

ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY, AND THE PERFORMANCE ASPIRATION: JOB CONFLICT AND STRESS AS MEDIATORS

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to determine the effect of organizational politics on the performance of the private university in Indonesia, mediated by workplace conflict and job stress. This study adheres to the quantitative explanatory approach by constructing a path analysis of PLS-SEM from the responses of 209 academic staff. The results showed that organizational politics influenced performance through mediating variables, workplace conflict and job stress. In addition to mediating organizational politics and performance, conflict and job stress affect performance in direct relationships.

Keywords: Performance; Organizational Politics; Workplace Conflict; Job Stress; Private University

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INTRODUCTION

The principle of hierarchy in an organization implies that there are those with power who govern and those who are governed and controlled. Thus, the people who wield the power use their abilities to save their field of work. Conflicts of interest are inevitable and are exacerbated by the struggle for limited organizational resources. These conflicts of interest are fundamental to organizational politics (Turnhout et al., 2020).

Organizational politics is a strategically planned process in which members of an organization, either as individuals or in groups, use their informal power tactics to achieve their goals, often at the expense of other individuals or groups (Munyon et al., 2021). Organizational and political tactics and behaviors color corporate life; indeed, some studies even show that politics is an epidemic in organizations and requires a great deal of attention and verifiable examination (Gupta et al., 2021). Although, in general, there is a negative perception of this kind of political behavior, it is essential to note that we are not necessarily saying that fighting for one's interests must be against the interests of the organization (Wiewiora et al., 2016). In developing countries, employees use organizational politics to create an advantage over their coworkers by taking on management positions with higher salaries and other financial benefits (Soomro, 2020). The goals that are fought for will lead to a conflict of interest in the organization. Furthermore, organizational politics can lead to the emergence of confusion about interests and negative influences on individuals, groups and organizations (Arefin et al., 2020).

Organizational politics has various connotations depending on how employees perceive it. Some might view corporate politics as dysfunctional because people pursue extreme personal goals that will harm other participants and the company, while employees elsewhere might believe that they need political competencies to build support for personal and organizational projects due to the political nature of the organization's internal environment (Amah, 2021).

The motivation behind this research is the high workload borne by university officials in Indonesia regarding the achievement of institutional quality in all academic fields, in addition to their responsibilities as busy lecturers who are expected to help in implementing the Tri Dharma of Higher Education (Sulistiyowati & Muazansyah, 2018; Tilova et al., 2020). University officials will use various tactics to meet the goals within their respective fields. The university's organizational and political constellation is dynamic, and it continues. A succession or election of a new chancellor is one example of a political phenomenon that will lead to the development of support organizations for registered candidates. This conflict of interest can potentially cause workplace conflicts and job stressors and, ultimately, affect the performance of university officials.

Conflict can potentially arise at any time in an organization consisting of individuals with various backgrounds, education, and characteristics. A dispute occurs when two or more groups disagree, and this is when high-level political

skills in conflict management are needed. This does not mean that one side can win at all costs, and the most important focus is maintaining employee relationships while also achieving a outcome (Murugan & Panchanatham, 2016). Clearly, organizational politics can lead to conflict (Franke & Foerstl, 2018), which can have either a positive or negative impact on the organization. In essence, conflict cannot be avoided but it can be minimized so that it does not lead to division, hostility, or even result in a loss for the organization. If conflict can be adequately managed, the organization will benefit by creating fair competition (Wati, 2017). Management must be able to catch the symptoms and indications of conflicts that have a constructive impact and disputes that have a destructive effect, and they must be careful in seeing and feeling the behavior of their employees so that adverse impacts can be minimized. Research conducted by Arefin et al. (2020), Fiaz and Qureshi (2021), Franke and Foerstl (2018), Murugan and Panchanatham (2016) and Yasin and Khalid (2015) state that organizational behavior affects the emergence of workplace conflict.

In addition to workplace conflict, job stress is one of the main problems that may arise in organizations (Labrague et al., 2017). Organizational politics can cause stress for employees because a work environment rich in political problems will increase the pressure on those who work there (Momeni & Hayavi, 2017). Stress is a condition of tension that affects a person's emotions, thought processes, and mental condition. Someone who experiences stress may feel depression, unhappiness, anger, frustration, panic, anxiety, and sadness (Parvaiz et al., 2015), all of which can be exacerbated by limited organizational resources and individual dissatisfaction with the work environment (Vandenabeele., 2009). The driving factors that cause stress are known as job stressors, and a highly political work environment can cause high job stress for employees (Cho & Yang, 2018).

