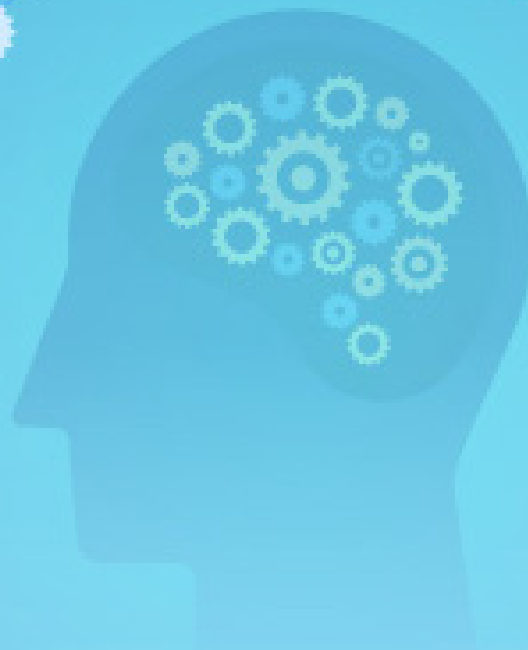




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Investigating the Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence in the Relationship between Perceived Organizational Politics and Counterproductive Behavior among University Faculty

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the moderating effect of emotional intelligence (EI) on the association between perceived organizational politics (POP) and counterproductive behavior (CB) in a sample of 385 public university faculties from six public universities in Bangladesh. The results were obtained using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), which demonstrated that POP has a significant impact on CB, and that EI is a moderator that dilutes this correlation. In particular, although greater POP levels correspond to greater CB, faculty members with greater EI are more emotionally controlled, which decreases their likelihood of engaging in counterproductive behavior. This study builds on social exchange theory (SET) by including EI as a psychological resource that mitigates the adverse impact of perceived organizational politics to provide subtle insights into how individuals respond to workplace stressors. The findings indicate that the development of EI can be an efficient approach to reducing CB and improving the well-being of faculty, which can be of great value in managing organizational politics in academic environments. This study contributes to the literature on individual differences and organizational behavior by demonstrating the importance of emotion regulation in lessening maladaptive responses to political stressors.

INTRODUCTION

Higher-education institutions play a significant role in facilitating societal development, economic growth, innovation, and the spread of knowledge (Uddin & Khan, 2024). However, in these institutions, undesirable workplace practices such as counterproductive behavior (CB), including withdrawal, less effort, and interpersonal conflict, pose a significant challenge not only to individual faculty members but also to the overall performance of the organization (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Spector & Fox, 2005). With the changing nature of universities to meet growing performance expectations, limited resources, and intricate governance systems, faculty members tend to experience perceived organizational politics (POP) (Abdi, 2025). It is assumed that organizational choices, especially rewards, promotions, and resource distribution, are based on self-interest and informal power instead of merit-based principles (Ferris *et al.*, 2012). Such feelings of injustice and political intrigue contribute to work stress, increasing the degree of CB, since faculty members can react to perceived injustice by disengaging, procrastinating, or even engaging in interpersonal deviance (Ferris *et al.*, 2002). Although many studies have been conducted to identify the adverse effects of POP, a significant portion of the available literature has focused more on attitudinal effects, including job satisfaction or organizational commitment, and provides little information about the behavioral effects of political work environments (Baloch *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, research has not paid much attention to individual variations that can influence

faculty members' responses to such stressful politically charged situations. The ability to recognize, interpret, and manage emotions in others and self-perceive them is one of these individual differences, known as Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Mayer, 2024). High EI is associated with improved stress management and interpersonal skills and is less likely to use maladaptive behaviors (Ilusanmi *et al.*, 2025; Joseph & Newman, 2010a). Individuals with EI are better at negative emotion management and self-control in response to organizational stressors, which can potentially lead them to better overcome the stressors of POP and lower their risk of committing CB. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the association between perceived organizational politics (POP) and counterproductive behavior (CB) among university faculty members. This study aims to contribute to the current knowledge of how psychological resources can be used to alleviate the adverse impact of a politicized work setting by investigating the role of individual differences in EI on the behavioral consequences linked to perceived workplace politics. This provides useful information to enhance faculty welfare and institutional performance in the context of higher education, where academic and professional performance stakes are high.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived Organizational Politics

