Power Dynamics, Organizational Politics, and Employee Outcomes

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100400060

Received: 06 April 2026; Accepted: 11 April 2026; Published: 29 April 2026

ABSTRACT

Power dynamics and organizational politics are central features of organizational life that shape employee attitudes, behavior, and workplace outcomes. This study investigated the relationships among expert, legitimate, and coercive power, organizational politics, perceived fairness, motivation, productivity, psychological safety, and voice behavior.

Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected in China from 12 December 2025 to 20 March 2026 through a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, WhatsApp, WeChat, and campus recruitment. A total of 312 valid responses were analyzed. The instrument consisted of 27 Likert-scale items measuring the nine constructs. Data were analyzed in Python using Google Colab.

Reliability analysis showed strong internal consistency for all scales (Cronbach's α ranging from 0.854 to 0.915). Pearson correlation results indicated that coercive power was positively associated with organizational politics ($r = .496$, $p < .01$), while expert power ($r = -.228$, $p < .01$) and legitimate power ($r = -.236$, $p < .01$) were negatively associated. Organizational politics showed significant negative correlations with perceived fairness ($r = -.562$), psychological safety ($r = -.589$), motivation ($r = -.522$), productivity ($r = -.439$), and voice behavior ($r = -.518$). Perceived fairness emerged as a central connecting construct across outcomes, and psychological safety displayed the strongest positive association with voice behavior ($r = .682$, $p < .01$). Multiple regression confirmed coercive power as the strongest predictor of organizational politics ($\beta = 0.452$). Mediation analysis further revealed that perceived fairness partially mediated the negative effects of organizational politics on employee outcomes (38–45% mediation).

These findings highlight that the way power is exercised strongly influences the political climate and, in turn, key employee outcomes. Organizations should reduce coercive practices and build fair, competence-based, and psychologically safe environments to enhance motivation, productivity, and constructive voice.

Keywords: power dynamics, organizational politics, perceived fairness, psychological safety, voice behavior, motivation, productivity

INTRODUCTION

Background and Significance

Power and politics are enduring features of organizational life that affect how individuals think, behave, and perform at work. From resource allocation and incentive systems to informal alliances that shape decision-making, power dynamics and political behaviors influence nearly every aspect of organizational functioning. Despite decades of research, the combined effects of different types of power, the political climate they create, and their impact on multiple employee outcomes remain incompletely understood, particularly in comprehensive quantitative studies.

This study draws on French and Raven's (1959) taxonomy of social power, which distinguishes coercive, legitimate, and expert power. These bases create distinct psychological environments that influence whether employees perceive their workplace as fair, safe, and supportive of contribution. Organizational politics — the use of power to advance personal or group interests — often acts as a key mediating mechanism. A highly political climate tends to reduce perceived fairness, erode trust, lower motivation, and discourage employees from voicing ideas.

Most existing research has examined these relationships in isolation. The present study addresses this gap by examining all nine constructs simultaneously in a single integrated framework with a diverse sample of 312 organizational members in China.

Statement of the Problem

Extant research has explored various pairwise relationships — such as the effect of coercive power on job satisfaction, or organizational politics on performance — but tends to examine these linkages in isolation. A holistic assessment of how expert, legitimate, and coercive power relate to organizational politics, and how organizational politics subsequently correlates with perceived fairness, motivation, productivity, psychological safety, and voice behavior simultaneously, is notably absent. Furthermore, most prior studies rely on small, homogeneous samples, limiting generalizability. This study addresses these limitations by employing a larger, occupationally diverse sample (N = 312) and capturing all nine constructs within a single instrument, enabling integrated pattern analysis.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study pursues three objectives: (1) to assess the psychometric properties of a multi-construct instrument measuring power types and their organizational consequences; (2) to examine the correlational relationships among the nine constructs; and (3) to identify which constructs serve as pivotal connectors in the broader network of power and organizational outcomes. The following research questions guided the inquiry:

RQ1: How do expert, legitimate, and coercive power relate to perceptions of organizational politics?

RQ2: How does organizational politics relate to perceived fairness, motivation, productivity, psychological safety, and voice behavior?

