

Perceptions of Positive and Negative Organizational Politics:  
Roles of the Frequency and Distance of Political Behavior

John Maslyn  
College of Business Administration  
Belmont University  
1900 Belmont Blvd.  
Nashville, TN 37212  
maslynj@mail.belmont.edu

Donald Fedor  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
College of Management  
800 W. Peachtree  
Atlanta, GA 30332-0520  
donald.fedor@mgt.gatech.edu

Steven Farmer  
Dept. of Management  
W. Frank Barton School of Business  
Wichita State University  
1845 Fairmont  
Wichita, KS 67260-0088  
Steven.Farmer@wichita.edu

Kenneth Bettenhausen  
School of Business  
University of Colorado at Denver  
Campus Box 65  
P.O. Box 173364  
Denver, Colorado 80217-3364  
Kenneth.Bettenhausen@cudenver.edu

Paper presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the Southern Management Association, Charlotte,  
SC

April 2005

Perceptions of Positive and Negative Organizational Politics:  
Roles of the Frequency and Distance of Political Behavior

Abstract

This study examined factors that contribute to an understanding of both a positive and a negative side of perceptions of politics. Participants were asked to rate the positive or negative nature of political practices within organizations, the frequency of those practices, and the effect on them personally. For both positive and negative political behavior, frequency of occurrence was associated with a positive evaluation of the behavior. Proximity to the respondent marginally predicted only positive politics. An interaction of proximity and frequency of occurrence added variance in the prediction of how positive both positive and negative political behavior were seen.

Perceptions of Positive and Negative Organizational Politics:  
Roles of the Frequency and Distance of Political Behavior

Over the past few years, research on perceptions of politics in organizations has begun a shift in direction. Initial research on perceptions of politics generated strong evidence of the validity of various portions of the Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989) model, with particular emphasis on the outcomes of perceptions of politics in organizations. Clearly, perceptions of politics as generally conceptualized and measured has been shown to be an antecedent to numerous negative outcomes, such as reduced job satisfaction, increased job anxiety, and increased intention to turnover (see Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002 for an extensive review). Ferris et al. (2002) also detail past research on antecedents of perceptions of politics. Factors such as uncertainty, competition, and change have been shown to be associated with a judgment of the occurrence of politics in the workplace.

In this research we take a different tact in understanding perceptions of politics, one that includes traditional conceptualizations (typically having a negative connotation) as well as politics as a positive event in organizations. This is consistent with Ferris et al. (2002) who, in detailing a future research agenda for perceptions of politics forward, raise the *positive* side of political behavior, or behavior judged to be political yet having positive consequences for the actor or others in the organization. These authors point out that the positive nature of politics in organizations is a particularly relevant pursuit since it is both under-researched and has the potential to significantly alter the study of politics in the workplace.

To do this, this research uses two approaches, 1) directly assessing judgments of the positive or negative nature of various political behaviors in the workplace, and 2) examining characteristics of perceived political behavior that contribute to a positive or negative evaluation,

such as the experienced frequency of political behavior and the extent to which it is seen as having a proximal or direct impact on the employees. Below we discuss perceptions of positive and negative politics and present predictions regarding the degree to which political behavior will be seen as positive or negative.

#### Perceptions of Politics, Positive and Negative

Ferris et al.'s (2002) review presents a number of key attributes of the various definitions of politics over roughly the last two decades. These definitions of politics in organizations have been traditionally framed in the negative. For example: "individual or group behavior that is informal, ostensibly parochial, typically divisive, and above all in a technical sense, illegitimate – sanctioned neither by formal authority, accepted ideology, nor certified expertise (although it may exploit any one of these)" (Mintzberg, 1983: 172) or "actions by individuals which are directed toward the goal of furthering their own self-interests without regard for the well-being of others or their organization" (Kacmar & Baron, 1999: 4). These definitions, and others discussed by Ferris et al. share the following key attributes: Politics is informal (i.e., it is a behavior and is "extra-role"), discretionary, promotes self-interest on the part of the actor (reflects intent or motives and is therefore a cognition), potentially threatens others (an outcome), is indifferent to or may run counter to organizational goals (an outcome), and is based on social influence (behavioral).

Consistent with this essentially negative connotation is a body of research that shows how the perception of such behavior negatively affects the individuals who are exposed to it. Perhaps this is so because these actions are often seen as taking advantage of someone or acting outside the bounds of acceptable behavior, though often not expressly prohibited by the organization (Farrell & Peterson, 1982). Not surprisingly, the established measures of

perceptions of politics (e.g., the POPs, Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997) have been consistent in tone with the belief that political behavior is an undesirable means to achieve self-serving goals.

