

Politics, Justice, and Trust: Examining the Influence of Perceived Organizational Politics, Organizational Justice, and Leadership Trust on Employee Turnover Intention

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ABSTRACT

Employees judge organizations not only through formal policies but also through everyday decisions about recognition, promotion, access to opportunities, and managerial support. This study examined how perceived organizational politics, organizational justice, and leadership trust relate to turnover intention, and whether tenure and employment status modify selected relationships. A quantitative-dominant mixed-methods design was used. Survey data from 342 employees across different organizational settings were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), mediation analysis, measurement invariance testing, multigroup analysis, and conditional probabilistic queries. Four open-ended questions were analyzed descriptively to provide contextual explanations of workplace politics, fairness, reasons for leaving, and reasons for staying. The measurement model demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity. Perceived organizational politics significantly predicted turnover intention ($\beta = .483, p < .001$). The paths from organizational politics to organizational justice ($\beta = .475, p < .001$) and leadership trust ($\beta = .456, p < .001$) were also significant but positive, contrary to the hypothesized negative directions. Organizational justice and leadership trust did not significantly predict turnover intention, and neither mediated the politics-turnover relationship. Tenure significantly differentiated the politics-turnover relationship, with the one-to-three-year group showing a stronger path than employees with less than one year of service. Qualitative responses emphasized favoritism, personal connections, career growth, compensation, leadership quality, recognition, and work environment. The findings position perceived organizational politics as a salient retention concern while showing that employee departure is a broader, multi-factor decision that varies across employment circumstances.

Keywords: perceived organizational politics; organizational justice; leadership trust; turnover intention; employee retention; mixed methods

INTRODUCTION

Employees rarely decide to stay with or leave an organization because of one event alone. The decision often develops through repeated experiences: how work is recognized, how opportunities are distributed, whether rules appear consistent, and whether leaders respond credibly to concerns. Formal policies

provide structure, yet organizations are also social environments in which relationships, influence, alliances, and access to decision-makers can shape how employees experience their jobs.

Personal relationships and professional networks are not inherently problematic. They become a managerial concern when employees believe that influence carries more weight than competence, performance, or established procedures. This perception is central to perceived organizational politics. Kacmar and Ferris (1991) emphasized the subjective nature of politics by developing the Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS), shifting attention from whether politics objectively exists to how employees interpret political behavior in their work environment.

Perceived politics matters because employees respond to what they believe is happening around them. De Clercq, Khan, and Haq (2023) found that perceptions of dysfunctional political games were associated with stronger turnover intentions, partly through reduced willingness to adapt to colleagues. Political environments can therefore become more than a source of frustration; they can alter employees' expectations about whether effort and competence will lead to valued outcomes.

Politics is closely related to organizational justice because many political perceptions emerge around decisions concerning scarce resources. Organizational justice refers to employees' judgments about fairness in outcomes, procedures, interpersonal treatment, and explanations. Employees may accept an unfavorable decision when they understand the criteria and regard the process as credible. The same decision may be interpreted very differently when it appears to be influenced by favoritism or personal connections. Recent evidence continues to connect organizational justice with turnover-related outcomes. Khanam et al. (2024), for example, found organizational justice to be relevant to turnover intention among health-care employees, while Zantua, Teng-Calleja, and Caringal-Go (2024) reported a meaningful role for organizational justice in turnover intent among Filipino employees.

Leadership trust adds another layer to these judgments. Employees cannot observe every discussion behind a promotion, performance evaluation, organizational change, or resource allocation decision. They therefore rely partly on whether leaders are seen as honest, reliable, and legitimate in the exercise of authority. Research in nursing has shown that leadership conditions and organizational trust are related to turnover intentions, although the strength and direction of these relationships can vary across settings (Türkmen Keskin & Özduyan Kiliç, 2024).

Turnover intention is especially important because it captures employee withdrawal before actual separation. Employees may remain physically present while psychologically preparing to leave, searching for alternatives, or questioning whether the organization still offers a viable future. Actual resignation can carry recruitment, training, continuity, and knowledge costs, but turnover intention also matters before departure because employees may already be reallocating attention and effort away from the organization.

Existing studies provide substantial evidence concerning politics, justice, trust, and turnover, but these constructs are often examined in different combinations or within specific occupational settings. The present study contributes by examining the four constructs together across employees from different organizational and industry settings, while also testing whether tenure and employment status alter selected relationships. The mixed-methods design adds employee descriptions of politics, fairness, leaving, and staying to the statistical model, which is useful when quantitative findings differ from theoretical expectations.

