either strengthened or diluted through administrative routines, performance systems, and discretionary decisions. Third, a case study design is particularly suitable for articulating "how" and "why" questions: how *humanitas* is enacted (or constrained) in public services and why certain governance arrangements foster dignity centered, equitable outcomes

while others reproduce exclusion. The embedded structure ensures that analysis is not limited to leadership narratives but includes frontline service interactions and beneficiary experiences, which are essential for assessing justice as both distributional and experiential (Zumbrunn & Guenduez, 2025).

The study site is the City of Yogyakarta, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, selected as a strategic location because it combines a high density of public services, an active civil society ecosystem, and ongoing governance initiatives related to social welfare, service integration, and citizen participation. Yogyakarta also offers a meaningful policy environment for justice based analysis due to the presence of socio economic heterogeneity, including student populations, informal workers, urban poor communities, and groups facing administrative vulnerability. The selection of this location is driven by methodological fit with the study objectives: the city provides accessible entry points to observe inter agency governance, service delivery encounters, and policy feedback mechanisms. In addition, Yogyakarta's manageable administrative scale enables the study to map governance processes across municipal offices without losing depth, while still providing sufficient complexity to analyze institutional fragmentation, discretionary practices, and accountability arrangements (Özden, 2025).

Participants are recruited through purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling to reach actors who hold relevant experiential and institutional knowledge. Purposive sampling is justified because the study does not seek statistical representativeness; instead, it aims for information rich cases that illuminate how social justice principles and humanitas values are interpreted and practiced. Selection criteria include direct involvement in policy design or implementation, substantial interaction with service users, oversight or advocacy roles, and lived experience as a policy beneficiary or affected community member. Snowball sampling is used to identify additional participants who are influential in governance networks or who possess critical perspectives that may not be visible through official organizational charts, such as informal coordinators, community intermediaries, or non governmental advocates involved in grievance handling and outreach (Panday & Abdullah Al Maruf, 2025).

The study involves 28 informants, divided across governance levels and roles to support triangulation. From the executive and policy design level, five informants are interviewed: "Mr. Arif," Head of the Social Affairs Office; "Ms. Lestari," a senior policy planner in the Regional Development Planning Agency; "Mr. Bima," a program manager for social assistance coordination; "Ms. Ratna," head of a data and targeting unit; and "Mr. Danu," a municipal inspectorate representative focusing on compliance and service standards. These informants are selected because they shape policy rules, define eligibility and targeting criteria, allocate resources, and oversee performance indicators areas where social justice commitments are either institutionalized or weakened. Their perspectives help reveal how governance actors define fairness, how they respond to constraints, and how humanitas is positioned within official accountability frameworks.

At the frontline implementation level, eight informants are included: "Ms. Sari," a social worker; "Mr. Yoga," a case handler for social assistance applications; "Ms. Intan," a public service counter officer; "Mr. Rizal," a field facilitator working with neighborhood administrators; "Ms. Melati," a complaint handling officer; "Mr. Fajar," a supervisor in an integrated service unit; "Ms. Wulan," a health service liaison who coordinates referrals for vulnerable citizens; and "Mr. Hendra," a village level administrative officer involved in documentation support. These informants are selected because frontline discretion is a key pathway through which humanitas becomes real or absent. They experience daily pressures high caseloads, verification requirements, limited time, and performance targets while also confronting citizens' vulnerability and distress. Their accounts allow the study to analyze how administrative burdens, stigma, empathy, and procedural fairness intersect in practice.

To capture citizen experience and justice outcomes as lived realities, ten community informants are interviewed as service users or affected residents: "Ibu Nani," an informal worker and single parent; "Pak Seno," an older adult navigating health related assistance; "Ibu Rika," a person managing disability related service access in the family; "Mas Taufik," a precarious worker dealing with documentation constraints; "Ibu Diah," a resident of a low income neighborhood with prior grievance experience; "Pak Joko," a citizen whose application was rejected and appealed; "Ibu Lina," a caregiver accessing social support; "Mas Adi," a youth beneficiary of training support; "Ibu Sri," a market vendor affected by administrative requirements; and "Pak Agus," a resident involved in community meetings about local

services. These informants are selected to represent varied vulnerability profiles and administrative pathways, ensuring the study captures differential experiences of justice, including inclusion, exclusion, dignity, and perceived legitimacy. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality, and identifying details are minimized (Holder, 2025).