Educational institutions face organizational and political problems which then cause stress (Soomro, 2020). Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2019) found that educational institutions in Pakistan tend to be politically inclined due to increased competition. In a university with people from diverse backgrounds, there is a possibility of organizational politics arising because everyone wants to fulfill their personal needs and achieve their desired goals.

Individuals in a highly political organization will face job stress and perceived politics can be a stressor for the employees because it can be a barrier to receiving rewards and perks. However, perceived politics can also create opportunities for engaged employees. Studies conducted by Agarwal (2016), Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2019), Cho and Yang (2018), de Clercq and Belausteguigoitia (2017) and Soomro (2020) suggest that organizational politics influences job stress.

Workplace conflict and job stressors can positively and negatively impact the organization, depending on the nature of the job stress, the conflict itself, and how it is dealt with. Conflict can be either functional or dysfunctional, so it must be managed as well as possible because it can affect the organization's activities and results. Workplace conflicts and job stressors also arise among university officials in Indonesia. If every issue at the university can be resolved properly, it

will improve their performance, thereby enhancing the university's performance. However, if problems arise often and remain unresolved for a long time, it will harm the organization.

The existence of politics in an organization also harms organizational performance as it often hinders normal administrative processes such as decision-making, promotion, and rewards (Gutpta et al., 2021). Employees working in universities often face politics in different situations, adversely affecting their performance (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2019). Arefin et al. (2020) found that organizational politics can impact performance by being mediated by workplace conflict, while Soomro (2020) stated that job stress could mediate the influence of organizational politics on performance.

The leader of a higher education institution has human resources in the form of lecturers, education staff, and other supporting roles, and he relies upon them to achieve the intended results within a certain period; there is therefore a very close relationship between individual performance and university performance. In Indonesia, the performance of a university is assessed within the *tri dharma* framework (Education, Research, and Civil Service) of higher education, which includes;

- quality assurance system-based operations,
- higher education accreditation ratings (APT),
- study program accreditation ratings (APS),
- administrative discipline,
- excellent service to students, and
- an ability to cooperate with external parties and others.

From this description, we examine the effect of organizational and political behavior on workplace conflict, job stressors and the performance of private university officials.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Performance

The extent to which a person succeeds in completing his work tasks is called his level of performance. According to Soomro (2020), performance is the ways in which employees behave at work. Individual performance can be measured in terms of both the quality and the quantity achieved by a team member in carrying out their responsibilities. Ismail and Sherwani (2018) explain that performance is the ability of an employee to carry out the duties assigned to them, according to the task or contextually. Ngozi Nzewi (2016) defines performance as the work achieved by a person during a specific period that is in line with their responsibilities. Performance results from a process measured over a particular time based on pre-determined provisions or agreements (Edison et al., 2016).

According to Mangkunegara (2017), performance standards consist of quantitative and qualitative aspects. Quantitative aspects comprise 1) the work process and working conditions, 2) the time taken to carry out the work, 3) the number of errors made, and 4) the number and type of service provisions at work.

The qualitative aspects are 1) accuracy and quality of work, 2) ability level, 3) ability to analyze data/information, 4) ability/failure to use machines/equipment, and 5) ability to evaluate customer complaints and objections. From some of the theories, it can be concluded that performance results from work in quality and quantity achieved by an employee in carrying out his duties following the responsibilities given to him.

Organizational Politics

Organizational politics is behaviors and activities without sanctions that are strategically designed to protect and promote personal interests that usually conflict with the organization (Guo et al., 2019). Khushk et al. (2021) also explain that organizational politics is an activity that assists employees within an organization in achieving their goals without going through the appropriate channels, while Elbanna (2018) reveals that traditionally, political behavior has been regarded as selfish, even to the point where it is against the norm.

Organizational politics is considered an illegal struggle to achieve power. Corporate politics is gaining control through various means other than merit or chance. It is used to gain power only through unfair means. All power is obtained by enriching personal benefits such as promotions, bringing in funds or other resources, or winning worthwhile projects (Ullah & Ahmad, 2018). Highly political organizations reward employees who have a strong influence, appreciate the work of others, belong to strong coalitions, and have connections to the leadership (Agarwal, 2016). We can therefore conclude that although political practices in organizations cannot be avoided, there are still ways to suppress their adverse effects and even turn them into positive ones; indeed, organizational politics are not necessarily harmful, providing it is kept within healthy limits. Healthy, in this case, is when political practices prioritize organizational values and do not cross any moral boundaries.