However, this traditional view of politics as always being somewhat evil is giving way to the understanding that political behavior may, at times, have a positive side or sides. One reason is that organizations tend to build systems to handle current and foreseeable events, but many things happen that organizational decision-makers do not plan for yet must also be addressed. As is becoming apparent, not all behaviors that might be deemed political are necessarily bad for organizations, and are often necessary for organizational effectiveness (Pfeffer, 1992). In fact, many researchers have noted that organizational politics can be helpful for members of the organization (e.g., Ferris, et al., 1996; Kumar & Ghadially, 1989; Pichault, 1995). This includes such things as creating positive change in the organization or overcoming unforeseen difficulties that cannot be addressed using currently accepted lines of authority.

Fedor and Maslyn (2002) suggest that politics can be perceived as positive when they are used by organizational members to get things accomplished or to raise issues that are “not appropriate” at a particular time. For example, this could occur in a situation where an organizational team bypasses the chain of command to increase the visibility of particular ideas (and by definition be self-serving) and yet what is then done with those ideas benefits the organization. As such, positive and negative political behavior are often similar forms of behavior, essentially unsanctioned and ostensibly self-interested; the major differences lie in the outcomes. Further, both positive and negative forms of political behavior can occur simultaneously in organizations (Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1980). This “positive ends justify the means” perspective was recently investigated by Viega, Golden, and

Dechant (2004), who reported on why managers “bend the rules” or violate stated policies and procedures in the course of getting their work done. Performance-based judgment calls, such as rule breaking being necessary to get the job done, were considered by 86% of managers to be common and acceptable behavior.

It is notable that the distinction between negative and positive politics, as we have defined it, comes primarily in terms of the more positive nature of the outcomes for the latter. However, positive politics is not the opposite of nor simply the absence of negative politics. Just as each is said to occur simultaneously (Ferris et al., 2002), recent research has found that measures of positive and negative politics each contribute significantly to predicting outcomes such as job satisfaction (Fedor, Maslyn, Farmer & Bettenhausen, 2003). We recognize that the benefit of positive politics is likely mixed for organizational members, insofar as some may view that even positive political action can undercut the legitimacy of organizational authority and structures. As such, the definition of positive politics differs from traditional conceptualizations of politics primarily in that it does not threaten the interests of others or run counter to organizational goals. It is still informal, discretionary, does promote self-interest, and is influence-based.

### Hypotheses

Despite increasing interest in the conceptualization of positive politics, little empirical study has directly tested perceptions of positive politics. In their recent work, Fedor et al. (2003) identified measures of positive and negative political perceptions at the individual, group, and organizational level and provided validation of the positive politics construct as being unique from negative perceptions of politics. However, the extent to which the organizational practices measured were actually evaluated as positive (i.e., actually perceived to be a good thing) or

evaluated negatively (i.e., perceived to be a bad thing) was not empirically examined. Further, missing from the vast work on perceptions of politics is an understanding about the nature of political behavior in organizations and the means by which it is seen to impact the observer. For a better understanding of why political behaviors may be seen more positively or more negatively, we believe two contextual factors need to be considered. The first contextual factor is the perceived frequency of occurrence of the political behavior, while the second is the distance of the impact of the behavior from the person perceiving it.

The selection of these two factors is based on the premise that what does not affect an individual directly will often occupy fewer attentional resources (e.g., Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989), whereas employees actively attend to workplace events or outcomes that affect their sense of dependency and control (Fiske, 1993; Konst, Vonk, & Van der Vlist, 1999). As a result of core self-concept motives (i.e., self-enhancement, self-consistency, self-efficacy; Erez & Earley, 1993), evaluative judgments (i.e., positive or negative) are more likely to be made when a potential threat, or opportunity, is psychologically salient. Therefore, we suggest that the frequency of the political behavior—the extent to which it is seen as occurring, and an individual's distance from it—the extent to which individuals see it affecting them or others close to them—will influence one's perceptions such that actions that are not as close, or have little direct impact, ought to be seen as less intense. In the case of positive politics, less positive and in the case of negative politics, less negative. This conclusion is consistent with Latane's (1981) law of social impact where events with higher psychological immediacy (close proximity in time and space) have a more powerful effect on individuals than those with lower immediacy.

**Comment [SMF1]:** Fiske, S. T. (1993). Controlling other people: The impact of power on stereotyping. *American Psychologist*, 48, 621-628.