The study addresses three related questions. First, how are perceived organizational politics, organizational justice, leadership trust, and turnover intention related? Second, do organizational justice

and leadership trust mediate the relationship between politics and turnover intention? Third, do employment tenure and employment status change selected relationships? The qualitative strand is used to interpret the statistical patterns and identify workplace experiences that employees themselves associate with politics, fairness, leaving, and staying.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework positions perceived organizational politics as the principal antecedent and examines its relationships with organizational justice, leadership trust, and turnover intention. Organizational justice and leadership trust were also tested as potential mediating mechanisms, while employment tenure and employment status were examined as effect-modifying factors in selected paths.

H9b: Employment Status acts as an effect-modifying factor influencing the association between Leadership Trust and Turnover Intention in the context of human capital management

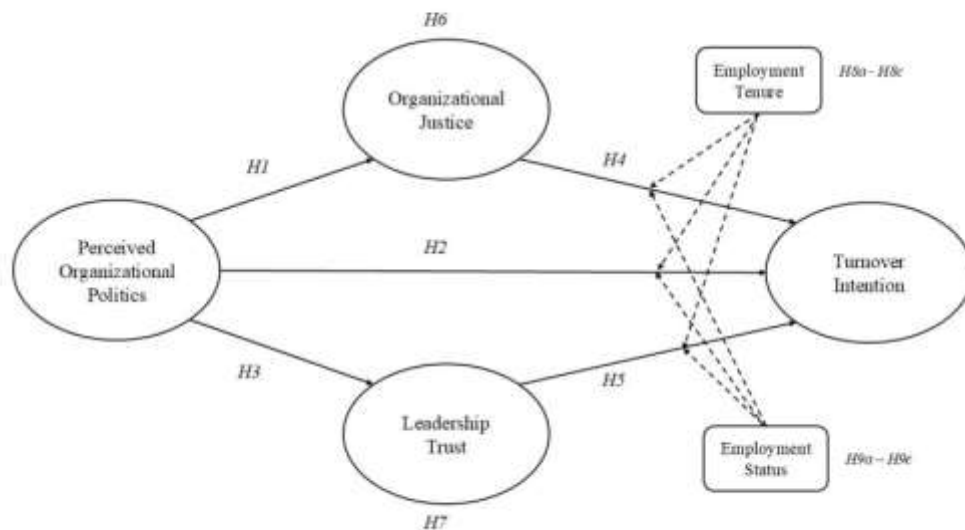


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study examined how perceived organizational politics, organizational justice, and leadership trust are associated with employee turnover intention. It further assessed whether organizational justice and leadership trust mediate the politics-turnover relationship and whether employment tenure and employment status modify selected relationships. The qualitative component was used to provide contextual explanations for the quantitative patterns.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Perceived Organizational Politics

Organizational politics reflects attempts to influence decisions, resources, or outcomes in settings where interests are not perfectly aligned. Political behavior is not automatically dysfunctional; networking and influence can help organizations coordinate work. The concern is the employee's perception that self-interest, favoritism, alliances, or personal access substitute for merit. Kacmar and Ferris (1991) established a widely used approach to measuring these perceptions. More recent work shows that

dysfunctional political perceptions can drain resources and increase employees' desire to leave (De Clercq et al., 2023).

The present study operationalized perceived organizational politics through items addressing personal relationships in workplace decisions, advantages arising from influential connections, the relative importance of influence and performance, informal alliances, and career opportunities that may depend on factors other than qualifications and performance. These items focus on the employee's interpretation of organizational processes rather than on proving the objective existence of political conduct.

Organizational Justice

Organizational justice concerns employees' perceptions of fairness. Its major dimensions commonly include distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, and informational justice. These dimensions capture whether outcomes are fairly allocated, decision procedures are consistent and impartial, employees are treated with dignity, and explanations are adequate. Colquitt (2001) demonstrated the multidimensional nature of justice and the importance of distinguishing among these forms of fairness.

Politics and justice are theoretically connected because political influence can undermine confidence in the process through which organizational outcomes are allocated. Employees who believe that promotion, recognition, or access to opportunities depends on relationships rather than transparent criteria may judge the system as less fair. Prior evidence generally expects a negative association between political perceptions and justice. The study therefore proposed H1: perceived organizational politics has a significant negative effect on organizational justice.