Job Conflict

Workplace conflict cannot be avoided in an organizational environment (Murugan & Panchanatham, 2016). Workplace conflict is an inter-role conflict that is inconsistent with the demands of the role of one side with other people (Arefin et al., 2020). Workplace conflicts usually arise due to communication issues, personal relationships, and organizational structures (Paramita, 2019).

Mangkunegara (2017) explains that, in organizational life, opinions about conflict can be viewed from three perspectives, namely the traditional view that conflict is undesirable and dangerous to corporate life; the behavioral thesis that argues that conflict is an event or series of events that can either be beneficial or detrimental to the organization; and the interaction view that argues that a conflict is unavoidable and indispensable for organizational leaders.

Job Stress

Job stress is an employee's negative physical, psychological, or physiological reaction to the increasing demands of their work and their inability to meet these demands (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2019). It is a response that psychologically excites and damages and occurs when job requirements do not match the needs and skills of employees (Soomro, 2020). Job stress can even be a physical response to any demand made by a superior. A stressful situation for employees is when the organization demands more from them than their capabilities and resources can handle, and it is threatening and challenging for them when expectations are not met (Parvaiz et al., 2015).

Organizations or companies that are highly political tend to be a source of stress for their employees, disrupting their focus because they experience pressure to overcome and manage political tensions (Agarwal, 2016). There are several causes of job stress, such as the nature of the work, an excessive workload or working hours, control and career development, position in the organization, interpersonal relationships, and organizational culture. Job stress also affects the organization in various ways, such as increased absenteeism, staff turnover, unsafe work practices, criticism from customers, decreased job security, and damage to the organization's image (Ullah & Ahmad, 2018).

Organizational Politics and Performance

Organizational politics will have an impact on performance. The presence of political practices in an organization will cause various gaps for employees. Political practices that often hinder legal and organizational processes (for example, decision-making, promotions, and rewards) can damage individual performance and, thus, the organization (Gupta et al., 2021). Corporate politics will worsen performance as it drives employees to focus on internal politics rather than their work. Organizations with intense political practices often deploy unfair processes for evaluating employee performance, and proximity can be used as a performance criterion (Aslam et al., 2017). Likewise, organizational and political practices in educational institutions impact performance (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2019; Soomro, 2020). Several other studies have found that organizational politics influence performance (Aslam et al., 2017; Goodfaith Nnenna, 2019; Hussain et al., 2017; Munyon et al., 2021).

H1: Organizational politics has a significant influence on performance.

Organizational Politics and Workplace Conflict

Self-interest in achieving organizational goals is a form of political practice that allows for losses to be experienced between employees and can result in friction or conflict within an organization (Arefin et al., 2020). A dispute arises when two or more groups disagree. Organizational politics is one source of conflict that can negatively affect employee behavior and lead to conflict (Yasin & Khalid, 2015). On the other hand, the political abilities within an organization can also be used in conflict management. Although this is not the only way, organizational and political capabilities reduce conflicts and maintain relationships between employees so that goals can be adequately achieved

(Murugan & Panchanatham, 2016). Several studies suggest that organizational politics has an influence on workplace conflict (Arefin et al., 2020; Fiaz & Qureshi, 2021; Franke & Foerstl, 2018; Murugan & Panchanatham, 2016; Yasin & Khalid, 2015)

H2: Organizational politics has a significant influence on workplace conflict.

Organizational Politics and Job Stress

Organizational politics is one of the sources of employee stress as it creates various pressures from the demands that the leadership team makes on their employees; if these pressures are not in balance with their abilities and conditions, this can cause job stress. A work environment rife with political problems can burden employees, causing burnout, psychological disorders, or fear (Momeni & Hayavi, 2017). A highly politicized environment can increase employee stress levels and weaken motivation (de Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017; van Roekel & Schott., 2021). Employees will experience a loss of focus on their work due to overcoming and managing pressures that occur due to organizational politics, which in turn will cause job stress (Agarwal, 2016). Several studies suggest that organizational politics influences the occurrence of job stress experienced by employees (Agarwal, 2016; Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2019; de Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017; Momeni & Hayavi, 2017; Soomro, 2020).