Thus, we propose that the more often, and more immediate (proximity wise) politics are perceived, the more they will be judged to be positive or negative given the nature of the political behavior. Based on the above discussion, we tested the following hypotheses.

***Hypothesis 1a: Positive politics occurring more frequently will be perceived as more positive than perceptions of positive politics occurring less frequently.***

***Hypothesis 1b: Negative politics occurring more frequently will be perceived as more negative than perceptions of negative politics occurring less frequently.***

***Hypothesis 2a: Positive politics occurring more proximally will be perceived as more positive than perceptions of positive politics occurring less proximally.***

***Hypothesis 2b: Negative politics occurring more proximally will be perceived as more negative than perceptions of negative politics occurring less proximally.***

An additional issue with regard to the perceptions of positive politics is how proximity of impact and the frequency of occurrence act together in the perception of politics. As proposed in the hypotheses presented above, both frequency and proximity or impact ought to affect the extent to which political behavior is perceived as a good or bad thing. We expect that these characteristics of positive or negative political behavior will interact in the prediction of how positive or negative certain behaviors are perceived to be. We believe the issue rests on the question of whether individuals see themselves as victims of politics, beneficiaries of politics, or unaffected observers. For positive politics, individuals are unlikely to be victims, but may not perceive that they are benefiting if the impact is minimal or far away. In looking at the joint occurrence of frequency and proximity of the impact, we suggest that proximity or impact will moderate the effect of occurrence. When the political behavior is perceived to be far away, the positive effects of its frequency of occurrence are expected to be diminished, but when perceived as psychologically close, the positive effects of occurrence on the extent to which the political behavior is perceived to be positive will be magnified.

For perceptions of negative political behavior, distance is also expected to diminish the impact of frequency. The reason is that negative political behavior is perceived as such because it causes harm to employees. Examples include altering what is seen as the “appropriate” distribution of resources or making the employee’s job more difficult. However, even when these negative political behaviors are occurring frequently, as their impact moves further from the employee they pose less of a threat. Therefore, proximity is predicted to moderate the effects of frequency in regard to negative political behavior as well.

***Hypothesis 3a: The extent to which positive politics in the workplace is judged to be positive is associated with the joint occurrence of the frequency and the proximity of the political behavior. Specifically, the effect of frequency will be diminished when the positive political behavior is seen as being organizationally distant, and will be increased when the positive political behavior is seen as being organizationally close.***

***Hypothesis 3b: The extent to which negative politics in the workplace is judged to be negative is associated with the joint occurrence of the frequency and the proximity of the political behavior. Specifically, the effect of frequency will be diminished when the negative political behavior is seen as being organizationally distant, and will be increased when the negative political behavior is seen as being organizationally close.***

## METHODS

### Sample, Setting, and Procedures

To investigate our ideas about the occurrence and distance of political behavior, we wanted to sample a population that contained reasonable variance in organizational settings, so that our findings would have some degree of generalizability. To do this, we chose to sample graduate MBA students and collected data in an evening program at a large Midwestern university. This program is designed for adults who are currently employed and who typically have significant work experience. Respondents held a variety of managerial, professional, or technical positions (e.g., project engineer, investment analyst, marketing manager, auditor,

controller, HR manager, pharmaceutical researcher, attorney, computer programmer, business analyst) across a wide distribution of fields such as architecture, telecommunications, chemical research, health care, education, manufacturing, sales, law, financial services, government, construction, and hospitality.

Data were collected in two separate activities, conducted approximately nine months apart. The first data collection was designed to generate a measure of positive politics and assessed political perceptions of the participant's organization along with demographic information. The second data collection was designed to permit hypothesis testing with of the developed perceptions of positive politics measure along with an established measure of perceptions of politics (negative in orientation) and demographics. All data were collected from the same university's evening MBA students, but utilized different samples. Most participants were given class time to complete the surveys. While filling out the questionnaires, the respondents were asked to think about their own personal experiences in their current or a recent workplace. A researcher was present during the administration to introduce the study, answer questions, and reassure participants regarding the confidentiality of their responses.

One hundred sixty-eight MBA students participated in the initial data collection. The average age of respondents was 29.1 years (s.d. = 5.35), average tenure with their respective organization was 3.0 years (s.d. = 2.74), and average full time work experience was 6.83 years (s.d. = 5.01). Respondents were 43.5% female and 56% male with less than 1% not reporting. One hundred -fifteen MBA students participated in the hypothesis testing portion of the study. The average age of these respondents was 31.2 years (s.d. = 6.73), average tenure with the organization was 3.98 years (s.d. = 3.44), and average full-time work experience was 9.1 years (s.d. = 6.9). Respondents were 33% female and 63.5% male with 3.5% not reporting.

