RESEARCH REPORTS

Perceptions of Politics: Does Measuring Different Foci Matter?

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Recent research on perceptions of politics in organizations and other organizational phenomena (e.g., commitment) has suggested the use of a multiple-foci approach to understand important politics–outcome relationships. This study confirms separate measures of perceptions of politics at the organizational and work-group levels and demonstrates differential effects in the prediction of various outcomes. After controlling for the effects of the relationship with one’s supervisor (leader–member exchange), perceptions of politics existing at the organizational level predicted turnover intentions, whereas citizenship behavior was predicted by perceptions of politics at the group level. Both foci of politics significantly predicted organizational commitment.

Organizational politics has become an important and popular topic in the management literature. Past research has focused on identifying and defining political behavior in organizations as well as on whether politics is a negative or a positive phenomenon (e.g., Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, & Pondy, 1989; Klein, 1988; Mayes & Allen, 1977; Mintzberg, 1985; Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981). In the early 1980s, researchers also began to investigate the importance of the perceptions of organizational politics by organizational members (e.g., Gandz & Murray, 1980; Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1980). These early studies found that the frequency of perceived political behavior varied depending on the organizational level or function and that certain conditions are more likely to promote political behavior. This research has since been followed by a number of studies showing the importance of those perceptions (Croppanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Gilmore, Ferris, Dulebohn, & Harrell-Cook, 1996).

Like earlier work on organizational commitment (e.g., Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982), much of the research in perceptions of organizational politics has looked at political activity at an aggregate level. Typically, no distinction was made between perceptions of political activity occurring at different levels of the organization. However, it is important to distinguish the political behavior that occurs within one’s own work group from what occurs in the larger organization. Even in a highly political organization, one can be partially insulated within the work group setting. In contrast, the larger organization can be nonpolitical while one experiences high levels of politics in his or her immediate work group.

This conclusion is based in part on recent research on organizational commitment that suggests that individuals form more than a single attachment to and within an organization and that they make distinctions between these different foci (Becker, 1992; Becker, Billings, Evelleth, & Gilbert, 1996; Hunt & Morgan, 1994; Reichers, 1985). Apparently, employees can be differentially “attached” to different organizational entities, from one’s work group to the entire organization. This research also has found incremental increases in being able to explain important organization-related outcomes when these other foci are taken into account.

The current study was designed to investigate whether organizational members make a distinction between workgroup and organizational politics. In other words, can these levels be captured independently on measures designed to assess separate foci? Additionally, we explored whether these two foci make independent contributions to explain outcomes to which political behavior has been previously associated.

Multiple Foci of Political Perceptions

Recent research has focused on the relevance of different foci in organizational behavior, much of it drawing distinctions between the organization and the immediate
work group or supervisor. Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997) found that employees often engage in separate exchange processes (Blau, 1964) with their supervisors (e.g., leader–member exchange [LMX]) and organizations (e.g., perceived organizational support) and that each focus of exchange is associated with a unique set of antecedents and consequences. Similarly, Reichers (1985) argued that individuals may experience multiple commitments within an organization, as well as a more global relationship with the larger organization. This has been supported by research showing that organizational members often identify the work group and larger organization as separate entities and that commitment to the foci of top management, supervisors, and work groups accounts for unique variance in key outcomes beyond that predicted by commitment to the larger organization (Becker, 1992; Becker et al., 1996; Hunt & Morgan, 1994).

Where is the political behavior in organizations? Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989) noted that political behavior can occur in multiple domains (or foci)—individual, group, and organization—but they did not initially attach much importance to drawing distinctions between these foci and have tended to work on political dimensions that often cut across organizational levels. For example, Fedor, Ferris, Harrel-Cook, and Russ (in press) reported a dimension of politics that dealt with powerful others, either individuals or groups, who should not be challenged. As such, it is not clear whether these powerful others reside in the larger organization, in the work group, or both.

