

## Politics in the Organizational Life: A Study of the Public Sector of Pakistan

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**Abstract:** Political behavior is a common aspect of organizational life. Literature shows organizational politics as an aversive phenomenon therefore, various efforts have been made in different settings to know the causes and consequences of politics. This study attempts to explore the reactions of organizational politics prescribed by Hirschman's theory of organizational decline (1970) from public sector employees of Pakistan. Through questionnaire survey, 109 responses were collected randomly. Results showed perception of politics as a significant predictor towards exit, voice, loyalty and neglect behavior. However, loyalty emerged as a key outcome of prevailing politics in the organization. Discussions and managerial implications are discussed based on the results. [Adnan Riaz and Dr. Aisha Akbar. **Politics in the Organizational Life: A Study of the Public Sector of Pakistan.** *Life Sci J* 2013;10(12s):34-38]. (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 8

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### 1. Introduction

The present era is witnessing dynamic organizational environment due to over increasing trend towards rightsizing and downsizing. This proliferate insecurity, uncertainty and skepticism among employees which further weaken the bond between employee and employer. Employees take some extra measures to secure themselves under such turbulence environment (Rosen, Harris and Kacmar, 2009). This also induces other employees to exercise political tactics for their personal gain. Ultimately, organizational environment is gradually politicized and politics becomes a common aspect of every organizational life.

At the other extreme, employees have divergent views about politics at workplace. Usually employees define politics in terms of power, conflict, influence, coalitions and authority grabbing practices because employees use various influential strategies to secure their personal benefits under political environment (Vigoda, 2003). Their efforts range from lobbying, deception, unethical maneuvering and bypassing chain of command. Under political environment, only few employees secure undue advantages but it politicizes the whole environment of the organization (Muhammad, 2007).

Despite various categorical efforts made to analyze the nature, causes and consequences of organizational politics, still some gaps exist because authors and experts have categorized organizational politics and political behavior as a contextual phenomenon (Hofstede, 1993; Drory and Vigoda-Gadot, 2010; Vigoda, 2001). Its intensity differs from culture to culture depending upon various situational

and work related factors. Therefore, there is a strong need to figure out the key variables causing politics and emerging as outcomes of organizational politics.

Vigoda (2001) contends that most of the researches in examining organizational politics are originated from American settings. More contribution is required from other parts of the world especially from Asian countries.

Since organizational politics is associated with negative attitudinal and behavioral outcomes such as turnover intentions (e.g. Vigoda-Gadot and Kapun, 2005; Harris, Andrews and Kacmar, 2007; Poon, 2004; Miller et al., 2008; Bodla and Danish, 2008) reduced job satisfaction (e.g. Ram and Prabhakar, 2010; Poon, 2003; Vigoda, 2000, Vigoda-Gadot, 2007; Poon, 2004; Buenge et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2008; Bodla and Danish, 2008) and organizational commitment (e.g. Vigoda, 2000; Wilson, 1995; Miller, 2008; Bodla and Danish, 2008) therefore, more research efforts are required to know the causes and consequences of organizational politics from different cultures. This would help to curtail the negative outcomes of organizational politics (Poon, 2006).

#### **Theoretical Support;**

Various theories provide the support to this study. According to system theory, a system comprises various subsystems interconnected to achieve goals or objectives. For continuous working of the system, all the integrated components and subsystems should work harmoniously to achieve goals and objectives (Greene, 1991; Stein, 1974). Pakistan has recently been transformed from the dictatorial system of governance to the democratic

system, therefore this study is an attempt to know the perception of politics and its outcomes after the changed governance at macro level. Changes at macro level may have trickle down effects at micro level (Kuper, 2003). Resource dependence theory (RDT) also helps to explain the argument which explains the possession-reliance relationship between two parties. Since organization needs resources therefore, they have to rely at external agents which become a source of power. At broader level, since public organizations largely depend on government agencies for financial and other resources therefore, they have to comply with the influence exerted by these parties (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). Bodla and Danish (2009) also contended that since public organizations are directly associated with external regulatory bodies which are controlled by political government therefore, this facilitate and augment the politics in the organizations.