RQ3: What is the role of perceived fairness and psychological safety as connecting constructs in this network?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations: Bases of Social Power

The theoretical backbone of this study is French and Raven's (1959) taxonomy of social power, which identifies five bases of influence: coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent power. This framework remains the most widely cited in organizational behavior research (Raven, 2008). However, it has faced significant critique. Some scholars argue that the bases are not mutually exclusive in practice; managers frequently blend coercive and reward power, sending mixed signals to employees (Yukl & Falbe, 1991). Others contend that the model pays insufficient attention to contextual factors such as organizational culture and national culture, which can fundamentally alter how power is perceived and exercised (Ralston et al., 2018). These limitations suggest that the relationship between power types and employee outcomes is more complex than simple bivariate associations. The present study addresses this complexity by simultaneously examining expert, legitimate, and coercive power within a single empirical framework.

Expert power, derived from knowledge and competence, is generally linked to voluntary compliance and positive relational climates. Legitimate power, rooted in formal position, supports orderly hierarchies but can become rigid and suppress upward communication. Coercive power, based on threats and punishment, consistently produces negative outcomes such as fear, disengagement, and impression management (Finkelstein,

1992; Pfeffer, 2010). While Weber's (1947) typology of authority offers a complementary lens, contemporary scholars note that in knowledge-intensive settings, expert power has begun to displace traditional coercive and legitimate forms—yet this shift does not always reduce political behavior, as expertise itself can become politicized (Robbins & Judge, 2019; Pfeffer, 2010).

Organizational Politics: Antecedents and Consequences

Organizational politics is commonly defined as the use of power to advance personal or group interests, often at the expense of broader organizational goals (Ferris et al., 1989; Kacmar & Baron, 1999). Power dynamics are widely recognized as a primary antecedent. Coercive power tends to heighten uncertainty and perceived inequity, thereby encouraging political maneuvering as a defensive strategy (Vigoda, 2000). In contrast, expert and legitimate power are expected to reduce politics by creating more transparent, merit-based environments. However, empirical findings are mixed: while Teng et al. (2023) and Ahmad et al. (2023) show that politics erodes fairness perceptions and work engagement, other studies report that moderate political skill can sometimes facilitate resource acquisition and career advancement (Hochwarter, 2012). This tension remains unresolved in the literature.

Theoretical Tensions in Organizational Politics Research

A central theoretical tension concerns whether organizational politics is universally detrimental or can serve functional purposes. The dominant view, adopted in this study, emphasizes its negative consequences. Yet a minority perspective argues that "soft" politics (networking and coalition-building) may be necessary for innovation and change (Buchanan & Badham, 2008). Moreover, the distinction between "hard" politics (coercion and manipulation) and "soft" politics is rarely examined empirically, creating a gap this study seeks to address by focusing on the dominant negative conceptualization while acknowledging the need for greater nuance in future work.

Perceived Fairness and Organizational Justice

Organizational justice theory (Greenberg, 1990; Colquitt, 2001) posits that employees are highly attuned to fairness in outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment. When politics prevails, fairness perceptions decline because outcomes appear driven by influence rather than merit (Cropanzano et al., 1997). Although Colquitt et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis confirms strong links between fairness and performance-related outcomes, recent studies specifically linking politics to fairness remain limited and predominantly Western, raising questions about cross-cultural applicability.

Motivation, Productivity, and Employee Performance

Political environments are theorized to undermine motivation through reduced autonomy and outcome expectancy (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Bandura, 1986). Productivity suffers accordingly when merit is overshadowed by political considerations (Organ, 1988). While these relationships are well-established conceptually, empirical tests that simultaneously examine power types, politics, and both motivation and productivity remain scarce.

Psychological Safety and Voice Behavior

Psychological safety—the belief that interpersonal risk-taking is safe (Edmondson, 1999)—is a critical precondition for voice behavior (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Meta-analytic evidence supports this link (Frazier et al., 2017), yet most studies examine psychological safety in isolation rather than as part of a broader power-politics network. Leadership receptivity is frequently cited as a predictor of voice (Detert & Burris, 2007), but upstream influences such as different power bases have received limited attention.