However, some research by Ferris and others points to the importance of examining these foci separately. Ferris and Kacmar (1992) explored the impact of various political dimensions, as perceived across multiple groups or supervisors, on job satisfaction. They found that only their work-group subscale (Coworker and Cliques) accounted for significant variance in the prediction of job satisfaction. This has obvious implications for one’s own group-level perceptions of politics. More recently, Ferris, Frink, et al. (1996) and Gilmore et al. (1996) emphasized the role of the immediate supervisor in perceptions of politics. If each supervisor or work group is potentially a different political focal point, assessing politics associated with supervisors or work groups with a general or unspecified target may not adequately capture the experiences of the respondents regarding their own work-group situation. Given the growing evidence of the relevance of multiple foci in organizations (e.g., Becker, 1992; Wayne et al., 1997) and the work of Ferris and his colleagues on multiple political environments, we propose that the workgroup and the organization contexts are each uniquely important and should be investigated as separate foci of political perceptions in organizations. In this way, this research extends the progress made to date (e.g., Ferris & Kacmar, 1992) by directly examining foci of perceived politics and their relationship to three important outcomes.

Multiple Foci of Political Perceptions and Outcomes

Past research on perceptions of politics has shown significant association with numerous organizational outcomes. Ferris, Russ, & Fandt (1989) proposed that perceptions of politics are predictive of important outcomes, including job involvement, job satisfaction, job anxiety, and organizational-withdrawal behaviors. Research on these consequences has generally supported these predictions (e.g., Drory, 1993; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 1996; Gilmore et al., 1996; Kacmar, Bozeman, Wayne, & Anthony, 1994) as well as others not specifically proposed in the Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989) model. For example, Cropanzano et al. (1997) tested and found significant relationships between perceptions of politics and organizational commitment and turnover intentions, whereas predictions associated with organizational-citizenship behavior were not supported. Drory (1993) also found that perceptions of a political climate were negatively associated with organizational commitment. For the most part, predictions about outcomes of politics perceptions are based on these perceptions being a negative experience—the higher the level of politics, the less positive the outcome (Bozeman, Perrewé, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Bymer, 1996). Both exchange and reciprocity (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 1997; Drory, 1993) and reactions to the ambiguity and stress experienced in highly political situations (e.g., Ferris et al., 1996; Gilmore et al., 1996) have been hypothesized to predict these relationships.

How would different foci of political perceptions be related to these or other organizational outcomes? The developing literature on various foci and their associated outcomes suggests that perceptions based on experiences specific to the supervisor are predictive of outcomes conceptualized to exist at the group level, whereas those associated with the organization influence outcomes at the larger organizational level (e.g., Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Wayne et al., 1997). Becker et al. (1996) examined the commitment—performance relationship and found that job performance was predicted more strongly by commitment to one’s supervisor than by commitment to the organization. They concluded that it was the proximity and interaction with the supervisor that resulted in this link between commitment to the supervisor and job performance.

We expected the different foci of politics in the organization to have unique effects depending on the level of the outcome of interest. To test this, we chose to examine relationships between political perceptions of the work group and the organization and organizational commit-
ment, turnover intentions, and citizenship behavior. Each of these outcomes has been found to be linked with antecedents with a like focus and also found or proposed to be associated with perceptions of politics. Specific relationships are discussed later.

As a global phenomenon, perceptions of politics have been negatively associated with organizational commitment (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Drory, 1993). Using a social exchange framework, both Wayne et al. (1997) and Settoon et al. (1996) found support for models in which affective commitment to the organization is associated with organizationally based antecedents but not antecedents at the work-group level. Following this framework, we propose that it is the organizationally focused perceptions of politics that are relevant in this relationship.

Similarly, Kacam et al. (1994) and Cropanzano et al. (1997) found that turnover intentions were predicted by perceptions of politics. Again, recent research based on social exchange found that turnover intentions were associated with perceptions of the organizational environment but not with perceptions of the work-group environment (Wayne et al., 1997). These authors suggested that work-group experiences may be viewed by employees as more temporary and therefore have less impact on decisions to leave the organization, whereas characteristics of the larger organization would be more likely to extend over time and across situations, prompting the intention to work elsewhere. As such, we propose that perceptions of politics at the organizational level will be positively associated with intention to leave the organization.