### **Hirschman's Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect (EVLN) Theory**

The consequences of perceived politics is based on the reactions prescribed by Hirschman's theory of organizational decline (1970) which posit four responses to any aversive situation in an organization or society i.e. EVLN (exit, voice, loyalty and neglect). "Exit" explains leaving the situation without making any effort to fix the problem (exit). The second response "Voice" is to speak up as a protest (voice). "Loyalty" refers to stay committed and avoid any negative feeling. The last response "neglect" unveils the negligent behavior of individuals by assigning reasons for the unfavorable events going on (Hirschman's, 1970).

Hirschman's *Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect Theory to Organizational decline* (1970) has provided the underpinning to various researches in different domains. It was initially emerged to explain the reactions to customer dissatisfaction with a product. However, the theory has been used in various other environments to know the reactions of individuals as a response to aversive and unfavorable situations such as antigovernment swings (Weber, 2011), shareholders dissatisfaction (Kostant, 1999), dissatisfaction with public services (Dowding and John, 2008), voters discomfort (Feld, 1997), dissatisfaction with health services provided by the government (Dowding and John, 2011), double deviation scenarios (customers facing both the initial service failure and a failed service recovery (Casado-Díaz and Nicolau-González, 2011) etc. Particularly in organizational behavior literature, reactions to organizational cynicism (Naus, Iterson and Roe, 2007), job dissatisfaction (Farrell, 1983) psychological contract breach (Turnley and Feldman,

1999; Si et al., 2008) and job insecurity (Sverke and Hellgren, 2001) have also been evaluated.

Specifically examining the organizational politics literature, Ferris, Harrell-Cook and Dulebohn (2000) perhaps made the first attempt to know the reactions to perception of politics in the form of turnover intentions (exit) and political behavior (voice). Bacharach and Lawler (1980) claimed political behavior as an alternate to voice element because employees start engaging in political behavior instead of raising their voices.

Later Vigoda (2000) examined various reactions to perceived politics such as exit, neglect, job performance, turnover, absenteeism and organizational citizenship behavior. Exit and neglect were based on the theoretical proposition of organizational decline prescribed by Hirschman's (1970).

The contribution made by Vigoda (2001) was more related with the present study because the author endeavored to study various reactions of perceived politics specified by Hirschman's (1970) such exit, voice, loyalty and neglect by comparing British and Israeli cultures. The attempt was basically focused at comparing the reactions to organizational politics in two different environments of England and Israel. Results confirmed British with more negligent behavior (neglect) and exit intentions while comparatively less loyal with their respective organizations as compared to Israeli employees. Voice element lacked any significant difference. The study of Vigoda (2001) was also worth considering because the author selected the sample other than North America which had been studied many times before. The author emphasized to study the European and Asian culture to know differences and similarities (Vigoda, 2001).

Drory and Vigoda-Gadot (2010) also claimed power and politics as contextual phenomenon. This study was an attempt to know the consequences of organizational politics from South Asian context to satisfy the cultural concerns of various authors (Hofstede, 1993; Drory and Vigoda-Gadot, 2010; Vigoda, 2001).

## **2. Material and Methods**

### **Subjects/Sample;**

The purpose of the study was to know the consequences of organizational politics in the public sector of Pakistan. This study was confined to public sector organizations working under the control of federal government and located in the capital territory of Pakistan. Politics perception can be held by anyone working at any position and level. Therefore, all the employees working at various hierarchical levels were considered as the population of the study.

