



What Affects Perceived Organizational Politics Among Public Health Workers in Zamboanga City, Philippines?

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) on Perceived Organizational Politics (POP), and the mediating role of Public Service Motivation (PSM) on this relationship. An online survey was administered to 85 employees of the Department of Health Zamboanga Peninsula - Center for Health Development in Zamboanga City. The collected data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation and mediation analyses in Jamovi. The results showed that, while the direct relationship between POS and POP was weak and non-significant, PSM was positively correlated with both constructs. The mediation analysis revealed that PSM acted as a suppressor variable, counteracting the negative effect of POS on POP, indicating that POS paradoxically heightened employees' sensitivity to organizational politics. Although the findings were limited by sample size and homogeneity, they provided critical insights into employee perceptions in public sector organizations. The results offered a nuanced view of the conventional relationship between POS and POP as opposites along a single continuum; instead, a parallel relationship is possible, especially for employees with high PSM.

Key word: Perceived Organizational Support; Perceived Organizational Politics; Public Service Motivation; Public Health Workers; Suppression Model

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1. INTRODUCTION

Support is a foundational concept for organizational success, as employees tend to respond positively to their organization's goals when they feel supported and cared for (Eisenberger et al., 2020). However, conflicts often arise in human relationships within organizations when employees perceive themselves as disadvantaged or treated unfairly (Karim et al., 2021; Wijewantha et al., 2020). Such perceived unfair treatment can lead employees to engage in self-serving behaviors to gain an advantage (Biçer & Büyükyılmaz, 2019). The pervasive presence of organizational politics across different levels is frequently cited as a contributing factor to these perceptions (Hochwarter et al., 2020). This study aims to provide insights into how organizational support affects perceived organizational support, thereby enhancing our understanding of why interpersonal conflicts emerge in organizational settings.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) are negatively associated with each other. They are at opposite sides of the spectrum (Kim et al., 2023). The data showed that when POS is high, POP is low. The opposite is true in organizations with high POP. However, nuanced perspectives have been offered to this field. POS has been treated as a general background or a default feature of organizations. So, it does not capture changes in dynamics or temporal fluctuations in organizational politics (Hochwarter et al., 2020). Additionally, this conception fails to account for the possibility that employees in organizations with high POP may also believe their organizations are supportive (Jeong & Kim, 2022). Nevertheless, some studies suggest that culture is a contributory factor in this highly politicized environment (Dhanasekar & Anandh, 2025). For instance, Asian cultures tend to be collectivist, favoring group loyalty (Lim & Moon, 2025; Nazir et al., 2024) and thriving in networks (Guo et al., 2019).

The relationship between POP and POS is regarded as highly conditional (Albloush et al., 2019). Several studies have argued that POS should act as a "buffer" (Jabeen & Siddiqui, 2022) or a psychological barrier to minimize the adverse effects of POP in organizations when it is introduced as a moderator in the POP-outcome relationship (Kim et al., 2023). Cognitive and perceptual moderators are essential psychological components in determining whether employees interpret organizational support and organizational incidents as a venue for opportunities or a potential threat (Bhattarai, 2021).

A majority of studies on the perception of organizational politics examine its relationship with workplace outcomes through a moderating or mediating variable, such as resilience (Tziner et al., 2021) or political skills (Demissie et al., 2023). Ugwu et al. (2023) reported that there is a gap in comprehensive knowledge regarding the exact psychological and behavioral mechanisms that link organizational politics to attitudes and behaviors. This study builds on this idea of psychological gap to explain how organizational support influences perceptions of organizational politics in organizations. Drawing on Public Service Motivation (PSM), or the general belief among employees that societal interests should be prioritized (Wang et al., 2020), this study explores the role of motivation among public employees in appraising organizational settings within their organizations. Particularly, the study assesses whether public employees with high PSM are sensitive to organizational politics while at the same time believing that their organizations sufficiently support them.