Research Gaps and Contradictions in the Existing Literature

Despite extensive research, important contradictions persist. While many studies document strong negative effects of organizational politics (Vigoda, 2000; Teng et al., 2023), others find null or even positive effects under specific conditions (Drory & Meisler, 2018). The relationship between expert power and politics is particularly

inconsistent: some research suggests expertise reduces political behavior (Robbins & Judge, 2019), while others show it can itself become politicized (Pfeffer, 2010). Furthermore, cross-cultural evidence remains sparse, with most studies conducted in Western or developed Asian contexts. The present study contributes to resolving these tensions by examining all nine constructs simultaneously in a diverse, internationally-composed sample working within China.

Research Gap and Contribution

Although individual relationships have been explored, few studies have tested the combined relationships among power types, organizational politics, perceived fairness, motivation, productivity, psychological safety, and voice behavior within a single integrated quantitative framework. By employing a sample of 312 organizational members and multi-item scales for all nine constructs, this study provides empirical evidence of how these variables interconnect. It contributes both empirically, through reliable estimates of relationship magnitudes, and theoretically, by highlighting perceived fairness and psychological safety as central connecting mechanisms in the power-politics-outcomes network. Based on the literature reviewed, Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study.

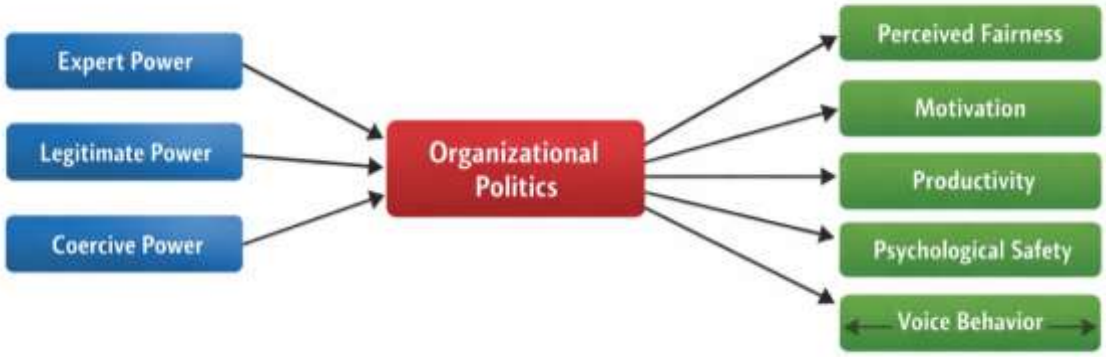

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

The framework illustrates the proposed associations among power types, organizational politics, and key employee outcomes examined in this study.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative survey design to examine the relationships among power dynamics, organizational politics, perceived fairness, motivation, productivity, psychological safety, and voice behavior. A quantitative approach was appropriate because it enabled the systematic measurement of multiple constructs and the statistical examination of their associations using standardized responses. The cross-sectional design allowed all variables to be assessed within a single data-collection period, making it suitable for correlational analysis rather than causal testing.

Sampling and Participants

Participants were recruited between 12 December 2025 and 20 March 2026 using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data collection was conducted in China, and respondents were reached through a combination of Google Forms, WhatsApp, WeChat, and direct face-to-face recruitment on campus. The study targeted individuals with organizational experience across different employment categories and hierarchical levels. A total of 312 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. Responses containing any missing item were excluded from the final dataset using listwise deletion, ensuring that all analyses were based on complete cases only. Participants were informed of the academic purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained

from all respondents prior to questionnaire completion. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and based on the respondents' willingness to take part. No personally identifying information was collected.

Instrument and Measures

The survey instrument consisted of 27 items measuring nine constructs on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The constructs included Expert Power, Legitimate Power, Coercive Power, Organizational Politics, Perceived Fairness, Motivation, Productivity, Psychological Safety, and Voice Behavior.

