


Research Article

How and When Perception of Organizational Politics Triggers Workplace Deviance: A Moderated-Mediation Model of Authentic Leadership and Organizational Cynicism

*¹Faqir Sajjad Ul Hassan | ²Hassan Ahmed Shah | ³Akhtar Nawaz | ⁴Qasim Shahzad

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Management Sciences, Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak
 Email: faqirphd@yahoo.com

²Lecturer, Department of Management Sciences, Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak

Email: hassan.shah@kku.edu.pk

³Lecturer, Department of Public Policy & Administration, Hazara University, Mansehra

Email: akhtar_nawaz@hu.edu.pk

⁴Deputy Director Academic & Research, Hazara University, Mansehra
 Email: kasimswati@gmail.com

Correspondence

Faqir Sajjad Ul Hassan
 Email: faqirphd@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the effect of perceived organizational politics on workplace deviance under the theoretical rationale of social exchanges and the job demand resource model. In addition, it investigates the mediating role of organizational cynicism and the moderating role of authentic leadership in this process. This moderated-mediation model of the study was tested using PLS-SEM technique on data of employees of six different public sector universities situated in the southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Results found that perceived organizational politics is directly and positively related to workplace deviance. We found partial support of the mediation of organizational cynicism between the direct perceived organizational politics-workplace deviance relationship. We further revealed that these direct and indirect relationships are not constant but vanish where employees work under a highly authentic leadership climate and vice versa. In this way, this study broadens the research on the perceived organizational politics-workplace deviance relationship by introducing a novel mediator of organizational cynicism. This study further contributes to the literature by exploring authentic leadership as the boundary condition for both direct and indirect relationships. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Perceived organizational politics, workplace deviance, organizational cynicism, authentic leadership

1 | INTRODUCTION

Workplace deviance (WD) is characterized as employees' behaviors that deliberately violate an organization's norms and standards and go counter to the organization's or its members' legitimate interests (Sackett, 2002). These are so prevalent in the workplace that in US alone employee theft and fraud, according to Case (2000), affect 95% of US firms and cost the country over \$50 billion yearly (An et al., 2016; Coffin, 2003). While globally around 75% of workers have been stolen at least once, according to US Chamber of Commerce research (Shulman, 2005). Moreover, due to dishonest activities, global firms deal with more than US\$2.9 trillion every year (Li et al., 2020).

This is a staggering sum, suggesting that unethical activities are significantly more pervasive than the intensive attention on a small number of high-profile cases reported by the main news media.

Recently, the sharp rise in WD has garnered much attention from organizational theorists and professionals alike (Jiang et al., 2017). Researchers have studied WD in thousands of cases over the course of the previous 20 years, and many new insights into the various WD antecedents and consequences have been explored (Mackey et al., 2019). The literature suggests that antecedents of WD may be situational or personal like employee's personality, their attitudes and work stressors (Carpenter et al., 2021). Studies reported that WD has adverse consequences both on individual as well as organizational outcomes. For instance, it has been related to employees frustration, job stress and burnout, job dissatisfaction, psychological contract breach, reduced organizational commitment, in-role performance, extra-role performance and turnout (Cohen & Diamant, 2019; Kundi & Badar, 2021). The organizational outcomes due to WD includes reduction in productivity, loses or damage of property, higher insurance cost, and reduced organizational performance (Khattak et al., 2021; Penney & Spector, 2005). These detrimental effects on individual and organizational consequences suggest that in order to comprehend how WD develops, it is crucial to investigate its possible antecedents and contextual elements (De Clercq et al., 2021).

While previous studies on the antecedents of WD have mostly concentrated on individual differences (Jones, 2009; Rodell & Judge, 2009), interpersonal issues (Wei & Si, 2013), negative emotions towards individuals (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007), and linked it to personality. Yet, the situational and attitudinal antecedents of WD have not received as much attention in the empirical literature. The perception of organizational politics (POP) as a situational organizational factor has been shown to shape undesirable work attitudes and outcomes (Bedi & Schat, 2013). The notation that POP influences WD has gained traction recently, and prior research supports the positive link between POP and WD (Meisler et al., 2020). Even while the direct relationship of POP and its consequences have received a lot of attention, there are a lot of unexplained variances previously seen in these associations (Chang et al., 2009), which hints a strong reason to anticipate possible underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions that may influence the relationship. In this area, it is not particular to POP but in general, past research is rare if not absent in addressing the questions of why and when WD develops (Herscovis et al., 2007). Paying attention to this potential void in the extant literature, anchoring on the combination of social exchange theory (SET: Blau, 1964) and job-demand resource model (JDR: Demerouti et al., 2001) this study's main goal is to find out why and when POP might lead to unfavorable behaviors like WD. First, for the why question, our knowledge of the mechanisms behind the motivations of organizational members to engage in WD in response to POP is limited since the relationship between POP and WD is still unclear (Meisler et al., 2020). We argue that organizational cynicism (OC), a negative attitude towards an organization that may develop through POP may be a significant underlying mechanism by which POP inside the organization might provoke such negative behaviors. Such an indirect connection to the knowledge of authors has not been the subject of any prior investigation.