Perceived organizational politics (POP) is the perception that employees have about the way decisions are made

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about rewards, promotion, and resource allocation based on self-interest instead of merit, thus influencing their attitudes and behaviors (Ferris *et al.*, 2012). POP is a perceptual construct that determines how employees perceive fairness and power relations within organizations, especially in higher education, where competition over scarce resources and unclear evaluation systems increase political perceptions (de Wit & Altbach, 2020a). Studies have consistently associated POP with adverse consequences, such as decreased job satisfaction and commitment and increased stress (Abdi, 2025). Furthermore, people's reactions to POP differ, and the degree of such effects depends on personality traits and emotional intelligence (Samanta & Kallou, 2020). Faculty members in academic fields, where hierarchy and promotion and funding of research increase the intensity of political perceptions, tend to experience more stress because of POP (Ahmed *et al.*, 2020). It is linked to emotional burnout, disengagement, and lack of motivation, which affect the quality of teaching and research productivity (de Wit & Altbach, 2020b). Moreover, counterproductive behaviors (CB), including withdrawal and interpersonal conflict, have been associated with POP (Fang, 2024). Nonetheless, attitudinal outcomes have been the main area of study, and little is known about how individual differences influence behavioral reactions to such politics. This study aims to fill this gap by discussing the role of emotional intelligence in mediating the relationship between POP and CB.

Counterproductive Behavior

Counterproductive behavior (CB) is defined as behavior that works against the interests of an organization, including stealing, sabotage, interpersonal aggression, and wastage, which have an adverse impact on productivity, employee morale, and performance (Spector *et al.*, 2010). CB costs companies billions of dollars per year and can be presented as lateness, defamation, and social isolation, which make it difficult to cooperate and be effective in an organization (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Absenteeism, slandering the public, and other behaviors in academic institutions not only interfere with daily activities but also destroy the reputation and academic culture of the institution (Spector *et al.*, 2006). CB is especially susceptible to faculty members who are exposed to elevated levels of organizational politics and tend to deal with it by disengaging and engaging in interpersonal conflict (Karim, 2021). CB according to the Counterproductive Behavior Checklist (CB-C) has ten main behaviors, including resource misuse and derision of peers, which represent wider organizational stressors (Spector *et al.*, 2010). Such practices undermine employee dedication and institutional development (Kelloway & Day, 2005). To reduce CB and its negative consequences, universities should create a friendly atmosphere, improve communication, and have clear policies (Duradoni *et al.*, 2025).

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the capacity to experience, sense, manage, and apply emotions to oneself and others, which allows one to perform effectively in any emotionally challenging context (Loi, 2014). Contrary to fixed personality traits, EI is a skill that can be acquired and improved through experience and training (Filice & Weese, 2024). It is essential in organizational settings, where interpersonal contacts are frequent and emotional situations are complicated (Groth *et al.*, 2024). Studies have also associated EI with positive work results, including better relationships, reduced emotional exhaustion, and stress management (Zeidner *et al.*, 2004a). The results of the meta-analysis prove that EI is a significant factor in explaining the behavior of employees and the difference between cognitive ability and personality traits (O'Boyle *et al.*, 2011). Individuals with high EI can control negative emotions and minimize impulsive responses in stressful situations (Miao *et al.*, 2021). Emotional intelligence (EI) has become an increasingly popular buffering resource that reduces the adverse effects of stress and adverse organizational conditions (Miao *et al.*, 2021; Salip & Quines, 2023). The higher the EI of employees, the more adaptive coping mechanisms and emotional balance they have; the lower the EI of employees, the more susceptible they are to counterproductive behavior (Loi, 2014). EI is important in dealing with stress and developing collegial relationships in the context of higher education, where faculty members perform emotionally demanding work, including teaching, mentoring, and decision-making (Herman *et al.*, 2023). However, most studies have concentrated on the direct impacts of EI, and little has been done to examine the moderating impacts of EI in organizations. This study fills this gap by conceptualizing EI as a moderating variable that affects faculty responses to perceived organizational politics (POP) and CB.