Leadership Trust

Trust in leadership reflects an employee's willingness to rely on leaders under conditions of vulnerability and incomplete information. The integrative model of organizational trust emphasizes perceptions of ability, benevolence, and integrity as central antecedents of trustworthiness (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). In organizational settings, employees form these judgments through repeated experiences involving communication, promises, fairness, and the legitimacy of decisions.

Political behavior may threaten trust when employees interpret leaders as tolerating favoritism or applying standards selectively. On this basis, H3 proposed a significant negative effect of perceived organizational politics on leadership trust. At the same time, justice and trust are conceptually related because fair procedures and respectful treatment can strengthen employees' willingness to rely on decision-makers.

Turnover Intention and Direct Effects

Turnover intention refers to an employee's conscious consideration of leaving, exploring outside employment, or accepting another suitable opportunity. It is not identical to actual turnover, but it is a meaningful indicator of withdrawal. Political environments may raise turnover intention when employees conclude that their future depends on factors outside their performance or control. Based on this logic and prior evidence (De Clercq et al., 2023), H2 proposed that perceived organizational politics significantly increases turnover intention.

Organizational justice and leadership trust were expected to reduce turnover intention. Recent studies have linked justice with lower turnover-related attitudes in health-care and public-sector settings (Khanam et al., 2024; Moon, Lim, & Kim, 2024), while Philippine evidence likewise suggests that justice can contribute to turnover intent within broader rewards and commitment processes (Zantua et

al., 2024). Accordingly, H4 proposed a significant negative effect of organizational justice on turnover intention. H5 proposed a significant negative effect of leadership trust on turnover intention.

Mediation and Employee-Group Differences

The original model also proposed that organizational justice and leadership trust might explain how politics translates into turnover intention. If political environments weaken fairness perceptions or leadership trust, those changes may in turn increase withdrawal. H6 therefore proposed mediation through organizational justice, while H7 proposed mediation through leadership trust.

The study further considered tenure and employment status because the meaning of workplace experiences may change as employees accumulate organizational experience or occupy different employment arrangements. Employees with more time in the organization have greater exposure to promotion systems, informal networks, and leadership practices. Employment status may also change expectations regarding security, progression, and dependence on supervisory decisions. H8a-H8c tested tenure as an effect-modifying factor for the OJ-TI, POP-TI, and LT-TI relationships, while H9a-H9c tested employment status as an effect-modifying factor for the same three relationships.

Study Hypotheses

H1. Perceived organizational politics has a significant negative effect on organizational justice.

H2. Perceived organizational politics significantly increases turnover intention.

H3. Perceived organizational politics has a significant negative effect on leadership trust.

H4. Organizational justice has a significant negative effect on turnover intention.

H5. Leadership trust has a significant negative effect on turnover intention.

H6. Organizational justice mediates the relationship between perceived organizational politics and turnover intention.

H7. Leadership trust mediates the relationship between perceived organizational politics and turnover intention.

H8a-H8c. Employment tenure modifies the organizational justice-turnover, politics-turnover, and leadership trust-turnover relationships.

H9a-H9c. Employment status modifies the organizational justice-turnover, politics-turnover, and leadership trust-turnover relationships.

METHODS

Research Design, Sampling, and Respondents

The study used a quantitative-dominant mixed-methods design. The quantitative strand was primary and tested the proposed relationships among perceived organizational politics (POP), organizational justice (OJ), leadership trust (LT), and turnover intention (TI). The qualitative strand consisted of four open-ended survey questions and was used to provide contextual explanations of workplace politics, fairness and trust, reasons for leaving, and factors that may encourage employees to stay.

The final quantitative analysis included 342 respondents from different employment settings. The study was intentionally not restricted to a single company, allowing workplace perceptions to be examined across varied organizational and industry contexts. The minimum sample size was assessed using the inverse square root and gamma-exponential approaches described by Kock and Hadaya (2018). The estimated minima were 76 and 55, respectively; thus, the final sample exceeded both requirements.

The sample was predominantly Gen Z (80.7%). In terms of tenure, 53.8% had been with their current organization for less than one year and 36.5% for one to three years. Employment status was distributed

across part-time/contractual (43.6%), regular/permanent (30.1%), and probationary (26.3%) categories. These distributions are relevant to the multigroup analyses because the study specifically examined whether tenure and employment status altered selected structural relationships.