This study explores the mediating role of PSM in the relationship between POP and POS. It examines how these factors interact, emphasizing that public employees with high PSM are motivated by a sincere desire to serve the public interest. Such employees are driven by altruism and a commitment to organizational goals, rather than personal rewards or perceptions of fairness. Their strong dedication makes them more resilient in the face of challenges, as their motivation stems from a genuine commitment to the organization's mission. By understanding this dynamic, the research highlights the importance of PSM in fostering a motivated and resilient public workforce capable of

positively impacting organizational effectiveness. Overall, the study underscores that high PSM enhances the positive effects of POP on POS, shaping a more committed and resilient public service environment.

This study is structured into four comprehensive parts. It begins with a literature review that outlines the overall landscape of POP and POS studies, highlighting key debates within organizational research. Next, the methodologies section explains the quantitative tools and analyses employed, including a mediation analysis. The third part presents the study's findings in detail, providing a thorough discussion and interpretation. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes these results, summarizes the main findings, and outlines their implications in relation to the study's aims and arguments. This organized approach ensures a clear flow from background context to methodology, results, and overarching insights, facilitating a cohesive understanding of the research.

Organizational research has consistently emphasized that organizational politics and organizational support are interconnected concepts that significantly impact workplace outcomes. Studies show that organizational politics involve actions perceived as machinations, leading to distrust, negatively affecting job satisfaction and commitment, and increasing stress and turnover intentions (Dhanasekar & Anandh, 2025; Karim et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2023; F. Ugwu et al., 2023). In contrast, POS reflects employees' perceptions of how much their organization values and supports them, which correlates with higher engagement, dedication, and overall organizational effectiveness (Choi, 2020; Imran & Aldaas, 2020; Ritz et al., 2021; Saadeh & Suifan, 2020). While perceived organizational politics (POP) often exacerbates negative feelings and reduces trust, perceived organizational support (POS) acts as a buffer, mitigating these adverse effects and fostering a healthier work environment (Bergeron & Thompson, 2020; Jabeen & Siddiqui, 2022). Understanding the interplay between these concepts helps organizations manage workplace climate effectively, promoting employee well-being and performance, ultimately ensuring organizational success.

Most research has explored the relationship between POP and POS, viewing them as related concepts (Bergeron & Thompson, 2020). Although they are distinct, they are said to lie along the same continuum (Kim et al., 2023). POP represents employees' subjective perception of others' manipulative, self-interested actions (Biçer & Büyükyılmaz, 2019; Wijewantha et al., 2020), while POS relates to employees' belief that their organization values their well-being, fostering positive perceptions (Eisenberger et al., 2020). In this light, both occupy the same organizational social environment, even though they seem to be at opposite ends of the continuum. Interestingly, Kanwal et al. (2019) found that both concepts positively moderate the relationship between benevolent leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior, challenging the idea that they are opposites. This suggests that organizations can be both supportive and highly political (Jeong & Kim, 2022). The findings imply that POP and POS are not fixed features of an organization; instead, they change and evolve in response to the dynamic social environment.

The recent studies, however, are consistent with the general predictions of the concepts. POP maintained its links with increased anti-social behaviors (Ugwu et al., (Ugwu et al., 2023; Ugwu et al., 2022), such as workplace ostracism and conflict (Karim et al., 2021; Ullah et al., 2019) and physical withdrawal (Dhanasekar & Anandh, 2025), while adversely impacting prosocial behaviors, like helping colleagues (Rashid et al., 2019) and sharing ideas and knowledge (Bergeron & Thompson, 2020; Kuar & Kang, 2022), and straining workplace friendships, ultimately increasing interpersonal conflicts (Biçer & Büyükyılmaz, 2019). Similarly, POS has been shown to be positively associated with prosocial behavior (Shabbir et al., 2021) and improved work engagement (Astutu & Udin, 2020; Choi, 2020; Rubel & Kee, 2013). These findings highlight the contrasting effects of POS and POP on workplace behavior and well-being. This also implies an inverse relationship; for instance, a low POS environment is associated with negative outcomes (Rubel & Kee, 2013; Xu & Yang, 2018).