Hypothesis Development

Perceived Organizational Politics and Counterproductive Behavior

Perceived organizational politics (POP) is a set of beliefs among employees that organizational decisions are made based on self-interest and not merit, which results in the perception of unfairness and lack of control (Ferris *et al.*, 2012). Such perceptions may lower the desire to conform to organizational norms, especially when hard work is not compensated (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). Studies have established that POP is associated with disengagement, withdrawal, and interpersonal deviance in different work environments (Cohen, 2013). In this context, POP can be exacerbated by unclear evaluation procedures and reward competition in higher education, which leads to a greater propensity for faculty to engage in counterproductive behaviors (Abdi, 2025).

H1: Perceived organizational politics has a significant positive effect on counterproductive behavior among university faculty.

Emotional Intelligence and Counterproductive Behavior

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the capacity to recognize, interpret, and manage emotions in oneself and others, which enhances more effective self-regulation and coping in emotionally intense circumstances (Loi, 2014). Individuals with higher EI have better impulse control, emotional regulation, and coping skills, which lead to a lower risk of involvement in CB when exposed to stress (Miao *et al.*, 2021; O’Boyle *et al.*, 2011). Conversely, a lower EI is associated with heightened emotional reactivity and a propensity for maladaptive behaviors (Zeidner *et al.*, 2004a). Academically, where interpersonal relationships and self-regulation are essential, EI faculty members are more likely to observe professional behavior even when they are under organizational stress (Herman *et al.*, 2023). H2: Emotional intelligence has a significant negative effect on counterproductive behavior among university faculty members.

The Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence

Although POP tends to escalate counterproductive behavior, individuals’ reactions to politically charged settings are different (Filice & Weese, 2024). EI is a major moderating variable that determines emotional regulation, coping, and behavioral reactions to perceived unfairness and stress (Loi, 2014). Social Exchange Theory suggests that employees who perceive organizational politics may view such conditions as unfair exchanges (Blau, 1964). High-EI faculty members manage to control the negative emotions caused by perceived imbalances and remain reciprocally behaved despite unfavorable conditions. In contrast, individuals with low EI might be more emotionally reactive, which only contributes to counterproductive behaviors (Miao *et al.*, 2021; Zeidner *et al.*, 2004b).

H3: Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between perceived organizational politics and counterproductive behavior among university faculty.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This research is based on the Social Exchange Theory (SET), according to which employees assess relationships in the workplace in terms of fairness and reciprocity (Blau, 1964). Employees who feel that organizational decisions, including promotions and rewards, are made based on self-interest and not merit, experience feelings of unfairness and initiate negative behavioral reactions, including counterproductive behavior (CB) (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) in higher education is an indicator of such unfair interactions, which frustrate people and develop CB as a negative reciprocity (Ferris *et al.*, 2012). This relationship is mediated by Emotional Intelligence (EI). EI refers to the capacity to control emotions; the higher the EI, the greater the ability to handle negative emotions brought on by political settings, and thus, the lower the risk of CB (Mayer, 2024). In contrast, individuals with lower EI can have an increased level of emotional reactivity, which results in an increase in CB behavior (Zeidner *et al.*, 2004b). Therefore, it is assumed that EI undermines the positive correlation between POP and CB, serving as a moderator that reduces the behavioral effects of perceived organizational politics on CB. This framework highlights the importance of individual differences in determining reactions to organizational stress and provides information on when and to whom POP is most likely to cause adverse effects on employees. The theoretical framework of this study is illustrated in figure 1.