H3: Organizational politics has a significant influence on job stress.

Workplace Conflict and Performance

In a company, the occurrence of differences of opinion or views is something that often happens. The existence of these differences will lead to conflict between employees. Then the development of the company will also have an impact on the condition of employees. If human resources cannot adapt to the changes that occur, it will cause workplace conflicts that impact performance. Workplace conflict generally arises because of differences in perceptions, competition, knowledge, goals, and other factors between individuals, groups, or organizations (Agwu & Ogiriki, 2014). Employees tend to thrive in a work environment that can support them in completing their work. If there are many problems from superiors or coworkers in the work environment that cause workplace conflicts, this will impact performance (Cahyaningrum & Surjanti, 2018). Several studies suggest that workplace conflict can influence performance (Agwu & Ogiriki, 2014; Bai et al., 2016; Cahyaningrum & Surjanti, 2018; Irfad et al., 2021; Saranani, 2015)

H4: Workplace conflict has a significant influence on performance.

Job Stress and Performance

Job stress is when a person experiences pressure due to job demands that are not to their abilities. Job stress occurs due to excessive workload, which usually results in stress. Job stress affects performance and can lead to negative behaviors such as depression and nervousness when there is no match between

varying demands and job responsibilities (Ullah & Ahmad, 2018). Job stress can have both positive and negative impacts. At first, stress can have a positive impact, motivating employees, but if the stress continues consistently for a long time, the negative effects often emerge in the form of increasing frustration, anxiety, and delays in the work schedule (Ehsan & Ali, 2019). Several studies have stated that job stress influences performance (Agarwal, 2016; de Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017; Ehsan & Ali, 2019; Momeni & Hayavi, 2017; Ullah & Ahmad, 2018).

H5: Job stress has a significant influence on performance.

Organizational Politics on Performance Mediated by Workplace Conflict

Workplace conflict in a company that occurs due to the practice of organizational politics has an impact on the performance of its employees. The existence of disputes that arise affects decreasing performance. This is because a conflict breaks the employee's focus on his work. In addition, workplace conflict can also have an impact on cohesiveness between employees, which can hinder the achievement of organizational goals. Organizational politics that occurs causes increased demands and pressures that result in conflict. Workplace conflicts affect performance (Arefin et al., 2020). Due to vested interests, employees tend to become involved in organizational politics that are neither endorsed nor approved by the organization, and this can lead to conflicts and a work environment that is not harmonious (Bai et al., 2016). Several studies suggest that workplace conflict mediates the influence of organizational politics on performance (Arefin et al., 2020; Bai et al., 2016; Cheong & Kim, 2018).

H6: Organizational politics influence performance through workplace conflict.

Organizational Politics on Performance Mediated by Job Stress

Organizations or companies with a high level of political practice can stress employees, disrupting their focus as they try to overcome and manage political tension (Agarwal, 2016). This stress can cause employees to experience physical and psychological damage, compromising their performance (Soomro, 2020). Several studies suggest that job stress mediates the influence of organizational politics on performance (Agarwal, 2016; Hussain et al., 2017; Soomro, 2020). This leads to our final hypothesis and the construction of the research model shown in Figure 1.

H7: Organizational politics influence performance through job stress

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a quantitative descriptive method and explanatory research to test our hypotheses and explain the connection between the variables. We employ the route analysis method and the SmartPLS statistical test tool (Purwanto et al., 2021).

This study employs a questionnaire covering the indicators of each variable. Without coercion, questionnaires will be provided directly to all

respondents who answer from their knowledge, ability, and truthfulness. Table 1 presents the demographic data of this study.

Table 1. Demographic Data

Category	Possible Answers	F	%
Sex	Male	120	57.4
	Female	89	42.6
Age	< 29 Years Old	12	5.7
	30 - 39 Years Old	94	45.0
	40 - 49 Years Old	76	36.4
	50 - 59 Years Old	22	10.5
	> 60 Years Old	5	2.4
Education	Magister	140	67.0
	Doctor	69	33.0
Academic Position	Assistant Professor	79	37.8
	Assistant Professor (Lektor)	112	53.6
	Associate Professor	15	7.2
	Professor	3	1.4
Position	Vice-Rector	4	1.9
	Dean/Director	8	3.8
	Head of Department	5	2.4
	Vice Dean/Director	16	7.7
	Head of Study Program	23	11.0
	Secretary of Study Program	22	10.5
	Head of Division	15	7.2
	Lecturer	116	55.5
Working Period	< 5 Years	32	15.3
	5 - 10 Years	69	33.0
	11 - 15 Years	75	35.9
	16 - 20 Years	21	10.0
	> 20 Years	12	5.7

Source: Data processed, 2022

The participants in this study consisted of 434 university officials and lecturers from Swadaya Gunung Jati University. The sampling method employs probability-based random sampling by determining the number of samples using the Roscoe formula (Sugiyono, 2017).