Second for the when question, very limited research is currently available exploring the boundary conditions of antecedents and WD that may neutralize the relationships like the direct and/or indirect link of POS and WD. We postulate that the existence of authentic leadership may act as a buffer against the depletion of positive work energy in the event that employees experience POS. Given that it is contended that when followers perceive their leaders to act in an authentic manner, their cognitive states improve and they behave in positive and productive ways (Chen & Hou, 2016; Hoyt et al., 2013). This may recover their cognitive states and reduce the likelihood of engaging into WD even in the existence of POS. To this end, we test a moderated-mediation model in which we not only advance and contribute to the extant literature on a novel underlying mechanism of OC answering why POS causes WD, but also, we address when such detrimental effects of POS are mitigated by authentic leadership. Such like relationships are not previously developed and tested in a single study which makes this study significant in the relevant literature

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 | Perception of Organizational Politics and Workplace Deviance

Ferris et al., (1989) defined the concept of organizational politics as “a social influence process in which behavior is strategically designed to maximize short-term or long-term self-interest, which is either consistent with or at the expense of others’ interests” (p. 145). Based on this, the POP delineates the degree to which employees perceive their work environment as politically charged, serving the self-interests of others, and thus perceived as unjust and

unfair from an employee's personal perspective (Chang et al., 2012).

The SET and JDR are two overarching theories that guide the relationship of POP to negative work outcomes. According to SET (Blau, 1964), people form exchange relationships as a result of their interactions with other people. Individuals that adhere to the reciprocity norm (Gouldner, 1960) frequently give back to others in the same way that they get, i.e., good with good or bad with bad (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007). Next, according to the JD-R paradigm, job demands and job resources are two distinct aspects of the work environment that have an impact on employee well-being (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The physical, social, and organizational components of the work environment that necessitate consistent physical and/or mental effort are referred to as job demands. On the other hand, job resources are the organizational, psychological, and physical aspects of a job that support a person in meeting job requirements.

It has been suggested that POS may threaten social interactions in a variety of ways. Given that politics is associated with nonsupportive as well as unsafe work environments, it has been argued that POP reduces socioemotional resources (Cropanzano et al., 1997, Rosen et al., 2009). Thereby, employees are more likely to believe that firms have violated expected exchange relationships when they do not provide the required socioemotional resources. POP being an organizational stressor is regarded as job demands (Meisler et al., 2017). In this way, the POP hinders employees' resources and elevates job demands, thus in line with SET, reciprocity mechanisms activate in employees as a bad for bad conduct and so it is reasonable to argue that they may engage into WD which also interchangeably used as counterproductive work behaviors in the literature. Several empirical studies also support the direct positive association between POP and WD (De Clercq & Pereira, 2024; Meisler et al., 2020; Nauman et al., 2023; Wiltshire et al., 2014; Ugwu et al., 2023). Besides, Bedi & Schat, (2013) discovered in their meta-analysis a positive correlation between POP and WD, implying that those who are affected by politics could react by being involved into these kinds of withdrawal behaviors. Accordingly, we postulate that:

H1: The POP is positively related to WD.

2.2 | Organizational Cynicism as a Mediator

According to Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998), organizational cynicism is a negative attitude of an employee regarding his/her organization that combines cognitive, affective and behavioral components. The cognitive aspect is the employee's belief that the organization lacks integrity, honesty, and fairness. The affective part is the employee's negative emotions towards the organization (e.g., anger, disgust) while the behavioral dimension is critical, disparaging actions and behaviors of an employee directed at the organization. It is argued that the cognitive component significantly influences shaping the emotions and behaviors of employees (Stanley et al., 2005). According to Zivnuska et al., (2004), incentives in the political work environment are typically linked to more subjective elements like connections and power. Political activities might include circumventing the boss, not obeying the rules, and lobbying upper management to receive benefits like promotions or special work assignments. Although the organization does not support these actions, they are also typically not specifically prohibited (Ferris et al. 2002). Thus, POP strengths when actions take place that do not quite align with the rules and regulations the organization, but are also not explicitly forbidden by it (Harris et al., 2007). With higher POP, when employees' rewards are not distributed on merit, it is confusing and more difficult for workers to predict that their which actions would result in a reward. Employees' feelings of autonomy and competence may decline because of their perceptions of fewer links between their own efforts and the achievement of desired objectives (Aryee et al., 2004).

