

Journal of Management Sciences

Mitigating Workplace Politics: The impact of Inclusive Leadership on Commitment and Citizenship Behavior in Contemporary Organizations

Affiliation:

Eram Shahid
School of Economics and Management,
Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu, China
Email: eramshahid@my.swjtu.edu.cn

Jin Xu

School of Economics and Management,
and
Service School and Innovation Key Laboratory of
Sichuan Province, Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu, China
Email: xj_james@163.com



Manuscript Information

Submission Date: March 13, 2024

Reviews Completed: December 12, 2024

Acceptance Date: July 22, 2025

Publication Date: July 25, 2025

Citation in APA Style:

Shahid, E., & Xu, J. (2025). Mitigating Workplace Politics: The impact of Inclusive Leadership on Commitment and Citizenship Behavior in Contemporary Organizations, *Journal of Management Sciences*, 12 (1), 46-60.



Mitigating Workplace Politics: The impact of Inclusive Leadership on Commitment and Citizenship Behavior in Contemporary Organizations

Eram Shahid¹, Jin Xu^{1,2 *}

Abstract: Organizational politics has become a common and inevitable part of modern organizations, in which people struggle for limited resources. This study employs social exchange theory to examine the moderating role of inclusive leadership in mitigating the negative impact of perceptions of organizational politics on employee commitment and citizenship behavior. It also hypothesizes that inclusive leadership buffers the effects of workplace politics. Data were collected from 347 full-time employees working in Pakistan's telecommunications sector using a quantitative approach. The data were analyzed through variance-based structural equation modeling using Smart PLS-4. The findings offer valuable insights revealing that inclusive leaders foster a supportive culture characterized by fairness, diversity, trust, and organizational effectiveness, which helps mitigate the harmful effects of workplace politics. Furthermore, support from inclusive leadership played a key role in alleviating the negative workplace behaviors.

Keywords: Perceptions of organizational politics, inclusive leadership, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior.

Introduction

From the last two decades, workplace politics has been a significant topic in management studies, particularly in academic institutions (De Clercq & Pereira, 2024). This issue, concerning both personal and social perspectives, has received significant theoretical and empirical attention (Ferris et al., 1989). The political behavior of individuals within organizations has gained a lot of interest from researchers (De Clercq et al., 2023; Riaz et al., 2023; Gandz & Murray, 1980). Workplace politics is a pervasive and often inevitable fact of organizational life (Hochwarter et al., 2020). Historically, employees in contemporary organizations have competed for limited resources and pursued their objectives at the expense of others. Perceptions of organizational politics (POP) negatively impact business performance, as previous research confirmed a higher increase in employee dissatisfaction (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Silva et al., 2023). Moreover, high levels of POP adversely affect employee commitment and citizenship

¹ School of Economics and Management, Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu, China

² Service Science and Innovation Key Laboratory of Sichuan Province, Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu, China *(Corresponding Author)

behavior (OCB) (Silva et al., 2023), employee trust and engagement (Mehmood et al., 2023), and contribute to job frustration (Saei & Liu, 2023).

Until now, few scholars have investigated how leadership behaviors correlate with POPs and which leader actions serve to buffer the negative influence of POPs (Demissie et al., 2024; Khattak et al., 2023). Many authors call for future inquiry to understand POPs through different contextual and performance factors (Ugwu et al., 2023; De Clercq & Pereira, 2022). Thus, there is a need to study how different leadership styles affect high levels of organizational politics and other performance results, which needs detailed discussion across various cultures (Saei & Liu, 2023; Khattak et al., 2023; Mansoor et al., 2021). Despite the several studies on this current topic, it remains an important and understudied area. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the influence of workplace politics in terms of its role in commitment to work and OCB (Son et al., 2023; Yu & Lin, 2022).

By addressing these complex relationships, the present research makes several contributions to the prevailing literature on workplace politics by offering deeper intuitions of the buffering role of leader inclusiveness on POP within the telecommunications sector of Pakistan. The telecommunications in Pakistan are developing rapidly, driven by competition and innovation. The telecommunications sector plays a vital role for a nation's economic growth (Wright, 1994). Therefore, this study focuses on this sector to explore the influence of politics on organizational outcomes. This research aims to examine the impact of politics on commitment and citizenship behavior, particularly in developing country like Pakistan. This study proposes that IL plays a beneficial role in high-stakes political work environments, potentially mitigating the effects of resource threats. Based on the social exchange framework, this study examines how a specific leadership style (inclusive leadership) can effectively overcome the detrimental effects of political behaviors.

