



## Research article

## The mediating effect of interpersonal distrust on the relationship between perceived organizational politics and workplace ostracism in higher education institutions

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Perceived organizational politics  
 Interpersonal distrust  
 Workplace ostracism  
 Higher education institutions

## ABSTRACT

Despite a widespread consensus towards the implications of workplace ostracism to employees, little research attention has been paid to exploring its determinants, especially in the educational sector. In the context of higher education institutions, workplace ostracism can lead to a number of undesired outcomes, such as deviant workplace behavior, turnover, and decreased job performance. Thus, this study aims to explore the role of perceived organizational politics in promoting workplace ostracism. Drawing on the social exchange theory, the study also attempts to identify the mediating role of interpersonal distrust in the relationship between perceived organizational politics and workplace ostracism in higher education institutions. Data were conveniently collected from 154 full-time faculty members serving in five public universities in Bangladesh. To test the research hypotheses, the study employed partial least squares path modeling. The findings revealed that there is a significant positive association between perceived organizational politics and workplace ostracism and that interpersonal distrust plays an intervening role in the relationship. These results highlight the role of perceived organizational politics and interpersonal distrust in shaping academics' workplace ostracism. Based on the findings, the study suggests both practical and theoretical implications with directions for future research.

## 1. Introduction

Workplace ostracism (WO) is considered a pervasive workplace phenomenon, which is a serious and widespread concern for today's organizations (Hsieh and Karatepe, 2019; Liu et al., 2013). Indeed, ostracism has a consistently negative influence on the behaviors and feelings of employees, where employees engage in many self-defeating behaviors (Haldorai et al., 2020). WO refers to "the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others" (Ferris et al., 2008, p. 1348). Based on the early studies surrounding social rejection, WO is also known as peer rejection, social exclusion, social isolation, abandonment, and being "out of the loop" (O'Reilly et al., 2015). A recent study conducted by Jon M. Huntsman School of Business of Utah State University revealed that 66% of employees experienced some sort of ostracism at their workplace (Parker, 2019). Another earlier study discovered that over a length of 5 years, 66% of respondents encountered WO in the forms of the silent treatment, whereas 28.7%

reported that co-workers intentionally left the place upon their arrival (Fox and Stallworth, 2005). As a serious workplace stressor, WO brings a variety of negative effects on targets' psychological, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Zimmerman et al., 2016). WO causes job dissatisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, poor job performance, greater counterproductive workplace behavior, and higher turnover intentions (Hsieh and Karatepe, 2019). Despite widespread research attention to the issue in recent years, scholars have paid very little attention to its antecedents (Liu et al., 2019). Consequently, it is essential to discover the factors that can shape WO and the mechanism by which these factors affect WO (Zhang and Dai, 2015).

Since experiencing WO generally depends on the behavior of others at the workplace (Chen and Li, 2019; Ferris et al., 2008; Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019), interpersonal factors, particularly the negative ones, are likely to play a vital role in instilling employees' sense of WO. Thus, we suggest that perceived organizational politics and interpersonal distrust can stimulate employees' WO, which is still unexplored in the existing

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literature. Organizational politics, in general, represents unofficial, self-serving, and sometimes behind-the-scenes behaviors to influence others, accumulate power, sell ideas, or attain predetermined objectives (Bauer and Erdogan, 2012). Therefore, employees usually perceive organizational politics as unethical, unfair, and unjust behavior (Başar et al., 2018; Bodla et al., 2014). The literature clearly indicates that perceived organizational politics (POP) is a genuine culprit of generating various negative employee outcomes (Baloch et al., 2017; Karatepe, 2013; Landells and Albrecht, 2019; Saleem, 2015). In particular, perceiving organizational politics at a greater degree promotes interpersonal conflict and distrust (Bai et al., 2016; Kumar and Ghadially, 1989; Ullah et al., 2019; Utami et al., 2014), as well as undermines interpersonal exchange relationships (Chinomona and Mofokeng, 2016; Scott et al., 2013), which can cause an individual to feel ostracized at the workplace (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2016; Zhang and Dai, 2015).