### Procedures;

Questionnaire survey was used to collect the data through convenience sampling. Previous researches have also been conducted to select samples from various levels because organizational politics can be perceived by anyone across the hierarchy (Parker et al. 1995; Bodla and Danish, 2009, Vigoda-Gadot, 2007; Vigoda-Gadot and Kapun, 2005; Byrne, 2005). The questionnaire contained brief information about the purpose and significance of the study, and confidentiality measures. Most of questionnaires were mailed with return envelop through local postage service. In some cases, self-administered approach was also employed.

In total 400 questionnaires were floated. However, the response rate was quite low. Later reminder letter and telephonic efforts were also made. In total 117 questionnaires were received back. Among them 109 usable questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 15.0.

### Measures

#### Perceptions of Organizational Politics (POPs)

A shorter version of perceptions of organizational politics scale was adopted from the study of Kacmar and Ferris (1991) which was later used and validated by Kacmar and Carlson (1994) and Vigoda and Cohen (2002). The scale comprised 12 items measuring various facets of perception of politics based on five point likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliability of the scale in this study was reported high as 0.67, as compared to previous studies (e.g., 0.74 in Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; 0.77 in Vigoda and Cohen (2002).

#### Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect

To measure the reactions of perception of politics, various items were adopted from the study of Naus, Iterson and Roe (2007). Naus et al., (2007) adopted a precise version to measure exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect from the study of Hagedoorn and colleagues (1999). Five items were given to measure each variable constituting 20 items to measure the behavioral manifestations of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. Five point likert scale was used to measure each item from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### 3. Results

Demographical data shows that most of the respondents (75% apprx) are less than 35 years old. This figure is quite aligned with the tenure of employment which is reported as 6-10 years for 66% of employees. This also indicates that majority of

young respondents took part in the survey. Whereas nearly 51% of the respondents were earning between Rs. 21,000/- to 40,000/-. Due to recent inflation, government has provided reasonable pay increases to public employees. This is the reason most of the employees (<70%) indicated their earnings more than Rs. 21,000/-.

14 years of education (graduation) is considered as the reasonable qualification to get a job in Pakistan. Therefore, 48% of the respondents claim as having graduation degree. Another encouraging figure is obtained about master's degree holder as 54%. Pakistan is a male dominant society therefore; gender category reveals that 74.3% of the respondents are male while 25.7% female respondents participate in the study.

Table 1. Demography of the Respondents

Measures	Items	f	%age
Age	20 or below	13	11.9
	21-25	17	15.6
	26-30	22	20.2
	31-35	31	28.4
	36-40	9	8.3
	41 or Above	17	15.6
Income Level	Below 10,000	12	11.0
	11,000-20,000	15	13.8
	21,000-30,000	32	29.4
	31,000-40,000	23	21.1
	41,000-50,000	15	13.8
	Above 50,000	12	11.0
Measures	Items	f	%age
Tenure of Employment	Less than 1 year	7	6.4
	1-5 yrs.	11	10.1
	6-10 yrs.	72	66.1
	10 or above	19	17.4
Gender	Male	81	74.3
	Female	28	25.7
Highest Level of Education	Bachelors	48	44.0
	Masters	59	54.1
	MS/M.Phil	2	1.8
	PhD	0	0.0

Descriptive results (Table-II) show relatively high politics perception and comparatively high exit tendencies among employees in the public sector of Pakistan. To know the association between variables of the study, correlation analysis is applied. Results show significantly high relationship between the variables of the study as given in table-II. Correlation coefficients in relation with perception of politics are found for exit ( $r=0.34$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), voice ( $r=0.34$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and neglect ( $r=0.38$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). However, significant negative relationship is found between perception of politics and loyalty ( $r= -0.33$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

Table 2. Correlation Analysis

		Mean	Std. Dev	1	2	3	4	5
1	POP	3.10	0.55	(0.67)				
2	Exit	3.31	0.80	0.34**	(0.80)			
3	Voice	2.66	0.72	0.34**	-0.01	(0.68)		
4	Loyalty	2.77	1.22	-0.33**	0.01	-0.19**	(0.90)	
5	Neglect	2.27	0.97	0.38**	0.31**	0.21**	0.13	(0.82)

\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.001  
Reliability estimates in parentheses.