Instrument

Data were gathered through an online questionnaire. The quantitative portion contained 20 Likert-type items: five for perceived organizational politics, six for organizational justice, five for leadership trust, and four for turnover intention. Responses used a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The qualitative portion included four open-ended questions asking respondents to describe situations associated with politics, fairness or unfairness and leadership trust, reasons good employees leave, and practices that could encourage them to stay.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary. Respondents were informed that the survey was for academic research, and the instrument did not require disclosure of employer names, supervisors, colleagues, or other personally identifying information. Responses were analyzed at the aggregate level.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage distributions were used to summarize respondent characteristics. PLS-SEM was used for the primary structural analysis. Internal consistency was assessed through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Convergent validity was assessed using factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was examined using HTMT2 ratios. Full collinearity VIF values were used to assess collinearity concerns (Kock, 2015). Mediation analysis tested H6 and H7. Measurement invariance testing preceded multigroup analysis of tenure and employment-status differences. The analysis was implemented in WarpPLS 8.0 (Kock, 2022).

During measurement-model assessment, OJ1, OJ6, and LT3 were omitted because of measurement concerns identified in the validity assessment. The final structural model therefore used the retained indicators rather than all original questionnaire items.

Qualitative Analysis and Integration

The open-ended responses were reviewed for recurring ideas and organized into descriptive themes corresponding to the four qualitative questions. The analysis was explanatory rather than intended as a stand-alone qualitative study. Themes were compared with the quantitative findings to identify convergence, divergence, and contextual explanations. In particular, the qualitative responses were used to interpret the significant POP-TI relationship, the nonsignificant OJ-TI and LT-TI paths, the unexpected positive POP-OJ and POP-LT coefficients, and the group differences involving tenure and employment status.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model Assessment

All four constructs met the reported internal-consistency criteria. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were .916 and .937 for POP, .878 and .925 for OJ, .945 and .960 for LT, and .933 and .952 for TI. After OJ1, OJ6, and LT3 were removed, AVE values were .750 for POP, .804 for OJ, .858 for LT, and .833 for TI. The retained factor loadings were significant at $p < .001$. HTMT2 ratios were below .85, and full collinearity VIF values ranged from 1.304 to 2.473, below the 3.30 threshold used in the analysis.

Table 1. Reliability and convergent validity of the study constructs

Construct	AVE	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability
Perceived organizational politics	.750	.916	.937
Organizational justice	.804	.878	.925
Leadership trust	.858	.945	.960
Turnover intention	.833	.933	.952

Note. OJ1, OJ6, and LT3 were omitted during measurement-model assessment.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model produced three significant direct paths from perceived organizational politics. POP significantly predicted OJ ($\beta = .475$, $p < .001$), TI ($\beta = .483$, $p < .001$), and LT ($\beta = .456$, $p < .001$). The POP-TI result supported H2. However, the POP-OJ and POP-LT coefficients were positive rather than negative. Because the measures were not reverse-coded, H1 and H3 were not supported in their hypothesized directions even though the paths were statistically significant. OJ did not significantly predict TI ($\beta = -.027$, $p = .308$), and LT did not significantly predict TI ($\beta = -.024$, $p = .329$); therefore, H4 and H5 were not supported. Neither OJ nor LT significantly mediated the POP-TI relationship, so H6 and H7 were also not supported.

Table 2. Structural model and hypothesis-testing results

Hypothesis	Path	β	p	Effect size	Decision
H1	POP $\rightarrow$ OJ	.475	$< .001$	.225	Not supported (opposite direction)
H2	POP $\rightarrow$ TI	.483	$< .001$	.232	Supported
H3	POP $\rightarrow$ LT	.456	$< .001$	.208	Not supported (opposite direction)
H4	OJ $\rightarrow$ TI	-.027	.308	.006	Not supported
H5	LT $\rightarrow$ TI	-.024	.329	.005	Not supported
H6	POP $\rightarrow$ OJ $\rightarrow$ TI	.006	.433	.003	Not supported
H7	POP $\rightarrow$ LT $\rightarrow$ TI	-.004	.454	.002	Not supported

The findings present a more complex view of turnover intention than the original model anticipated. Perceived organizational politics was the clearest and most consistent turnover-related variable. Its positive association with turnover intention is consistent with De Clercq et al. (2023), who showed that dysfunctional political perceptions can translate into a stronger desire to leave. In the present data, qualitative responses clarify why: politics was repeatedly associated with favoritism, personal connections, and unequal access to opportunities. Employees may tolerate disagreement or temporary difficulty, but political environments can undermine confidence that effort and competence will shape future outcomes.

