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Perceived Organizational Politics and Employee Turnover Intention: Testing the Moderating Role of Ethical Leadership among IT Professionals in Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract:

This study investigates whether ethical leadership moderates the relationship between perceived organizational politics (POP) and turnover intention among a location-stratified quota sample of 200 information technology professionals from Lucknow and Noida/Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh. POP, ethical leadership, and turnover intention were assessed with six-, ten-, and three-item five-point measures, respectively. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the proposed three-factor measurement model. Hierarchical regression showed that POP was positively associated with turnover intention, whereas ethical leadership had a negative association. The POP-by-ethical-leadership interaction was negative and significant, adding 16.7% explained variance. Simple-slope analysis showed a strong positive POP effect under low ethical leadership and a substantially weaker, although still significant, effect under high ethical leadership. Drawing on social exchange and conservation of resources theories, the findings suggest that ethical leadership supplies fairness, voice, and predictability that can reduce employees' withdrawal responses to political conditions. Because the data are cross-sectional and were obtained through nonprobability quota sampling, the results represent sample-specific associations rather than causal or population-wide estimates. Organizations should combine ethical supervision with transparent allocation, promotion, and employee-voice systems.

Keywords: IT professionals; perceived organizational politics; ethical leadership; turnover intention; social exchange theory; conservation of resources theory

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Organizations are social, technical, and political systems. Employees attempt to understand managerial decisions, compete for limited rewards, and navigate both formal authority and informal influence. Political behavior is not necessarily dysfunctional. Problems arise, however, when employees believe that personal connections matter more than performance, procedures are unclear, or benefits are distributed selectively. This interpretation of the workplace is commonly described as perceived organizational politics (POP) (Ferris et al., 1989; Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992). Because POP is perceptual, employees may interpret similar organizational conditions differently; nevertheless, their interpretations can meaningfully shape attitudes and behavior.

Turnover intention is a conscious inclination to leave an organization and is a central stage in the employee-withdrawal process (Mobley, 1977; Tett and Meyer, 1993; Griffeth et al., 2000). It is particularly consequential in information technology (IT) work. Technical employees develop project knowledge, client familiarity, and specialized skills that may be transferable across employers. Their departure can interrupt project continuity, weaken client service, and create recruitment and training costs. Identifying when and why IT employees begin considering departure therefore has immediate managerial relevance.

Previous research generally associates POP with unfavorable attitudes, strain, reduced trust, and withdrawal (Miller et al., 2008; Bedi and Schat, 2013; Hochwarter et al., 2020). Employees, however, often encounter organizational rules and daily decisions through their immediate supervisors. Ethical leaders communicate standards, listen to employees, make balanced decisions, address misconduct, and demonstrate consistency between stated principles and actual conduct (Brown et al., 2005; Brown and Trevino, 2006). When the wider environment appears political, such behavior may provide a credible counter-signal. The present study consequently examines both the association between POP and turnover intention and the extent to which ethical leadership changes that association.

1.2 Research Problem

Political cues create uncertainty about how effort will be evaluated, rewards allocated, and formal procedures applied. In IT organizations, unclear promotion standards, selective recognition, opaque hiring decisions, or influence-driven project allocation may lead employees to doubt whether continued organizational investment will be rewarded. When merit appears insufficient for advancement, or disagreement with influential actors seems risky, leaving may appear more controllable than attempting to change the system.

The relationship between POP and turnover intention need not be uniform. An ethical supervisor can explain constraints, provide employee voice, make local decisions more predictable, and demonstrate that misconduct has consequences. These practices may preserve trust and personal resources even when employees detect politics elsewhere. Without testing this boundary condition, research may identify organizational politics as a retention risk while overlooking a leadership resource that organizations can develop.

1.3 Research Gap

Three gaps motivate this research. First, much POP research has examined direct relationships or broad attitudinal outcomes, while the conditions that strengthen or weaken withdrawal remain less settled (Kacmar and Baron, 1999; Hochwarter et al., 2020). Second, ethical leadership is commonly modeled as a direct antecedent of favorable employee outcomes (Bedi et al., 2016); its capacity to buffer employees against a political work environment has received less attention. Third, evidence focused specifically on IT professionals in Uttar Pradesh remains limited. Lucknow and Noida/Greater Noida differ in their organizational ecosystems, yet both include employees whose work depends on expertise, coordination, and career mobility. Studying these locations contributes occupationally and geographically focused evidence to a literature often based on mixed-sector samples.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To examine the association between perceived organizational politics and employee turnover intention among IT employees in Uttar Pradesh.

2. To assess whether ethical leadership moderates the relationship between perceived organizational politics and employee turnover intention.

1.5 Research Questions

RQ1: Is perceived organizational politics positively associated with turnover intention among IT professionals in Uttar Pradesh?

RQ2: Does ethical leadership significantly change the strength of the relationship between perceived organizational politics and turnover intention?