Despite a growing number of studies on WO in the context of business organizations, little empirical attention has been paid to the education sector (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2016; Fatima et al., 2017). Moreover, antecedents of WO in the context of HEIs are often overlooked by research, with a few exceptions (e.g., Bilal et al., 2020; Erkutlu and Chafra, 2016). Since a large number of faculty members working in public HEIs in Bangladesh actively engage in partisan and organizational politics (Shiddike and Rahman, 2019; Tithi, 2017), the current study draws on social exchange theory (SET), as well as proposes and aims to examine the direct effect of perceived organizational politics (POP) on WO and the mediating effect of interpersonal distrust towards the relationship between POP and WO in the context of public HEIs of Bangladesh. The present study contributes to the literature by identifying perceived organizational politics as a predictor of interpersonal distrust and workplace ostracism. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this study is the first of its kind to reveal the mediating role of interpersonal distrust in the relation between perceived organizational politics and workplace ostracism. Moreover, this study contributes to helping HEIs regarding how to reduce the phenomenon of workplace ostracism by showing that perceived organizational politics and interpersonal distrust can be important determining factors of workplace ostracism. Thus, HEIs should take initiatives to encourage fairness, equity, and non-politicized decision-making in relation to pay and promotion practices in order to promote a trustworthy working environment. According to the above discussion, this study aims to address the following question: Is there a relationship between perceived organizational politics and workplace ostracism by mediating effect of interpersonal distrust in HEIs?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Workplace ostracism

Ostracism is widely prevalent almost everywhere in society, including the workplace (Chen and Li, 2019; Yang and Treadway, 2018). WO represents a situation in which an individual feels that he or she is ignored, rejected, uninvited, or excluded by others in the workplace (Zhao and Xia, 2017). At work, an employee may feel ignored or excluded by co-workers' behaviors, such as deliberate ignorance, denying eye contact, leaving the room when he/she comes in, ignoring him/her in the conversation, being unresponsive to his/her greetings, giving him/her the "cold shoulder" or withholding needed information (Chen and Li, 2019; Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019; Yang and Treadway, 2018). These behaviors are a kind of interpersonal mistreatment that is painful and aversive to the ostracized employees (Chen and Li, 2019; Wan et al., 2018). Compared with bullying, sexual harassment, and other forms of explicit mistreatments, WO is more ambiguous, subtle, and sometimes unintentional (Zimmerman et al., 2016). In certain instances, it may happen unintentionally when the source is too busy or not aware that his or her behavior socially ignores someone else (Al-Atwi, 2017; Chung and Kim, 2017). Whether it is intentional or unintentional,

ostracized employees tend to feel humiliated, powerless, angry, stressed, dissatisfied, and revengeful, resulting in negative behavior (Fiset et al., 2017; Gkorezis et al., 2016; Liu and Xia, 2016; Riaz et al., 2019a,b). According to Gkorezis et al. (2016), WO is likely to undermine several fundamental human needs of the victims, particularly the need for belongingness, self-esteem, a meaningful existence, and control. It produces an unfavorable work environment which tends to bring numerous negative work outcomes, such as job stress (Mahfooz et al., 2017; Vui-Yee and Yen-Hwa, 2020), job tension (Hsieh and Karatepe, 2019), reduced job satisfaction (Chung and Kim, 2017; Fatima, 2016), reduced job embeddedness (Lyu and Zhu, 2019), higher turnover intention (Mahfooz et al., 2017; Vui-Yee and Yen-Hwa, 2020), reduced organizational commitment (Hitlan et al., 2006), emotional exhaustion (Jahanzeb and Fatima, 2018), and higher deviant behaviors (Jahanzeb and Fatima, 2018; Peng and Zeng, 2017). Moreover, WO can have a negative effect on work engagement (Kaya et al., 2017), organizational citizenship behaviors (Wu et al., 2016), job performance (De Clercq et al., 2019; Jahanzeb et al., 2020).

In the context of HEIs, WO can lead to a number of undesired outcomes such as withdrawal behavior, deviant workplace behavior, resignation, and decreased job performance (Bilal et al., 2020; Fatima et al., 2019; Mirza et al., 2020).

### 2.2. Perceived organizational politics

Organizational politics is a common phenomenon in today's organizational life (Drory and Meisler, 2016). It refers to "intentional behaviors or actions that promote or protect one's self-interest at the expense of others or of organizational goals in the workplace" (Goo et al., 2019, p. 5). In a politically driven organization, employees are likely to perceive the work environment as unjust and unfair and thus, a threat to their interest and organizational well-being (Bodla et al., 2014; Cho and Yang, 2018). Thus, the way employees perceive organizational politics and the resulting implications have drawn the great attention of researchers (Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot, 2014).