Such mistrust is linked to a lack of interpersonal empathy or relatedness between parties, it has been determined that this lack of trust in employers is another harmful kind of social interaction between employees and the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Thus, POP acts as a job demand that depletes employees' resources. When such situations continue between employees and the organization, employees perceive that their organization lacks integrity, honesty, and fairness, so in this way, employees' view of OC develops. According to SET, this cynicism arises from a perceived breach of the social exchange relationship with POP. Once cynicism sets in, the JD-R model predicts that employees may engage in WD as a way to cope with the resulting strain. SET further explains these WD as a form of retaliation against perceived injustices, completing the cycle from POP to OC and subsequently to WD. The meta-analysis of Chiaburu et al., (2013) support this notation and a positive relationship between POP and OC was established in prior research. Empirical evidence also supported the next relationship of our model linking OC to WD, as prior research found a positive relationship between the OC and WD (Evans et al., 2011; S. Li & Chen, 2018). We believe based on the theoretical arguments and empirical evidence that POP is direct and indirectly related to WD via OC. According, we formulate the following hypotheses:

- H2: The POP is positively related to OC.
- H3: The OC is positively related to WD.
- H4: The OC acts as a mediator between the direct POP-WD relationship.

2.3 | Authentic Leadership as a Moderator

AL is a style where leaders act in a genuine, sincere, and real way, true to their own values and beliefs. This is a relationship-focused style who fosters trust and meaningful relationships with followers (Avolio, & Gardner, 2005). Leaders who have a lot of personal resources and the backing of their company are likely to show their subordinates more positive attitudes and behaviors on a regular basis. Authentic leaders provide careful consideration to their staff members' growth in addition to themselves (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Consistent with the JDR model, we argue the AL as a potential resource given that its various types of supportive behaviors towards employees may mitigate the POP and OC view of employees in organizational settings. Authentic leaders are open and equitable, which lessens the ambiguity and deception that are sometimes connected to organizational politics. They reduce employees' impression of politics as damaging and self-serving by fostering clarity and trust by open communication and treating workers fairly. Employees' unfavorable reactions to POP are lessened by this reciprocal exchange of trust. Moreover, Authentic leaders' honesty and dedication to ethical behavior foster a pleasant social exchange atmosphere in which workers feel appreciated and respected. This addresses the mistrust and negative attitudes (cynicism) that frequently occur when workers believe they have been duped or misled by their bosses. Employees respond to honest leadership with more engagement and good attitudes, lowering corporate cynicism. Authentic leaders prioritize justice and cultivate a supportive, value-driven culture, which improves the psychological bond between leaders and workers. Employees are less likely to engage in WD because they believe the leader-employee relationship is fair and based on mutual respect. Thus, as per SET, the reciprocal social trade promotes loyalty and moral behavior, reducing the risk of negative activities like WD. According to previous research, AL has a beneficial impact on worker attitudes and behaviors of employees including performance, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and job engagement (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005; George, 2003; Ilies et al., 2005). Thus, these arguments suggest that authentic leadership may minimize the effects of POP and OC on WD, and we assume that:

- H5: AL is inversely related to WD.
- H6: AL moderates the OC-WD relationship.
- H7: AL moderates the POP-WD relationship.
- H8: The indirect POP-WD relationship via OC is contingent on AL

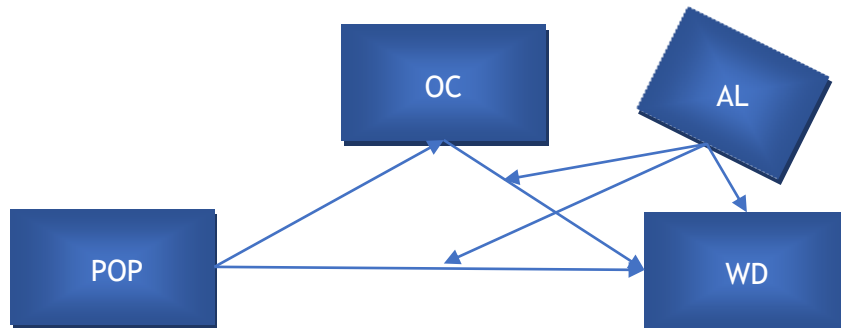


Figure1: Theoretical Framework

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Sample and Procedure

In this cross-sectional type of study, we collected data from six public sector universities situated in the southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. These organizations represent two main groups including faculty/teachers

and administration staff. To better understand the study relationships and for the larger generalizability of the study, we included both constituencies in our study survey. We collected data using a questionnaire as a measurement instrument. Each questionnaire had a cover letter attached that outlined the research's purpose, assured respondents that participation in the study was voluntary basis, promised anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. A total of 450 questionnaires were self-administered in these institutions using a convenience sampling procedure. Subsequently, we collected a total of 391 responses yielding 86 % response rate. However, 22 questionnaires were found invalid and thus 369 usable questionnaires were used for analyses. Table 1 shows the details of the demographic profile of the respondents. Within a total of 369, the majority were male (74%), the respondents belonging to middle age dominated the survey (58%), most of the participants having doctorate degrees (56%), a large number of the respondents had experience between 1-10 year (83%), and the majority were belonging to faculty group (70%). The details of the respondents' profile is summarized in Table I.