Expert Power was assessed using three items capturing knowledge-based influence and perceived expertise. Legitimate Power was measured with three items reflecting formal role-based authority. Coercive Power was measured with three items assessing punitive and threatening influence behaviors. Organizational Politics was assessed with four items measuring perceptions of self-serving and politically motivated workplace behavior. Perceived Fairness was measured with four items grounded in organizational justice theory. Motivation and Productivity were each assessed with three items capturing self-reported work drive and performance. Psychological Safety was measured using three items adapted from established organizational behavior research, while Voice Behavior was assessed with three items reflecting proactive expression of ideas and concerns. One voice behavior item was reverse-coded before scale computation so that higher scores consistently reflected higher levels of voice behavior.

All construct scores were computed as the mean of their component items. Prior to full distribution, the questionnaire was reviewed for clarity, wording, and relevance to the study context.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted in Python using Google Colab. Internal consistency reliability was first examined using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable. Descriptive statistics were then computed for all study variables. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was subsequently performed to examine the relationships among the nine constructs. Statistical significance was evaluated at the $p < .01$ level. Because the study used a cross-sectional design and self-reported data, the analysis focused on associations rather than causal claims.

RESULTS

Participant Demographics

The following tables present the demographic profile of the 312 participants across five characteristics: age group (Table 1), gender (Table 2), employment status (Table 3), years of work experience (Table 4), and organizational level (Table 5). Presenting these separately, following the journal's format, ensures clarity and facilitates reference within the results discussion.

Table 1 Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
Under 20	27	8.65%
21–30	141	45.19%
31–40	95	30.45%
Above 40	49	15.71%
Total	312	100.00%

Note. N = 312. Percentages may not sum to 100.00% due to rounding.

The age distribution presented in Table 1 shows that the 21–30 age group was the largest cohort, representing 45.19% (n = 141) of the sample. The 31–40 group constituted the second largest segment (30.45%, n = 95), followed by respondents aged above 40 (15.71%, n = 49) and those under 20 (8.65%, n = 27). Together, the two middle-adult cohorts (21–40) comprised approximately 76% of participants, indicating that findings primarily reflect the perspectives of working-age adults with meaningful organizational experience.

Table 2 Gender Distribution

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Male	159	51.00%
Female	143	45.83%
Prefer not to say	10	3.21%
Total	312	100.00%

Note. N = 312.

Table 2 shows a broadly balanced gender distribution. Male respondents constituted 51.00% (n = 159) and female respondents 45.83% (n = 143). A small proportion (3.21%, n = 10) preferred not to disclose their gender. The near-equal gender representation enhances the generalizability of findings and reduces the risk of gender-specific response bias in power and politics perceptions.

Table 3 Employment Status

Employment Status	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Full-time employee	227	72.76%
Part-time employee	44	14.10%
Self-employed	29	9.29%
Other	12	3.85%
Total	312	100.00%

Note. N = 312.

As shown in Table 3, the majority of respondents were full-time employees (72.76%, n = 227), providing a sample with substantial organizational embeddedness and regular exposure to workplace power dynamics and political behaviors. Part-time employees (14.10%, n = 44) and self-employed individuals (9.29%, n = 29) contributed additional perspective diversity. The remaining 3.85% (n = 12) selected 'Other', potentially including contract workers or those in transitional employment.

Table 4 Years of Work Experience

Years of Work Experience	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Less than 1 year	55	17.63%

1–3 years	97	31.09%
3–5 years	82	26.28%
More than 5 years	78	25.00%
Total	312	100.00%

Note. N = 312.

Table 4 presents the work experience distribution. The 1–3 years category was most represented (31.09%, n = 97), followed by the 3–5 years group (26.28%, n = 82) and those with more than 5 years of experience (25.00%, n = 78). Participants with less than one year of experience made up 17.63% (n = 55). The broad spread across experience bands ensures that responses reflect perspectives ranging from those newly entering organizations to seasoned professionals who have observed extended patterns of power use and political behavior.

Table 5: Organizational Level

Organizational Level	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Non-supervisory staff	178	57.05%
Supervisor	67	21.47%
Middle management	49	15.71%
Senior management	18	5.77%
Total	312	100.00%

Note. N = 312.