Perceived organizational politics (POP) involves an individual's subjective evaluation in regards to the behaviors of others towards a self-serving purpose (Cho and Yang, 2018). POP refers to "the degree to which respondents view their work environment as political in nature, promoting the self-interests of others, and thereby unjust and unfair from the individual point of view" (Vigoda and Cohen, 2002, p. 311). POP comprises of three dimensions: i) 'General political behavior' (perceived self-serving behaviors of organizational members with the purpose of obtaining valued outcomes); ii) 'go along to go ahead' (perceived organizational members' behaviors of remaining supportively silent, passive, and inactive with the aim of achieving one's goals; and iii) 'pay and promotion' (perceived unfairness regarding pay and reward practices in the organization) (Kacmar and Carlson, 1997; Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; Makhdoom et al., 2015). Since POP greatly affects an employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions, understanding its effects has both academic and practical significance (Crawford et al., 2019). Past research has shown that POP is negatively associated with desired employee outcomes, such as employee well-being (Ullah et al., 2019), meaningfulness of work (Landells and Albrecht, 2019), perceived organizational support (Bukhari and Kamal, 2017), moral efficacy (Khan et al., 2019), job satisfaction (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2019; Bukhari and Kamal, 2017), work engagement (Karatepe, 2013), organizational commitment (Bukhari and Kamal, 2017; Lau et al., 2017), employee creativity (Malik et al., 2019), extra-role performance (Karatepe, 2013), and job performance (Hasan et al., 2019). Moreover, POP was found to have a positive relationship with negative employee outcomes, in particular, stress (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2019; Bukhari and Kamal, 2017; Landells and Albrecht, 2019), task and relationship conflicts (Bai et al., 2016), employee silence (Sun and Xia, 2018), turnover intention (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2019; Bukhari and Kamal, 2017), knowledge hiding

(Malik et al., 2019), and counterproductive work behaviors (Baloch et al., 2017).

### 2.3. Perceived organizational politics and workplace ostracism

In general, an increased perception of organizational politics can cause employees' feelings of unfairness, powerlessness, anxiety, increased awareness of self-protection, imbalanced interpersonal relationship, destruction of the exchange relationship between the employees, triggering the sense of separation and crowding out by colleagues (Sun and Xia, 2018). Moreover, POP promotes conflict of interests, self-serving behaviors against each other, task and relationship conflicts, and interpersonal distrust (Bai et al., 2016; Ullah et al., 2019) and subsequently, yield employees' feeling of being ostracized by others (Mlika et al., 2017; Zhang and Dai, 2015). In the context of social exchange theory, POP usually promotes a sense of unfairness and adversely affects employee outcomes, which is likely to weaken the exchange relationship (Chinomona and Mofokeng, 2016). In a poor social exchange relationship, employees are more likely to perceive themselves as weak or low-contributing social exchange partner and thus, feel excluded from each other (Scott et al., 2013). Moreover, considering the numerous negative employee outcomes of POP (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2019; Bukhari and Kamal, 2017; Labrague et al., 2017; Landells and Albrecht, 2017; Malik et al., 2019), it is assumed that POP can prompt another damaging employee outcome, i.e., WO. Thus, the study proposes the following hypothesis.

**H1.** Perceived organizational politics has a significant positive relationship with workplace ostracism.

### 2.4. Perceived organizational politics, interpersonal trust, and workplace ostracism

Social exchange theory reflects the idea that human beings are driven to reciprocate and engage in a social exchange relationship, in which successful exchange with others greatly depends on the actions and interpersonal trust developed with them (Wang et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2009). In a politicized organization, individuals engage in self-serving behaviors by ignoring the interests of others, which causes conflicts of interests and interpersonal distrust (Bai et al., 2016; Malik et al., 2019). The resulting distrust among employees in a work environment undermines social exchange relationships (Scott et al., 2013), wherein an employee becomes unwilling to interact and maintain relationships with those who are distrusted, resulting in negative interactions (i.e., workplace ostracism) (Zhang and Dai, 2015).