1.6 Contribution of the Study

The study makes four contributions. It connects POP with turnover intention in a knowledge-intensive occupational setting; treats ethical leadership as a boundary condition rather than only a direct predictor; combines social-exchange and resource-conservation explanations of employee withdrawal; and provides evidence from two major IT locations in Uttar Pradesh. Practically, it distinguishes between two complementary retention levers:

reducing political ambiguity through transparent systems and strengthening supervisors' capacity to act fairly and consistently.

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Perceived Organizational Politics

Organizational politics includes activities through which individuals or groups influence decisions to advance particular interests (Ferris et al., 1989). POP concerns an employee's judgment about how frequently such behavior occurs, especially when conduct appears self-serving, informal influence outweighs formal process, or rewards are allocated without clear justification (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). Employees with different information, rank, experience, or access to decision makers can interpret similar structures differently. The construct is therefore explicitly perceptual.

The POP literature commonly distinguishes general political behavior, “going along to get ahead,” and politics in reward and promotion practices (Nye and Witt, 1993; Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). General political behavior involves conduct that seems to advance individual or group interests. Going along to get ahead refers to silence, compliance, or strategic agreement used to secure approval or avoid negative consequences. Politics in rewards and promotion refers to perceived uncertainty or favoritism in the allocation of important outcomes. Together, these perceptions shape whether employees expect performance or influence to determine workplace success.

Meta-analytic evidence associates POP with lower satisfaction, commitment, trust, and performance, and with greater strain and withdrawal-related outcomes (Miller et al., 2008; Bedi and Schat, 2013). Political conditions reduce predictability. Employees must devote attention to interpreting motives, managing impressions, and protecting themselves, leaving fewer resources for task and relationship demands.

2.2 Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal behavior, interpersonal relationships, communication, reinforcement, and decision making (Brown et al., 2005). It combines the qualities of a moral person—honesty, care, fairness, and integrity—with those of a moral manager who makes ethical standards visible and reinforces them (Trevino et al., 2000; Brown and Trevino, 2006). Ethical leadership therefore involves more than a supervisor's private character. Employees must be able to observe how principles affect decisions, rewards, treatment, and discipline.

Social learning theory explains why these behaviors matter: leaders are visible role models whose conduct and reinforcement communicate what is expected (Bandura, 1977; Brown et al., 2005). Social-exchange reasoning further suggests that fair and respectful treatment builds trust and encourages constructive reciprocity. Meta-analytic findings associate ethical leadership with stronger employee attitudes, trust, citizenship behavior, and performance, as well as reduced misconduct and disengagement (Bedi et al., 2016).

2.3 Employee Turnover Intention

Turnover intention includes considering resignation, searching for alternative employment, or planning to leave when a suitable opportunity becomes available. The withdrawal model proposed by Mobley (1977) describes a progression from dissatisfaction through thoughts of quitting, search and evaluation of alternatives, intention, and eventual departure. Although intention is not identical to actual turnover, it is an important predictor of later voluntary exit (Tett and Meyer, 1993; Griffeth et al., 2000).

For IT professionals, both push and pull factors may shape departure. Push factors include unfair treatment, job insecurity, limited advancement, and low trust in management. Pull factors include external demand for specialized technical skills and more attractive career opportunities. The present study focuses on two workplace conditions that can influence this process: perceptions of politics and the ethical quality of immediate leadership.

2.4 Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory views employment as an ongoing exchange of valuable, partly unspecified benefits (Blau, 1964). The norm of reciprocity encourages people to return favorable treatment and to protect themselves when exchanges become unfavorable (Gouldner, 1960). Transparent selection, encouragement, respect, and dependable support signal that an organization values its employees. Rewards based on influence or self-interest communicate an imbalance in which effort alone may not determine outcomes.

From this perspective, POP can erode confidence that employee contributions will receive a fair return and can weaken the employee–organization relationship. Turnover intention becomes one way of reducing exposure to an unfavorable exchange. Ethical leadership should operate in the opposite direction. A supervisor who listens, explains decisions, honors commitments, and applies standards consistently provides recurring evidence that the immediate exchange relationship remains dependable. This evidence may partly offset conclusions drawn from political cues elsewhere in the organization.

2.5 Conservation of Resources Theory

Conservation of resources (COR) theory proposes that people seek to acquire, retain, and protect valued resources and experience stress when those resources are threatened or lost (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Resources relevant to political workplaces include time, attention, status, predictability, supportive relationships, and confidence that effort will produce valued outcomes. Political conditions threaten these resources by demanding vigilance and impression management while making returns uncertain.

Resource loss is particularly consequential because it can initiate a loss spiral. Uncertainty consumes attention, declining trust restricts support seeking, and unsuccessful attempts to navigate politics consume additional energy. Considering departure can therefore become a resource-protection strategy. Ethical leaders may serve as a resource passageway by clarifying expectations, protecting respectful treatment, enabling voice, and supplying reliable information. Ethical leadership should consequently reduce the extent to which POP translates into turnover intention.

2.6 POP and Turnover Intention

POP should increase turnover intention through several connected mechanisms. Political decision making reduces procedural predictability; self-interested conduct lowers interpersonal trust; pressure to remain silent restricts voice; and opaque promotion systems weaken the perceived connection between performance and reward. These signals create an exchange imbalance and consume psychological resources. Departure becomes more attractive when remaining requires continued investment in an environment that may not return effort fairly.