## Measures

*Perceptions of Organizational Politics—Positive.* Based on prior pilot testing with MBA students and ideas from past work on positive politics (Fedor & Maslyn, 2002; Fedor, et al., 2003), 44 items were written to capture positive political behavior in the workplace. All items contained a root statement of a political behavior in organizations as the referent for answering three sub-items. First, consistent with previous work in this area (e.g., Kacmar & Carlson, 1997), we used a 5-point Likert response format asking the extent to which the respondent agreed with the item statement of the occurrence of political behavior in their workplace (strongly disagree to strongly agree) to represent the frequency of occurrence. To capture the positive or negative essence of the political item, we then asked them to respond regarding the extent to which each political behavior was seen as positive or negative. We did so by again using a 5-point likert scale, but with anchors ranging from “I generally see this as a bad thing” to “I generally see this as a good thing.” This same format was used to assess respondents’ judgments of the proximity of the impact of the political behavior in relation to themselves (“The impact of this on me would usually be” with scale anchors ranging from indirect/distant to direct/close).

Identification of perceptions of politics items considered to represent positive politics was conducted in two steps. First, we assessed the extent to which the political behavior in the organization was perceived as either “a good thing” or “a bad thing” by identifying those items whose mean values were greater than 3.0 on a Likert scale with these anchors. Twenty-four of the 44 items met this criterion. Second, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify items for scale formation. Analysis of the 24 items suggested two factors were present in the data (scree plot criterion). Elimination of weakly loaded or cross-loaded items and iteration of

the factor analysis (Hinkin, 1998) resulted in a first factor group of seven items which were consistent with our theoretical notion of positive politics— the ends justify the means. Sample items include: “The political maneuverings of individuals and groups has caused some good things to happen for the organization in total,” “Our manager/supervisor has had to be a politician in order to protect or promote our work group,” and “I would not be as successful as I am without the use of some political behavior on my part.” The internal consistency (alpha) for the seven item scale constructed from these items was .81.

This set of seven items served as the basis for our other positive politics measures. Therefore, scales assessing the extent to which the respondent agreed that positive politics was present or occurring in their workplace (frequency), and the extent to which they reported the political event as distant or close, were constructed using the seven previously discussed items to capture the more positive political behaviors. In the development sample, the internal consistencies (alphas) for these scales were .75 for the extent of such behavior, and .76 for the proximity of the political effect.

These items were then used in the data collection designed for hypothesis testing. Resulting scales generated from these items in this sample also had acceptable alphas: .79 for the positive nature of the behavior, .71 for the extent of the behavior, and .71 for the proximity of the political effect.

*Perceptions of Organizational Politics—Negative.* Traditional measures of (negative) perceptions of politics have been developed and refined for many years (Ferris, et al., 2002). We collected data on traditional perceptions of politics by using the 15 perceptions of politics (POPs) items developed by Kacmar & Carlson (1997). We applied the same three-part response format to the traditional, negative items as we did the positive items. Since the POPs is an established

scale, we constructed our perceptions of negative politics measures using all 15 items. The alphas for these scales were .66 for the negative nature of the behavior, .81 for the extent such behavior was present, and .61 for the proximity of the effect of the political behavior.

*Control variables.* Demographically based control variables were included in the study in order to remove some potential confounds. First, respondent's age and gender were included. Additionally, since perspectives may change as individuals spend time in their organizations we also controlled for the participant's organizational tenure.

## RESULTS

Variable means and intercorrelations for both samples are reported in Table 1. With regard to positive politics, Table 1 shows that perceptions of organizational politics can be seen in a relatively positive light, with benefits to the individual or the organization in spite of the political nature of the event. In the initial data set, the mean value of this set of items was 3.15 (5-point scale) with a standard deviation of .72. Since we initially chose items that were at 3.0 or above in our scale development for positive politics, this was not surprising. When using the data from the main study sample we confirm, in an absolute and relative sense, the positive and negative nature of the perceptions of politics. Examination of the mean scale values on the positive-negative question showed that the traditional negative POPs scale was indeed perceived to reflect a somewhat negative organizational experience (mean = 2.37). The items from the positive scale in this data set showed a significantly more positive mean value of 2.98 ( $t(103) = 6.73, p < .001$ ). Given this more positive rating of the positive politics items, we conclude that political behavior in the workplace with positive outcomes is seen as more positive than traditional conceptualizations of perceptions of negative politics.