Ferris et al. (2002) argued that organizational politics can result in employees competing for scarce resources often with the loss of others, which is likely to eliminate trust among them. Generally, perceiving a high level of self-acting political activities increases the experience of unfairness, backstabbing, insecurity, conflicts and chaos, deteriorates interpersonal relationships, and thereby promotes interpersonal distrust at the workplace (Kulkarni, 2016; Ullah et al., 2019; Sun and Xia, 2018). On this basis, prior studies have found empirical evidence that employees' POP is positively associated with interpersonal distrust (Kumar and Ghadially, 1989; Ullah et al., 2019; Utami et al., 2014). Once interpersonal distrust becomes dominant in the workplace, individuals may feel hesitant to interact with those who are deemed distrustful and to maintain or restore relationships with them, turning the latter into low contributors in the exchange relationship and risking exposure of these individuals to ostracism (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2016; Scott et al., 2013). Accordingly, several studies found that interpersonal distrust results in WO (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2016; Scott et al., 2013; Zhang and Dai, 2015). Thus, we assume that interpersonal distrust can mediate the relationship between POP and WO.

**H2.** Perceived organizational politics has a significant positive relationship with interpersonal distrust.

**H3.** Interpersonal distrust has a significant positive relationship with workplace ostracism.

**H4.** Interpersonal distrust mediates the positive relationship between perceived organizational politics and workplace ostracism.

### 2.5. Theoretical framework of the study

The researchers indicated that social exchange theory is based on the principle of reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Cook et al., 2013; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Salleh et al., 2020). The principle of reciprocity refers to the equal exchange of either positive or negative commitments between the parties involved (Aburumman et al., 2020). It appears that HEIs can promote fairness and justice through establishing a non-politicized work environment, in which academics will experience trustworthy relationships among them and hence feel less ostracized at the workplace. Therefore, social exchange theory supports these relationships. Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework of this study.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Sample and data collection

The sample consisted of full-time faculty members serving in five Bangladeshi public universities. Using Google forms, a total of 350 self-report questionnaires were conveniently sent to the faculty members' email addresses, which were collected from the official directories of the respective universities. Each email contained a cover letter mentioning the purpose of the study, the instructions, and an invitation to participate in the survey. Within the given time limit of two months in April–May 2020, a total of 154 completed questionnaires were returned, with a response rate of 44 percent. A sample size of 100 or more responses is sufficient to obtain reliable results in PLS-SEM path modeling (Awang et al., 2015; Nitzl, 2018). Of the respondents, as shown in Table 1, 62.3% were male while 81.2% were married. Participants held the position of lecturer (31.8%), assistant professor (37.0%), associate professor (20.8%), and professor (10.4 %). As for the participants' educational background, 1.9%, 68.8%, and 29.2 % of respondents had an honor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate degree, respectively. It is observed that participants belonging to the age group of 20–30, 31–40, 41–50, and >50 years were 48.1%, 29.9 %, 18.2 %, and 3.9 % respectively. In relation to the length their working experience, 43.5 %, 16.2 %, 16.9 %, 17.5 %, 2.6 %, and 3.2 % had job experience in the range of 0–5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–20, and 21–25 years respectively. A 5-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree = 1" to "strongly agree = 5" was used to quantify the indicators.

### 3.2. Measurement

We used Kacmar and Ferris's (1991) twelve-item scale to measure POP. The reported consistency reliability was 0.87. The scale's first six items depicted 'general political behavior'; the next four items represented the political behavior of 'go along to go ahead'; and the last two items indicated perceived politics in relation to 'pay and promotion policies'. It should be emphasized that the study used the scale as a unidimensional measure which was validated in many studies (e.g., De Clercq et al., 2018; Husain, 2017; Malik et al., 2019; Mathotaarachchi, 2017; Riaz et al., 2019a,b; Valle and Witt, 2001). Sample items were 'Favoritism not merit gets people ahead' and 'Policy changes help only a few'. To measure interpersonal distrust, three items were adapted from the study of Chen et al. (2018) with  $\alpha = 0.64$ . A sample item included 'people do more and more hypocritical things in our organization'. A ten-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008) was used to measure WO. Sample items were 'Your greetings have gone unanswered at work' and 'Others avoided you at work'. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.83.