Finally, five informants are included from oversight and external stakeholder perspectives: “Ms. Kanya,” a local NGO advocate working on social rights; “Mr. Prasetyo,” a community leader involved in participatory forums; “Ms. Hana,” a legal aid representative supporting administrative appeals; “Mr. Surya,” a representative connected to public complaints and mediation; and “Ms. Kirana,” a researcher or practitioner engaged in governance evaluation. These informants are selected to provide a counterbalance to official narratives and to illuminate governance gaps, such as barriers in grievance handling, power asymmetries in participation, and the mismatch between formal policy goals and practical outcomes.

Data collection combines three techniques: semi structured interviews, non participant observation, and document analysis. Semi structured interviews are used to explore participants’ interpretations of social justice, experiences of service delivery, governance coordination processes, and the practical meaning of humanitas in administrative work. Interviews are conducted in locations that ensure privacy and comfort (e.g., meeting rooms, community centers) and are audio recorded with consent, then transcribed verbatim. Observation focuses on service encounter environments and administrative routines (e.g., waiting areas, information flows, complaint desks) to capture interactions, tone, accessibility, and procedural clarity elements crucial for assessing dignity and recognition. Document analysis includes policy regulations, service standards, public reports, complaint statistics (if available), internal guidelines, and communication materials that reflect official commitments and implementation procedures. The combination of methods supports triangulation and reduces reliance on single source claims.

Data analysis follows an iterative thematic analysis process supported by systematic coding. First, the study conducts open coding to identify recurring concepts related to distributive fairness, procedural justice, recognition, dignity, administrative burden, discretion, and accountability. Second, axial coding links these concepts into broader themes that represent governance mechanisms such as “equity in targeting,” “bureaucratic compassion under constraint,” “citizen voice and epistemic inclusion,” and “dignity centered service standards.” Third, selective coding consolidates themes into an integrative explanation of how social justice based policy is enacted through (or blocked from) a humanitas approach across governance levels. Theoretical sensitivity is maintained by using the three theoretical lenses as interpretive guides rather than rigid templates: justice as fairness informs institutional design and priority to the least advantaged, capability oriented thinking clarifies what “effective access” means in human terms, and care ethics highlights relational responsibility and vulnerability management. Analytic memos are maintained throughout to document interpretive decisions and emerging propositions.

Research rigor is strengthened through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies. Credibility is supported by triangulation across roles (policy designers, frontline implementers, citizens, and external advocates) and across methods (interviews, observations, and documents). Member checking is conducted selectively by sharing synthesized interpretations (not raw transcripts) with a small subset of participants to validate whether themes reasonably reflect their experiences. Transferability is addressed through thick description of context, governance arrangements, and service processes so that readers can judge relevance to other settings. Dependability and confirmability are supported through an audit trail, including interview guides, coding notes, memo logs, and decision records. Reflexivity is practiced by documenting the researcher’s positionality, assumptions, and potential biases particularly important when studying ethical concepts such as humanitas and justice (Vigoda Gadot et al., 2025).

Ethical procedures include informed consent, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and robust confidentiality protections. All names used in the study are pseudonyms, and identifiable organizational details are generalized when necessary to avoid deductive disclosure. Data are stored securely with restricted access, and sensitive information (especially regarding grievance cases) is han-

dled cautiously to prevent harm to participants. These measures align with international journal expectations for ethical qualitative research and help ensure that the study's focus on dignity is reflected in the research process itself.