The studies reveal a consistent pattern across the constructs; they often confirm expected results. This may be due to the homogeneity of sample populations, such as banking (Iqbal et al., 2024; Rashid et al., 2019) and higher education institutions (Jabeen et al., 2021; Nazir et al., 2024), which might not reflect those from other industries. There is also a call for theoretical shifts; Hochwarter et al. (2020) argue that POP is dynamic, changing with organizational context, and that longitudinal studies are needed to better understand its development (Kim et al., 2023). More importantly, POP encounters difficulties in explaining its direct relations with its outcomes. Researchers often consider mediators like aggression and anxiety (Karim et al., 2021; F. Ugwu et al., 2023; Ullah et al., 2019, 2023) or moderators such as political skills, personality traits (Bhattarai, 2021; Demissie et al., 2023), and resilience (Tziner et al., 2021). Further variables are needed to clarify the relationships between the concept and its outcomes.

Although numerous moderating and mediating variables are employed to better understand the relationship between POP and POS and their respective outcomes, little is known about why some studies yield nuanced results. For example, highly political environments may also exist within highly supportive work settings (Jeong & Kim, 2022; Kanwal et al., 2019), suggesting that other factors influence employee behavior. Some studies provide explanations for this phenomenon; for instance, Park and Lee (2020) found that intrinsic motivation enables highly motivated employees to perform well in political environments, though they are also susceptible to politicization. From this point, Public Service Motivation (PSM), or the intrinsic drive of public employees to contribute to the public good and societal interests (Lim & Moon, 2025), which is said to be autonomous and does not easily fluctuate (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2020) It provides a pathway to explore the non-continuum relationship between POP and POS.

Much of the existing literature draws on Social Exchange Theory (SET). This theory posits that employee relationships in organizations are guided by norms of reciprocity (Ugwu et al., 2022) and by feelings of appreciation and self-worth (Iqbal & Haroon, 2024). When employees feel their organization supports them, they feel a sense of obligation to give back to it (Jabeen & Saddiqui, 2022). Conversely, when employees believe that the organization is unfairly and unequally treating them, this perception signals negative organizational outcomes (Karim et al., 2021; Jeong & Kim, 2022). Trust theory further elaborates the POP-POS relationship when using SET (Kim et al., 2023). Moreover, SET is often integrated with the Perceived Organizational Support Theory to explain POS as a critical resource or buffer against negative organizational outcomes (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Imran & Aldaas, 2020; Ladao et al., 2022). Lee et al. (2019) noted that SET facilitates the interdisciplinary dialogue between psychological and sociological underpinnings of PSM.

Methodologically, research on POP and POS commonly uses Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) (Albloush et al., 2019; Dhanasekar & Anandh, 2025; Demissie et al., 2023; Karim et al., 2021; Khanipour & Fathi, 2020; Tziner et al., 2021). SEM allows researchers to test theoretical models, describe causal dependencies, and examine mediation and moderation effects (Soung, 2021; Ridwan et al., 2020). Similarly, Hayes PROCESS Macro Analysis is used as an alternative to SEM when the research involves moderation and mediation analysis (Kanwal et al., 2019; Kaur & Kang, 2022; Ullah et al., 2019; Ullah et al., 2023). Although PROCESS Macro does not estimate unobserved (latent) variables, it suffices for predefined mediation, moderation, and conditional process models. Other models employ Standard Regression or Correlation Analysis to estimate the strength of the relationship between variables (Iqbal & Haroon, 2024; Rashied et al., 2019; Al Jisr et al., 2020). The use of regression in mediation analysis is possible but used to a lesser extent (Jabeen et al., 2021; Jabeen et al., 2022).