Prior studies repeatedly connect POP with withdrawal-related attitudes. Meta-analyses report positive associations with turnover intention alongside negative associations with satisfaction and commitment (Miller et al., 2008; Bedi and Schat, 2013). The relationship is also consistent with models that treat politics as an organizational stressor (Ferris et al., 1996). The expected association is therefore positive.

2.7 Ethical Leadership and Turnover Intention

Ethical leadership may directly reduce turnover intention. Fair decisions lower uncertainty, listening provides voice, promise keeping strengthens trust, and visible discipline communicates that misconduct is not costless. These practices improve the quality of social exchange and supply interpersonal resources, leaving employees with fewer reasons to search for an alternative employment relationship. Prior research associates ethical leadership with lower turnover intention, both directly and through ethical climate and affective commitment (Demirtas and Akdogan, 2015; Bedi et al., 2016).

Although the principal leadership hypothesis concerns moderation, the direct association must also be estimated. A buffering effect is conceptually distinct from a general tendency for employees with more ethical leaders to report lower turnover intentions.

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2.8 Ethical Leadership as a Moderator

The central argument is that ethical leadership changes how employees respond to political conditions. When ethical leadership is low, political signals remain largely unchallenged. Employees receive little assurance that their supervisor will explain decisions, defend standards, or exercise authority fairly. POP should then translate strongly into turnover intention. When ethical leadership is high, the supervisor offers a proximal source of fairness, voice, clarity, and trust. Politics may still be noticed, but its meaning and resource cost are reduced because an influential local actor behaves predictably and can help employees navigate uncertainty.

This reasoning does not imply that supervisors can neutralize a structurally political system. Ethical leadership is expected to attenuate—not necessarily eliminate—the positive POP–turnover intention association. This buffering prediction is consistent with both social exchange and COR theory: ethical conduct improves the immediate exchange relationship and supplies resources that make political demands less damaging.

3 Hypothesis Development and Conceptual Framework

H1: Perceived organizational politics is positively associated with employee turnover intention.

H2: Ethical leadership significantly moderates the relationship between perceived organizational politics and employee turnover intention, such that the positive relationship is weaker when ethical leadership is high.

Figure 1 summarizes the hypothesized relationships. Ethical leadership is represented as both a direct predictor and a moderator, allowing the interaction to be interpreted after accounting for its general association with turnover intention.

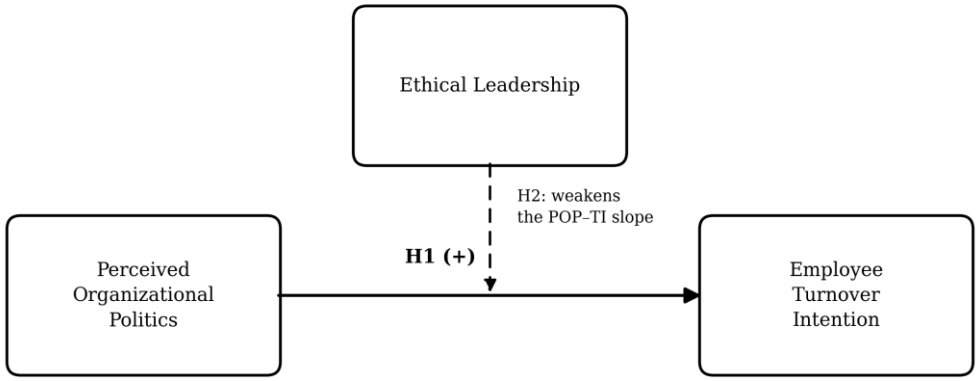

Figure 1. Conceptual framework. Perceived Organizational Politics → Employee Turnover Intention (H1, positive); Ethical Leadership moderates the POP–Turnover Intention relationship (H2, weakens the POP slope).

4 Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, explanatory survey design. A structured questionnaire measured employee perceptions at one point in time. This design is suitable for estimating associations and moderation but cannot establish temporal or causal order. Results are therefore interpreted as relationships among reported perceptions rather than proof that organizational politics causes later turnover.

4.2 Research Context

The study examined the IT workforce in Uttar Pradesh, India. Respondents were drawn from Central Uttar Pradesh (Lucknow) and Western Uttar Pradesh (Noida/Greater Noida). These locations provide variation within the state while retaining a common occupational focus. The individual employee was the unit of analysis.

4.3 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised professionals currently employed by IT and IT-enabled organizations in Uttar Pradesh. Because a complete sampling frame of regional IT employees was unavailable, stratified quota sampling was used, with location as the stratification variable. Equal quotas of 100 respondents were established for Lucknow and Noida/Greater Noida, and eligible professionals were approached within each location until the quota was filled.

Respondent selection within each quota was not random. Consequently, the study supports theory testing within the achieved sample but should not be interpreted as a probability-based prevalence estimate for all IT professionals in Uttar Pradesh. Position, IT experience, and organizational tenure were recorded descriptively rather than used as additional quota controls, which accounts for the uneven category distributions in Table 1.