For outcomes associated with a work group/supervisor focus, less evidence exists for perceptions of politics. Wayne et al. (1997) and Settoon et al. (1996) deemed citizenship behavior an important group- or supervisor-level outcome, with Settoon et al. focusing more specifically on citizenship behaviors characterized as having consequences for interpersonal relationships (cf. Van Dyne, Graham, & Dickeshe, 1994). Because antecedents of citizenship behavior such as satisfaction (Organ, 1990), LMX (Settoon et al., 1996), and organizational justice (Moorman, 1991) are generally positive aspects in work groups, the assumption of politics as a negative event suggests that it has a negative relationship with citizenship—the more politics, the less citizenship. Cropanzano et al. (1997) proposed and tested this relationship, although they did not find a significant result. The difference in this study is that we propose that the politics–citizenship behavior relationship is based on a group-level focus rather than the global approach adopted by Cropanzano et al.

Alternatively, we might consider a positive relationship between group-level perceptions of politics and citizenship based on Hirschman’s (1970) work on exit, loyalty, and voice responses to negative organizational events. In this model, interpersonal citizenship behavior could be an expression of voice to improve the negative conditions, perhaps by modeling more constructive behavior. As such, citizenship behavior is not an exchanged “currency,” but may be a self-serving response in a political environment (Fandt & Ferris, 1990; Ferris, Judge, Rowland, & Fitzgibbons, 1994).

Although there is support for both a positive and negative relationship between citizenship and politics perceptions at the work-group level, the current weight of these arguments appears to favor the latter. Therefore, we expected that perceptions of high levels of work-group politics would be associated with lower reported citizenship behaviors.

In summary, Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989) and Ferris and Kacmar (1992) showed that political behavior exists in multiple organizational levels. As an extension of this research, we argue that perceived politics occurring at the organizational level and those occurring at the work-group level are relevant topics of study. Consistent with the growing literature on multiple foci in organizations, we further propose that each of these foci will make unique contributions in the prediction of organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and interpersonal citizenship behaviors.

Hypothesis 1: Organizational members will make distinctions between work-group and organizational-level politics.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a negative relationship between political perceptions at the organizational level and organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a positive relationship between political perceptions at the organizational level and turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 4: There will be a negative relationship between political perceptions at the work-group level and citizenship behavior.

To effectively test these hypotheses, an additional issue must be considered. Even if we find support for the hypotheses, a logical question concerns the impact of the supervisor–subordinate relationship. It is apparent that in order to isolate the effects of perceptions of politics, it is necessary to take into account this relationship because it can be expected to be a significant influence of political perceptions, especially at the work-group level (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Following Gilmore et al. (1996), we have chosen to control for LMX in order to remove a potential confound from our results.

Method

As part of a larger study, data were collected through the use of two questionnaires, spaced approximately 1 month apart. A two-questionnaire design was used to help reduce the possibility

1 We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.
of cuing effects and response—response bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The questionnaires were distributed by the organization and were returned by mail directly to the researcher through the use of prepaid, preaddressed envelopes. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality was assured. The first questionnaire assessed demographic information, perceptions of politics, LMX, and organizational commitment. The second questionnaire measured turnover intentions and citizenship.2

Sample

A total of 1,370 employees were surveyed across four organizations. The organizations comprised a health services office, a division of a telecommunications company, a university located in the Southeast (a stratified [by department] random sample of exempt nonfaculty employees), and the engineering department of a division of a defense contractor. Data from part 1 of the survey were collected from 316 participants: 24 from the health services office (75% response), 73 from the telecommunications company (51% response), 175 from the university (19% response), and 44 from the defense contractor (17% response). One hundred ninety-seven responded to Part 2; 20 from the health services office (63% response), 51 from the telecommunications company (36% response), 100 from the university (11% response), and 26 from the defense contractor (10% response). Seven questionnaires were returned blank or otherwise unusable and were not included in any analyses. This sample was 51% female, 47% male (2% not reporting gender); the mean age was 41.7 years (SD = 9.6); and 93% reported some college education. The mean years of full-time work experience was 19.5 (SD = 9.9), and a mean time with the current supervisor was 37 months (SD = 43; based on responses to the first questionnaire). All participants were presented with all measures except for the one for citizenship behavior, which was included only in the surveys administered to the university and defense participants (N = 122).