As demonstrated above, the results in the POP and POS studies are mostly the same. However, there are added layers to Asian contexts. Dhanasekar and Anandh (2025) found high levels of POP in the Indian construction industry due to societal norms and a highly hierarchical structure. Moreover,

Asian cultures tend to be collectivist, and loyalty to the in-group is paramount (Jeong & Kim, 2022; Lim & Moon, 2025; Nazir et al., 2023). Guo et al. (2019) also noted influential networks, such as *guanxi*, that help employees get favors. Considering these factors, Asian organizations in non-Asian countries would be considered highly politicized. Alcoba and Phinaitrup (2019) highlighted that in the Philippines, especially in Local Government Units, political perceptions are heightened. Nonetheless, given that organizational settings in the Asian context tend to lean towards informal networks and maneuvering, a highly supportive organization is also possible in these settings. Thus, it offers a non-continuum view of the POP-POS relationship.

Across the studies, several themes emerged. Firstly, a majority of studies support the distinct yet relatedness of POP and POS. This idea supports that when POP is high, POS is low, and vice versa. In this manner, both concepts occupy a single continuum where they are opposites, signifying an inverse relationship. Although nuanced perspectives have been offered (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2019; Jeong & Kim, 2022; Kanwal et al., 2019). Secondly, SET bridges the concepts together. The theory posits that the organization and its members are engaged in a reciprocal, if not transactional, relationship where favors are met with feelings of indebtedness. The theory allows researchers to capture dynamics within organizations. Thirdly, both concepts require either a moderating or mediating variable to explain their relationship with each other and organizational outcomes. This is why most studies use SEM and the PROCESS macro to further examine the strength of their relationship and explain how and why it exists.

In sum, while important insights have been made, there remains a need to situate the relationship between POP and POS as parallel concepts that explain employees' responses in organizational social settings. Even when POP and POS act as moderating and mediating variables, they still follow their inverse relationship. Furthermore, this study uses PSM, the pre-existing beliefs of employees that prioritize the common good and societal interests as paramount goals for their organizations (Lim & Moon, 2025), to assess the strength of the POS-POP relationship among public employees. PSM is argued to be an independent, intrinsic motivation that is relatively unaffected by organizational disruptions (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2019). Thus, this study proactively considers the possibility of supporting a non-continuum argument in POP and POS research.

2. METHOD

The study employed a quantitative method to explore the relationships among the constructs. Quantitative method refers to the use of measurements of quantifiable variables to test hypotheses and observations (Creswell, 2003). Moreover, correlation analysis allows the determination of relationships among variables without inferring causality (Holton III & Burnet, 2005). The research on the studied organizational variables is a quantitative inquiry that uses correlation and moderation analyses to answer the research questions.

The study adopted the self-reported survey. These surveys rely on the specific accounts of individuals regarding their experiences, beliefs, and perceptions (Blozis & Villareal, 2024). These self-reported measures are used to assess the experimental attributes of specific variables experienced by individuals (Truijens et al., 2023). Studies on the attitudes and behaviors of members of the organization were conducted through self-reported surveys, as this method allows individuals to report their feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors directly. Considering that the research explores the correlation between POS and POP, and the mediating effect of PSM, both of which are measured through individual perceptions. Hence, the method was appropriate for the study.

The respondents of the study are health workers working in Zamboanga City. The respondents were selected based on the following criteria: they must be working in the Department of Health Zamboanga Peninsula - Center for Health Development (DOH ZP-CHD) for at least 6 months and be

assigned to or report to the regional office. Such criteria ensure that the respondents have enough experience to develop a perception of the organization's culture and internal dynamics. The participants were selected through a snowball sampling.

Data were collected through self-reported surveys using Google Forms. Before the link was disseminated, a request was submitted to the Regional Director's office for endorsement and distribution to the regional office's departments. The individual responses were consolidated in Google Sheets. The data were then encoded in Jamovi (version 2.6.44) for data cleaning and treatment. The study consisted of a 16-item scale for PSM (Kim et al., 2023), an 8-item scale for POS (Eisenberger, 1997), and a 6-item scale for POP (Hochwarter et al, 2003). The respondents documented their responses by answering a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), not sure (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5).