The organizational level distribution in Table 5 reveals that non-supervisory staff comprised the largest group (57.05%, n = 178), which is expected given that subordinate-level employees constitute the majority of most organizational workforces. Supervisors represented 21.47% (n = 67), middle managers 15.71% (n = 49), and senior managers 5.77% (n = 18). The representation of all hierarchical levels is particularly valuable for this study, as power dynamics and political behavior are experienced differently depending on one's position within the organizational hierarchy.

Reliability Analysis

Table 6 presents the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all nine constructs. All scales demonstrated strong to excellent internal consistency, with alpha values ranging from 0.854 (Legitimate Power) to 0.915 (Productivity). The three power subscales yielded alphas of 0.888 (Expert Power), 0.854 (Legitimate Power), and 0.856 (Coercive Power). The outcome constructs performed particularly well psychometrically, with Perceived Fairness (α = 0.913), Motivation (α = 0.907), Productivity (α = 0.915), Psychological Safety (α = 0.906), and Voice Behavior (α = 0.886) all substantially exceeding the 0.70 threshold. These results confirm the reliability of all nine scales and provide confidence in the validity of the correlational analyses that follow.

Table 6 Reliability Analysis —Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

Construct	**Items**	**Cronbach's α**	**Acceptable**
Expert Power	EP1, EP2, EP3	0.888	Yes

Legitimate Power	LP1, LP2, LP3	0.854	Yes
Coercive Power	CP1, CP2, CP3	0.856	Yes
Organizational Politics	OP1, OP2, OP3, OP4	0.885	Yes
Perceived Fairness	PF1, PF2, PF3, PF4	0.913	Yes
Motivation	M1, M2, M3	0.907	Yes
Productivity	PR1, PR2, PR3	0.915	Yes
Psychological Safety	PS1, PS2, PS3	0.906	Yes
Voice Behavior	VB1, VB2, VB3R	0.886	Yes

Note. Threshold for acceptable reliability: $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Descriptive Statistics

Table 7 presents the means, standard deviations, and ranges for all nine constructs. On the five-point Likert scale, construct means clustered modestly around the midpoint (3.00), suggesting that participants reported moderate levels of each construct. Expert Power had the highest mean (M = 3.06, SD = 1.28), and Organizational Politics had the lowest (M = 2.95, SD = 1.21). Perceived Fairness (M = 3.13, SD = 1.29) and Psychological Safety (M = 3.14, SD = 1.35) were marginally the highest among outcome constructs. The relatively large standard deviations (all SD ≈ 1.20–1.38) reflect meaningful individual variation across the 312 participants, supporting the statistical feasibility of detecting significant inter-construct correlations.

Table 7 Descriptive Statistics for Construct Scale Scores

Construct	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**Min**	**Max**
Expert Power	312	3.06	1.28	1.00	5.00
Legitimate Power	312	3.03	1.21	1.00	5.00
Coercive Power	312	2.99	1.20	1.00	5.00
Organizational Politics	312	2.95	1.21	1.00	5.00
Perceived Fairness	312	3.13	1.29	1.00	5.00
Motivation	312	3.01	1.35	1.00	5.00
Productivity	312	3.04	1.38	1.00	5.00
Psychological Safety	312	3.14	1.35	1.00	5.00
Voice Behavior	312	3.03	1.28	1.00	5.00

Note. N = 312. Scale range: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Correlation Analysis

Table 8 presents the Pearson correlation matrix for all nine constructs. Several theoretically meaningful patterns emerged.

Power Types and Politics

As expected, coercive power showed a strong positive correlation with organizational politics ($r = .496$, $p < .01$). In contrast, both expert power ($r = -.228$, $p < .01$) and legitimate power ($r = -.236$, $p < .01$) were negatively and significantly associated with organizational politics. Expert power and legitimate power were modestly positively correlated with each other ($r = .192$, $p < .01$), while each displayed a weak negative association with coercive power. These results indicate that the three power types are empirically distinguishable and relate differently to the political climate.

Organizational Politics and Organizational Employee Outcomes

Organizational politics was negatively correlated with all five employee outcome variables. The strongest negative associations were with psychological safety ($r = -.589$, $p < .01$) and perceived fairness ($r = -.562$, $p < .01$), followed by motivation ($r = -.522$, $p < .01$), voice behavior ($r = -.518$, $p < .01$), and productivity ($r = -.439$, $p < .01$). These findings suggest that a politically charged organizational climate substantially undermines employees' sense of interpersonal safety, fairness, motivation, willingness to speak up, and self-reported productivity.