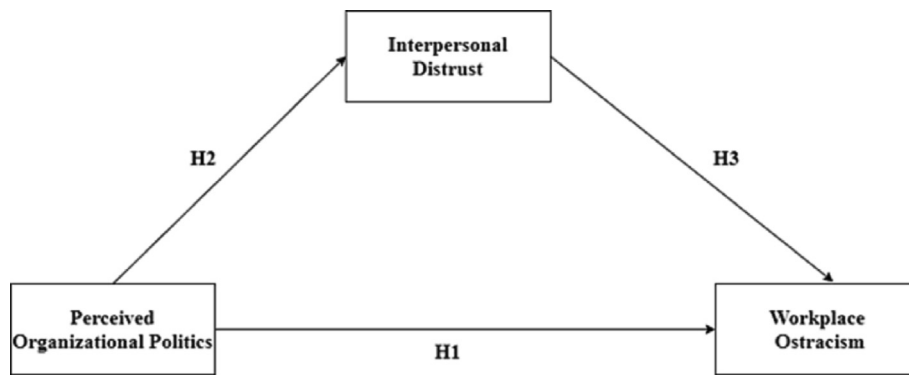


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of this study.

Table 1. Demographic information of the respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	96	62.3
	Female	58	37.7
Status	Married	125	81.2
	Single	29	18.8
Position	Lecturer	49	31.8
	Assistant Professor	57	37.0
	Associate Professor	32	20.8
	Professor	16	10.4
Education	Honors	3	1.9
	Masters	106	68.8
	PhD	45	29.2
Age	20–30 years	74	48.1
	31–40 years	46	29.9
	41–50 Years	28	18.2
	Above 50	6	3.9
Working experience	1–5 Years	67	43.5
	6–10 Years	25	16.2
	11–15 Years	26	16.9
	16–20 Years	28	18.2
	21–25 Years	3	1.9
	Above 25 Years	5	3.2

4. Data analysis and results

Descriptive statistics and inter-construct correlations were assessed with SPSS software (SPSS 24.0). PLS-SEM analysis was conducted using the SmartPLS 3 software to validate the instruments and test the hypotheses of the research model. PLS-SEM is a robust statistical technique used for handling complex models with small sample sizes and can minimize the unexplained variance and maximize the explained variance in the dependent variable(s) accounted for by independent variables (Hair et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2020). PLS-SEM involves a two-step approach (i.e., evaluation of the measurement model and structural model) to analyze and interpret the results of a research model (Ali et al., 2018).

4.1. Descriptive statistics and correlation

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of the model's variables. As shown in Table 2, POP was positively associated with interpersonal distrust ( $r = .499, p < .01$ ) and WO ( $r = .671, p < .01$ ), and interpersonal distrust was positively correlated with WO ( $r = .458, p < 0.01$ ).

4.2. Measurement model

We first assessed the measurement model to confirm the reliability (i.e., indicator reliability and internal consistency reliability) and validity (i.e. convergent validity and discriminant validity) of the model's

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations of latent constructs.

SL	Latent Variables	Mean	S.D	1	2	3
1.	Perceived organizational politics (POP)	3.89	.55	1		
2.	Interpersonal distrust (ID)	3.28	.60	.499**	1	
3.	Workplace ostracism (WO)	3.46	.52	.671**	.458**	1

Notes: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); \*\*p < 0.01.

indicators in relation to the constructs (Ali et al., 2018; Govender and Rootman-le Grange, 2015). As shown in Table 3, all the indicator loadings of the constructs were above the minimum threshold of 0.60 (Chin et al., 1997), suggesting the indicator reliability. All alpha values, Dijkstra Henseler's rho values, and composite reliability scores were above 0.70, indicating sufficient consistency reliability. The measurement model confirmed necessary convergent validity since the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was greater than 0.50.

Finally, this study used heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) as a criterion in assessing the discriminant validity which measures the uniqueness of the constructs. HTMT is superior to the traditional methods (i.e., Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings) for evaluating discriminant validity (Ringle et al., 2020). HTMT values of the measurement model were within 0.85. Table 4 shows the HTMT values all being smaller than 0.85 for each construct and were within the range of 0.485–0.725, suggesting discriminant validity of the constructs. Moreover, variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to check for potential collinearity. VIF values for the study vary from 1.000 to 1.349, which were lower than the cut-off of 5 and indicated no collinearity problem (Ali et al., 2018).