4.4 Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected with a structured, self-administered questionnaire. The final dataset contained 200 complete responses: 100 from Lucknow and 100 from Noida/Greater Noida. All respondents supplied complete demographic and scale data, so neither case deletion nor imputation was required. Responses used the full five-point range. Higher scores consistently represented more of the relevant construct, and the questionnaire contained no reverse-worded items.

4.5 Measurement Instruments

Perceived organizational politics. POP was measured with six items adapted from the Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale tradition (Kacmar and Ferris, 1991; Kacmar and Carlson, 1997). Two items represented each of three content areas: general political behavior, going along to get ahead, and politics in compensation or promotion practices.

Ethical leadership. Ethical leadership was measured with ten items adapted from the Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown et al., 2005). The items addressed listening, ethical discipline, personal conduct, employee interests, balanced decision making, trustworthiness, ethical communication, leading by example, process-based definitions of success, and ethical consideration in decisions.

Turnover intention. Turnover intention was assessed with three items adapted from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann et al., 1979) and aligned with research on the employee-withdrawal process (Mobley, 1977).

All substantive items used a five-point Likert response scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). The complete administered item set is reproduced in Appendix A.

4.6 Variable Operationalization

Composite scores were calculated as the arithmetic mean of the items assigned to each construct, preserving the original 1–5 metric. POP and ethical-leadership composites were standardized before their product term was calculated for moderation analysis. Standardization reduces nonessential multicollinearity and permits simple slopes to be interpreted at one standard deviation below and above the moderator mean (Aiken and West, 1991; Hayes, 2022).

4.7 Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded in seven stages. First, frequencies described the sample. Second, means, standard deviations, skewness, and bivariate correlations summarized the study variables. Third, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) assessed internal consistency. Fourth, maximum-likelihood confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) evaluated a three-factor reflective measurement model. Model fit was assessed with χ^2, the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Fifth, convergent validity was examined through standardized loadings and average variance extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was assessed with the Fornell–Larcker criterion

and heterotrait–monotrait ratios (HTMT) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015). Sixth, hierarchical ordinary least squares regression tested the direct and interaction effects. Seventh, 5,000 nonparametric bootstrap resamples provided a confidence interval for the interaction, and simple slopes were estimated at low (−1SD), mean, and high (+1SD) ethical leadership.

As a limited diagnostic for common-method variance, an unrotated factor analysis of all 19 substantive items was inspected. The first factor accounted for 29.28% of total variance, below the commonly used 50% warning threshold. This result does not rule out common-method bias because a single-factor test is only a coarse diagnostic (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Respondents could decline or discontinue participation without penalty. No direct personal identifiers were collected, and data were maintained in de-identified form and analyzed in aggregate. The study involved no deception, experimental manipulation, or sensitive clinical information. Data access was restricted to the research team. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee prior to data collection, and approval documentation is available from the corresponding author on request.

5 Results

5.1 Respondent Profile

Table 1 presents the sample characteristics. The largest age group was 26–35 years (46.5%). Men represented 54.0% and women 44.0% of respondents, with 2.0% selecting another gender category. Just over half of the sample held entry-level positions (52.0%), and 51.0% had between one and five years of IT experience. Organizational tenure was most commonly one to three years (43.0%).

Table 1 Respondent Profile (N = 200)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Location	Lucknow	100	50.0
	Noida/Greater Noida	100	50.0
Age group	Below 25	32	16.0
	26–35	93	46.5
	36–45	56	28.0
	46–55	17	8.5
	Above 55	2	1.0
Gender	Male	108	54.0
	Female	88	44.0
	Other	4	2.0
Position	Entry-level	104	52.0
	Mid-level management	70	35.0
	Senior management	26	13.0
IT experience	Less than 1 year	29	14.5
	1–5 years	102	51.0

Characteristic	Category	n	%
	6–10 years	44	22.0
	More than 10 years	25	12.5
Current-organization tenure	Less than 1 year	47	23.5
	1–3 years	86	43.0
	4–6 years	43	21.5
	More than 6 years	24	12.0

5.2 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Mean POP was close to the response-scale midpoint (M = 3.068, SD = .665). Ethical leadership was above the midpoint (M = 3.606, SD = .576), while turnover intention was slightly below it (M = 2.823, SD = .894). Absolute skewness was below .20 for all composites, indicating broadly symmetric distributions. Turnover intention departed from exact normality in the Shapiro–Wilk test. Given the sample size, use of composite scores, and bootstrapped interaction interval, ordinary least squares regression was retained and interpreted cautiously.

As Table 2 shows, Cronbach's alpha exceeded .80 for every construct, and CR values were likewise above .80. Corrected item–total correlations ranged from .541 to .625 for POP, .551 to .668 for ethical leadership, and .667 to .741 for turnover intention. No item deletion was indicated on reliability grounds.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	α	CR	AVE
Perceived organizational politics	6	3.068	.665	.819	.821	.434
Ethical leadership	10	3.606	.576	.888	.889	.445
Turnover intention	3	2.823	.894	.832	.835	.628

Note. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted. Scores range from 1 to 5.