The Table also shows moderate to high positive correlations between the frequency, positive-negative evaluation, and proximity of politics in both samples and within both positive and traditionally negative forms of politics. The exception is a lack of a significant relationship between impact proximity and the positive-negative evaluation. The correlations between evaluations of the positive and negative measures of perceived politics were more modest. Specifically, the reported frequency of occurrence of positive political behavior was not significantly associated with the reported frequency of negative political behavior ( $r = -.11$ ). Similarly, the extent to which political behavior was seen as negative was not associated with the extent to which political behavior with positive outcomes was perceived as positive ( $r = .13$ ). This suggests that these judgments were neither mirror images of one another nor strongly related to each other. Respondents reported a significant correlation between the proximity of positive and negative political behavior ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ).

Insert Table 1 About Here

Hypothesis 1a addressed the effect of the frequency of occurrence on the perception of politics. To the extent that political behavior could be seen as having a relatively positive or negative outcome, we proposed that the greater the occurrence, the more positively or negatively respectively the behavior would be perceived. For positive politics, the correlation between the positive nature of the behavior and the frequency of the behavior was  $.47 (p < .01)$ , indicating initial support for Hypothesis 1a. We also regressed the evaluation of positive politics on the reported frequency of the political action along with the participant's gender, age, and organizational tenure. In support of Hypothesis 1a, the frequency of occurrence of positive politics was a significant predictor of how positive the political behavior was perceived (see Table 2). Consistent with a self-interest basis for the hypothesis, the more the respondent

experienced a positive political event in the workplace, the more the more positively it was reported to be. Correlational and regression tests of hypothesis 1b, regarding negative political behavior, also showed significant prediction by occurrence of the behavior. Interestingly, however, the more frequently the traditional political behaviors were seen, the more positively they were rated, counter to our prediction. At this point, we can only conjecture that as negative political behavior becomes more frequent is also becomes more of the norm for how the organization functions. As a result, it just isn't "that big a thing" compared to when it is less frequent and, thus, stands out as a significant violation of appropriate organizational standards for conduct and decision making.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b also made predictions regarding the extent to which political behavior in the work place was evaluated—the greater the proximity of the impact, the stronger positive or negative the behavior would be perceived. Using a similar approach to testing Hypotheses 1a & b, the correlation between the proximity of the impact of the political behavior and the extent to which it was perceived to be positive was significant at .23 ( $p < .05$ ). The regression analysis testing this question was significant at the ( $p < .10$ ) level indicating guarded support for hypothesis 2a. For negative political behavior, proximity of impact was not found to be a significant predictor in either correlational or regression analysis. As such, hypothesis 2b was not supported.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Hypothesis 3a predicted that positive politics perceptions would be associated with the joint influence of frequency and proximity. Specifically, the proximity of the impact of the political behavior was expected to moderate the effects of its occurrence. Using hierarchical regression with all interaction components centered, the interaction of occurrence and proximity

of impact was found to be a significant predictor of the positive nature of the political experience, accounting for an  $R^2$  change of .03 ( $p < .05$ ). Figure 1 shows this interaction (levels were based on  $\pm 1$  SD from the mean for each variable [Cohen & Cohen, 1983]). Specifically, the perceived positive nature of the political behavior is lowest when the behavior is seen to have a high impact but is not occurring very often, and highest when the impact is close or direct and frequent. These results provide support for Hypothesis 3a.

We used hierarchical regression analysis again to explore the impact of the interaction of frequency of occurrence and proximity in the prediction of judgments regarding how negatively the participants judged negative political behavior (H3b). The interaction of frequency and proximity was also significant (at  $p < .10$ ), accounting for an additional 3% of the variance in the evaluation of the behavior (see Figure 1). Perceptions of the negative nature of the political behavior were lowest when it was seen less often and had impact farther away from the respondent.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

## DISCUSSION

This study investigated the existence of a both positive and negative organizational politics to determine how the frequency of their occurrence, and their degrees of impact, affected the perception of each construct. Since perception of political behavior in organizations has historically been treated as negative, it has been consistently conceptualized as something causing harm or loss (e.g., coalitions that get more resources than they deserve or individual employees having to defend themselves from the political behavior of others). Exploring the more positive side of politics in comparison with the traditional side provides an opportunity to expand our understanding of this behavior in organizations. Our findings point to the

recognition by employees of a more positive side to organizational politics and that it represents more than simply the absence of negative political behaviors.