### 4.3. Structural model

The structural model was examined in order to test the hypotheses and to determine the significance of the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect size ( $f^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) (Hair et al., 2017). In order to hypotheses test of the study, the first step is examining the standardized path coefficients using the PLS algorithm embedded with SmartPLS (version 3.3.2). While the second step is to examine the p-values, t-values, and confidence interval accompanying each path coefficient using the bootstrapping techniques embedded with SmartPLS (version 3.3.2) with a minimum bootstrap sample of 10,000 (Ringle et al., 2020), as presented shown in Table 5. The results illustrated that POP ( $\beta = 0.208, t = 8.824, p < 0.001$ ) as well as ID ( $\beta = 0.167, t = 2.609, p < 0.01$ ) have significant impact on WO. Hence, the hypotheses H1 and H3 were

accepted. Moreover, the result revealed that there is a direct and significant effect of POP ( $\beta = 0.208, t = 8.824, p < 0.001$ ) on ID. Thus, H2 was accepted. In addition, this study verified for the mediating role of ID in the relationship between POP and WO. A particular mediation effect is considered to be statistically significant when the indirect effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable through an intervening variable is found to be significant (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). As shown in Table 5, ID mediates the relationship between POP and WO ( $\beta = 0.085, t = 2.368, p < 0.01$ ), providing support for H4.

To measure the model's in-sample predictive power, the researchers assessed the  $R^2$  value for the endogenous constructs (WO = 0.478 and ID = 0.258), indicating substantial and moderate levels of predictive accuracy, respectively (Cohen, 1988). Moreover, this study examined the effect size ( $f^2$ ) which measures the effect/contribution of an exogenous variable to the value of  $R^2$  of the endogenous variable (Samad, 2018). As shown in Table 5, the effect size of POP on WO (0.496) and POP on ID (0.347) were strong, whereas the effect size of ID on WO (0.040) was small (Cohen, 1988). Following a blindfolding procedure, the study also reported Stone-Geisser index ( $Q^2$ ) which indicates predictive relevance (out-of-sample) and should be greater than zero (Ali et al., 2018). Since the two  $Q^2$  values of this study were greater than zero, the model has predictive relevance.

### 5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine how POP contributes to WO through promoting ID in the context of HEIs in Bangladesh. The results of the study supported all the hypothesized relationships for the empirical study. Specifically, the findings revealed that perceiving a greater degree of organizational politics promotes a growing sense of distrust among the organizational members. The finding is consistent with several past studies (Kumar and Ghadially, 1989; Ullah et al., 2019; Utami et al., 2014). The finding implies that self-serving political behaviors that ignore the interests of others result in conflicts of interests (Bai et al., 2016) and a sense of distrust among the organizational members (Malik

Table 3. Outcomes of measurement model.

Constructs	Items	SL	$\alpha$	rho_A	CR	AVE
Perceived organizational politics	POP1	0.763	0.916	0.918	0.929	0.521
	POP2	0.760				
	POP3	0.700				
	POP4	0.759				
	POP5	0.745				
	POP6	0.728				
	POP7	0.704				
	POP8	0.704				
	POP9	0.708				
	POP10	0.677				
	POP11	0.705				
	POP12	0.705				
Interpersonal distrust	ID1	0.847	0.784	0.799	0.873	0.696
	ID2	0.798				
	ID3	0.857				
Workplace ostracism	WO1	0.700	0.901	0.906	0.919	0.533
	WO2	0.709				
	WO3	0.647				
	WO4	0.737				
	WO5	0.604				
	WO6	0.812				
	WO7	0.790				
	WO8	0.809				
	WO9	0.713				
	WO10	0.752				

**Table 4.** Discriminant validity by HTMT.

Construct	POP	ID	WO
POP			
ID	0.600		
WO	0.725	0.485	

**Table 5.** Outcomes of the structural model.

Hs	Paths	$\beta$	SE	T Values	R <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>	Decision	95% Con. Interval (BC)	
									LL	UL
H1	POP->WO	0.592	0.067	8.824***	0.478	0.496	0.242	Supported	0.466	0.690
H2	POP->ID	0.508	0.060	8.511***	0.258	0.347	0.169	Supported	0.391	0.592
H3	ID->WO	0.167	0.064	2.609**		0.040		Supported	0.064	0.274
H4	POP->ID->WO	0.085	0.036	2.368**				Supported	0.032	0.149