5.3 Measurement Model

The hypothesized three-factor CFA model closely reproduced the covariance matrix: $\chi^2(149) = 152.61$, $p = .403$; CFI = .997; TLI = .997; RMSEA = .011; and SRMR = .048. All standardized loadings were positive and statistically meaningful, ranging from .592 to .863. The complete loading pattern is reported in Table 3.

Table 3 Standardized Measurement-Model Loadings

Construct	Standardized item loadings
POP	.701, .656, .623, .624, .673, .671
Ethical leadership	.704, .640, .666, .611, .681, .713, .667, .592, .695, .689
Turnover intention	.863, .750, .760

5.4 Convergent Validity

Turnover intention exceeded the conventional .50 AVE benchmark. POP and ethical leadership produced AVE values of .434 and .445, respectively. These estimates mean that the two latent factors explained, on average, 43.4% and 44.5% of their indicators' variance; they therefore did not satisfy the usual requirement that a construct

account for at least half of its indicator variance (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Cheung et al., 2024). Convergent validity for POP and ethical leadership cannot consequently be described as fully established.

The remaining evidence is mixed rather than uniformly poor. Both constructs had strong composite reliability (POP = .821; ethical leadership = .889), every standardized loading was positive and above .50, and the three-factor model showed close global fit. These results indicate internally consistent and theoretically coherent item sets, but high reliability and global fit do not replace the missing AVE criterion (Cheung et al., 2024). The shortfall is also substantive rather than a rounding artifact: POP fell .066 below .50 and ethical leadership fell .055 below .50. Items were not removed after inspecting the results because post-hoc deletion could narrow construct coverage and capitalize on this particular sample. The complete measures were therefore retained, and the structural estimates are interpreted as provisional associations based on composites that require replication with stronger measurement. Future studies should estimate confidence intervals for AVE, conduct cognitive pretesting, and evaluate whether revised or full validated item sets improve convergence without sacrificing content validity.

5.5 Discriminant Validity

Evidence that the constructs were empirically distinguishable was favorable. Each square root of AVE exceeded the relevant absolute interconstruct latent correlations. HTMT ratios were .118 for POP–ethical leadership, .586 for POP–turnover intention, and .449 for ethical leadership–turnover intention; all were below the conservative .85 criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). These separation tests do not, however, remedy the weaker convergence of the POP and ethical-leadership indicators. The results support construct distinctness while leaving overall measurement validity qualified by the AVE shortfall.

Table 4 Fornell–Larcker Matrix and HTMT Ratios

Construct	POP	EL	TI	HTMT POP–EL	HTMT POP–TI	HTMT EL–TI
POP	.658					
EL	.056	.667		.118		
TI	.568	−.454	.793		.586	.449

Note. POP = perceived organizational politics; EL = ethical leadership; TI = turnover intention. Diagonal entries are square roots of AVE; CFA latent correlations appear below the diagonal.

5.6 Correlations

Table 5 reports composite-score correlations. POP was positively correlated with turnover intention ($r = .484$, $p < .001$), whereas ethical leadership was negatively correlated with turnover intention ($r = −.387$, $p < .001$). POP and ethical leadership were not significantly correlated ($r = .052$, $p = .468$), suggesting that respondents distinguished wider political conditions from the conduct of their immediate supervisor.

Table 5 Means, Standard Deviations, and Composite-Score Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Perceived organizational politics	3.068	.665	1		
2. Ethical leadership	3.606	.576	.052	1	
3. Turnover intention	2.823	.894	.484***	−.387***	1

Note. N = 200. ***p < .001, two-tailed.

5.7 Hierarchical Moderated Regression

Table 6 presents the hierarchical regression results. Model 1 tested H1. Standardized POP was positively associated with turnover intention ($\beta = .484$, $SE = .062$, $t = 7.792$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.362, .607]), explaining

23.5% of the variance. Model 2 added ethical leadership. POP remained positive (β = .506, p < .001), ethical leadership was negative (β = −.413, p < .001), and explained variance increased to 40.5%.

Model 3 added the POP × ethical leadership interaction. The full model explained 57.2% of turnover-intention variance, F(3, 196) = 87.14, p < .001. The interaction was negative and significant (β = −.378, SE = .043, t = −8.737, p < .001, 95% CI [−.464, −.293]), contributing an additional 16.7% of explained variance. Variance-inflation factors ranged from 1.005 to 1.011, indicating no problematic multicollinearity. HC3 robust standard errors produced the same substantive conclusions. A 5,000-resample bootstrap interval for the interaction, [−.449, −.306], excluded zero.