Table 1
Respondent Profile

Demographics		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	273	74.0
	Female	96	26.0
Age	20-30 years	79	21.4
	31-40	215	58.3
	41-50	57	15.4
	51-60	18	4.9
Education	Bachelor	3	.8
	Master	38	10.3
	MS/MPhil	118	32.0
	PhD	209	56.6
	Other	1	.3
Experience	1-5 years	178	48.2
	6-10	129	35.0
	11-15	29	7.9
	16-20	13	3.5
	Above 20	20	5.4
Status of employment	Faculty	257	69.6
	Admin. Staff	112	30.4

n=369

3.2 | Measurement

The scale of Kacmar and Ferris (1991) which measures general political behaviors consisting of six items was adopted. This is the most significant part of the scale and is frequently used in previous studies (e.g. Abbas et al., 2014; Byrne, 2005). To measure the cognitive part of organizational cynicism, we used a 5-item scale of Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly's (2003). We took scales of both POP and OC as reflective manners. WD was measured as second order reflective-formative fashion, given that it has two different dimensions including WD direct towards organization and others are relevant to interpersonal WD. The scale was borrowed from Bennett and Robinson, (2000) having a total of 19 items, 12 for WD-O and 7 for WD-I. Finally, four items were taken from Walumbwa et al. (2008) scale of measuring AL. each item was representing a unique dimension of AL. we took four items as formative measures given that each item was measuring different aspect of AL that are not interchangeable. All the items of measurement scales were slightly modified based on the organizational context of the study. For both formative scales' measures i.e., AL and WD, we used a globe single item for each for the purpose of redundancy analysis. The respondents rated all the multi-item variables as discussed above on the anchors of 1-7 Likert scale where 1 was representing "strongly disagree" and 7 indicating "strongly agree".

3.3 | Common Method Variance (CMV)

The cross-section design and self-reported questionnaire procedure of the study may be prone to common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To check the severity of this bias, a statistical technique of Harman's single factor was used. test was utilized to investigate CMV among the study variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The fundamental premise of Harman's single-factor test is that one general factor will explain the majority (>50%) of the covariance

between the variables if a significant level of CMV is present. We submitted all the items of the questionnaire in principle component of factor analysis. The test's findings demonstrated that several factors were identified, with the first component only contributing 37% of the variation in total. The factor analysis did not reveal any strong general factor explaining variance greater than 50%, therefore some of the concerns regarding CMV may be partially mitigated.

4 | ANALYTICAL APPROACH AND RESULTS

Since we measured AL as the formative manner and WD as a second-order reflective-formative approach, therefore, to avoid model identification problem instead of covariance structural equation modeling, the partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was suitable to run a complex moderated mediation model with formative scales of the study (see e.g., Hair et al., 2019). For initial descriptive statistics, we used SPSS version 24, while to test the hypotheses and different models we utilized SmartPLS 4.0. In the proceeding headings in the analysis section, in line with the guidelines of PLS-SEM approach, we first assess the measurement model followed by the structural model, mediation and moderated mediation examinations.

4.1 | Assessment of Measurement Model

To begin with, we discuss the criteria for the reflective scales assessment as per the recommendation of Hair et al., (2021). For the reliability of the reflective scales, we checked inter-item consistency using the criteria of Cronbach alpha (conservative) and composite reliability (liberal). We see the results in Table II, both of the criteria's values are above the cutoff value of 0.70 confirming the acceptable reliability of our reflective scales (Ringle et al., 2020).

For the construct validity of the reflective scales, we estimated both convergent as well as discriminate validity. The criteria of the average variance extracted (AVE) and factor loadings were used to check the convergent validity. We see the results in Table II, the AVE values of all constructs are above the threshold of 0.50. Moreover, the factor loadings of all items are over the cutoff value of 0.70 except 2 items of WDi (interpersonal) scale and 1 item of WDo (organizational) scale, which were deleted as per the guidelines of Hair et al., (2021) as reflective scales are interchangeable. Thus, these both statistics show satisfactory convergent validity of the study scales.