We also investigated the effects of two contextual variables that were hypothesized to affect the evaluation of the positive or negative nature of political perceptions, namely frequency of occurrence and distance of the impact from the individual. The argument was made that political behavior occurring infrequently or at a distance would not be seen as very significant and, therefore, less positive or less negative than when it is more frequent or having a more direct impact. Our findings partially supported these predictions in that frequency was positively related to the ratings of positive political behavior, while distance of impact was only weakly related to this rating. For negative politics, the frequency of occurrence was again a significant predictor, but the proximity of impact was not. Counter to our hypothesis, the evaluation of traditionally negative political behavior was reported to be more positive when it occurred more frequently.

The final hypothesis focused on the interaction between frequency and distance in the judgment of the positive or negative nature of political behavior. The expectation was that distance would moderate the effect of frequency, such that when positive political behavior was occurring often it would be seen as less positive if it was also taking place at a distance. Similarly, negative political behavior would be seen as less negative if it was judged to have less impact on the employee. Essentially, distant or low impact positive politics would be benefiting (or harming) the employee less than this type of politics occurring more proximally. The results provided support for this prediction. More frequent positive politics was perceived to be even more positive when it was proximal to the individual than when it was distal. However, an

anomaly evident in this interaction concerns the low frequency situation. In this case, positive politics was seen as less positive than when it had a high impact, but occurred less often.

The effects of frequency and distance on the perceptions of negative politics showed that the lowest ratings (the politics perceived to be the most negative) are when the negative politics has a low occurrence and is distant. At this point, we can surmise that employees often have the most negative views of things that are potentially harmful, infrequent, and that they do not experience directly. It may be that the uncertainty surrounding this form of politics makes it appear worse than it otherwise would be. Essentially, those employees in infrequent and distal negative political situations expect or perceived the worst. As with the question raised above, further study on the similarities, differences and interplay of positive and negative perceptions of politics should be conducted to determine the extent to which the two forms of politics might counteract or enhance the other's influence.

While the positive nature of negative political behavior was consistently less positive than judgments about political behavior with positive outcomes, for both conceptualizations, increased frequency and frequency in conjunction with proximity was associated with more positive ratings of the behavior. It was reported to be more of a good thing when it occurred more often and closer to the respondent. Though an unexpected result, we might conclude that all politics in organizations is seen as useful to some extent – that these behaviors in general are seen to serve a purpose, even if as past research has shown individuals generally report negative personal reactions to them.

Our position was that what makes perceptions of politics positive or negative is not that the workplace behavior is or is not political, but that the outcomes of the political behavior are the root of the positive - negative distinction. For positive politics, the ends justify the means for

a vast majority of organizational members (Viega, et al. 2004). Our data suggest that perhaps this is also true of negative politics. This does not suggest, however, that we necessarily accept or recommend such behavior since there is a growing body of research that suggests that political environments lead to stress and other undesirable outcomes that build over time (e.g., Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey & Toth, 1997; Vigoda, 2002). In a study of stress and burnout, Vigoda (2002) specifically suggests that so long as there are politics, individuals will eventually experience stress. This may explain the inconsistency between our results and past research on perceptions of politics that suggests negative consequences. One important question for future study is can there be negative effects from positive politics? Fedor et al. (2003) found that positive politics were directly associated with positive organizational outcomes such as satisfaction while negative perceptions of politics were inversely associated with these outcomes. At this early stage of study in perceptions of positive politics, we have shown that both the outcomes of political behavior and the process of politics in organizations appear to be relevant. However, we do not know whether outcome or process will, over time, turn out to be the more important influence when it comes to the effect of organizational politics on organizational members. Future research is suggested to examine this question.

#### Study Considerations

As with any study, this one has both strengths and shortcomings. In terms of strengths, the study was conducted with employees using their full-time jobs as reference points -- political behavior is expected to have been a salient issue in their working lives. Further, because the findings are derived from dozens of different organizations in each of the two samples, they are not confined to any particular type of organization or organizational culture. Finally, this research represents a very necessary step of expanding our view of organizational politics.

While there is a growing appreciation of the importance of possessing political skills, we now need to have a more complete picture of organizational politics by including its more positive side.

The sample of MBA students also presents a potential study limitation. While variability in organizational settings for their responses seems to exist, they were also obviously similar in educational level and perhaps also in motivational and value orientation. Thus, while some degree of generalizability of these results exists given the different positions and organizations of the respondents, replication of these results in other types of samples would be prudent. An additional concern is that the data are all self-report. While finding a significant interaction helps reduce concerns that the results are attributable to linear biasing, we recognize that future research needs to look for ways to further reduce the use of self-report information. Finally, while there were acceptable alphas for the positive politics scales, the internal consistency (alphas) for the extent of negativity and the proximity of the POPs were lower than recommended.