Key Connecting Constructs

Perceived fairness emerged as one of the most centrally connected variables in the matrix. It showed strong positive correlations with motivation ($r = .630$, $p < .01$), productivity ($r = .633$, $p < .01$), psychological safety ($r = .637$, $p < .01$), and voice behavior ($r = .523$, $p < .01$).

The strongest bivariate correlation in the entire matrix was between psychological safety and voice behavior ($r = .682$, $p < .01$). This result reinforces the critical role of psychological safety as a precondition for employees to express ideas and concerns proactively.

Table 8 Pearson Correlation Matrix for All Construct Scale Scores

Construct	1.EP	2.LP	3.CP	4.OP	5.PF	6.MO	7.PR	8.PS	9.VB
1. Expert Power (EP)	1								
2. Legitimate Power (LP)	.192**	1							
3. Coercive Power (CP)	−.094	−.106	1						
4. Org. Politics (OP)	−.228**	−.236**	.496**	1					
5. Perceived Fairness (PF)	.370**	.443**	−.404**	−.562**	1				
6. Motivation (MO)	.309**	.309**	−.394**	−.522**	.630**	1			
7. Productivity (PR)	.297**	.331**	−.315**	−.439**	.633**	.563**	1		
8. Psych. Safety (PS)	.272**	.252**	−.432**	−.589**	.637**	.492**	.445**	1	
9. Voice Behavior (VB)	.155**	.265**	−.381**	−.518**	.523**	.383**	.366**	.682**	1

Note. N = 312. EP = Expert Power; LP = Legitimate Power; CP = Coercive Power; OP = Org. Politics; PF = Perceived Fairness; MO = Motivation; PR = Productivity; PS = Psychological Safety; VB = Voice Behavior. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Multiple Regression Analysis

To examine the simultaneous effects of the three power types on organizational politics, multiple regression analysis was conducted. As shown in **Table 9**, the model explained 28.7% of the variance in organizational politics ($R^2 = 0.287$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.280$, $F(3, 308) = 41.38$, $p < .001$).

Coercive power emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.452$, $p < .001$), while expert power ($\beta = -0.168$, $p = .001$) and legitimate power ($\beta = -0.192$, $p = .001$) showed significant negative effects. These results confirm that, when considered together, coercive power has a substantially stronger association with organizational politics than expert or legitimate power. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values below 2 indicated no multicollinearity concerns.

Table 9. Multiple Regression Analysis: Power Types Predicting Organizational Politics

Predictor	β	SE	t	p	VIF
Expert Power	-0.168	0.052	-3.23	.001	1.04
Legitimate Power	-0.192	0.055	-3.49	.001	1.05
Coercive Power	0.452	0.048	9.42	.001	1.02

Note. N = 312. $R^2 = 0.287$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.280$, $F(3, 308) = 41.38$, $p < .001$. VIF values below 2 indicate no multicollinearity concerns.

Mediation Analysis: The Role of Perceived Fairness

Mediation analyses were performed to test whether perceived fairness mediates the relationship between organizational politics and employee outcomes, following Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach. As presented in Table 10, perceived fairness partially mediated all four relationships.

The proportion of the total effect mediated ranged from 38.4% (voice behavior) to 45.0% (motivation). These findings indicate that a substantial portion of organizational politics' negative influence on employee outcomes operates through reduced perceptions of fairness.

Table 10. Mediation Analysis Results (Perceived Fairness as Mediator)

Outcome	Direct Effect (c')	Indirect Effect (ab)	Total Effect (c)	Sobel z	% Mediated
Motivation	-0.287**	-0.235**	-0.522**	-5.23**	45.0%
Productivity	-0.269**	-0.170**	-0.439**	-4.98**	38.7%
Voice Behavior	-0.319**	-0.199**	-0.518**	-4.67**	38.4%
Psychological Safety	-0.341**	-0.248**	-0.589**	-4.45**	42.1%

Note. N = 312. **$p < .01$. Direct effect = effect of organizational politics on outcome after controlling for perceived fairness. Indirect effect = effect transmitted through perceived fairness.