First, by proposing and theoretically analyzing the study, we advance knowledge on how IL mitigates the adverse influence of POPs on employee-related outcomes, like commitment and citizenship behavior. Second, this study contributes to existing theories on organizational behavior and social exchange by identifying how leadership practices influence an over politicized work environment. Its objective is to provide a clear understanding of effective leadership style (inclusive leadership) as a moderator that diminishes the damaging influence of POP in highly political environments. In addition, it is essential to note that research on organizational politics is mostly conducted in developed nations in Europe and North America (Shahid et al., 2022), with very little published research in developing nations on the elements that mediate or moderate the harmful effects of organizational politics (Mehmood et al., 2023). Moreover, researchers like Hochwarter et al., (2020) and De Clercq & Pereira (2024) call for further research to explain different individual factors, such as moderators, in diverse associations. This study addresses these gaps by exploring how inclusive leadership can help reduce the negative impact of organizational politics.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Blau (1964) social exchange theory (SET) explains workplace relationships as exchanges where individuals offer valuable actions in return for perceived benefits. Researchers such as Eisenberger et al., (1986), who expanded on this theory, suggested that organizations need to satisfy their exchange obligations and provide compensatory

rewards to employees, thereby creating an atmosphere of encouragement and value for their contributions. According to SET, employees engage in various forms of exchange relationships within the organization (Cropanzano et al., 1997). These exchanges within organizations facilitate a reciprocal give-and-take process, which is crucial for maintaining positive relationships, promoting mutual benefits, and fostering improved reciprocal relationships (Hollander, 2012). This process of exchange will continue with social reciprocation: just as the organization fulfills its promises, the more employees are committed to the organization.

Moreover, when employees perceive organizational politics and believe the organization is not fulfilling its exchange expectations, it creates an imbalance in this relationship, negatively affecting outcomes like organizational citizenship behavior (Kapoutsis et al., 2021). SET theory indicates that in response to this imbalance, employees may put less effort and time into their jobs (Khan et al., 2019; Tripathi et al., 2023). When exchange relationships are imbalanced or not maintained equally, employees tend to reduce voluntary behaviors and focus more on self-serving actions (Khattak et al., 2023).

Conversely, in the context of social exchanges, when managers promote transparency, fairness, and a supportive and inclusive work environment, employees reciprocate with various positive workplace outcomes, such as higher performance, increased commitment, greater engagement, and lower intentions to quit their jobs (Khattak et al., 2023).

Inclusive leaders can enhance the sense of belonging among followers by fostering reciprocity, trust, and positive leader-member exchanges, wherein employees feel valued and supported (Karrani et al., 2024). Leader-follower relationships involve mutual respect, trust, and a desire to provide more for each other. Therefore, individuals who were satisfied with their employment were more actively involved (Hollander, 2012). Farh et al., (2017) found that SET increases employee commitment and participation, urging individuals to dedicate themselves fully to their employment. To inspire and engage employees, leaders should be open, approachable, and available to sustain trust and create excellent results (Hollander, 2012). Similarly, a positive workplace environment enhances employee performance. SET suggests that a strong leader-follower relationship can enhance commitment and OCB (Karrani et al., 2024; Eisenberger et al., 1997).

Perceptions of organizational politics and Commitment

The term “commitment” refers to the emotional state among individuals through which they remain committed to the organization (Meyer & Allen et al., 1997). Gotsis & Kortezi (2010) examine a significant negative association between POP and the extent of workplace commitment. Previous studies also show deteriorating effects of POP on commitment and job satisfaction (Abbas et al., 2014; Al-Abrow, 2022). Furthermore, Riaz et al. (2023) found a negative relationship between workplace politics and commitment. From the perspective of previous research and the social exchange theory, we hypothesize that the POPs decrease the OC.

H1: Perception of organizational politics is negatively related to organizational commitment.

Perceptions of Organizational Politics and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Unfavorable workplace politics adversely affect exchange relationships between employees and their employers (De Clercq & Pereira, 2024). OCB is an example of social exchange where employees who participate in citizenship behavior return favor and support given by their coworkers to maintain an exchange of equality (Hochwarter et al., 2023). Most studies have mainly looked at how well employees do their specific jobs, but recently, research has started to focus more on how employees go above and beyond their basic duties through discretionary OCB (Khattak et al., 2023; Tripathi et al., 2023; Mansoor et al., 2021). Moreover, the research conducted by Arefin et al. (2021) suggests that employees in high-political working environments avoid extra-role behavior (OCB) due to further losses. The study by Demissie et al., (2024) indicates a negative association between political perceptions and OCB. This study applies SET to clarify how political perceptions influence OCB, aiming to enhance understanding of organizational behavior.