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N.(e)^2} \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Notes:

- n = number of samples
- N = Total population
- e = error (5%)

The results of the sample calculation are as follows:

$$n = \frac{434}{1 + 434. (0,05)^2}$$

$$n = 208,1 \approx 209$$

Questionnaires were distributed, and the instrument was tested for validity and reliability. The information in Table 2 reveals the results of the validity and reliability tests. The questionnaire test item is valid if the outer loading value > 0.7 . The test results produce outer loading values for the organizational politics variables (0.755 to 0.853), workplace conflict variables (0.819 to 0.832), job stressors (0.725 to 0.844) and performance variables (0.776 to 0.876). Furthermore, multicollinearity measurements can be assessed if the VIF value is below 5, and reliability can be traced to Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 and AVE above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014). The outer model measurement for the data quality is presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Convergent Validity and Collinearity Results

Item	VIF	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
OP1	2.226		
OP2	2.053		
OP3	2.850	0.889	0.642
OP4	2.498		
OP5	1.937		
OP6	2.453		
WC1	2.363		
WC2	2.501		
WC3	3.195	0.912	0.682
WC4	3.234		
WC5	2.772		
WC6	2.975		
JS1	2.211		
JS2	2.157		
JS3	2.859	0.904	0.627
JS4	2.990		
JS5	3.299		
JS6	2.347		
JS7	2.202		
P1	4.013		
P2	3.403		
P3	4.467	0.950	0.627
P4	3.537		
P5	2.370		
P6	4.612		
P7	4.454		
P8	4.187		
P9	3.037		
P10	2.952		