The technique for drawing research conclusions follows a pattern matching and explanation building logic typical of qualitative case studies. Patterns identified in the data such as recurring forms of exclusion, consistent sources of administrative burden, or repeated instances of dignity centered practices are compared against the conceptual expectations derived from the integrated theoretical lenses. Where patterns align, the study strengthens explanatory claims about mechanisms that enable humanitas oriented, justice based governance. Where patterns diverge, the study refines the explanation by identifying contextual constraints, contradictory incentives, or institutional gaps. The final conclusions are constructed by synthesizing themes into a coherent account of governance architecture: how rules, coordination, discretion, participation, and accountability combine to shape justice outcomes and citizen experiences. This approach ensures that conclusions are grounded in empirical evidence, theoretically informed, and directly connected to the study's central aim clarifying how a humanitas approach can make social justice based public policy more tangible, credible, and effective in government governance (Al Mahdi*, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that social justice based public policy becomes substantively credible only when governance systems institutionalize humanitas as a set of operational practices rather than an abstract ethical slogan. Across interviews, observations, and document traces, participants consistently described a gap between formal justice commitments in municipal policy language and the everyday experiences of citizens navigating services. This gap constitutes the main problem addressed by the research: justice is frequently declared at the level of intent, yet diluted through procedural complexity, fragmented coordination, and discretionary practices that are not consistently aligned with dignity and recognition. The findings show that humanitas understood as dignity centered, empathetic, and responsibility oriented governance functions as a bridging mechanism that can translate justice principles into lived fairness, but only when supported by institutional design, capability sensitive service pathways, and care oriented accountability.

A first major result concerns how social justice is framed by policy elites and translated into institutional priorities. Senior officials generally defined social justice in distributional terms, emphasizing targeting accuracy, resource efficiency, and the prioritization of "eligible" vulnerable groups. This framing is broadly consistent with Rawlsian justice as fairness, especially the idea that institutions should be arranged to improve the position of the least advantaged. In practice, however, Rawlsian intent was frequently reduced to a narrow administrative logic of eligibility. Several program designers viewed justice as "correct allocation," equating fairness with compliance to rules and the minimization of leakage. While this perspective protects public integrity and can prevent elite capture, it also produced unintended harms when applied rigidly to citizens with unstable documentation, informal incomes, or crisis conditions. Observational evidence indicated that citizens who could not provide complete administrative requirements experienced repeated delays and uncertainty, even when their vulnerability was clear. Thus, the Rawlsian principle of prioritizing the least advantaged was partially undermined by governance routines that privileged formal proof over lived disadvantage. The humanitas approach emerged as a corrective lens among some officials who argued that justice must include the manner in which the state recognizes hardship, not solely whether a citizen fits a category.

The second major result highlights how capability constraints shape justice outcomes more than policy designers often assume. Many service users reported that formal entitlements did not translate into actual access because of conversion barriers: time costs, transportation burdens, digital literacy gaps, stigma, and fear of rejection. These barriers align strongly with the capability approach associated with Amartya Sen and further systematized by Martha Nussbaum, which emphasizes that justice should be evaluated through substantive freedoms rather than nominal resources. The study found that "equal treatment" in standardized procedures often generated unequal capability outcomes. For example, a uniform requirement to submit online forms was experienced as a minor inconvenience by digitally literate citizens but became a decisive exclusion mechanism for older adults, informal workers with

irregular schedules, and residents with limited connectivity. Likewise, repeated verification steps created “administrative fatigue” that discouraged continued engagement, even when people were legally eligible. In capability terms, the governance system provided a benefit in principle but restricted the real opportunity to secure it. Humanitas oriented practices such as assisted filing, flexible appointment arrangements, and respectful explanatory communication were identified as mechanisms that expanded citizens’ effective capability to access services.

A third major result concerns the relational and moral dimensions of governance illuminated by care ethics, particularly as articulated by Joan Tronto. The study found that many forms of injustice were experienced not only as material deprivation but as relational degradation: being spoken to harshly, treated as suspicious, blamed for poverty, or made to feel burdensome for asking questions. These experiences were most frequently reported in high volume service points where frontline officers faced heavy caseloads and strict performance expectations. Care ethics helps interpret these dynamics by emphasizing that vulnerability and dependence are normal social conditions that governance must recognize, and that institutions distribute caring responsibilities in ways that can either protect or abandon citizens. The findings indicate that institutional pressures time limits, queue targets, and audit anxiety reallocated responsibility onto citizens, effectively making them manage complex bureaucratic tasks without sufficient support. Where frontline staff practiced humanitas, they often did so by absorbing additional emotional and procedural labor explaining repeatedly, negotiating exceptions, and coordinating referrals yet these acts were rarely recognized in official performance metrics. Thus, care based governance was present but fragile, depending on individual moral commitment rather than institutional support.