The data were analyzed using Pearson's Correlation Analysis to assess the mediating effects of PSM on the relationship between POP and POS. Correlation is a measure of the relationship between two or more variables that may change as those variables change (Samuel & Okey, 2015). Correlation may be positive or negative, depending on the type of relationship, and may range from +1.00 to -1.00. A strong correlation is observed when the value is near 1, with a significant p-value (< 0.50) (Funder & Ozer, 2019).

Hypotheses Testing

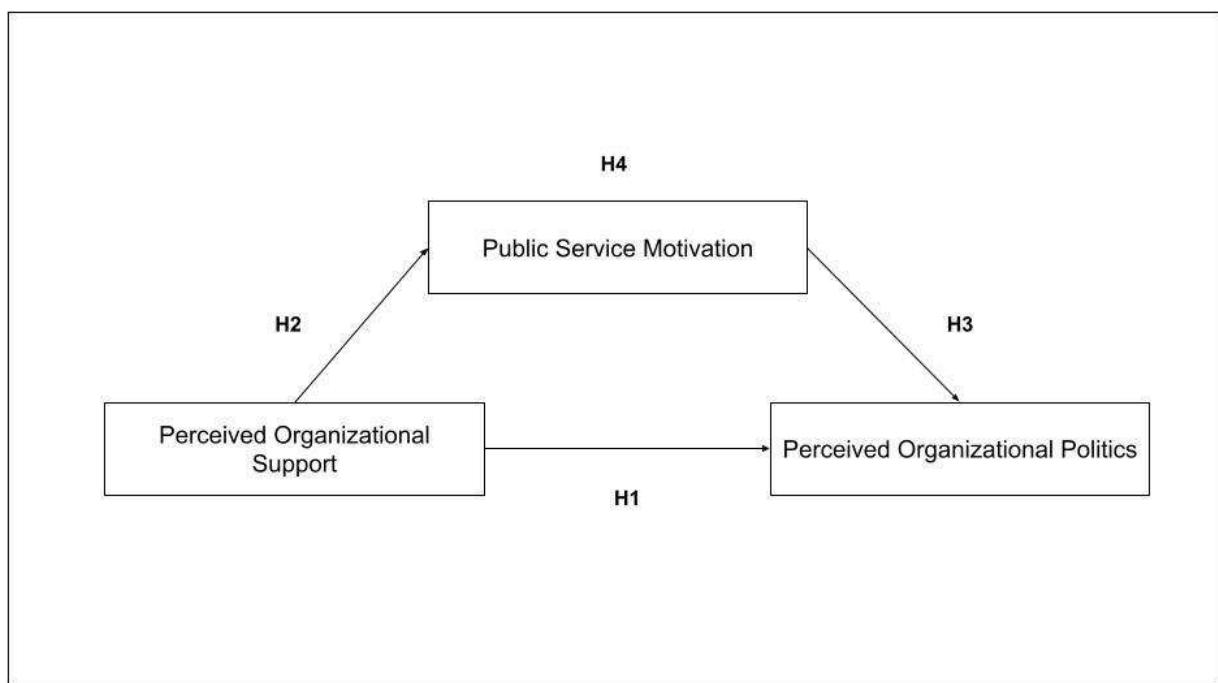


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

In this study, POS and PSM are the variables identified that affect the POP of public health workers. PSM is also theorized to mediate the relationship between POS and POP. POP is the dependent variable of this study. It is described as employees' subjective perception of events that may constitute manipulative, self-interested actions (Wijewantha et al., 2020). Based on the literature, POP is generally hypothesized to decrease when the organization is perceived as supportive and when employees are intrinsically motivated. In this study, POP referred to public health workers' perceptions of their colleagues' actions and in-group dynamics.

POS, as the main predictor, reflects employees' belief that their organization values their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2020). It is theorized to have a positive impact on organizational goals and outcomes. In this research, POS was measured by the level of agreement with the statement that the organization considers employee contributions and supports their overall well-being.

H1: Perceived organizational support negatively influences perceived organizational politics.