H2: Perceived organizational politics is negatively associated with organizational citizenship behavior.

Moderation role of Inclusive Leadership

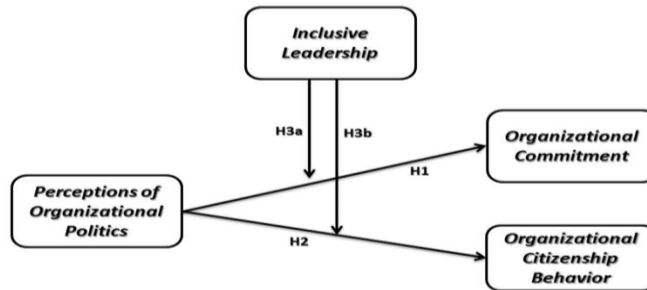
The initial concept of IL was presented by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006). In the study of leadership, its refer to words or deeds used by leaders that welcome and appreciate the input of their employees. Inclusive leadership can foster a supportive work environment where employees feel confident sharing their perspectives and participating proactively. Consequently, the inclusion of leaders encourages helping behaviors while enhancing commitment and citizenship behavior among employees (Mansoor et al., 2021).

According to Hollander (2012), when leaders are rational and supportive, employees feel more empowered, motivated, and committed to organizational goals. Meanwhile, prior research demonstrated that leadership inclusion is positively associated with outcomes such as engagement and commitment (Shafaei & Nejati, 2024; Mansoor et al., 2021). Meanwhile, IL may serve as a powerful tool to mitigate the detrimental effects of unfavorable attitudes by building trust and collaboration and reducing quiet quitting behaviors (Karrani et al., 2024). Building on the above rationale, this study investigates whether inclusive leadership (IL) can lessen the negative impact of perceived organizational politics (POP) on organizational commitment and citizenship behavior.

H3a: Inclusive leadership moderates the relationship between perceived organizational politics and organizational commitment.

H3b: Inclusive leadership moderates the relationship between perceived of organizational politics and citizenship behavior.

Figure 1: Proposed Theoretical Framework



Methodology

Measures

In this study, we collect the data by using a structured questionnaire to examine the proposed hypothesis. Before the collection of data, we needed to design the questionnaire to answer the main question of this study. For this basic purpose, we adapted the questionnaire format recommended by Venkatesh and Davis (2000). The questionnaire was organized into four sections. The first section introduced the study's objective, thanked participants, and assured them that their responses would remain confidential and be used only for research purposes.

Meanwhile, the second section of the questionnaire provides a brief explanation of the variables utilized in this study. In the third part, we gathered information about the respondents, such as age, education, and average employee tenure. We developed a hybrid questionnaire in the last part, updating and adjusting it based on previous studies to fully meet the current study goals.

Treatment of Scales

For assessment, we used five-point Likert scale with a range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Given the respondents' qualifications and type of job, the questionnaire will be in English, as it will be easily understood by all of them.

Perceptions of organizational politics

A thirteen items scale was adapted for the measurement of perceptions of organizational politics, which is introduced by (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997).

Inclusive leadership

The present study measured leadership inclusion through a nine items scale which was adopted from Carmeli et al. (2010) with a five-point Likert scale for measuring the inclusive leadership in the paper.

Organizational Commitment

The study employed six items adopted from Meyer and Allen's (1997) study, which used the same items used for the measurement of OC.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

In this manuscript, follow the Williams & Anderson's (1991) 14 items with various dimensions, such as altruism, conscientiousness, civic virtue, and sportsmanship.

Data Collection and Sampling Technique

The present study focuses on Pakistan's population, telecom sector, and four prominent cellular companies headquartered in Islamabad (Waird, Zong, Telenor, and Mobilink). This study employed the most popular survey method (questionnaire), commonly used in organizational behavior studies, in line with previous studies. This scenario involves the administrative collection of questionnaire data at two distinct time points. At Time 1, the human resource departments of selected organizations distributed the survey to employees. Participants voluntarily completed the survey during working hours. At Time 1, responses were collected based on perceptions of organizational politics and inclusive leadership. Two months later, at Time 2, employees provided responses regarding their organizational commitment and citizenship behavior. Each questionnaire was assigned a unique identification number at Time 1, which participants reused at Time 2 to allow the researchers to accurately match responses from both rounds of data collection.