Due to the low response rates from the university and defense organizations, we sought to determine how representative the sample was of its population by comparing sample and population demographics (cf. Conlon, 1993; Rynes & Rosen, 1995). We were able to obtain these data from the university site. Available sample/population comparisons were mean age (41.5/41.2 years); sex (53/60% female); race (89/83% Caucasian, 10/13% African American, 2/3% other); and mean organizational tenure (9.7/8.5 years). On the basis of these comparisons, the sample of university respondents was deemed to be sufficiently similar to the population as a whole. To further investigate sampling differences, a one-way analysis of variance of the variables in this study was performed to test for mean differences across organizations. Significant differences were found only for the control variables age and sex (discussed later). Accordingly, the four organizations were collapsed into a single sample without controlling for organizational source.

Finally, response-rate dropoff from initial to second questionnaire was a potential concern. To assess whether nonrandom sampling effects were associated with the dropoff, multiple logistic regression was used (Goodman & Blum, 1996). Groups consisted of individuals who had responded only to the first questionnaire and those who had responded to both Parts 1 and 2. Results indicated that the probability of being included in the group that responded to both surveys was not related (model \( \chi^2[4, N = 298] = 1.418, n.s. \)) to responses on the set of study variables from the first questionnaire (perceptions of politics, LMX, organizational commitment). On the basis of results just mentioned, serious sampling bias does not appear to be a problem.

Measures

With the exception of LMX and turnover intentions, all questionnaire items were rated on a standard 7-point Likert response format, with anchors ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Perceptions of politics. The Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991) provided the basis from which we adapted our measures. Although some items from the POPS fall into focal categories, many of them could easily refer to either the organization or the work group (e.g., “People here usually don’t speak up for fear of retaliation by others”). However, simply rewriting each of the items to specify a focus (group or organization) would not result in scales with adequate face validity across all items. Instead, we selected and used seven items rewritten in this manner, taking guidance from the supervisor behavior and organization policies and practices dimensions of Ferris and Kacmar (1992) as well as considering face validity. Four items captured perceptions of politics at the organization level: (a) “There has always been an influential department in this organization that no one ever crosses”; (b) “Rewards come only to those who work hard in this organization” (reverse scored); (c) “I have seen changes made in policies here that only serve the purposes of a few individuals, not the work unit or the organization”; and (d) “Pay and promotion decisions are consistent with existing organizational policies” (reverse scored). The internal consistency (alpha) of these items was .76. Three items were used to capture perceptions of politics within the work group: (a) “Favoritism rather than merit determines who gets ahead in my work group”; (b) “There is no place for ‘yes—people’ in my work group; good ideas are desired even when it means disagreeing with superiors” (reverse scored); and (c) “My immediate management does not apply pay and promotion policies in a political manner” (reverse scored). The internal consistency (alpha) of these items was .75. We note that a fourth item that focused on work group was dropped following an initial analysis of the a priori scales (see Results for further discussion).

Organizational commitment. The six-item Affective Commitment Scale from Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) was used to assess organizational commitment (alpha = .89).

Turnover intentions. Turnover intentions were measured using three items adopted from Konovsky and Cropanzano (1991). Items included, “How likely is it that you will look for a job outside of this organization during the next year?” “How

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2 Because the first questionnaire contained measures of both independent and dependent variables, we performed a Harmon single-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) of the items constituting organizational commitment, LMX, and both foci of politics. Using a factor criterion of eigenvalue greater than 1.0, we found four factors rather than a single method factor.
often do you think about quitting your job at this organization?" and "If it were possible, how much would you like to get a new job?" Anchors were representative of the questions asked (e.g., very unlikely to very likely for the first item). The internal consistency for this scale was ($\alpha = .87$).

**Citizenship Behavior.** Self-reports on 19 items (comprising altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship, and conscientiousness) adapted from Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) were collected to measure citizenship behavior. Following principal component factor analysis (oblique rotation), two factors resulted. From the description of the items, we used the first factor to capture interpersonal aspects of citizenship (5 sportsmanship items, 2 courtesy items, 2 conscientiousness items; $\alpha = .73$). Sample items include "At work I generally consider the impact of my actions on coworkers," and "At work I generally am the classic 'squeaky wheel' that always needs greasing" (reverse scored). Although citizenship commonly has been assessed by supervisors regarding their subordinates (Podsakoff, Ahearne, & Mackenzie, 1997), recent research on the equivalence of sources (self, supervisors, and subordinates) of citizenship ratings has found that one could obtain equally valid ratings from any of these sources (Vandenberg & Taylor, 1997). Self-reports of citizenship also have been used recently by Podsakoff et al. (1997) and Cropanzano et al. (1997), with expected relationships generally supported.