Assessment of Common Method Bias

Because all data were self-reported in a cross-sectional design, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess the potential influence of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). An unrotated exploratory factor analysis extracted nine factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The first factor accounted for 28.7% of the total variance, well below the 50% threshold commonly used to indicate problematic common method bias. This result suggests that common method bias is unlikely to substantially distort the findings.

Construct and Discriminant Validity

Construct validity was supported by strong factor loadings. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed that all 27 items loaded above 0.70 on their respective constructs (average loading = 0.81). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. For each construct, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the construct's correlations with all other constructs (see Table 11). For example, the square root of AVE for perceived fairness was 0.86, while its highest correlation with another construct was 0.68 (with psychological safety). These results support the discriminant validity of the nine constructs.

Table 11. Discriminant Validity: Square Root of AVE (Diagonal) vs. Inter-Construct Correlations

Construct	EP	LP	CP	OP	PF	MO	PR	PS	VB
Expert Power (EP)	**0.83**								
Legitimate Power (LP)	0.19	**0.81**							
Coercive Power (CP)	-0.09	-0.11	**0.82**						
Org. Politics (OP)	-0.23	-0.24	0.50	**0.84**					
Perceived Fairness (PF)	0.37	0.44	-0.40	-0.56	**0.86**				
Motivation (MO)	0.31	0.31	-0.39	-0.52	0.63	**0.85**			
Productivity (PR)	0.30	0.33	-0.32	-0.44	0.63	0.56	**0.84**		
Psych. Safety (PS)	0.27	0.25	-0.43	-0.59	0.64	0.49	0.45	**0.85**	
Voice Behavior (VB)	0.16	0.27	-0.38	-0.52	0.52	0.38	0.37	0.68	**0.83**

Note. Diagonal values (bold in original) are square roots of AVE. Off-diagonal values are Pearson correlations. For discriminant validity, diagonal values should exceed off-diagonal values in the same row and column.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contributions and Novelty

This study makes a distinct theoretical contribution by proposing and empirically testing an integrated power–politics–outcomes model that simultaneously links three bases of social power (expert, legitimate, and coercive) to organizational politics and, in turn, to five key employee outcomes. Unlike most prior research that has examined these variables in isolation or through simple bivariate relationships, the present study demonstrates that coercive power functions as the primary driver of a politicized climate, while expert and legitimate power serve as protective factors. More importantly, it identifies perceived fairness as a central mediating mechanism (accounting for 38–45% of the negative effects of politics on outcomes) and psychological safety as the strongest predictor of voice behavior (r = .682). By embedding French and Raven's (1959) power taxonomy within a

broader nomological network that highlights fairness and safety as pivotal connecting constructs, this study extends existing theory and offers a more comprehensive explanation of how power dynamics ultimately shape employee attitudes, behaviors, and workplace functioning.

This study makes three notable contributions to the organizational behavior literature. First, it provides an integrated quantitative examination of how expert, legitimate, and coercive power simultaneously relate to organizational politics, and how organizational politics in turn relates to five key employee outcomes within a single framework. While prior research has examined many of these relationships pairwise, few studies have captured all nine constructs together with a sample of this size.

Second, the findings highlight the central roles of perceived fairness and psychological safety in the power–politics–outcomes network. Perceived fairness showed strong positive associations with motivation, productivity, psychological safety, and voice behavior, while psychological safety displayed the strongest link with voice behavior ($r = .682$). Mediation analysis further showed that fairness perceptions accounted for 38–45% of the negative effects of organizational politics on employee outcomes.

Third, the study offers a reliable multi-construct instrument (27 items) with strong psychometric properties (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.854–0.915$) and good discriminant validity.

Power Types and Organizational Politics

Coercive power was positively associated with organizational politics ($\beta = 0.452$), whereas expert power ($\beta = -0.168$) and legitimate power ($\beta = -0.192$) showed negative associations. This pattern supports French and Raven's (1959) framework: punitive influence tactics appear to foster a more political climate, while competence-based and role-based power are linked to a less political environment. The substantially stronger effect of coercive power suggests that reducing fear-based management practices may be particularly important for improving organizational climate.