### Conclusion

This study represents an important step in our study of political behavior in organizations. When it comes to organizational politics, there is a potential “up-side” to what has traditionally been viewed as negative. However, there is clearly a lot more to learn about this important organizational phenomenon.

## References

- Cohen, J., & Cohen, P. (1983). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Cropanzano, R., Howes, J.C., Grandey, A.A., & Toth, P. (1997). The relationship of organizational politics and support to work behaviors, attitudes, and stress. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 18, 159-180.
- Erez, M., & Earley, P.C. 1993. *Culture, self-identity, and work*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Farrell, D., & Petersen, J.C. (1982). Patterns of political behavior in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 7, 403-412.
- Fedor, D.B., & Maslyn, J.M. (2002). Politics and political behavior: Where else do we go from here? In F. Dansereau and F.J. Yammarino (Eds.), *Research in Multi-Level Issues, vol. 1* (pp. 287-294). Oxford, UK: Elsevier Science/JAI Press.
- Fedor, D.B., Maslyn, J.M., Farmer, S.M., & Bettenhausen, K.L. (2003). *Perceptions of Positive Politics and their Impact on Organizational Outcomes*. Paper presented at the annual Academy of Management meetings, Seattle, WA.
- Ferris, G.R., Russ, G.S., & Fandt, P.M. (1989) Politics in organizations. In R.A. Giacalone & P. Rosenfeld (Eds.), *Impression Management in the Organization*, 143-170. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ferris, G.R., Adams, G., Kolodinsky, R.W., Hochwarter, W.A., & Ammeter, A.P. (2002). Perceptions of organizational politics: Theory and research directions. In F. Dansereau & F.J. Yammarino (Eds.), *Research in Multi-Level Issues, vol. 1*. Oxford, UK: Elsevier Science/JAI Press.

- Fiske, S. T. (1993). Controlling other people: The impact of power on stereotyping. *American Psychologist*, 48, 621-628.
- Hinkin, T.R. 1998. A brief tutorial on the development of measures for use in survey questionnaires. *Organizational Research Methods*, 1: 104-121.
- Kacmar, K.M., & Baron, R.A. (1999). The state of the field, links to related processes, and an agenda for future research. In G.R. Ferris (Ed.), *Research In Personnel And Human Resources Management*, vol. 17 (pp. 1-39). Stamford, CT: JAI Press.
- Kacmar, K.M., & Ferris, G.R. (1991). Perceptions of organizational politics scale (POPS): Development and construct validation. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 51, 193-205.
- Kacmar, K.M., & Carlson, D.S. (1997). Further validation of the Perceptions of Politics Scale (POPS): A multi-sample approach. *Journal of Management*, 23, 627-658.
- Kanfer, R & Ackerman, P.L. (1989). Motivation and cognitive abilities: An integrative/aptitude-treatment interaction approach to skill acquisition. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74, 657-690.
- Konst, D., Vonk, R., & Van der Vlist, R. 1999. Inferences about causes and consequences of behavior of leaders and subordinates. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 20: 261-271.
- Kumar, P., & Ghadially, R. (1989). Organizational politics and its effects on members of organizations. *Human Relations*, 42, 305-314.
- Latane, B. (1981). The psychology of social impact. *American Psychologist*, 36, 343-356.
- Madison, D.L., Allen, R.W., Porter, L.W., Renwick, P.A., & Mayes, B.T. (1980). Organizational politics: An exploration of managers' perceptions. *Human Relations*, 33, 79-100.

- Mintzberg, H. (1983). *Power in and around organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Pfeffer, J. 1992. *Managing with power: Politics and influence in organizations*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Pichault, F. (1995). The management of politics in technically related organizational change. *Organization Studies*, 3, 449-460.
- Viega, J.F., Golden, T.D., & Dechant, K (2004). Why managers bend company rules. *Academy of Management Executive*, 18, 84-90.
- Vigoda, E. (2002). Stress-related aftermaths to workplace politics: The relationships among politics, job distress, and aggressive behavior in organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23, 571-591.

**TABLE 1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Variables**

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Development Sample</b>							
1. Perceptions of Positive Politics - Frequency	3.56	.74					
2. Perceptions of Positive Politics– Evaluation	3.15	.72	.68**				
3. Perceptions of Positive Politics– Proximity	3.47	.64	.47**	.35**			
<b>Main Study Sample</b>							
1. Perceptions of Positive Politics– Frequency	3.59	.68					
2. Perceptions of Positive Politics– Evaluation	2.98	.72	.47**				
3. Perceptions of Positive Politics– Proximity	3.48	.57	.50**	.23*			
4. Perceptions of Negative Politics– Frequency	2.93	.69	-.11	-.26**	.07		
5. Perceptions of Negative Politics– Evaluation	2.37	.53	.09	.13	-.09	.30**	
6. Perceptions of Negative Politics– Proximity	3.08	.42	-.01	-.22*	.36**	.17	-.01

Means and standard deviations are based on a 5-point scale.