The POP-OJ relationship was statistically significant but positive, contrary to the negative direction proposed in H1. The same pattern appeared for POP-LT. These results should not be interpreted as evidence that politics improves justice or trust. Instead, they indicate that employees may distinguish among different layers of organizational experience. An employee can perceive informal political influence while still judging some formal procedures as fair, or can perceive political maneuvering in the broader organization while continuing to trust an immediate supervisor. The cross-industry composition of the sample may also combine contexts in which politics and formal control systems coexist in different ways.

These unexpected directions warrant methodological caution. They could reflect context, item interpretation, response patterns, or the distinction between political activity and dysfunctional politics. They also highlight the value of reporting results that depart from theory rather than forcing coefficients into the expected narrative. Replication using independently validated scales and confirmatory measurement work would help determine whether the positive paths are robust or sample-specific.

Organizational justice showed a negative but nonsignificant path to turnover intention. This differs from studies in health care and public employment where justice has been significantly associated with turnover-related outcomes (Khanam et al., 2024; Moon et al., 2024). It also differs from Philippine evidence in which justice contributed to explaining turnover intent within a rewards-management model (Zantua et al., 2024). The qualitative findings help reconcile this difference. Respondents clearly valued fair treatment, but they also identified compensation, career growth, recognition, workload, workplace culture, and external opportunities as reasons for leaving. Justice may therefore be important without being sufficient to explain turnover intention independently in a heterogeneous sample.

Leadership trust followed a similar pattern. The negative coefficient was consistent with the expected direction but was not statistically significant. This does not imply that leadership is irrelevant. Respondents frequently identified poor leadership and toxic management as reasons employees leave, and the employment-status analysis showed that the LT-TI relationship differed between probationary and part-time/contractual groups. The aggregate result may therefore conceal subgroup-specific relationships, reinforcing the need to avoid treating employees as a homogeneous population.

The mediation tests further strengthen the conclusion that politics was more directly associated with turnover intention than originally proposed. Neither OJ nor LT carried the POP-TI relationship. One interpretation is that employees do not need to translate politics into a separate judgment of unfairness or distrust before considering departure. When political behavior signals that career outcomes depend heavily on influence, the political climate itself may be sufficient to make alternative employment more attractive.

Employment Tenure and Employment Status

Employment tenure significantly differentiated the POP-TI relationship. The path was .347 among employees with less than one year of tenure and .739 among those with one to three years; the group difference was significant ($p < .001$), supporting H8b. Tenure did not significantly differentiate the OJ-TI or LT-TI relationships (H8a and H8c not supported). Employment status also produced significant differences in selected comparisons. The POP-TI relationship differed between regular employees and part-time/contractual employees ($p = .022$), while the LT-TI relationship differed between probationary and part-time/contractual employees ($p = .026$). No employment-status comparison significantly differentiated the OJ-TI relationship.

The tenure analysis has particular practical value. The POP-TI relationship was substantially stronger among employees with one to three years of service than among those with less than one year. This period may represent a career-evaluation window: employees have moved beyond initial socialization, accumulated enough experience to understand how opportunity and recognition work, and begun comparing expectations with reality. The qualitative emphasis on career growth supports this interpretation. Retention risk may therefore increase when employees conclude, after sufficient exposure, that political barriers constrain their future.

Employment status also changed selected relationships. Regular employees, probationary employees, and part-time or contractual employees may attach different meanings to political behavior, leadership, security, and career opportunity. The significant pairwise differences suggest that the same organizational climate can produce different reactions depending on the employee's relationship with the organization. This finding supports a more segmented view of human capital management.

Qualitative Findings and Mixed-Methods Integration

Four recurring qualitative patterns gave practical meaning to the structural results. First, respondents described workplace politics primarily through favoritism, personal connections, unequal treatment, political alliances, gossip, hidden agendas, and promotion decisions that appeared disconnected from merit. These descriptions closely align with the significant POP-TI path because they frame politics as a threat to predictability and career opportunity rather than merely as interpersonal discomfort.

Second, fairness and leadership trust were described through consistency, transparency, equal application of rules, employee voice, respect, and clear explanations. Respondents therefore treated justice and trust as important qualities of a desirable workplace. At the same time, their explanations of turnover were broader. Reasons for leaving included limited career growth, compensation, poor leadership, toxic workplace conditions, unfairness or favoritism, lack of recognition, workload and burnout, and better external opportunities.