Table 6 Hierarchical Moderated Regression Predicting Turnover Intention

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Predictor	**β**	**SE**	**β**	**SE**	**β**	**SE**
POP	.484***	.062	.506***	.055	.543***	.047
Ethical leadership			−.413***	.055	−.434***	.047
POP × ethical leadership					−.378***	.043
R^2	.235		.405		.572	
Adjusted R^2	.231		.399		.565	
ΔR^2	.235		.170		.167	
F	60.71***		66.94***		87.14***	
Degrees of freedom	(1, 198)		(2, 197)		(3, 196)	

Note. N = 200. Regression estimates use standardized composite scores. The interaction term multiplies standardized POP by standardized ethical leadership. ***p < .001.

5.8 Sensitivity Analysis

Because the sample size was set by location quotas rather than an a priori calculation, a noncentral-F sensitivity analysis was conducted for the incremental interaction test. An observed-power estimate based on the already observed effect was deliberately not reported because it is largely determined by the test's attained significance and contributes little additional information (Hoenig and Heisey, 2001). With N = 200, one tested interaction term, three predictors in the full model, α = .05, and denominator degrees of freedom of 196, the design had 80% power to detect an incremental effect of approximately $f^2 = .040$ and 90% power to detect approximately $f^2 = .053$ (Cohen, 1988). This prospective sensitivity statement indicates the smallest interaction effects the achieved design could detect with conventional power; it does not replace an a priori calculation, correct nonprobability sampling, or establish that the observed interaction will replicate.

5.9 Moderation and Simple-Slope Analysis

Simple slopes clarify the interaction. At low ethical leadership (−1SD), the conditional effect of POP on turnover intention was strong and positive (β = .921, p < .001). At mean ethical leadership, the slope remained positive (β = .543, p < .001). At high ethical leadership (+1SD), the conditional effect was substantially smaller but remained significant (β = .165, p = .007). Ethical leadership therefore buffered, but did not eliminate, the positive POP–turnover intention association. Figure 2 plots the three fitted regression lines and shows the corresponding rotation of the POP–turnover intention slope as ethical leadership moves from low to high.

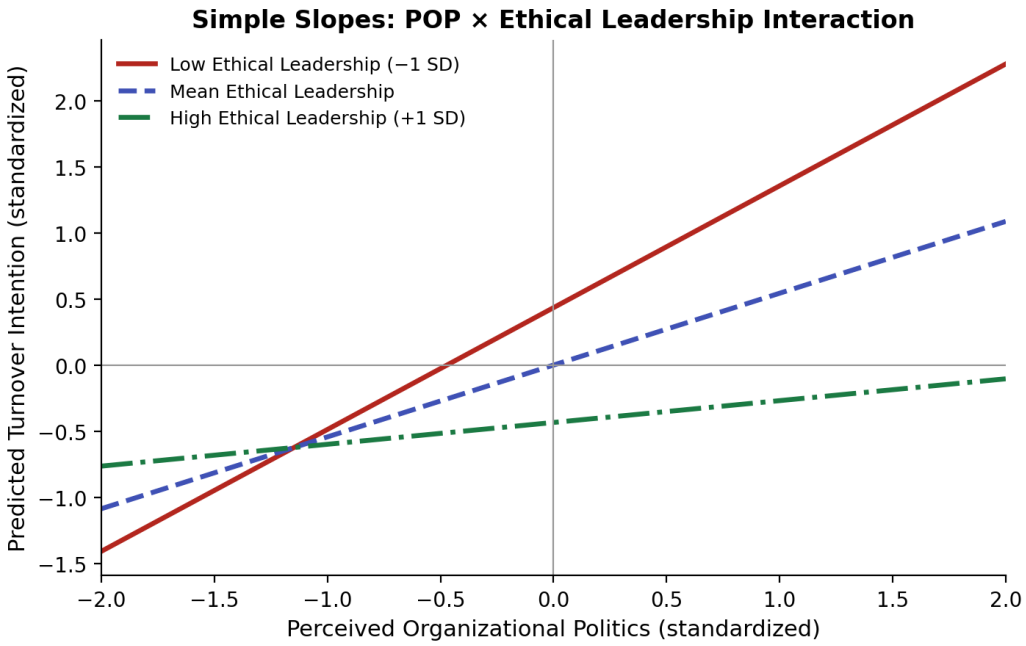

Figure 2. Simple slopes for the association between perceived organizational politics (POP) and turnover intention at low (−1SD), mean, and high (+1SD) levels of ethical leadership, plotted from the standardized Model 3 coefficients (POP β = .543, ethical leadership β = −.434, interaction β = −.378).

Table 7 Conditional Effect of POP on Turnover Intention

Ethical leadership level	Slope	SE	t	p
Low (−1SD)	.921	.067	13.804	< .001
Mean	.543	.047	11.552	< .001
High (+1SD)	.165	.061	2.707	.007

5.10 Hypothesis Testing

Table 8 Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Hyp.	Evidence	Decision
H1	POP was positively associated with turnover intention (β = .484, p < .001).	Supported
H2	The POP × ethical leadership interaction was negative and significant (β = −.378, p < .001), and the conditional POP effect weakened as ethical leadership increased.	Supported

6 Discussion

6.1 Discussion of H1

The positive association between POP and turnover intention supports H1. Employees who perceived more self-serving conduct, pressure to remain silent, and opaque promotion practices were more likely to consider leaving or seeking another job. The relationship was not merely statistically detectable: POP alone accounted for nearly one quarter of the variance in turnover intention. This finding is consistent with the view of organizational politics

as a stressor that weakens confidence in the effort–reward relationship (Ferris et al., 1996; Miller et al., 2008; Bedi and Schat, 2013).