For discriminate validity, we used an advanced technique of Henseler et al., (2015) HTMT ratios instead of traditional approaches that have serious statistical limitations. Table III shows the HTMT ratios, these ratios of each pair of constructs are below the yardstick of 0.85, which means all the constructs are different from each other. For formative scales, Hair et al., (2021) suggest that three quality checks including variance inflation factors (VIF) that should be less than 5, the significance of outer weights at $p < 0.05$ and redundancy analysis wherein one globe items are recommended to be associated with all items of a specific formative measure should be above 0.80. The formative measures of our study met all three criteria, as results are presented in Table III, which shows that no value of VIF is above the threshold of 5, all the outer weights AL and second order formative measures of WD are statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. Finally, the redundancy analysis association of items are 0.805 and 0.821 for AL and WD respectively. Thus, our study measurement model is valid.

Table 2
Summary of Measurement Model Results

Construct	Item	Loading	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	Mean	SD
POP	POP1	0.849**	0.892	0.917	0.651	4.881	1.210
	POP2	0.801**					
	POP3	0.789**					
	POP4	0.778**					
	POP5	0.788**					
	POP6	0.828**					
OC	OC1	0.863**	0.921	0.94	0.760	4.353	1.351
	OC2	0.882**					
	OC3	0.885**					
	OC4	0.878**					
	OC5	0.849**					

WD (1 st order)	WDo1	0.835**	0.947	0.955	0.702	4.891	1.458
	WDo2	0.868**					
	WDo3	0.796**					
	WDo4	0.691 ^D					
	WDo5	0.901**					
	WDo6	0.854**					
	WDo7	0.811**					
	WDo8	0.874**					
	WDo9	0.625 ^D					
	WDo10	0.895**					
	WDo11	0.865**					
	WDo12	0.788**					
	WDi1	0.864**	0.939	0.95	0.733	4.564	1.621
	WDi2	0.889**					
	WDi3	0.882**					
	WDi4	0.628 ^D					
	WDi5	0.811**					
	WDi6	0.914**					
	WDi7	0.832**					
Formative Measure		Outer Weight	VIF	Redundancy analysis β	Mean	SD	
WD (2 nd order)	WDi	0.488**	1.723	0.821	4.730	1.539	
	WDo	0.501**	1.542				
AL	AL1	0.408**	1.852	0.805	4.654	1.851	
	AL2	0.229**	1.990				
	AL3	0.434**	2.110				
	AL4	0.198**	2.540				

** $p < 0.01$, ^D deleted item

4.2 | Assessment of Structural Model

After the satisfactory results about the psychometric properties of the study scales, we move to evaluate the structural part of our model in order to test the hypotheses of direct relationships. Hair et al., (2021) proposed five steps to evaluate the structure model. Accordingly, we first checked the multi-collinearity between the study's constructs and the results indicated no severity of multi-collinearity as all VIF values are below the recommended value of 5. Second, direct relationship paths are estimated, and results supported all the hypotheses as expected. For instance, in all three models, the direct relationship between POP and WD was positive and statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. In the full model 3, we found the highest positive significant relationship between POP and OC ($\beta = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$) followed by OC and WD ($\beta = 0.495$, $p < 0.01$), and between POP and WD ($\beta = 0.119$, $p < 0.05$). However, as expected we found a negative and significant relationship between AL and WD ($\beta = -0.371$, $p < 0.01$). In this way, our all hypotheses or direct relationship *H1*, *H2*, *H3* and *H5* have been substantiated.

The next three steps include R^2 , f^2 and Q^2 , which determine the predictive power, the relative significance of an exogenous variable when omitted into the model and the predictive relevance/or out-of-sample predictive power of the full model, respectively. The R^2 value of our full model lies between the range of moderate to high level (Hair et al., 2021), showing very good predictive power of our study model. According to Hair et al. (2021), f^2 values of less than 0.02 should be regarded as weak, 0.15 as moderate, and 0.35 or above as significant. The f^2 values of our exogenous variables range from moderate to high, as per results, as displayed in Table III. The positive number indicates that Q^2 larger than 0 is a solid predictor of the predictive relevance of a model (Hair et al., 2021). Table III demonstrates that all of our model's Q^2 values are much higher than zero, indicating the outstanding predictive relevance of our study model.

Table 3
Structural Model Results Summary with HTMT Ratios

Relationships	Path Coefficient/ indirect effect	t value	f^2	VIF	HTMT Ratio
<i>Research Variables</i>					
POP→WD	0.119*	2.506	0.023	1.711	0.597

POP→OC	0.612**	16.408	0.599	1.000	0.673
OC→WD	0.495**	9.045	0.361	1.906	0.769
AL→WD	-0.371**	7.698	0.217	1.780	-
Endogenous Constructs	R²				Q2
OC	0.375				0.281
WD	0.643				0.417

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

4.3 | Mediation Analysis

To test the mediation effect of OC between the direct POP-WD relationship, we used two step approach in which first we ran a simple regression model to check the impact of POP on WD. The result of this relationship can be seen in Figure 2 and Table IV, which shows a positive and significant relationship between POP and WD. In the next step, we ran a model including a mediator into the model and the results as shown in Table IV which indirect effect of ($POP \rightarrow OC \rightarrow WD = 0.378, p < 0.01$). Figure 3 shows the direct relationship between POP and WD reduced at a substantial level, however, it remained also significant ($\beta = 0.179, p < 0.01$). Given that both direct and indirect are statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ and the variation inflator factor is not greater than 80, this is evidence of the partial mediation effect of OC between POP-WD relationship (see e.g., Hayes, 2014, Hair et al., 2014). Thus, we conclude that our hypothesis H4 was partially supported.