Third, reasons for staying largely mirrored the reasons for leaving: fair treatment, supportive leadership, competitive compensation, recognition, career development, a healthy work environment, open communication, and work-life balance. This pattern helps explain why OJ and LT were not significant independent predictors of turnover intention in the full structural model. Fairness and trust matter, but employees described departure as a multi-factor decision in which career and economic considerations also play major roles.

Fourth, the qualitative emphasis on career growth helps interpret the tenure result. Employees with one to three years of service may have had enough time to understand the organization's informal networks and promotion practices while still actively evaluating whether the organization offers a credible long-term future. Political barriers may therefore carry greater retention consequences at this stage than during the earliest months of employment.

CONCLUSION

This study examined perceived organizational politics, organizational justice, leadership trust, and turnover intention within a single mixed-methods framework. Perceived organizational politics emerged as the clearest variable associated with turnover intention, while organizational justice and leadership trust did not independently predict turnover intention and did not mediate the politics-turnover relationship. Tenure and employment status further showed that employee responses are not uniform. The qualitative responses reinforced the salience of favoritism and personal influence while also

showing that employees leave for broader reasons involving career growth, compensation, leadership, recognition, workload, and workplace culture. Taken together, the findings suggest that retention is shaped by both the formal employment offer and employees' interpretation of how the organization actually works. For organizations, the credibility of merit, opportunity, leadership, and decision processes may be as important as the policies themselves in shaping whether employees continue to see a future with the organization.

IMPLICATIONS

The results position perceived organizational politics as a human capital concern rather than merely an interpersonal issue. Managers cannot eliminate influence from organizational life, but they can reduce the extent to which employees believe personal connections override merit. Promotion, performance management, succession, recognition, and access to developmental opportunities are especially sensitive because they signal what the organization actually rewards.

The practical issue is visible meritocracy. A process can be formally fair yet still lose credibility if employees cannot understand why decisions were made. Clear criteria, documented reasoning, consistent communication, and meaningful opportunities for employee voice can reduce the informational gaps in which political interpretations grow. This is particularly important when managers exercise discretion, because discretion without explanation can be mistaken for favoritism.

The nonsignificant OJ-TI and LT-TI paths should not lead organizations to dismiss fairness or leadership trust. Instead, these factors should be treated as part of a broader employment experience that also includes compensation, development, recognition, workload, and career opportunity. Retention programs that focus on only one lever are unlikely to address the range of reasons employees described for leaving.

The one-to-three-year tenure group deserves specific managerial attention. Onboarding addresses entry, but the present findings suggest that retention risk can intensify after employees have had time to observe the organization's informal systems and assess their prospects. Career conversations, transparent progression criteria, development opportunities, and credible recognition practices may be especially important during this period.

Finally, the employment-status findings caution against a one-size-fits-all retention strategy. Regular, probationary, and contractual employees have different levels of organizational investment and different expectations of stability and progression. Managers should therefore interpret engagement and turnover signals in light of employment circumstances rather than assuming that the same workplace experience carries the same meaning for all groups.

LIMITATION

Several limitations define the boundaries of the findings. First, the study is cross-sectional; consequently, the structural paths indicate associations and predictive relationships rather than causal effects. Longitudinal designs would be useful for examining whether political perceptions precede changes in trust, justice, or actual turnover over time.

Second, the study relies on self-reported perceptions and intentions. This is appropriate for constructs such as perceived politics and trust, but common-source measurement can inflate or obscure relationships even when collinearity diagnostics are acceptable. Future research could combine employee surveys with supervisor assessments, organizational records, or actual turnover data.

Third, respondents came from different organizations and industries, which strengthens breadth but also introduces contextual heterogeneity. Industry, organizational size, occupation, and organizational culture may shape how political behavior is interpreted. Future studies could replicate the model within specific sectors and then compare results across contexts.

Fourth, the qualitative component consisted of open-ended survey responses rather than interviews or focus groups. It was therefore useful for contextual explanation but did not provide the depth of a stand-alone qualitative inquiry. Follow-up interviews could examine how employees distinguish between legitimate influence, networking, favoritism, and dysfunctional politics.

Finally, the unexpected positive POP-OJ and POP-LT coefficients warrant replication. Future studies should use established scales, document any reverse coding explicitly, and consider confirmatory factor analysis or alternative model specifications before drawing strong theoretical conclusions about these paths.

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