Listwise N = 165 for the Development sample and 103 for the Main Study sample.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

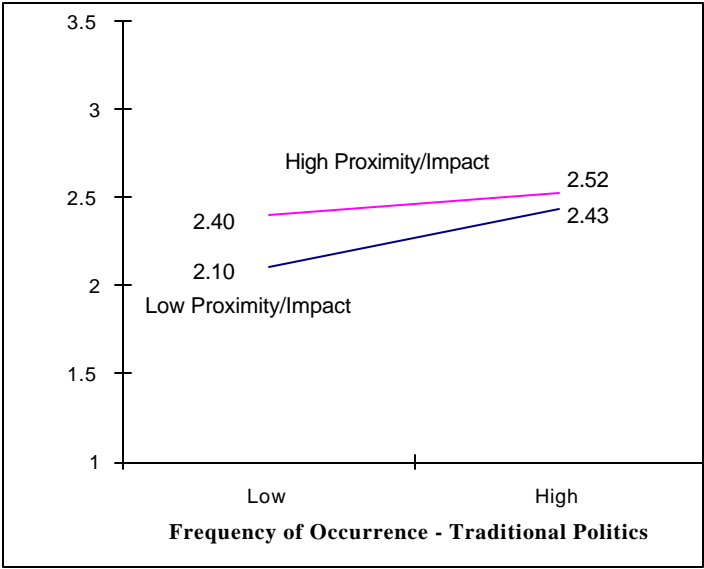
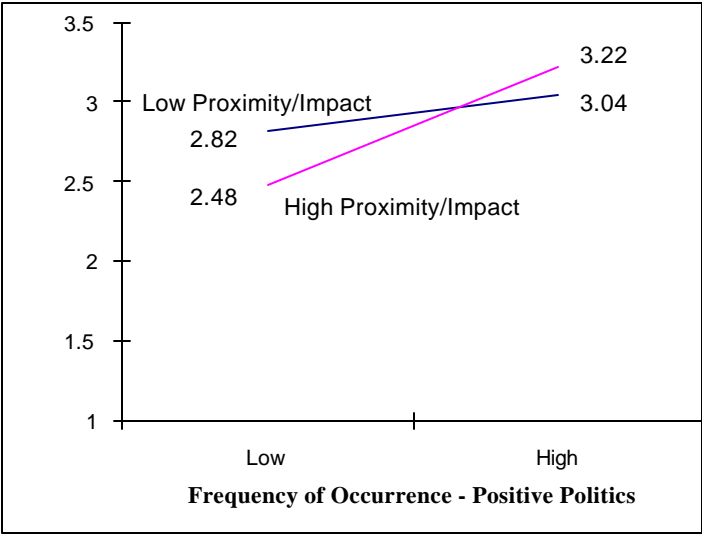
**TABLE 2**  
**Regression of Perceptions of the Positive -Negative Nature of Politics on Proximity/Impact and Frequency of Occurrence**

Dependent Variable:	Positive Politics			Negative Politics		
Step 1						
Age	.08	.03	.08	-.04	-.03	-.03
Organizational Tenure	-.14	-.15	-.14	.15	.17	.15
Gender	.01	-.04	.01	.12	.13	.12
Frequency	.46**		.46**	.26**		.27**
Proximity/Impact		.26**	.01		.00	-.04
Step 2						
Interaction of Frequency And Proximity			.19*			-.21 <sup>a</sup>
F	7.12**	2.35 <sup>a</sup>	5.55**	2.75*	.94	2.45*
(df)	(4, 95)	(4, 95)	(6, 93)	(4, 91)	(4, 91)	(6, 89)
R <sup>2</sup> /ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.23	.09	.26/.03*	.11	.07	.14/.03 <sup>a</sup>

Notes: Gender was coded 1= female, 2= male.

\*p <.05 ; \*\*p <.01; <sup>a</sup> p <.10

**FIGURE 1.**  
**Interaction of Frequency and Impact/Proximity of Positive and Traditional Political Behavior Toward a Positive-Negative Evaluation.**



Note: Higher values for the positive-negative evaluation axis represent more positive responses.