Social exchange theory helps explain this pattern. Political practices imply that formal contribution may not be reciprocated through fair treatment or advancement. Employees may respond by weakening their long-term attachment and considering an alternative employer. COR theory offers a complementary mechanism: interpreting influence networks, managing silence, and anticipating opaque decisions consume attention and threaten valued career resources. Turnover intention can become a cognitive strategy for protecting future resources.

6.2 Discussion of H2

The negative interaction supports H2 and represents the study's central finding. The positive association between POP and turnover intention was substantially weaker at higher ethical-leadership levels. At low ethical leadership, a one-standard-deviation increase in POP was associated with an approximately .92-standard-deviation increase in turnover intention; at high ethical leadership, the corresponding conditional slope was .165. The remaining positive slope shows that ethical leadership can buffer the consequences of perceived politics without fully neutralizing organizational conditions experienced as unfair.

The interaction's incremental contribution ($\Delta R^2 = .167$) is unusually large relative to the generally modest or inconsistent buffering effects reported across the wider POP moderator literature (Hochwarter et al., 2020). Its magnitude may partly reflect the occupationally focused sample, same-source cross-sectional measurement, and the use of reliable standardized composites, all of which can sharpen covariance patterns within a particular dataset. The estimate is therefore treated as sample-specific rather than as a stable population benchmark and should be replicated with independent samples, temporally separated measures, and alternative validated scales before strong comparative claims are made.

The moderation results also suggest that employees distinguish organization-level political signals from the conduct of their immediate supervisor. POP and ethical leadership were essentially unrelated in the sample, yet each independently predicted turnover intention in the regression models. A fuller account of retention therefore requires attention to both the wider environment and proximal leadership.

6.3 Theoretical Contributions

First, the findings position ethical leadership as a buffer against an adverse environment. Ethical-leadership research often emphasizes direct beneficial outcomes (Bedi et al., 2016); the present results indicate that leadership may be especially consequential when employees face uncertainty and perceived self-interest.

Second, the study connects COR theory with the observed interaction. Ethical supervisors provide resources such as voice, clarification, consistent norms, trustworthy information, and interpersonal protection. These resources reduce the likelihood that political perceptions will translate into withdrawal intentions.

Third, the near-zero correlation between POP and ethical leadership, combined with their independent predictive effects, offers a more differentiated view of employee experience. Immediate ethical leadership is not simply the opposite of organizational politics. It is a proximal condition that can alter how employees respond to the wider environment.

Fourth, the research contributes occupational and regional evidence. IT professionals' portable skills and project-specific knowledge make turnover intention consequential. Findings from Lucknow and Noida/Greater Noida demonstrate the relevance of established organizational-behavior relationships within this Uttar Pradesh sample while revealing a substantial leadership contingency.

6.4 Comparison with Previous Studies

The H1 result is consistent with meta-analyses linking POP to turnover intention and other withdrawal-related outcomes (Miller et al., 2008; Bedi and Schat, 2013). It also aligns with studies framing politics as a source of strain and uncertainty (Ferris et al., 1996; Kacmar and Baron, 1999). The negative main association between

ethical leadership and turnover intention is consistent with evidence that ethical leaders strengthen ethical climate and commitment and reduce employees' desire to leave (Demirtas and Akdogan, 2015; Bedi et al., 2016).

This study extends those direct relationships by demonstrating moderation. The result resembles broader evidence that personal and contextual resources can weaken dysfunctional outcomes of politics, while identifying ethical leadership as a specifically ethical and relational resource. The size of the interaction in this sample suggests that future models of POP should not treat leadership only as an antecedent or parallel predictor; its boundary role warrants explicit theorizing and replication.

7 Managerial Implications

Organizations should address both the sources of political perceptions and employees' capacity to respond to them.

1. Make allocation decisions explainable. Promotion, pay, project assignment, recognition, and development criteria should be published, applied consistently, and accompanied by clear reasons. Documented criteria reduce the informational space in which favoritism is inferred.

2. Create credible employee voice. Employees require safe ways to question decisions without retaliation. One-to-one meetings, appeal channels, skip-level conversations, and protected reporting mechanisms are useful only when concerns receive visible follow-up.

3. Develop ethical supervisors behaviorally. Leadership development should move beyond values statements to observable practices: listening, explaining trade-offs, keeping commitments, checking bias, applying standards consistently, and discussing how results are achieved.

4. Evaluate process as well as output. A manager who meets targets through opaque staffing, selective information, or pressure for silence may create hidden retention risk. Manager assessment should therefore include fairness, trust, voice, and team-retention indicators.

5. Use turnover intention as an early warning. Short confidential pulse surveys can monitor POP, ethical leadership, and withdrawal intention by unit. Changes over time are more informative than a single organization-wide average.