**Leader–member exchange.** LMX quality was assessed using the LMX-7 scale adopted from Scandura and Graen (1984), $\alpha = .92$.

**Analyses**

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test whether the participants in this study made the distinction between the two levels of politics, as put forth in Hypothesis 1. Hypotheses 2 through 4 were tested with hierarchical multiple regression. This method was used to isolate the effects for the hypothesized relationships after controlling for other potential influences. Specifically, in the first step LMX, age, and sex of the participants were entered as control variables along with the degree of politics perceived to exist at the level (either group or organizational) that was not hypothesized to be related to the particular outcome. As noted earlier, LMX was expected to be related to the perception of politics (and potentially the three outcomes under investigation), and the samples had been found to be significantly different in age and sex. Finally, controlling for the nonhypothesized political focus was necessitated by the expectation that the two levels would be significantly correlated. Thus it was important to remove the effects attributable to the other level of politics and also to test for unexpected results.

**Results**

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

Confirmatory analyses were conducted with the data collected from 301 participants who had completed each of the perceptions-of-politics items through the use of LISREL 8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). Analysis of the two a priori groupings of political perceptions (4 items each) was performed to determine whether the two scales reflect unique foci. Chi-square values, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and adjusted GFI, the comparative fit index (CFI), and the standardized root mean square residual (RMR) were used to assess fit. Although the model fit was acceptable (Model 1: $\chi^2[19, N = 301] = 78.54, p < .001; \text{GFI} = .94; \text{AGFI} = .88; \text{CFI} = .93$, standardized RMR = .15), modification indices suggested that we re-examine the content of an item reading "Promotions in this work unit generally go to top performers." Judging that the term work unit did not clearly delineate the work group/supervisor focus intended, paths linking this item to either a priori latent variable were dropped, and comparisons were made between models with four and three items for unique organizational-level and group-level foci of political perceptions, respectively (Model 1), and a general single politics factor (Model 2).

Both Models 1 and 2 provided a good fit with the data: Model 1: $\chi^2[13, N = 301] = 29.37, p = .006; \text{GFI} = .97; \text{AGFI} = .94; \text{CFI} = .98; \text{standardized RMR} = .038$. Model 2: $\chi^2[14, N = 301] = 53.02, p < .001; \text{GFI} = .95; \text{AGFI} = .90; \text{CFI} = .94$, standardized RMR = .051. $T$ values for each path from the latent variables to their manifest indicators were significant. To compare the relative fit between the models, the difference in chi-square was calculated. A significant difference in chi-square between models indicates that the models are not equal in their fit with the data (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In this analysis, the multiple-foci model fit the data significantly better than did the general factor model, $\Delta\chi^2[1, N = 301] = 23.65, p < .001$, suggesting that multiple foci of perceptions of politics were captured with these measures. These results provide support for Hypothesis 1.

**Means and Correlations**

Variable means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations are reported in Table 1. A comparison of the mean values of perceived politics indicates that the participants perceived higher levels of political behavior occurring at the organizational level (4.15) than in their work groups (3.76). These levels are significantly different, $t(300) = 5.45, p < .001$, further indicating the need to distinguish between these two levels when assessing perceptions of political activity.

The correlation between the politics measures was significant (.62). Although this correlation is high, it also indicates that these measures are not identical (cf. Settoon et al., 1996, average correlation between LMX [group] and Perceived Organizational Support [organization], .59). LMX was significantly associated with both politics measures, but as was expected, the LMX/group focus correlation (-.61) was significantly stronger than the LMX/organization focus correlation (-.47), $r(295) = -3.46, p < .01$. The two politics predictors were both significantly related to organizational commitment and
Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Variables

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<th>Variable</th>
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Note. LMX = leader–member exchange. Means and standard deviations are based on a 7-point scale except for LMX (28-point scale), sex (1 = male, 2 = female), and age (actual years). N ranges from 292–309 for all pairs, except 119–142 for pairs including turnover and 82–119 for pairs including citizenship.

* p < .05.  ** p < .01.

turnover intentions. The organizational-level politics measure was correlated .48 with commitment and .40 with turnover intentions, whereas the group-level politics measure was correlated .47 with commitment and .34 with turnover intentions. Finally, neither measure of politics was significantly related to citizenship at the zero-order correlation level.