Across these theoretical lenses, the study identified a clear implementation pattern: social justice commitments were strongest at the level of policy rhetoric, moderately present in distributional design, and weakest in procedural accessibility and dignity centered service interaction. This pattern explains the research gap: the governance system lacked an integrated operational framework linking fairness (Rawls), real freedoms (Sen/Nussbaum), and relational responsibility (Tronto) into coherent service standards and accountability mechanisms. The study found that when these dimensions were aligned through accessible procedures, proactive outreach, and respectful treatment citizens reported higher trust, greater willingness to participate in feedback forums, and stronger perceptions of state legitimacy. When misaligned through rigid verification, fragmented referrals, and stigmatizing communication citizens disengaged, relied on informal brokers, or avoided services entirely.

The findings directly address the study’s research questions regarding how justice principles are operationalized and how humanitas can function as a governance approach. First, social justice was operationalized primarily through targeting systems and budget prioritization, while participatory mechanisms and experiential justice indicators remained underdeveloped. Public participation was present in consultative meetings and complaint channels, yet many citizens perceived these avenues as symbolic because feedback rarely produced visible changes. This reflects a procedural justice deficit: citizens could speak but did not feel heard in ways that altered governance behavior. Humanitas oriented governance, in contrast, was operationalized through small but meaningful practices: transparent explanations, respectful greetings, flexibility for those in crisis, referral accompaniment, and the normalization of questions without judgment. These practices were most effective when supported by simple institutional enablers clear standard operating procedures for exceptions, dedicated staff for assisted access, and inter agency coordination protocols that reduced repeated documentation demands.

Second, the study found that institutional fragmentation was a core driver of injustice, linking directly to the main problem and the implementation gap. Social assistance, health referrals, civil registration support, and complaint handling were often managed by separate units with different databases and verification rules. Citizens were frequently required to repeat the same information multiple times, a pattern that increased administrative burden and reduced capability to persist. In Rawlsian terms, this fragmentation disadvantaged those with the least resources to navigate complexity. In capability terms, it reduced effective access by consuming time and energy needed for work and care. In care ethics terms, it shifted caring responsibility from institutions to vulnerable individuals. Humanitas was expressed most clearly in instances where officials coordinated across units to “carry” the case forward

rather than sending the citizen back to the beginning. Such coordination, however, was not consistently institutionalized, indicating a structural weakness that future reform must address.

Third, the study's results clarify how discretion functions as both a justice risk and a justice opportunity. Frontline discretion was often used to mitigate hardship for example, accepting alternative proofs, allowing extended deadlines, or prioritizing urgent cases. These practices exemplify *humanitas* as a governance mechanism, enabling institutions to recognize real vulnerability beyond rigid categories. However, discretion also created inconsistency: some citizens received supportive treatment while others experienced suspicion or rejection under the same rules. This inconsistency represents a significant procedural gap. The research indicates that *humanitas* cannot rely solely on individual virtue; it requires standardized dignity centered principles and training supported by oversight that rewards humane problem solving rather than punishing deviation from rigid checklists. In this sense, the study contributes a key interpretive result: the institutionalization of *humanitas* is the governance pathway that transforms discretion from arbitrary variability into ethically guided responsiveness.

These results are closely connected to the study's objectives. The first objective developing an integrated framework linking social justice and *humanitas* was supported by empirical evidence showing that justice outcomes depend on the alignment of distributive, capability, and care based dimensions. The second objective identifying governance dimensions for institutionalizing *humanitas* was supported through recurring themes: accessibility of procedures, assisted access and navigation support, dignity centered communication norms, exception handling protocols, inter agency coordination, and experiential evaluation tools. The third objective analyzing operation under constraints was addressed by evidence of workload pressures, audit anxiety, resource limitations, and digitalization challenges that shape frontline behavior. The fourth objective generating implications was supported by clear patterns indicating which governance arrangements reduce exclusion and which amplify it.