Table 4

Mediation Analyses

Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	t value	p value	VAF	Mediation?
Model 1:							
Excluding all variables							
POP→WD	0.557	-	-	14.253	0.000	-	-
Model 2:							
Including mediator							
POP→WD	0.179	-	0.557	3.684	0.704	-	-
POP → OC → WD	-	0.378	-	10.459	0.000	68%	Partial

4.4 | Moderation and Moderated-Mediation

Finally, we put the moderator of AL into the model as hypothesized in our theoretical framework as depicted in Figure 1. To run moderation analysis, given that formative second-order construct of WD, we used a two-step approach in which first the model was run taking the construct of WD as a second-order reflective formative and latent score of WD were stored then using these scores model was again run in the next phase (see e.g., Hair et al., 2021). The results summary of this full model 3 is presented in Figure 4 and Table V, it is evident here that AL significantly moderated the relationship of OC→WD the size of the moderating effect of -0.254, $p < 0.01$. The moderating effect is depicted in slope analysis in Figure 5, it means that in model 3, the simple effect between OC→WD when taking AL at an average level is $\beta = 0.495$, however, it decreases with the size of moderating effect with the high level of AL +1SD i.e., $0.495 - 0.254 = 2.41$ and vice versa (see e.g., Hair, et al., 2021).

Table 5

Moderation and Moderated Mediation

Predictors	Model 3			
	OC	WD	Interactional effect	Moderated-mediation?
POP	0.612***	0.119*		
OC		-0.495***		
AL		-0.371		
AL*OC→WD			-0.256**	
AL*POP→WD			-0.008 ^{NS}	

POP → OC → WD at AL +1SD	0.155 ^{NS}	YES
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***p<0.01, *p<0.05, NS non-significant*

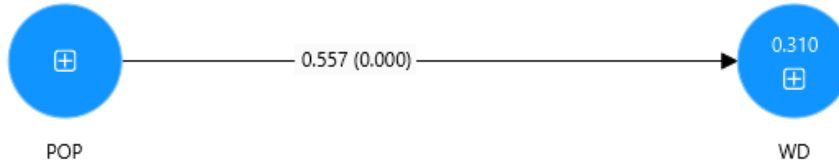


Figure 2: Model 1 (Direct relationships of POP and WD excluding mediator and moderator)

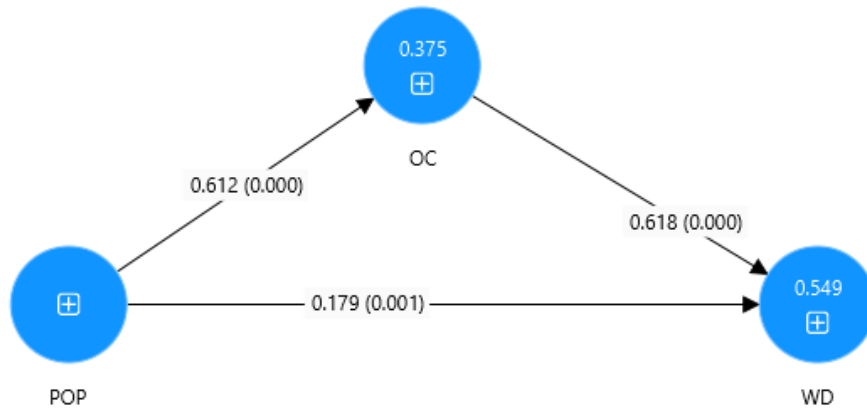
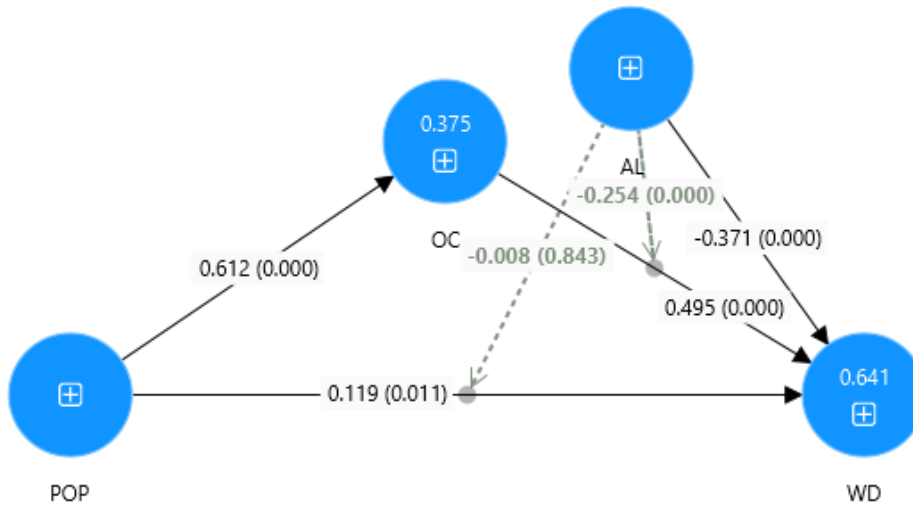