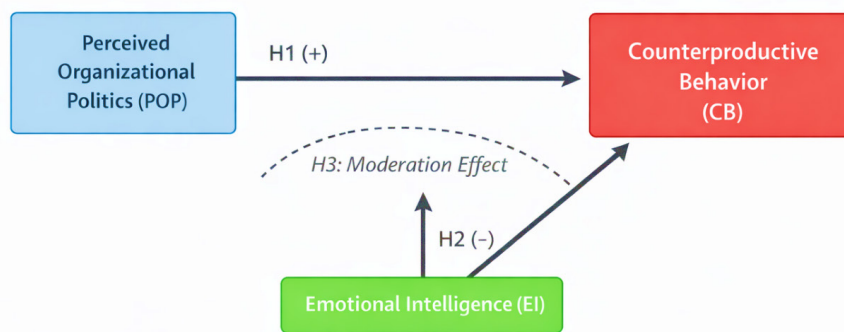


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Source: Author

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample and Data Collection

This study surveyed full-time faculty members from six public universities in Bangladesh, chosen because of their higher levels of autonomy and politicized conditions, which are most suitable for examining the effects of Perceived Organizational Politics (POP) and its influence on Counterproductive Behavior (CB). A self-reported questionnaire was sent to 790 faculty members via email, and the response time was between

September and October 2025. Of the initial feedbacks, 385 were considered for analysis, which provided sufficient statistical power to test the correlation between POP, Emotional Intelligence (EI), and CB. Data were examined on an individual basis to examine the role of faculty members’ characteristics and perceptions in their behavior. Convenience sampling was feasible because it was diverse in terms of academic rank, age, gender, and experience. The response rate (385 of 790) is deemed satisfactory in social science research and is similar to

other online survey research (Baruch and Holtom, 2008). Table 1 presents the demographic information of the respondents. Of the respondents, 56.6% were male and 43.4% were female. Regarding marital status, 67.3% were married and 32.7% were single. Academic rank: 35.1 percent assistant professors, 27.0 percent lecturers, 24.2 percent associate professors, and 13.7 percent others Full-time employment: 42.3 percent of the faculty had PhDs, 41.0 percent master's degrees, 7.3 percent bachelor's

degrees, and 9.4 percent others. The age distribution was as follows: 36.4% aged 35-44, 27.0% aged 25-34, 20.5% aged 45 years and above, 8.8% aged 55 years, and 7.3% below 25. In terms of academic experience, 39.7% had 11-20 years, 27.5% had 5-10 years, 21.3% had more than 20 years, and 11.4% had less than 5 years of experience. All constructs were assessed using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Table 1: Demographic information of the respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 25 years	28	7.3
	25–34 years	104	27.0
	35–44 years	140	36.4
	45–54 years	79	20.5
	55 years and above	34	8.8
	Total	385	100.0
Gender	Male	218	56.6
	Female	167	43.4
	Total	385	100.0
Academic Rank / Position	Lecturer	104	27.0
	Assistant Professor	135	35.1
	Associate Professor	93	24.2
	Professor	53	13.7
	Total	385	100.0
Academic Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	28	7.3
	Master's Degree	158	41.0
	PhD	163	42.3
	Other (Specify)	36	9.4
	Total	385	100.0
Years of Academic Experience	Less than 5 years	44	11.4
	5–10 years	106	27.5
	11–20 years	153	39.7
	More than 20 years	82	21.3
	Total	385	100.0
Marital Status	Single	126	32.7
	Married	259	67.3
	Total	385	100.0

Measurement

The instruments used in this study were established and psychometrically validated, and are commonly used in organizational research. The 12-item measure of perceived organizational politics (POP) was based on three dimensions: general political behavior (six items), go along to get ahead (four items), and pay and promotion policies (two items), and is acceptable in terms of reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$) (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), a 16-item measure of self-emotion appraisal, others emotion appraisal, emotion use, and emotion regulation, was used to measure Emotional