We distributed 500 questionnaires to employees. At Time 1, 407 completed responses were collected (an 81% response rate), and at Time 2, 398 responses were received. After excluding 12 incomplete questionnaires, the final sample size was determined. From which 386 respondents, with 68% males and 32% females. Participants' ages were 30% (25–34 years), 27% (35–44 years), 23% (45–54 years), and 20% (55 years and above). Education levels included 56% with graduation, 36% with masters, and 8% with MS. The average employee's tenure was 7.6 years. Meanwhile, a minimum sample size ten times is necessary according to Hair et al., (2014), while the questionnaire have 36 items with the lowest 360 responses. In addition, Following Ferber (1977) recommendation that survey items should be relevant to respondents and accurately represent the target population, we applied a self-selected convenience sampling method, as suggested by Akhtar et al., (2020). We conducted the survey in English, addressing linguistic concerns and enhancing questionnaire clarity through a focus group discussion and pre-test.

Results

Analytical Approach

Previous studies suggest that Smart PLS-4 PLS-SEM has a high statistical ability to investigate approaches to determining complex cause-and-effect models and a small sample size in management research, including moderation analysis (Gudergan et al., 2008). To analyze the data, we employed structural equation modeling (SEM) incorporating both reflective and formative constructs. PLS-SEM was chosen as the preferred method due to its suitability for handling complex models and predictive research contexts.

Common Method Bias (CMB)

We used Harman's single-factor test to determine CMB. Meanwhile, for the findings, the first elements account for 26 percent, below the cutoff point of 50 percent (Bagozzi et al., 1991). In light of this, the study's response statistics are free of bias.

The Measurement Models

Two methods for model assessment in PLS-SEM were suggested. The first method evaluated the measurement model, while the second method evaluated the structure model (Hair et al., 2014).

Reliability and Validity

This study evaluates the model's fitness with the statistical tool Cronbach's alpha for variable construct reliability, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker, (1981). However, after assessing the outer loadings and meeting the minimum acceptance criteria of 0.70, we also removed the factor loading of items below 0.70 from consideration. Table 1 shows the reliability and validity values, as well as the factor loadings for the items. Every Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) value was in accordance with the suggested value of 0.700. In order to confirm, the average extracted variance (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) values were all above or very near 0.500 and 0.700, respectively. We also evaluated the degree of multi-collinearity, as each indicator's variance inflation factor (VIF) was less than 5 (*see table no. I*), and *table no. II* demonstrated discriminant validity (Ali et al., 2023; Sarstedt, 2014).

Table I: Item Loadings, Reliability, Convergent Validity & VIF

Items	Loadings	CR.	AVE	C α	VIF
POP		0.933	0.622	0.932	
POP1	0.759				2.003
POP3	0.853				4.897
POP4	0.830				3.764
POP5	0.726				1.969
POP6	0.780				2.441
POP7	0.825				3.089
POP8	0.834				3.804
POP10	0.764				2.630
POP11	0.742				2.666
POP12	0.761				2.884
OC		0.904	0.674	0.903	
OC1	0.828				2.288
OC2	0.810				2.145
OC3	0.812				2.130
OC4	0.821				2.304
OC5	0.817				2.278
OC6	0.836				2.320
OCB		0.896	0.643	0.863	
OCB1	0.848				1.993
OCB2	0.778				1.654
OCB10	0.796				1.979
OCB11	0.785				1.887
OCB12	0.801				2.083
IL		0.941	0.69	0.91	
IL3	0.831				2.410

IL4	0.854	3.016
IL5	0.899	3.212
IL6	0.760	2.031
IL7	0.781	1.974
IL8	0.850	2.417

Table II: Discriminant Validity-HTMT Ratio

	OC	OCB	POP	IL
OC				
OCB	0.068			
POP	0.784	0.074		
IL	0.056	1.017	0.062	

Hetrotrait Monotrait Influence Ratio (HTMT)

In this study, we also compute the HTMT nexus ratio to analyze the legitimacy of discrimination value which is acceptable 0.85 in line with Henseler et al., (2015). Moreover, in case the value of legitimacy discrimination is less than 0.85 clearly shows the validity problem exist. In addition, three different approaches use in pervious literature HTMT_{inference}, HTMT_{.90}, and HTMT_{.85}, and is most conventional approach according to the (Henseler et al., 2015). Table no III indicate the hetrotrait monotrait ratio analysis results.