Figure 3: Model 2 (Direct and indirect relationships of POP, OC and WD excluding Moderator)



P values are given in the parenthesis in all the above figures.

Figure 4: Model 3 (Full model including mediator and moderator)

Further, the indirect effect of POP → OC → WD = 0.155 (on AL at +1SD) in model 3 also reduced and became non-significant at a significance level of 0.05, it implies that the indirect effect is also contingent on the moderator variable which means at higher values of AL the indirect relationship weakens and becomes non-significant while lower values of AL, it strengthens as shown in Figure 6 of simple slope analysis. However, we did not find the interaction effect of AL -0.008, p > 0.05 on the direct path of POP → WD. In this way, our two hypotheses of moderation affect H6, and moderated-mediation H8 substantiated while H7 was not supported.

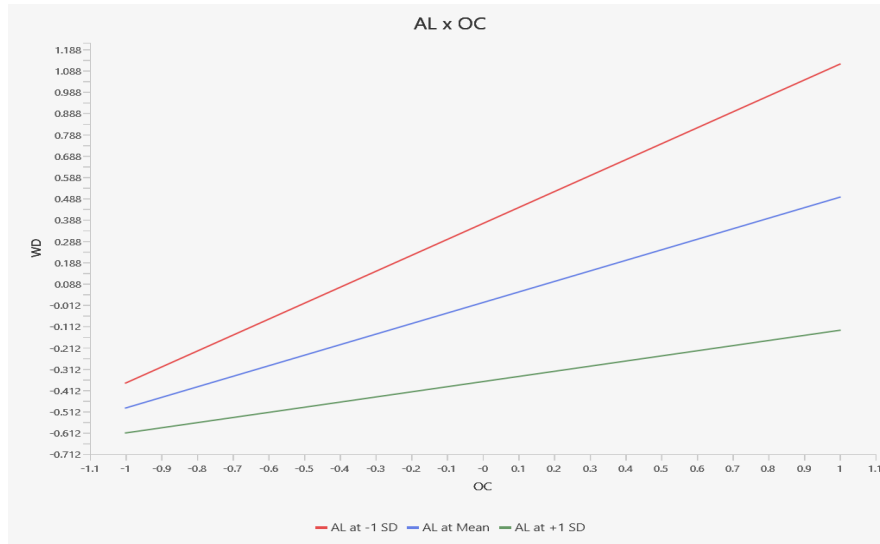


Figure 5: Simple slope analysis AL*OC→WD

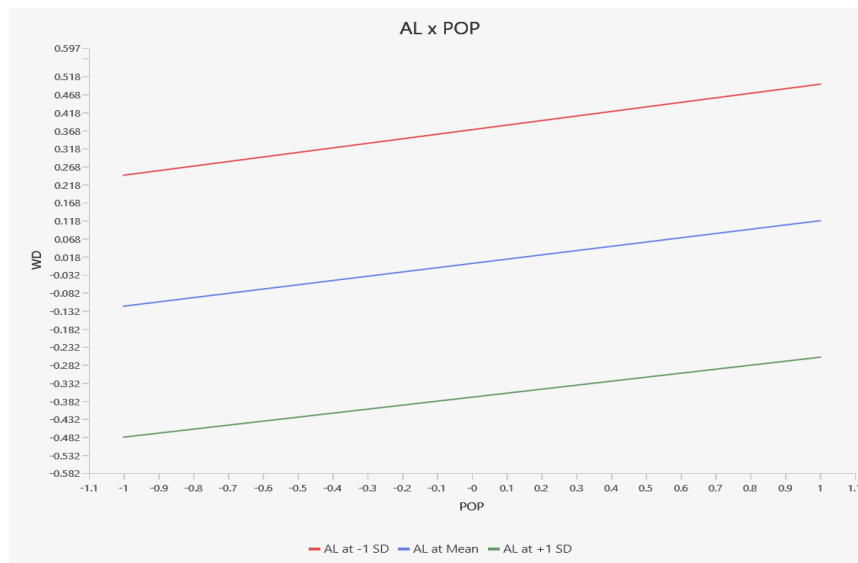


Figure 6: Simple slope analysis AL*POP→WD

5 | DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Since the development of the construct of POP, an increasing amount of research demonstrates that politics directly influences employees' attitudes and behavior at work (Rosen et al., 2014). However, limited research to date has been carried out that explores the underlying mechanisms between the POP and worker behaviors, especially WD. This restricts our comprehension of the motivations of employees to engage in WD as a reaction to POP. This kind of ignorance makes it difficult for us to organize and carry out treatments meant to lessen aberrant conduct, which is a POP side effect (Meisler et al., 2020). To fill this research gap and such understanding, this study is the first of its kind in which with the integration of SET and JDR theories we developed a model and empirically tested that explains not only the underlying mechanism through which POP links to WD but also advanced the literature about the boundary condition explaining when such link is reduced or further fueled up. In this way, our study continues to the extant literature in the following ways. First, the study established some new direct relationships and others replicated in a newer country and organizational setting. For instance, the study found a positive direct relationship between POP and WD similar to previous studies (Khattak et al., 2021; Wiltshire et al., 2014; Zettler and Hilbig,

2010). Next, our study also replicated the positive relationship in line with the previous research between POP and OC (Chiaburu et al., 2013) as well as OC and WD (Evans et al., 2011; S. Li & Chen, 2018). Moreover, according to the theoretical rationale our study explored the inverse relationship between AL and WD given that AL as resource and resources holder.

Second, our study introduced a novel underlying mechanism of organizational cynicism that actually influences the relationship between POP and WD being a mediator. By highlighting the role that negative organizational level attitudes play in elucidating the detrimental effects of POP, this study contributes to our understanding of the mechanism by which POP is related to WD. Such research is limited and sparse in the literature. Third, the most striking feature of this study is about the exploration of boundary condition when the adverse direct and indirect effects of POP to employee's behavior are mitigated. To this end, our study not only introduced a new mediator that fuels up the POP towards WD, but also elevating mechanism of AL to this adverse effect in a single study, which is very rare in the literature if not absent. Finally, the cultural background of this study provides further insight into its contribution. Research from Western countries has shaped most of our knowledge of POP and WD, despite the topic's significance for academic and managerial practice worldwide. The current study adds the Pakistani context to the literature, which is majorly Western-centric.