Intelligence (EI) with reliability $\alpha=0.76-0.89$ (Wong & Law, 2012). The 10 items counterproductive behavior checklist (CB-C), which assesses counterproductive behavior (CB), was used to measure counterproductive behavior, including resource misuse, lateness, and verbal abuse, with high reliability ($\alpha > 0.85$) (Spector *et al.*, 2010). All constructs were assessed on a five-point Likert scale, which guarantees high construct validity and reliability of the structural analyses of the study.

Data Analysis and Results

The SPSS (Version 24.0) and the Partial Least Squares

Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS (Version 4.1.1.6) were used to analyze descriptive statistics and inter-construct correlations to test the measurement tools and confirm the hypothesized relationships in the research model. PLS-SEM is a powerful multivariate method, particularly, when dealing with complex models and small sample sizes, and when it is necessary to explain endogenous constructs with low variance (Hair *et al.*,

2022). The study used a two-step PLS-SEM: measurement and structural models measured construct validity and reliability and hypothesized relationships between perceived organizational politics (POP), emotional intelligence (EI), and counterproductive behavior (CB), respectively (Ali *et al.*, 2018). Figure 2 presents the structural model and path coefficients and demonstrates the proposed relationships between the main constructs of this study.

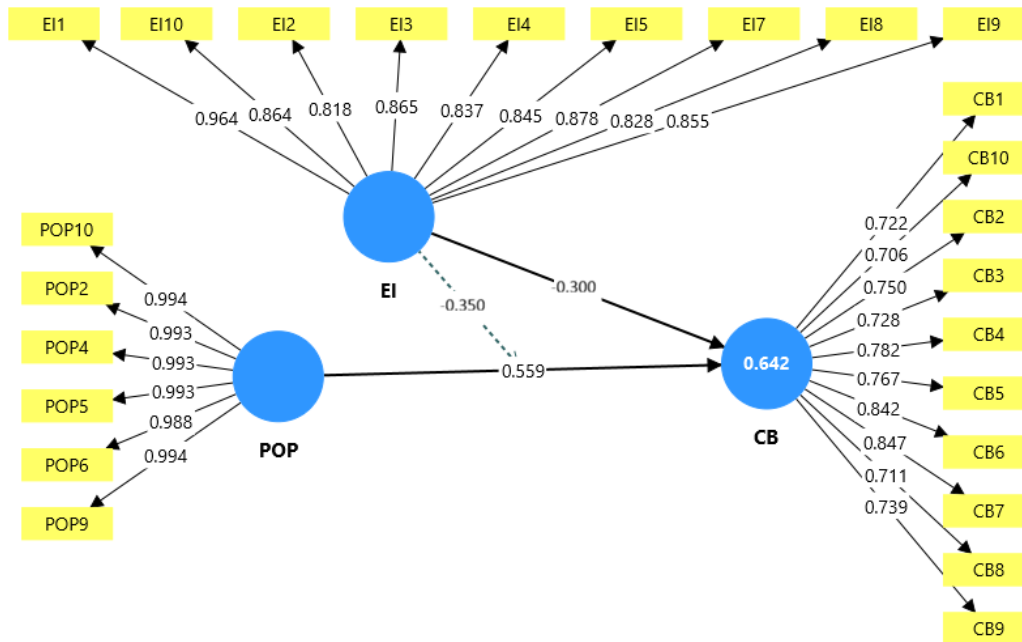


Figure 2: Structural model - path coefficient

Measurement Model

The reliability and validity of the latent constructs were tested using a measurement model. Some items, such as EI6, EI11, EI12, EI13, EI14, EI15, EI16, POP1, POP3, POP7, POP8, POP11, and POP12, had a factor loading lower than the acceptable level of 0.60, as shown in Table 2. Therefore, these items were not included in the analysis. After dropping these items, the remaining indicators had good loading values, indicating that they were reasonably reliable. All

constructs had a Cronbach alpha, rho, and composite reliability exceeding the recommended value of 0.70, which means that there was sufficient internal consistency. The AVE values of all constructs ranged between 0.579 and 0.985, which is greater than the acceptable minimum of 0.50; therefore, the convergent validity of the constructs was achieved. Hence, the measurement model presented in Table 2 has high indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity for all constructs.