On the other hand, PSM represents the intrinsic drive of public employees to prioritize societal interests and the common good over personal rewards (Wang et al, 2020). It is believed to be an autonomous and relatively stable psychological factor (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2020; Lim & Moon, 2025). In this study, PSM referred to public health workers' motivation to serve and to prioritize the public's interests and organizational missions. Both POS and PSM are tied to norms of reciprocity. Thus, this study hypothesized that employees who feel valued and cared for by their institution would be more committed to the organization's public-facing mission.

H2: Perceived organizational support positively influences Public Service Motivations.

H3: Public service motivation negatively influences perceived organizational politics.

Lastly, to further explain the POS-POP relationship, PSM was tested as an intervening variable, acting as a psychological component. While this study hypothesized based on the prevailing POS-POP relationship in the literature. Nonetheless, to validate whether POS and POP are parallel realities in the Asian context, PSM, being relatively autonomous and stable, accounts for this phenomenon.

H4: Public service motivation mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and perceived organizational politics

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study examined the factors that affect public employees' perceptions within their own organizations. The literature demonstrates an inverse relationship between POS and POP in organizations: when one is high, the other is expected to be low. This assumption posits that POP and POS are on opposite sides of the continuum. This research examines this relationship by introducing PSM as a mediating variable that explains why it may not fit Asian contexts. Using an online survey of all employees working in the DOH ZP-CHD, the hypotheses were tested in Jamovi.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Data

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Age	85	2.31	1.372	1	5
Sex	85	1.58	0.497	1	2
Job Type	85	1.51	0.503	1	2
Length of Service	85	1.86	1.187	1	4

The study sample consisted of 85 (N=85) participants, with 49 (57.6%) female and 36 (42.4%) male. Responses were evenly distributed among employees: 42 (49.4%) were engaged in administrative functions, while 43 (50.6%) held health technical roles, such as Health Program Officers. The average government experience among respondents was 1.86 years (SD = 1.187), with 50 individuals (58.8%) having served for five years or less. It is important to note that the sample size is below standard statistical thresholds. Nonetheless, multiple studies have used mediation analysis with smaller sample sizes (Fritz & McKinnon, 2007).

Based on the results, PSM showed positive and highly significant correlations with POS ($r = 0.558$, $p < 0.001$) and POP ($r = 0.321$, $p < 0.01$), as shown in Table 3. The findings support hypothesis 2, which suggests a positive relationship between POS and PSM, and reject hypothesis 3, which assumes a positive correlation between PSM and POS. Additionally, hypothesis 1 was rejected, which proposed a positive correlation between POS and POP. Overall, the results indicate that employees with greater motivation to serve the public are also more likely to believe their organization cares for them. However, these same employees are sensitive to organizational politics. Conversely, POP and POS showed a weak, negative relationship ($r = -0.096$), which was not statistically significant, suggesting no reliable link between employees' sense of support and their perception of organizational politics.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

	POS	PSM	POP
POS	—		
PSM	0.558***	—	
POP	-0.096	0.321**	—

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The positive correlation between PSM and POS is expected, as both constructs indicate a relatively favorable self and organizational appraisal. Although the constructs measure different perceptions, nonetheless, a connection is framed by the norm of reciprocity (Sihag & Dhoopar, 2023). Employees respond to organizational support by feeling obliged to help the organization achieve its goals (Imran & Aldaas, 2020; Lou, 2020). Moreover, employees with high POS tend to exhibit civic virtue, although directed towards the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2020). They tend to be altruistic and help their colleagues (Ridwan et al., 2020). PSM is also anchored on the idea of reciprocity: giving back to the public and serving its interests (Ritz et al., 2021). A supportive environment fosters a sense of reciprocity; as a result, employees perform better to achieve their organization's goals. In government organizations, a supportive environment motivates people to contribute to achieving the agency's or department's goals in order to serve the public.