For practicing managers, this study has several important implications. First, the descriptive finding of our study suggests that higher POP was observed in the surveyed universities (mean=4.88) on 7-point scale. This is alarming because this may engender a number of negative consequences not only to employees' attitudes and behaviors but at the organizational level at large. Second, our study empirically confirmed the direct and indirect effect via OC of POP on WD in these institutions. It means that with the highest political charged work environment, employees as social exchange mechanisms or due to reaction of strain due to POP and engage in WD which include for WDo as theft, property damage, absenteeism, tardiness, sabotage, misuse of resources and WDi as harassment, bullying, incivility, gossip and rumor-spreading, physical aggression, and verbal abuse.

All these negative behaviors of the workforce are enough to sabotage an organization. Thereby, the national media repeatedly reported financial crunches in Khyber Pakhtunkwa, universities (business recorder, May 17, 2021). To avoid such crises, we propose first that high-ups in the universities should bring the level of POP to a minimum, by ensuring merit and justice-based decisions. In this way, they may reduce the perception of OC among the employees which is a negative attitude that fueled up the POP and thus engaging works into WD as empirically shown in the findings of this study. Moreover, our study results showed that AL mitigates such relationships, therefore, we encourage administrators of these universities to practice AL style. Furthermore, training of such leadership style may improve their performance as AL and ultimately reduce WD by practicing.

6 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Some limitations of this study pave the way for further research. First, the cross-sectional nature of this study design restrains causal effects between the hypothesized relationships of the study. For future research with at least time-lagged or for more deeper understanding of causal effects, we recommend for longitudinal design to test such effects. Second, though our statistical results confirmed no severe issue of CMV, yet chance of this bias cannot be totally ruled out. Therefore, we suggest multi-source data to further replicate the relationships of this study. Third, the authors' personal and professional networks enabled them to gather a convenience sample for the statistical analyses, which although raised the participation rate yet may have limited the findings' generalizability. Moreover, the sample was based on the southern region's public universities of KP, Pakistan. Therefore, for larger generalizability of the findings, it may be extended to other organizational and country contexts using some form of probability sampling procedure. Though our study provides one very relevant mediator and moderator in the relationship of POP and WD, future research can further explore more new mediators and moderators to better understand this important relationship of POP and WD.

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