Table 2: Outcomes of measurement model

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Counterproductive Behavior (CB)	CB1	0.722	0.921	0.933	0.932	0.579
	CB10	0.706				
	CB2	0.750				
	CB3	0.728				
	CB4	0.782				
	CB5	0.767				
	CB6	0.842				
	CB7	0.847				
	CB8	0.711				
	CB9	0.739				

Emotional Intelligence (EI)	EI1	0.964	0.957	0.959	0.963	0.744
	EI10	0.864				
	EI2	0.818				
	EI3	0.865				
	EI4	0.837				
	EI5	0.845				
	EI7	0.878				
	EI8	0.828				
	EI9	0.855				
Perceived Organizational Politics (POP)	POP10	0.994	0.997	0.997	0.997	0.985
	POP2	0.993				
	POP4	0.993				
	POP5	0.993				
	POP6	0.988				
	POP9	0.994				
	EI x POP	1.000				

The heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) was used to determine discriminant validity, as it is a more robust measure than conventional methods, including the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings (Ringle *et al.*, 2020). The study constructs in Table 3 had HTMT values ranging from 0.341 to 0.733. In particular, the HTMT value between counterproductive behavior (CB) and emotional intelligence (EI) was 0.624, whereas the HTMT value between CB and perceived organizational politics (POP) was 0.733. The HTMT value between CB

and the interaction term EI x POP was 0.442. The EI x POP interaction term EI x POP was 0.553, and the HTMT between EI and POP was 0.461.

The values of all HTMT were significantly lower than the conservative level of 0.90, indicating that the constructs had sufficient discriminant validity. These results indicate that the constructs are empirically differentiated and represent conceptually different phenomena, thus indicating the discriminant validity of the measures applied in this study.

Table 3: Discriminant validity by HTMT

	CB	EI	POP	EI x POP
CB				
EI	0.624			
POP	0.733	0.553		
EI x POP	0.442	0.461	0.341	

Structural Model

Table 4 presents the findings of the structural model. The results suggest that all the hypotheses were accepted, and substantial relationships were noted between perceived organizational politics (POP), emotional intelligence (EI), and counterproductive behavior (CB). In particular, POP positively impacted CB ($\beta = 0.559$, $t = 7.975$, $p < 0.001$), implying that a greater perception of organizational politics is strongly linked to a higher level of counterproductive behavior. Similarly, EI negatively influenced CB ($\beta = -0.300$, $t = 3.750$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that the greater the EI, the lower the

counterproductive behavior. Furthermore, the interaction term of EI and POP had a significant moderating effect on the relationship between POP and CB ($\beta = -0.350$, $t = 5.130$, $p = 0.004$), confirming the hypothesis that EI reduces the positive effects of POP on CB, although moderately. The R^2 value of CB was 0.642, which means that the model accounted for 64.2 percent of the variance in counterproductive behavior. The f^2 values of POP \rightarrow CB (0.350), EI \rightarrow CB (0.400), and EI x POP \rightarrow CB (0.450) indicate that the effect size of the moderating variables is medium to large, with the largest effect size of 0.450, indicating the largest moderating effect size.