Note: \*\*t  $\geq$  2.327 at the p < 0.01 level; \*\*\*t  $\geq$  3.092 at the p < 0.001 level (based on one-tailed test with 10,000 bootstrapping). H = hypothesis, POP = perceived organizational politics, ID = interpersonal distrust, WO = workplace ostracism, BC = biased corrected, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit.

et al., 2019). Moreover, this study affirmed ID as a significant predictor of WO, which is supported by previous scholarly works (e.g., Erktulu and Chafra, 2016; Scott et al., 2013; Zhang and Dai, 2015). According to Scott et al. (2013), once ID grows, individuals tend to be unwilling to develop, maintain or restore relationships with those who are distrusted and thus, are likely to encounter the feeling of being excluded or ostracized from others at the workplace. This study also confirmed the significant direct impact of POP on WO, which is in alignment with the arguments of social exchange theory. Perceiving high level of organizational politics tends to destroy interpersonal exchange relationships (Sun and Xia, 2018), leading to an increased sense of WO among the organizational members (Scott et al., 2013). From the results of this study, ID appeared as a significant intervening variable in the relationship between POP and WO. This finding supported the social exchange theory which highlighted that POP promotes interpersonal distrust and thereby weakens employees' interpersonal exchange relationship and results in an increased sense of their WO.

Organizational politics is the harsh reality existing in Bangladeshi public HEIs, wherein many faculty members allegedly engage in politics for personal interest (Reza, 2014; Tithi, 2017). Under this circumstance, faculty members who engage in politics are usually rewarded (e.g., quick promotions, power, positions), while others do not (Tithi, 2017), resulting in conflicts of interest and a growing sense of distrust among them. Consequently, they are likely to experience poor interpersonal relationships and a feeling of being ostracized from each other. Considering these facts, efforts should be undertaken to curb the excessive involvement of teachers in organizational politics in HEIs in order to develop a sound academic working environment.

### 5.1. Theoretical and practical contributions

The findings of this study have several theoretical and practical implications. First, the study adds new insights into the literature on WO by demonstrating POP as its antecedent, which is overlooked in the current literature. Second, the study extends the current literature on the POP–outcome relationship by investigating the association between POP and WO. Third, the results of the study confirm the applicability of social exchange theory in explaining the association of WO with its antecedents. Fourth, although the present literature has successfully explored employee attitudes such as employee engagement, interpersonal conflict, and trust (e.g. Karatepe, 2013; Ullah et al., 2019) as intervening mechanisms for POP and behavioral outcomes, examining ID as an intervening variable for POP and WO was overlooked. This study contributes new insights by proposing and confirming the intervening effect of ID in the

relationship between POP and workplace ostracism. Moreover, the study enriches WO-outcome literature in the context of academic settings. The findings of this study also have several practical implications. The findings indicate that WO is a prevailing phenomenon at HEIs. Thus, appropriate interventions may be required to reduce workplace ostracism. HEIs may promote a culture that fosters transparency, openness, and fair practices (Zhao et al., 2016). This study also showed that POP and ID can be important determining factors of WO. Therefore, the government, university grants commission (UGC), and university administrations should establish specific guidelines for curbing the self-serving political behaviors of university teachers. Moreover, HEIs should take initiatives to develop a trustworthy working environment through promoting policies and practices of non-politicized decision-making in relation to pay and promotion.

### 5.2. Limitations and directions for future research

The study has several limitations that can stimulate probable directions for future research. First, since the current study is based on small sample size, future studies with large samples can help assess the stability of the findings. Moreover, the study employed the cross-sectional survey and thus, future longitudinal studies are encouraged to establish causal relationships between the study variables. In addition, this study collected data using the convenience sampling method which might limit the generalizability of the findings. Thus, the researchers advise future studies to employ the probability sampling method to ensure findings' generalizability. Furthermore, the research model should be tested across different countries and sectors. Finally, it will be useful to examine the intervening role of interpersonal conflict and power imbalance in the relationship between POP and WO.

### Declarations

#### Author contribution statement

Dewan Niamul Karim: Contributed theoretical framework, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Abdul Halim Abdul Majid: Performed the experiments; Wrote the paper.

Khatijah Omar: Conceived and designed the experiments; Wrote the paper.

Omar Jaber Aburumman: Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.

### Funding statement

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability statement

Data will be made available on request.

### Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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