Source: Data processed, 2022

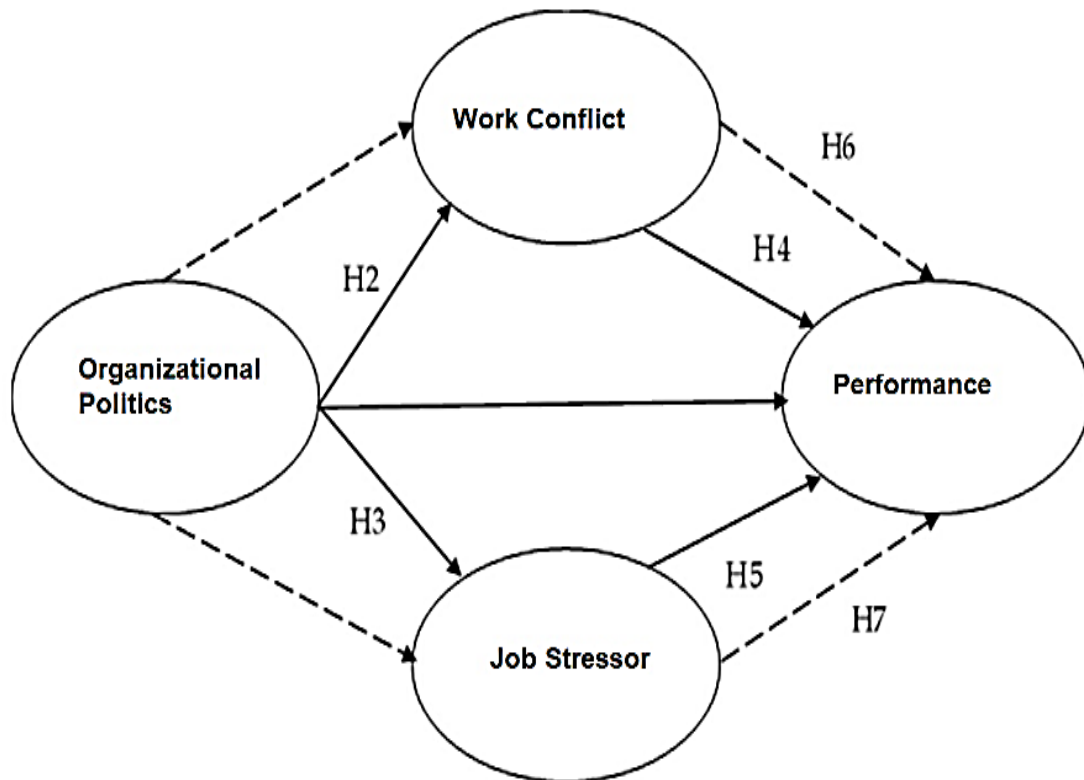


Figure 1. Research Model

RESULTS

This study conducts two layers of assessments: the outer model measurement and the inferential statistics, as presented in Table 4. The Fornell-Larcker test measures the discriminant validity of the study, as shown in Table 3. It indicates that each construct is more significantly related to its corresponding variables than other variables. There are no indications of excessive VIF values over 5, meaning the absence of multicollinearity, as shown in Table 3. The Cronbach's alpha and the AVE of each construct and scales are within the said guidelines, following an alpha > 0.70 and AVE > 0.05. These measures conclude the validity and reliability of the employed instruments, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The Fornell-Larcker Test of Discriminant Validity

	Job Stress	Organizational Politics	Performance	Work Conflict
Job Stress	0.792			
Organizational Politic	0.631	0.802		
Performance	-0.504	-0.476	0.827	
Work Conflict	0.680	0.613	-0.483	0.826

Source: Data processed, 2022

Hypotheses Revelations

After all data variables were declared valid and reliable, the hypotheses testing is conducted as in Figure 1 and summarized in Table 4.