Table 4: Outcomes of the structural model

Hs	Paths	β	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	R ²	f ²	Q ²	P values	Decision	95% Con. Interval (BC)	
										LL	UL
H ₁	POP \rightarrow CB	0.559	0.070	7.975***	0.642	0.350	0.594	0.000	Supported	0.452	0.682

H ₂	EI -> CB	-0.300	0.08	3.750***		0.400		0.002	Supported	-0.405	-0.129
H ₃	EI x POP -> CB	-0.350	0.07	5.130***		0.450		0.004	Supported	-0.400	-0.250

Note: ***t* ≥ 2.327 at the *p* < 0.01 level; ****t* ≥ 3.092 at the *p* < 0.001 level (based on one-tailed test with 10,000 bootstrapping). *H* = hypothesis, POP = Perceived Organizational Politics, EI = Emotional Intelligence, CB = counterproductive behavior, BC = biased corrected, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit

The Q² value of CB (0.594) has moderate predictive relevance, implying that the model is capable of predicting counterproductive behavior. These findings highlight the key roles of organizational politics and emotional intelligence in shaping counterproductive behavior, with emotional intelligence as a moderator that dilutes the effect of organizational politics on counterproductive behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study addresses the moderating effect of emotional intelligence (EI) on the association between perceived organizational politics (POP) and counterproductive behavior (CB) among faculty in Bangladeshi higher education institutions (HEIs). The results validate that POP positively affects CB, greater EI has a significant negative impact on this effect, and emotion regulation plays a protective role in politically charged settings. These findings are consistent with previous studies that indicate that POP contributes to the development of negative behavioral patterns, including disengagement and procrastination, especially in the academic environment, where politics tend to increase stress levels (Ferris *et al.*, 2012). Higher EI helps faculty members control such stressors and avoid their escalation into CB (Joseph & Newman, 2010b). Moderation analysis confirms the social exchange theory in those employees who experience unfair exchange like POP could participate in negative reciprocity (Blau, 1964). Nevertheless, EI allows people to control their emotional reactions and mitigate CB, even in situations of political pressure. Such a moderating effect is especially applicable to the setting of Bangladeshi HEIs, where the political process tends to prevail over merit-based choices, and EI becomes even more important for conducting CB management (Godonoga, 2026). In summary, this study highlights the importance of EI in alleviating the adverse impact of POP on CB, implying that EI training may become an effective intervention to help faculty members manage politically charged settings and promote the well-being of the institution.

This research has great theoretical implications for the literature on organizational behavior. The results build upon social exchange theory by adding EI as an important moderator, which adds to the application of SET in situations where perceived unfairness and political stress are high. This study demonstrates the role of emotional control in reactions to organizational politics by providing a more complex picture of when and why workers are affected by CB. It also leads to a

more comprehensive interpretation of the interaction between individual differences and organizational factors in influencing workplace behaviors. In a practical sense, this research has practical implications for institutions and organizations in the higher education field that experience toxic political climates. In particular, EI was found to be a protective factor that reduced the effects of POP on CB. Developing EI in training programs will help institutions minimize counterproductive behaviors, improve the well-being of employees, and foster a collaborative and resilient workforce. This study supports the idea of individual-level interventions, which target not only emotional competencies but also personality traits, providing a holistic approach to reducing the adverse impact of political toxicity in academia and organizations.

This study has some limitations that provide guidelines for future research. To begin with, the causal inference is restricted by cross-sectional design. The longitudinal or experimental studies in the future would be more effective in determining causal relationships between perceived organizational politics (POP), emotional intelligence (EI), and counterproductive behavior (CB). Second, this study was on Bangladeshi universities and the results might not be applicable to other cultural or organizational settings beyond Bangladesh. The generalizability of the results could be evaluated with the assistance of cross-cultural studies or comparative research. Other personal differences that could mediate the relationship between POP and CB should be studied in the future. Moreover, organizational forces, such as leadership styles or organizational justice, must be investigated to comprehend the interaction between the climate in the workplace and individual differences. Lastly, future studies can be expanded to include other contexts, such as the business world or healthcare institutions, to determine the impact of politics and emotional intelligence on behavior in different organizational situations.

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