Table III: Discriminant Validity-Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	OC	OCB	POP	IL
OC	0.821			
OCB	0.014	0.802		
POP	0.723	-0.008	0.789	
IL	0.01	0.895	-0.013	0.83

Structural Model Evaluation

The study utilized the PLS regression technique to investigate the hypotheses and establish causal interconnections. PLS is widely recognized as a highly effective method to assess latent variable models. Moreover, it demonstrates its worth and effectiveness as a useful instrument for examining the impacts of control variables (Ali et al., 2023; Chin et al., 2003). The direct path and standard errors was estimated using the bootstrap resampling method with 5000 resamples (Ringle at el., 2013). The findings of the direct linkage hypotheses are given in Table IV. The analysis revealed significant negative relationship between POP and OC ($\beta = -0.214$, $t = -3.95$, $p < 0.001$). This suggest

that politically charged work environment can weaken employee's sense of organizational commitment. This provides support to H1 hypothesis. Similarly, the findings indicate a significant negative relationship between the POP and OCB ($\beta = -0.384$, $t = -5.54$, $p < 0.001$) supporting H2.

Table IV: Direct Relationships

Hypothesis	B	T-Value	P-Value	Support
H1: POP --> OC	-0.214	-3.95	$p < 0.001$	Yes
H2: POP --> OCB	-0.384	-5.54	$p < 0.001$	Yes

Table V: Moderating Relationships

Hypothesis	β	T-Value	P-Value	Support
H3a: IL*POP --> OC	-0.143	1.98	$p < 0.018$	Yes
H3b: IL*POP --> OCB	-0.206	2.116	$p < 0.003$	Yes

Moderation Results

To test moderating influence of IL on the relationship between POP and commitment, which is also significant ($\beta = -0.143$, $t = 1.98$, $p = .018$) and supported H3a. Similarly, the results confirmed H3b, which indicates that IL play a moderation role between POP and OCB ($\beta = -0.206$, $t = 2.116$, $p = .003$) in Table V. This moderation effectively mitigates the negative impact of organizational politics by encouraging employees to maintain their citizenship behavior despite the presence of political dynamics within the organization.

Discussion

Grounded in social exchange theory, the purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between organizational politics, employee commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Furthermore, this research investigates whether inclusive leadership moderates these relationships, and provides insights into how IL helps mitigate the negative impact of organizational politics on employee outcomes. Consistent with prior research, the present study confirms a negative association between organizational politics and commitment (Khattak et al., 2023; Cesinger et al., 2023). The findings, validated by De Clercq et al., (2023), show that perceiving the workplace environment as political reduces employee's loyalty. In addition, our finding is further supported by Silva et al., (2022), which reveals that high levels of workplace politics may lead employees to feel their decisions are based on personal interests or favoritism (Silva et al., 2022).

Furthermore, results further reveal a negative association between workplace politics and OCB, which aligns with prior investigations (Demissie et al., 2024; Khattak et al., 2023). Employees may not engage in citizenship behavior when they perceive self-serving behaviors from others (Yu, 2022). The current research reveals that individuals' POPs have a detrimental influence on their citizenship behavior, a finding further validated by Tripathi et al., (2023). Conversely, strong views of organizational politics negatively impact citizenship behavior (Kaur & Kang, 2022).

The findings reveal the buffering role of IL, demonstrating how this conceptually relevant individual factor mitigates the destructive influence of organizational politics on commitment (Riaz et al., 2023) and citizenship behavior (Goo et al., 2022). Consistent with prior research (Arias Rodriguez et al., 2024; Khattak et al., 2023). In the same vein, when employees perceive their manager as an inclusive leader, they are more inclined to participate in helping behaviors (Mansoor et al., 2021). Furthermore, their subordinates positively accept inclusive leaders, leading to an increase in dedication and citizenship (Hollander, 2012). Overall, the findings show that inclusive leaders have a substantial impact on the employees' commitment and citizenship behavior.