The study's theoretical benefits arise from demonstrating how the three theories operate together in real governance practice. Justice as fairness provides the institutional normative baseline but can become technocratic when reduced to eligibility compliance; the capability approach reveals why equal rules yield unequal freedoms and identifies the practical barriers that must be addressed; care ethics explains why relational treatment and responsibility distribution are central to justice and why dignity must be treated as a governance outcome. The integration offers an analytical contribution to international journal audiences by presenting justice as a multi layered governance achievement rather than a single policy variable (Stanisevski, 2024).

The academic benefits include a conceptual model that can be tested across sectors and contexts, as well as a set of empirically grounded indicators for future research. The study suggests that justice evaluation should incorporate not only distributional metrics but also measures of administrative burden, assisted access availability, complaint resolution responsiveness, and citizen experience indicators related to respect and clarity. Such a multidimensional evaluation approach contributes to scholarship that seeks to bridge normative theory and administrative empirics. It also provides a basis for comparative studies across different administrative traditions, where the meaning and institutional expression of *humanitas* may vary culturally while maintaining shared justice principles.

The practical benefits are evidenced by the study's identification of implementable reforms. First, simplifying procedures and minimizing repeated verification directly reduce administrative burden and expand capabilities. Second, establishing assisted access roles or desks institutionalizes *humanitas* by ensuring that citizens with lower literacy or higher vulnerability are supported rather than excluded (Ma, 2025). Third, creating formal exception pathways transparent, documented, and ethically guided reduces arbitrary discretion while preserving responsiveness. Fourth, strengthening inter agency data coordination prevents citizens from becoming "information couriers" between offices. Fifth, integrating dignity and experiential justice into performance evaluation shifts organizational incentives toward humane governance. These reforms reflect the core implementation insight: *humanitas* becomes sustainable when embedded in governance architecture, not when treated as individual kindness (Sulca, 2025).

The linkage between results and discussion is further strengthened by comparison with earlier research patterns commonly reported in the broader field. Prior studies on equity oriented policy frequently note that targeting and compliance systems can create administrative burdens and stigmatizing interactions for beneficiaries, and that digital reforms can intensify exclusion when design is not inclusive. In line with those established patterns, the present findings show that governance systems often prioritize measurable efficiency while undervaluing relational and experiential justice. However, the study extends prior work by offering a synthesized explanatory mechanism: injustice persists not merely because resources are insufficient, but because governance systems fail to integrate distributive fairness, capability expansion, and care responsibility into a coherent operational model. This integrated model is the study's novelty contribution, explaining why reforms that focus only on budgets or technology can still reproduce injustice.

In relation to the main problem, the results show that the credibility of justice oriented policy depends on how citizens experience the state in everyday encounters. In relation to the research gap, the findings demonstrate that justice cannot be institutionalized through targeting reforms alone; it requires capability sensitive accessibility and care based relational governance. In relation to the research questions, the results clarify how justice is currently operationalized, where *humanitas* appears in practice, and what mechanisms enable or inhibit its institutionalization. In relation to the objectives, the results provide both a conceptual framework and a set of actionable governance dimensions. In relation to the benefits, the results establish theoretical integration, academic measurement possibilities, and practical reform pathways grounded in observed implementation realities.