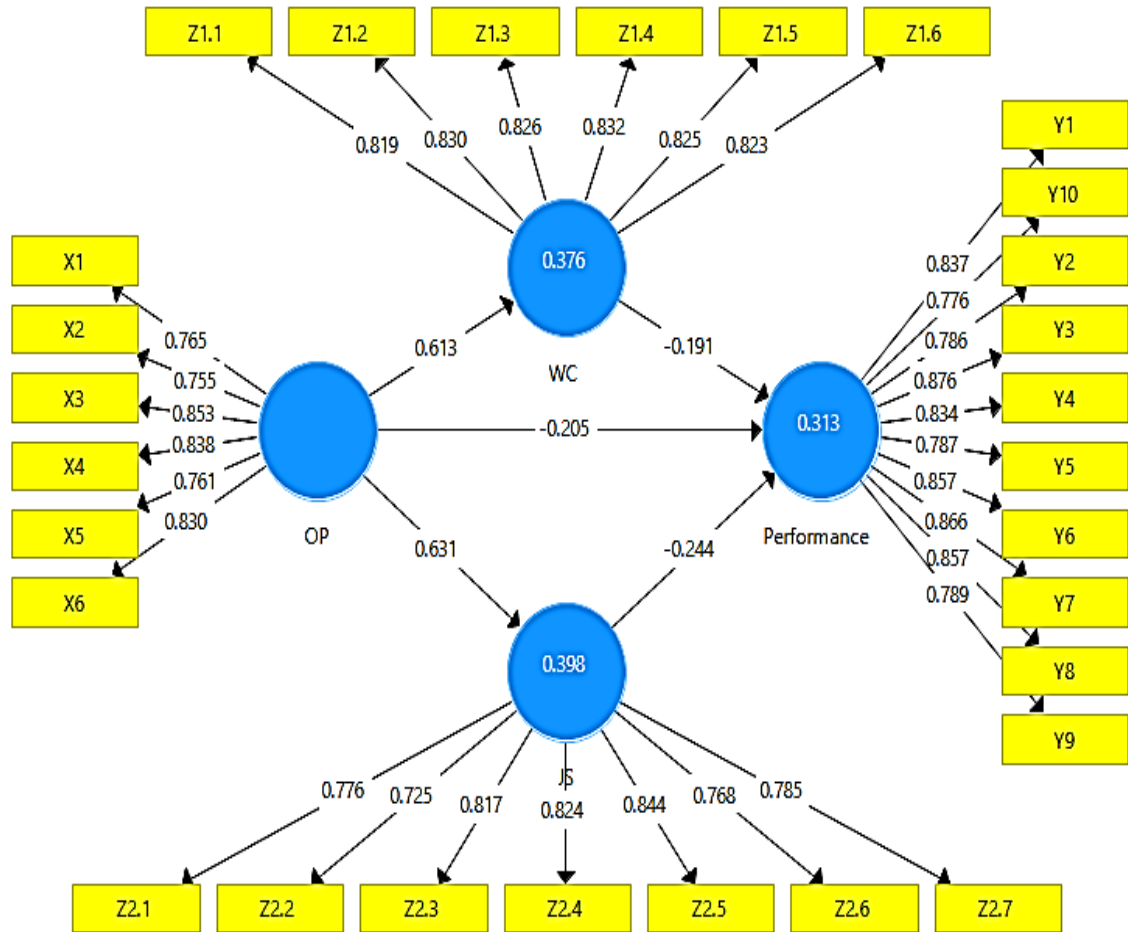


Figure 2: Path Analysis Results
Source: SmartPLS Software

Table 4. The Summary of the Hypotheses Findings

	Independent	Mediation	Dependent	Effect	P-Value
H1	Organizational Politics	-	Performance	-0.205	0.006
H2	Organizational Politics	-	Workplace Conflict	0.613	0.000
H3	Organizational Politics	-	Job Stressor	0.631	0.000
H4	Workplace Conflict	-	Performance	-0.191	0.014
H5	Job Stressor	-	Performance	-0.244	0.006
H6	Organizational Politics	Workplace Conflict	Performance	-0.117	0.014
H7	Organizational Politics	Job Stressor	Workplace Conflict	-0.154	0.007

Source: Adapted SmartPLS 3 output, 2022

Table 4 summarizes the acceptance of all variables. Some relationships present with a negative direction and must be treated cautiously. This study reports that the presence of extensive politics may derail and compromise the performance agenda of a private university.

DISCUSSION

From the results of the data analysis, we can conclude that organizational politics significantly influences performance. These results align with Nnenna (2019) where organizational politics around cultural differences, salary and promotion policies, and religious diversity, influence performance at universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. Similarly, according to Arefin et al. (2020), organizational politics has a detrimental impact on performance because it makes a corporation's management processes susceptible to political influences. The results of this study also show that organizational politics influences workplace conflict; following the findings of Murugan & Panchanatham (2016), organizational politics is a source of conflict in an organization.

The results also show that organizational politics influences job stress, which is in line with the findings of Ullah & Ahmad (2018). If organizational politics increases, it will also increase job stress within an organization to the point where workplace conflict influences performance. This finding is in line with Saranani (2015), where the coefficient value obtained is positive but not significant from the analysis of the influence of role conflict on performance. This shows that high conflict plays a role in improving performance but does not significantly influence employees. We also show that job stress influences performance, which is in line with the findings of Ehsan & Ali (2019), who found that stress-related factors negatively influence the work environment and decrease performance. However, management can take steps to minimize it.

We also found the mediating role of workplace conflict on the influence of organizational politics on performance. This is similar to the findings of Bai et al. (2016); workplace conflict has an entire relationship mediating between organizational politics and performance. Finally, the researcher found that, apart from being mediated by workplace conflict, the influence of organizational politics on performance can also be mediated by job stress. Following the findings from Soomro (2020), job stress mediates the relationship between organizational politics and performance. His research also shows that organizational politics is a cause of job stress and psychologically harms employees, thereby reducing performance. To reduce stress levels, university administrators must develop a work environment that accommodates mutual interests. Similarly, corporate political behavior must contribute to organizational performance by putting the interests of neither the group nor the individual first. The attitudes stemming from political activity should be consistent with organizational ethics and objectives in higher education.

The process of accreditation is predicated upon securing university performance. Accepting new students, officials, and lecturers who bring their utmost effort, without being focused solely on their personal objectives, will uplift

the entire university culture over time. This process will secure the implementation of the *tri dharma* of Indonesian higher education (i.e., educating, researching, and community development). Transformational leadership from the institution is urgent and critical to guide the transition of the education sector.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY

The results show that all variables influence performance, either directly or indirectly, and that organizational politics, workplace conflict, and job stress directly impact the performance of university officials. Workplace conflict and job stress can also mediate the relationship between organizational politics and performance. Subsequent research can further examine the role of organizational politics in other contexts, with potentially better-quality data, more respondents, and different measurements of organizational politics. Future studies may also benefit from the potentiality of cross-regional discussions, as different loci may alter the variable interactions. The demographic differences could also serve as a prospective ground for further discussions.

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