The rejection of hypothesis 1 and the acceptance of hypothesis 3 tell a nuanced perspective. The majority of the literature demonstrates an inverse relationship between POS and POP (Kim et al., 2023): When one is high, the other is low. Although statistically significant, the path coefficient is negative, suggesting a possible inverse relationship. This study has argued that this relationship might differ in a collectivist culture where loyalty and in-group thinking are rewarded (Jeong & Kim, 2022; Lim & Moon, 2025). However, the findings show that they are not correlated with each other; any indication to the contrary is not statistically significant. Interestingly, PSM is positively correlated with POP (H3). The path coefficient is 0.321, signifying a low yet positive correlation. Some scholars argued for POS to act as a buffer against the negative effects of POP in organizations (Jabeen et al., 2022). Kim et al. (2023) proposed additional psychological components that will also act as barriers. Similarly, Bhattacharai (2021) proposed psychological factors to explain how employees perceived organizational settings. PSM fits this psychological component. Some studies found that motivated employees are sensitive to organizational politics (Wang et al., 2020). Park and Lee (2020) found that intrinsically motivated employees still perform well, although they tend to be more suspicious. This suggests that people with

high PSM are engaged and focused on achieving public value, and therefore more likely to be aware of and sensitive to internal activities that may undermine their mission.

Table 3. Mediation Estimates

Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p	% Mediation
Indirect	a x b	0.521	0.251	2.076	0.038	43.2
Direct	c*	-0.686	0.155	-4.419	<0.001	56.8
Total	c + a x b	-0.165	0.265	-0.623	0.534	100.00

Given the result on PSM-POP association, a mediating analysis was conducted to assess the mediating effect of PSM on POS-POP relationship. Path estimates were calculated to determine the strength and direction, as well as their statistical significance. Results show that path *a* (POS to PSM) estimate is 0.617 ($p < 0.05$) and path *b* (PSM to POP) estimate is 0.844 ($p < 0.001$). The results demonstrate a significant positive association. Conversely, the path *c* (POS to POP) estimate is -0.686 ($p < .001$), indicating a highly negative association between POS and POP. All paths are significant, qualifying the parameters set for a mediation analysis (Fritz & McKennon, 2007; McKennon et al., 2000).

Table 4 shows the mediation analysis, outlining the effect of PSM on the connection between POS and POP. The indirect effect estimate is 0.521 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that PSM significantly mediates the relationship between POS and POP. Conversely, the direct effect remains significant, with a path estimate of -0.686 ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that POP continues to exert a strong direct influence. The total effect estimate is -0.165 ($p > 0.05$), which implies that the overall relationship between POS and POP is weak and not statistically significant when PSM is excluded. The overall mediation estimates indicate a partial mediating effect, partially supporting hypothesis 4.

However, the results point to an inconsistent mediation. An inconsistent mediation happens because the estimate of the total effect (-0.165) is closer to zero than the direct effect (-0.686). This implies that PSM and the direct path between POS and POP are in a tug-of-war, suggesting a more complex relationship. The inconsistent mediation described here reflects a suppression model. Suppression occurs when the direct effect influences the outcome in one direction, while the indirect effect pushes it in the opposite direction (McKinnon et al., 2000). An earlier insignificant, weak, negative correlation suggested an inverse relationship, aligning with most findings in the literature. This implies that POS positively impacts organizations by reducing employees' perceptions of politics. However, this beneficial effect is suppressed by an intervening psychological process (PSM), in which POS paradoxically increases employees' sensitivity to or perception of POP. Employees driven by public interest tend to react strongly to self-serving behavior (Park & Lee, 2020). As a result, the overall observable relationship between POS and POP appears weak because these opposing forces cancel each other out.

Rethinking Organizational Realities

The study revealed the organization's parallel realities. The employees' perceptions of organizational support and organizational politics are not fixed on a single continuum but relatively parallel concepts that dynamically interact with the psychological makeup of the employee. This parallel phenomenon is pertinent in collectivist cultures like the Philippines, where strong in-group loyalties

and the ability to thrive in informal networks can be seen as both forms of organizational support and political maneuvering. At the outset, a cultural layer of explanation may account for the findings; however, in the Asian context, such a phenomenon is a norm, so a psychological component better substantiates the parallel realities in organizations.