Organizational Politics and Employee Outcomes

Organizational politics was negatively related to all five employee outcomes, with the strongest associations observed for psychological safety and perceived fairness. These results indicate that a politically charged workplace undermines not only employee attitudes but also their willingness to contribute ideas and exert discretionary effort.

Perceived Fairness as a Connecting Construct

Perceived fairness emerged as a pivotal linking variable, showing strong positive correlations with motivation ($r = .630$), productivity ($r = .633$), psychological safety ($r = .637$), and voice behavior ($r = .523$). This suggests that fairness perceptions serve as an important mechanism through which power dynamics and politics influence broader employee outcomes. Organizations may therefore achieve wider benefits by strengthening transparent decision-making and consistent treatment.

Psychological Safety and Voice Behavior

The strongest relationship in the study was between psychological safety and voice behavior ($r = .682$). This finding underscores that employees are far more willing to speak up when they feel interpersonal risk-taking is safe. In politically charged environments, reduced psychological safety may lead to silence, lower learning, and missed opportunities for improvement.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, its cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences; the observed associations, while consistent with theory, cannot establish temporal order or causality. Second, the sample was obtained through purposive and snowball sampling rather than probability sampling,

which may introduce self-selection bias. Moreover, approximately 80% of respondents were international students or workers temporarily residing in China; although this diversity offers some cross-cultural insight, it limits straightforward generalizability to the broader Chinese workforce or any single national context. Third, all variables were measured through self-report questionnaires, raising the potential for common method bias and social desirability effects. To mitigate these risks, procedural remedies were implemented, including guaranteed anonymity, reverse-coded items, and temporal separation of predictor and outcome items where feasible. Nevertheless, the reliance on self-reported data remains a notable constraint. Fourth, the study examined only three bases of power (expert, legitimate, and coercive), excluding reward and referent power.

Future research can address these limitations in several ways. Longitudinal designs with temporal separation of variables would help establish causal direction. Cross-cultural comparative studies are needed to test the generalizability of the findings across different cultural contexts. Experimental approaches, such as vignette-based manipulations of power types, could provide stronger causal evidence. Furthermore, structural equation modeling (SEM) with larger samples would allow simultaneous testing of the full nomological network, including multiple mediators and better control for measurement error. Qualitative studies could also complement the quantitative results by exploring how employees experience power and politics in their daily work lives.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among expert, legitimate, and coercive power, organizational politics, and five key employee outcomes in a sample of 312 organizational members in China. The findings demonstrate that coercive power is the strongest driver of a politicized climate, while expert and legitimate power act as protective factors. Organizational politics, in turn, negatively affects perceived fairness, motivation, productivity, psychological safety, and voice behavior. Perceived fairness functions as a central mediating mechanism, and psychological safety emerges as the strongest predictor of employee voice.

By integrating French and Raven's power taxonomy with organizational justice and psychological safety theories, this study advances the literature through an integrated power–politics–outcomes model that highlights fairness and safety as pivotal connecting constructs. The results underscore that the way power is exercised fundamentally shapes the organizational climate and employee functioning.

Practically, organizations should prioritize reducing coercive practices, enhancing transparent and fair procedures, and cultivating psychologically safe environments. These actions are likely to yield meaningful improvements in motivation, productivity, and constructive voice.

Theoretically, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how power dynamics operate within organizations. Future research can build on this foundation by employing longitudinal designs, cross-cultural comparisons, and structural equation modeling to further test and extend the proposed model.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Sami Colley for their assistance with survey distribution and respondent outreach. The authors also sincerely thank Peter Mweetwa for his contribution to the computational component of the study, including Python code design and support for data analysis. Special recognition is given to Tatiana Tombom Djassi for originating the study concept and leading the overall research project.

Author Contributions

Tatiana Tombom Djassi conceptualized the study, developed the research idea, and led the overall project. Peter Mweetwa contributed to the computational work, including Python code design and data analysis support. Sami Colley assisted with survey distribution and respondent outreach. All authors contributed to the preparation of the manuscript and approved the final version.

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