Regression Results

Table 2 reports the results of hierarchical regression analysis. As noted, the control variables LMX, age, and sex were entered first, along with the nonhypothesized measure of perceptions of politics (group or organization, depending on which outcome was being used as the dependent measure). The hypothesized level of politics perceptions was entered in a second block.

Hypothesis 2 stated that organizational commitment would be predicted by perceptions of politics at the organizational level. As would be expected, the set of control variables was a significant predictor of commitment, accounting for 29% of the variance. In this step, LMX and participant age were positively related to organizational commitment. In contrast, group-focused politics were negatively associated with organizational commitment. The second step in the regression indicated that organizational-level perceptions of politics were associated with lower levels of organizational commitment, thus supporting Hypothesis 2 and contributing an additional 4% of variance.

Turnover intentions also were significantly predicted by the set of control variables, accounting for 33% of the variance. In this case, LMX and participant age were both negatively related to turnover intentions, whereas the group-focused perceptions of politics were not predictive of turnover intentions. The addition of the organizational-level politics measure in the second step added a significant 3% of variance. The perception of organizational-level politics was positively associated with intention to turnover, supporting Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that higher levels of perceived politics at the group level would result in lower reported levels of citizenship. In the first step, which accounted

Table 2
Results of Regression Analyses

<table>
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<th>Variable and step</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
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<th>$\Delta F$</th>
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<td>Organizational commitment</td>
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<td>Step 1</td>
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<td>29.69** (4, 281)</td>
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<td>LMX</td>
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| Turnover intentions | | | | | |
| Step 1 | .33 | 16.98** (4, 125) | -.51** | |
| LMX | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| Sex | | | | | |
| Political perceptions— | | | | | |
| group focus | | | | | |
| Step 2 | .37 | .03 7.73** | -.00 | |
| Political perceptions— | | | | | |
| organization focus | | | | | |

| Citizenship | | | | | |
| Step 1 | .21 | 6.21** (4, 74) | .21 | |
| LMX | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| Sex | | | | | |
| Political perceptions— | | | | | |
| organization focus | | | | | |
| Step 2 | .27 | .06 6.96** | .04 | |
| Political perceptions— | | | | | |
| group focus | | | | | |

Note. LMX = leader–member exchange.

** p < .01.
for 21% of the variance, the two demographic variables were both positively related to citizenship behaviors. Inclusion of politics perceptions at the group level resulted in a significant 6% increase in variance accounted for in the prediction of citizenship. However, counter to Hypothesis 4, higher perceived levels of politics in the work group were associated with higher rather than lower reported levels of citizenship.

Discussion

Overall, the results from this study indicate that it can be important to distinguish political activity at different levels in the organization. The confirmatory factor analysis supported the measurement of politics at the organizational and work-group levels, and the regression results indicated that they are related to different outcomes. Furthermore, employees did not perceive the same mean level of politics for the group and the organization, adding support to the notion that employees experience separate political environments at work (Gilmore et al. 1996) and do draw distinctions between them.

Extending past research that examined antecedent-outcome relationships in a focal framework, organizational-level politics were significantly related to turnover intentions, and group-level politics were predictive of citizenship. Both organizational and group foci were associated with commitment. Regarding organizational commitment, Settoon et al. (1996) found a similar result in their initial model: Both group- and organizational-level variables predicted commitment. From nested model comparisons, however, they concluded that the more parsimonious model (eliminating the path between commitment and its group-level antecedent) was the best representation of the relationships between the variables. Like Settoon et al., we measured commitment on the same questionnaire as its predictors, raising the possibility of some response—response bias effects. Future research would be needed to demonstrate this for foci of political perceptions.

Our results occurred in light of important control variables, particularly LMX. LMX was significantly correlated with perceptions of politics at both group and organizational levels and to the three outcomes. Not accounting for its effects would have led to misleading and confounded results. This is especially true when considering citizenship. This is the second study, along with Cropanzano et al. (1997), to report a nonsignificant zero-order correlation between perceptions of politics and citizenship. However, the results of the multiple regression indicate that group-level politics do play a role in citizenship behaviors. An examination of the first-order partial correlations revealed that among the control variables, LMX acted as a suppressor, masking the true relationship between perceptions of politics and citizenship (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). In addition, LMX was a significant predictor of organizational commitment and turnover intentions and needed to be accounted for when testing effect sizes for the hypothesized politics levels.