6. Do not rely indefinitely on ethical leaders as compensation. The simple slope at high ethical leadership remained positive. Structural sources of politics—unclear governance, discretionary promotion, inconsistent performance management, and concentrated informal influence—also require correction.

For IT organizations, these actions can be embedded in project staffing, appraisal calibration, technical-career pathways, and manager review. Transparent decisions are especially important where visible assignments shape later promotion and employability.

8 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations define the scope of the findings. First, the cross-sectional design prevents causal claims. Employees already considering resignation may interpret organizational events more negatively, and reciprocal relationships are possible. Longitudinal studies should measure politics and leadership before later turnover intention and actual exit.

Second, all variables were reported by the same individuals during the same data-collection period. Although the first unrotated factor accounted for 29.28% of variance, this diagnostic does not eliminate common-method concerns. Future studies could connect survey responses to actual turnover records, obtain leadership ratings from multiple team members, and separate measurements over time.

Third, the sample comprised 200 employees selected through location-based quota sampling. Equal quotas ensured balanced coverage of Lucknow and Noida/Greater Noida but did not involve random selection within each location. The sample may therefore not represent the entire Uttar Pradesh IT workforce. A stronger replication would use two-stage stratified organizational sampling: organizations would first be stratified by zone and relevant characteristics such as size or service segment and randomly selected, after which eligible employees

would be randomly sampled within the participating organizations. No a priori power calculation informed the original quotas. The sensitivity analysis indicates that the achieved design had 80% power for an incremental effect of approximately $f^2 = .040$, but it does not remove possible effect-size inflation or sampling bias. Future research should preregister an expected interaction effect and determine sample size before recruitment.

Fourth, AVE values for POP and ethical leadership were below .50 despite good model fit and reliability. Accordingly, convergent validity for these constructs was not fully established, and favorable CR, loadings, HTMT values, and global fit should not be used to dismiss that failure. Measurement error can distort structural coefficients and interaction estimates, so the unusually large moderation result should be viewed cautiously. Future research should conduct cognitive pilot interviews, estimate uncertainty intervals for AVE and CR, compare revised and complete validated measures in an independent sample, and test measurement invariance across location, gender, and role level.

Fifth, demographic and employment controls were not included in the primary hypothesis model because the theory concerned focal psychological conditions and some categories were unevenly distributed. Preregistered research could examine career stage, labor-market alternatives, remote-work status, pay satisfaction, organizational tenure, and perceived employability as controls or boundary conditions.

Finally, leadership was measured as an individual perception. Where employees share supervisors, team-level ethical leadership may operate differently. Multilevel designs should separate individual deviations from team consensus and investigate whether ethical climate mediates the buffering process.

9 Conclusion

This study examined perceived organizational politics, ethical leadership, and turnover intention among 200 IT professionals in Uttar Pradesh. POP was positively associated with turnover intention, supporting H1. Ethical leadership had a negative main association with turnover intention and substantially weakened the positive POP–turnover intention relationship, supporting H2.

The conditional effect of POP remained positive even when ethical leadership was high, although it was much smaller than under low ethical leadership. The managerial message is therefore balanced. Ethical leadership is a practical retention resource, but it cannot permanently compensate for political structures. Employees consider both the wider organizational environment and the conduct of their supervisor when deciding whether to remain. Organizations can reduce turnover risk by combining transparent systems with leaders who listen, communicate clearly, keep commitments, apply standards consistently, and model ethical conduct.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire Used in the Study

Response scale for Sections B–D: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree.

Section A: Demographics

Age group; gender; location; current position; years of IT-industry experience; and tenure in the current organization.

Section B: Perceived Organizational Politics

POP1. People in this organization often act in their own self-interest rather than the organization's interest.

POP2. I have seen changes made to policies here that only serve the interests of a few individuals.

POP3. It is safer in this organization to stay quiet than to openly disagree with influential people.

POP4. Agreeing with powerful people, rather than raising objections, is the way to succeed here.

POP5. Promotions in this organization do not always go to the employees who perform best.

POP6. The way promotion decisions are made here is not made clear to employees.

Section C: Ethical Leadership

EL1. My supervisor pays close attention to employees' opinions and concerns.

EL2. My supervisor takes corrective action when employees breach ethical standards.

EL3. My supervisor behaves ethically in his/her personal conduct outside of work.

EL4. My supervisor genuinely considers what is best for employees when making decisions.

EL5. My supervisor weighs all sides fairly before reaching a decision.

EL6. My supervisor can be trusted to keep his/her word.

EL7. My supervisor talks openly with employees about ethical issues and organizational values.

EL8. My supervisor leads by example when it comes to doing things the right way, ethically.

EL9. My supervisor defines success not just by results, but also by how those results are achieved.

EL10. My supervisor considers what is morally right before making decisions.

Section D: Employee Turnover Intention

TI1. I often think about leaving this organization.

TI2. I will likely look for a job at a different organization within the next year.

TI3. As soon as a suitable opportunity comes along, I intend to leave this organization.