The study's significant finding was a direct challenge to the prevailing single continuum conception of the POS-POP relationship. For the surveyed employees, there was no reliable, direct link between feeling supported and perceiving a less political environment. It was found that the individual PSM of employees contributes to this relationship. PSM acted as a powerful driver of performance, resilience, and commitment to the organization. However, the same commitment made employees more attuned and critical of internal activities that may undermine the organization.

The suppression model provides strong empirical support for the view that POS and POP can function as parallel rather than opposite concepts on a single continuum. The data confirm what some scholars have previously suggested: an organization can be perceived as both highly supportive and highly political simultaneously (Jeong & Kim, 2022; Kanwal et al., 2019). The incumbent theory used to explain the traditional inverse relationship is Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that employees operate on norms of reciprocity. In a transactional SET model, employees who feel supported should feel obligated to reciprocate with positive attitudes, such as ignoring or downplaying organizational politics. However, this study reveals the limitations of a purely transactional model in a public service context.

This study answers the call from researchers such as Ugwu et al. (2023) for a deeper exploration of the "psychological mechanisms" that link organizational politics to employee attitudes. PSM emerges as that critical mechanism. For public servants, motivation is not based solely on transactional reciprocity, but on an intrinsic desire to contribute to the public good. This dedication makes them acutely aware of—and sensitive to—any political behaviors that could derail their mission-oriented work, even within an otherwise supportive context.

The plausibility of this parallel existence is further amplified within Asian, collectivist cultural contexts. In such environments, organizational dynamics are often shaped by a strong emphasis on loyalty, in-group favoritism, and the cultivation of informal networks (Guo et al., 2019). This creates a unique paradox: these strong interpersonal networks can be perceived as organizational support by insiders, while simultaneously being viewed as political maneuvering by mission-driven outsiders with high PSM. This revised theoretical understanding has direct consequences for how we approach leadership in public sector organizations.

Considering the results, there are two practical implications for public sector management. Firstly, support initiatives are insufficient. Simply investing in programs to increase feelings of organizational support may not be enough to mitigate the negative effects of a political climate. This research demonstrated that for the public health workers, such support can inadvertently increase sensitivity to political maneuvering. To counter this paradox, public sector leaders must nurture mission-driven employees, the second implication of this study. Leaders must recognize that employees with high PSM are critical assets that may boost transparency and mission integrity. These employees consistently perform regardless of the level of organizational support provided. Effective management of this group involves reinforcing the alignment between organizational actions and its public service mission, thereby validating the core motivation of these dedicated employees.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the study add a layer to the simplistic generalization of the inverse relationship between POS and POP. By identifying a suppression model, the research offers a framework for how the concepts can be parallel, confirming that an organization can be both supportive and political (Jeong & Kim, 2022). Furthermore, PSM played a critical role in this relationship. Employees driven by societal interests are more attuned to and critical of internal activities, a finding supported by prior research showing that intrinsically motivated employees are more suspicious of organizational dynamics (Park & Lee, 2020). Such a role of the PSM helps address some gaps in the organizational setting literature.

Beyond its theoretical value and surface-level support, the findings indicate that while POS reduces perceptions of politics, support initiatives alone cannot be assumed to resolve the issue of a politicized climate. Government institutions must effectively manage employees with high PSM, as these individuals are often aware of internal politics. Such employees can help foster a more transparent and mission-oriented environment.

There were several limitations to this study. Firstly, due to the small sample size and homogeneity, it is recommended that future research use a larger sample from different government sectors. Secondly, incorporating qualitative data, such as interviews or group discussions, can enrich the literature by providing a more in-depth understanding. Finally, following the suggestions of scholars such as Hochwarter et al. (2020) and Kim et al. (2023), researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to better capture the dynamic nature of organizational politics and to understand how employee perceptions of support and politics evolve.

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