This study identifies overlooked contingency elements that lessen the harmful effects of organizational politics on workplace outcomes (De Clercq et al., 2023) by surveying respondents from the telecommunication sector of Pakistan. A manager's role as an effective inclusive leader fosters trust, encourages transparency, and promotes a fairness culture for employees' attitudes and behaviors (Arias Rodriguez et al., 2024). Employees' commitment to the organization increases and the negative influence of politics lessens when they perceive their leaders to be inclusive and care about their well-being (Hollander, 2012; Shahid et al., 2022). Our study confirmed an important role of IL in shaping employee's attitudes and behaviors in an oversized political environment. As postulated, inclusive leaders create a positive environment for employees to participate in decision-making. This leadership support lessens negative perceptions of workplace politics (Saei & Liu, 2023), resulting in increased commitment and enhanced citizenship behavior. Furthermore, it helps decision-making groups and managers be aware of the negative and destructive effects of workplace politics on employees' behaviors.

Theoretical Implications

This study broadens our theoretical understanding of social exchange and how IL influences the exchange of resources and employees' outcomes in organizational politics. Managers primarily concentrated on work-related matters, neglecting the issue of employee perception.

The present study significantly contributes to the existing body of research (Chen et al., 2024; Cesinger et al., 2023). Firstly, this research reveals a negative correlation between employees' POPs and their OC, as well as their voluntary and helpful behavior within the organization. Secondly, this research aimed to explore how leaders' inclusive behaviors can foster positive employee outcomes in a high political work environment. Finally, the present study viewed IL as a moderator while adding to the existing literature on leadership, organizational behavior, and social exchange theory. POP has significant negative roles towards OC and OCB, and inclusive leaders contribute more to engaging workforce capabilities in such relations. Therefore, the study emphasizes the importance of exchange relationships in suppressing negative POP, thereby enhancing employee OC and fostering good citizenship behavior.

Practical Implications

The present study is beneficial for managers because it elucidates how IL, as a potent strategy, can effectively mitigate workplace politics. It also assists them in adhering to specific policies, procedures, and job descriptions that align with the specific requirements of each job. This study provides more valuable insights regarding why organizations should initiate leadership practices to foster inclusive leadership competencies among managers and supervisors. Additionally, this study highlights the

value of a trust-based, inclusive culture within the organization. It emphasizes how IL actively promotes transparency, fairness, and open communication to increase employees' commitment and enhance their voluntary behavior (OCB) while keeping the employees unharmed and safe. In addition to the above, we expect our findings to encourage middle managers to employ active management-by-exception, preventing negative organizational outcomes. We anticipate that our findings will motivate top managers to abandon passive management by exception, thereby promoting positive organizational outcomes. This study shows that generally POPs is harsh for employees, so there must be additional support and control over managerial behavior (Tripathi et al., 2023).

Managers must consider the destructive effects of workplace politics and perform as role models whom employees can trust while developing a clear and strong communication channel between employees (AL-Abrrow, 2022). Managers can minimize such negativity by making transparent decisions, by mentoring and coaching employees, and by maintaining positive relationships among supervisors and subordinates (Ejaz et al., 2023).

Limitations/Future Directions

Based on the theoretical and practical aspects, readers may have some questions. First, cross-sectional design using self-reports can cause concern for some readers. However, we believe that the robustness of our analysis, especially to ensure internal validity and address common method variance, would provide readers with confidence in our findings. Second, we focused only on the outcome variables of OC and OCB. For generalization's sake, future research needs to include more organizational outcomes, e.g., job-related satisfaction, stress, and intentions to quit. Similarly, the inclusion of leaders, establishes the external validation of our research.

Finally, it might be interesting to compare the results of different samples. As an extension of our study, future research can collect data from the banking sector and compare employees of conventional banks with Islamic banks. Future research should explore the role of leadership inclusion in multiple countries, cultures, and organizational structures.

Conclusion

This study builds on previous research by clarifying intra-organizational politics and examining how employees' preconceptions of an overly political organizational climate affect their commitment and voluntary behaviors. The present study underscores the significance of leadership inclusion in enhancing employees' commitment and citizenship behaviors in this negative dynamic. Strongly politicized events make employees more inclined to disengage from their employer, which validly justifies the resulting distraction from organizational goals.

This study is novel in that it was the first to check the role of IL to overcome negative politics perceptions to increase commitment and citizenship behavior, while most studies are in a western context. Moreover, the findings of this research provide full support for testing the hypothesis. Researchers relying on this perspective of moderation effects will lead to expansion in the POPs model and enhance understanding of workplace politics from management aspects. Meanwhile, by promoting the culture of leadership practices, trust, and inclusiveness inside the organization, managers can effectively reach targets as well as enhance organizational success.

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