Table 2. Regression Results for the Consequences of Perception of Politics

	Exit	Voice	Loyalty	Neglect
	0.50***	0.45***	0.74***	0.33***
R	0.34	0.35	0.34	0.38
R2	0.12	0.19	0.12	0.15
Adj. R2	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.14
F	14.22***	14.35***	13.82***	18.30***
t	3.77	3.79	-3.71	4.28

\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.001  
Note: n = 109. Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect as criterion variables.

#### 4. Discussions

Organizational politics is considered as the common feature of work life and various efforts have been made to know the causes and consequences of this particular construct. However, very few efforts were made to know the reactions out of organizational politics and its intensity particularly from developing world (Vigoda, 2000). This study endeavored to fill this gap by incorporating Hirschman's (1970) theory of organizational decline as an outcome of perceived politics. Exit, voice, loyalty and neglect were assumed be the key outcomes of organizational politics.

Results showed perception of politics as key predictor towards exit, voice, loyalty and neglect. Exit emerged as the most significant reaction to prevailing politics in the organization. Previous researches have also established positive link between perception of politics and employees turnover intentions (Valle and Perrewe, 2000; Miller et al., 2008). Under politicized environment only few employees can take undue advantage but it drastically dampens the morale of rest of the competing employees (Muhammad, 2007). Ultimately they have left with no option except to leave the organization. In this study, exit as a construct was measured in terms of quitting intentions which were found high among employees. However, labor market conditions in Pakistan are not much favorable. Employees willing to exit and can't find place to quite pose another challenge. This induces employees towards deviant work behavior which was operationalized as neglect behavior in this study. Employees start avoiding work assignments and put fewer efforts.

Likewise, absenteeism and punctuality issues also emerge in response to aversive work environment. This is probably the reason; the relationship between neglect behavior and exit has been significant and strong although it is not hypothesized.

Voice as a construct emerged as the second highly significant response to organizational politics. In Pakistan, employees usually avoid blowing whistle in response to any wrongdoings or malpractices going on in the organization (Bashir et al., 2010). The results of the present study reveal that employees also strive to work out solutions to address the politicized environment of the organization under which employees pursue their personal agenda even at the cost of organizational goals (Kacmar et al., 1999). If employees raise their voices to come up with suggestions for how to prevent these circumstances, it shows their loyalty. Rising politics may deteriorate work performance (Vigoda, 2000) therefore, loyal employees come up with solutions to benefit their organizations.

Another interesting finding concluded, is about the loyalty of the employees with their organization which is drastically affected by the organizational politics. When employees consistently face the unjust and biased decisions, this negatively influences employees' loyalty. In the present study, perceived politics showed significant negative relationship with employees' loyalty. However, this fact should also be treated cautiously, because loyalty in this study was operationalized as optimistic feelings of the employees. In Pakistan, employees remain confident about the situation which will turn around and everything will work out fine. However,

over a longer period of time if situations remain same, employees may start developing quitting intentions which may further lead towards actual turnover.

### 5. Practical Implications

Organizational politics has been proved as unproductive function in most of the previous studies. This study also confirmed organizational politics as an unfavorable phenomenon which further induces employees towards exit, voice and neglect behavior. Managers should take strong measures to eradicate self-serving behavior. As prescribed in previous researches, counter measures taken in this regard can be employees' involvement in decision making, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, justice and transparency, trust climate, work autonomy, career advancement etc (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Muhammad, 2007; Rosen et al., 2009; Vigoda, 2001).

### 6. Suggestions for Future Study

Perceived politics was taken as predictor to exit, voice, loyalty and neglect in this study. Future study may explore the link in terms of process model according to the intensity of the reactions. Perception of politics may predict voice, voice may predict neglect and if nothing work out it further lead towards exit intentions.

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