Overall, the findings conclude that a social justice based public policy agenda becomes meaningfully *humanitas* oriented when governance systems treat dignity as a measurable public value, reduce administrative burdens as an equity strategy, and design procedures that expand citizens' real capabilities to access services. The study's novelty lies in demonstrating that the integration of Rawlsian fairness, capability oriented freedom, and care based responsibility offers a viable governance architecture for closing the persistent gap between justice rhetoric and citizen experience. This integrated perspective provides a coherent foundation for subsequent sections of discussion and recommendations, especially those aimed at institutional reform, service redesign, and justice sensitive accountability in government governance.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social justice based public policy becomes substantively meaningful when government governance institutionalizes *humanitas* as an operational principle across the policy cycle, not merely as ethical rhetoric. Drawing on the integrated insights from the results and discussion, the research shows that the central governance challenge is the persistent distance between justice commitments expressed in policy language and the lived experiences of citizens navigating public services. That distance is produced through procedural complexity, fragmented inter agency coordination, and inconsistent frontline discretion, which collectively generate exclusion even where formal entitlements exist. Accordingly, the research affirms that justice must be evaluated as a combined governance achievement fair distribution, real accessibility, and dignity centered public service relations.

From the perspective of justice as fairness, the findings indicate that policy arrangements often prioritize targeting accuracy and rule compliance as the dominant interpretation of "fairness." While this orientation can protect integrity and reduce misallocation, it frequently narrows the meaning of justice to eligibility verification. The study demonstrates that such a reduction can contradict the ethical demand to prioritize the least advantaged, because the most vulnerable citizens are often those least able to satisfy rigid administrative requirements. As discussed in the empirical findings, Rawlsian justice therefore requires more than allocating benefits to a category; it requires institutional designs that anticipate vulnerability and ensure that access pathways do not disadvantage those already structurally constrained.

The capability approach strengthens this conclusion by clarifying that equal rules do not yield equal freedoms. The study confirms that citizens' ability to convert formal policy provisions into real benefits is shaped by conversion barriers such as digital exclusion, time poverty, transportation costs, documentation gaps, stigma, and repeated verification. These barriers operate as hidden determinants

of injustice because they are frequently invisible in routine performance indicators that emphasize outputs rather than lived outcomes. The conclusion derived from the results is that justice oriented governance must treat administrative burden reduction, assisted access, and procedural clarity as capability expanding interventions. Without these, policy becomes a nominal promise rather than a realizable freedom.

Care ethics contributes a further decisive implication: injustice is experienced not only as material deprivation but as relational harm. Many citizen experiences described in the findings humiliation, suspicion, harsh communication, and being treated as a burden reflect a governance failure to distribute responsibility for care in a humane way. Under workload pressure and audit anxiety, responsibility is often shifted to citizens who must repeatedly prove their deservingness and navigate complex procedures with limited support. The study therefore concludes that *humanitas* must be institutionalized, not individualized. Humane governance cannot depend on personal compassion alone; it must be reinforced through service standards, exception handling protocols, interagency coordination, and accountability mechanisms that recognize dignity as a measurable public value.

Overall, the study consolidates the argument that the core novelty lies in articulating *humanitas* as a governance architecture that integrates distributive fairness, capability expansion, and care based responsibility. The results and discussion jointly show that where governance arrangements align these three dimensions through accessible procedures, coordinated referrals, transparent communication, and ethically guided discretion citizens report greater trust, stronger perceptions of legitimacy, and a higher likelihood of using feedback and grievance channels. Conversely, where these dimensions are misaligned, governance reproduces exclusion through administrative fatigue, inconsistent treatment, and symbolic participation that does not translate into institutional change. Thus, the study concludes that closing the justice gap requires redesigning governance systems so that dignity, accessibility, and responsiveness are built into routine practice and performance evaluation.

In practical terms, the conclusion supports several evidence based directions consistent with the discussion: simplifying requirements and reducing repeated verification; institutionalizing assisted access roles for vulnerable citizens; formalizing ethical and transparent exception pathways; strengthening inter agency data and referral coordination; and integrating experiential justice indicators such as respectful treatment, clarity of information, and responsiveness to complaints into performance systems. These directions are not presented as add ons but as core reforms necessary to align governance with justice. In summary, social justice based policy becomes credible when *humanitas* is embedded in institutions, measured in practice, and sustained through governance incentives. This conclusion reflects the study's central contribution to political humanistic governance discourse: justice is realized not only by what the state allocates, but by how the state recognizes, enables, and treats the people it serves.

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