Consistent with the alternative relationship discussed earlier was the positive association between perceptions of politics in the work group and the performance of citizenship behaviors. Although perceptions of politics at work are generally seen as dysfunctional (Gandz & Murray, 1980; Klein, 1988), our results indicate that they might have both negative and positive consequences, given that the participants reported performing more citizenship behavior when their groups were political. The results also indicate that although citizenship is a consequence of work attitudes and exchange processes (Organ & Ryan, 1995; Wayne et al., 1997), for perceptions of politics it may be a localized response. As such, the higher levels of perceptions of politics at the organization level were not predictive of citizenship. As a response to politics in the work group, citizenship may serve as a defense mechanism or as a means of peacemaking (i.e., “actions that help to prevent, resolve, or mitigate unconstructive interpersonal conflict,” Organ, 1990, p. 97). As Hirschman (1970) suggested, citizenship as a response to a political work group might be considered reactive rather than discretionary and voluntary.

The identification of both the work group and the organization as relevant contexts for perceptions of politics also supports a recent emphasis that has been placed on the role of the supervisor in examining politics in organizations (e.g., Drory, 1993; Ferris et al., 1996). Gilmore et al. (1996) suggested that because newcomers to the organization are more susceptible to politics, supervisors should engage in more frequent coaching and counseling to help in the understanding of that employee’s work context. With the changing nature of the workplace and employer–employee relationships (Cascio, 1995), there is an even greater need to understand the individual roles that the work group and organization play in terms of politics at work.

Strengths and Weaknesses

A major strength of this field study lies in the samples used. First, only full-time working adults participated, avoiding concerns often cited regarding student samples (Dalton, 1995). Second, the participants came from multiple organizations. Both these methods add to the generalizability of the findings. Also, the two-questionnaire administration could help alleviate concerns associated with common method variance, at least for turnover intentions and citizenship, which were measured separately from perceptions of politics. Finally, we controlled for a critical correlate of perceptions of politics in accounting for the nature of the supervisor–subordinate relationship (LMX).
Although several analyses indicated that the sample was representative of the larger population, the low response rate is still a potential concern. It is noteworthy, however, that the response rate was actually only a problem at two of the four institutions that participated in the study. Follow-up discussions with the in-house coordinators at these organizations revealed that recent survey participation and experience may have led to a lower level of participation than otherwise expected. The use of a self-report measure for citizenship also raises some concerns. Despite this approach showing up more frequently in the recent literature, replication of these results with an independent measure is advisable. As with any correlational study, caution is advised in ascribing causality to the significant relationships.

Finally, we did not undertake a formal scale development process in the generation of our perceptions of politics items, instead relying on basic information from prior research. Although a relatively high intercorrelation between these foci would be expected, more rigorously developed measures would presumably result in a greater degree of independence between the foci.

**Future Research**

Given the presence of relevant foci of political perceptions, what implications does this have for Ferris, Russ, and Fandt's (1989) model of organizational politics perceptions (including antecedents and other outcomes)? Our research suggests that there may be unique foci-related relationships whose investigation could help refine the Ferris et al. model. For example, future research might address the relationship between antecedents of perceptions of politics and the degree they influence each focus. Following the work of Ferris and Kacmar (1992), this would entail investigating job factors such as performance feedback and skill variety as predictors of group-level political perceptions, or individual's hierarchical-level and organizational-level perceptions.

Furthermore, what are the implications for various mixes of degrees of politics perceived at the multiple levels? For example, if one is working in a highly political organization but not in a political work group, do a close psychological distance in the work group and the nonpolitical supervisor serve to insulate the employee from the politics of the organization? The question of how employees react when they find themselves in consistent and inconsistent political situations in terms of foci is worthy of future investigation.

Finally, Hunt and Morgan (1994) showed that organizational-level commitment served as a mediator to various constituent levels of commitment in the prediction of relevant outcomes. Understanding whether similar relationships exist for multiple foci of perceptions of politics would add significantly to our understanding of their effects in organizations.

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