

Citation: Tir, M., Kia Kojouri, D., Gilanipour, J., & Rahmaty, M. (2026). Triangle of Political Behavior in Governmental Organizations: An Analysis of the Black, White, and Gray Spectrum of Political Behavior Using Meta-Synthesis Approach. *Digital Transformation and Administration Innovation*, 4(1), 1-13.

Received date: 2025-07-13

Revised date: 2025-09-26

Accepted date: 2025-09-29

Initial published date: 2025-12-23

Final published date: 2026-01-01



Triangle of Political Behavior in Governmental Organizations: An Analysis of the Black, White, and Gray Spectrum of Political Behavior Using Meta-Synthesis Approach

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Abstract

Political behavior in governmental organizations refers to a set of informal actions and interactions that employees and managers engage in beyond their formal job descriptions to gain, maintain, and increase influence, power, and access to scarce resources. The primary objective of the present study is to provide a model of political behavior in governmental organizations using the meta-synthesis method. This study employed a qualitative and development-oriented research design. The seven-step method of Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) was used to examine the model of political behavior in governmental organizations through meta-synthesis. The statistical population included scientific articles, academic theses, and books. A total of 157 sources were reviewed, and ultimately 60 sources were selected and analyzed. Through a purposive meta-synthesis approach, the components related to political behavior were identified. The reliability of the components was confirmed using the Kappa coefficient. SPSS version 19 was used for statistical analysis. The findings of the study revealed that political behavior in governmental organizations includes three categories: black political behavior (33 components), white political behavior (37 components), and gray political behavior (20 components). Understanding political behavior enables managers to predict and manage such actions instead of directly confronting and eliminating them, which is often impractical.

Keywords: Political behavior, black behavior, white behavior, gray behavior, governmental organizations.

1. Introduction

Political behavior in organizations has long been recognized as an inevitable part of organizational life. Especially in governmental organizations, where complex hierarchies, multiple stakeholders, and resource limitations prevail, informal political dynamics play a decisive role in shaping decision-making processes, influencing policy outcomes, and affecting employee attitudes and performance (Torkzadeh & Firoduni, 2018). Political behavior is broadly defined as the actions and interactions—often beyond formal roles—that individuals and groups employ to gain, maintain, and increase influence and access to scarce organizational resources (Esmaeili Ranjbar & Salajegheh, 2019). Although some political activities can have positive, adaptive functions—such as fostering collaboration or protecting group interests—others may be dysfunctional, leading to mistrust, conflict, and diminished organizational effectiveness (Tatari et al., 2019). Understanding the nature,



antecedents, and consequences of political behavior is thus a fundamental step toward enhancing organizational health and performance in the public sector.

Recent research underscores that political behavior in governmental institutions emerges from the interplay of individual dispositions, organizational structures, cultural contexts, and environmental uncertainties (Khodadadnejad et al., 2021; Sanai et al., 2022). Managers and employees operate within highly politicized ecosystems where informal networks, power asymmetries, and nontransparent decision-making channels can either enable effective governance or exacerbate inefficiency and cynicism (Esmaeili Ranjbar & Salajegheh, 2019; Tatari et al., 2019). At the individual level, personal power orientation, political skills, and ethical perceptions shape how employees interpret organizational politics and choose their behavioral responses (Milon & Lishchinsky, 2021; Namati et al., 2020). At the structural level, ambiguities in job roles, resource scarcity, and weak formal controls can intensify the reliance on political maneuvering (Khazaei Poul et al., 2023; Taheri et al., 2024). These realities are especially acute in public organizations where bureaucratic systems and shifting socio-political priorities interact (Torkzadeh & Firoduni, 2018).

The duality of political behavior—its potential to both support and disrupt organizational functioning—has led scholars to conceptualize political actions along a continuum from constructive to destructive. Constructive political behaviors, sometimes labeled as “white politics,” may involve leveraging influence to align interests, promote ethical decision-making, and support group objectives (Beikzad et al., 2021; NamjooFard et al., 2025). Conversely, destructive or “black politics” is characterized by manipulation, secrecy, favoritism, and power abuse, which erode trust and undermine collective goals (Abun, 2022; Sanai et al., 2022). Between these two extremes lies “gray politics,” where behaviors are ethically ambiguous, sometimes beneficial but often self-serving (Izadi et al., 2024). Mapping these behaviors within the nuanced context of governmental organizations provides a deeper, more actionable understanding for leaders.

Another dimension driving interest in organizational politics is its impact on employee outcomes. Several studies have demonstrated that negative perceptions of organizational politics are linked to lower job satisfaction, disengagement, and turnover intentions (Deep et al., 2025; Haque et al., 2019). Conversely, when political savvy is combined with ethical climates and authentic leadership, political behavior can foster stronger professional identities and commitment (Haque et al., 2019; Milon & Lishchinsky, 2021). In public-sector settings, where missions are tied to public value creation, political dynamics influence not just internal performance but also public trust and service quality (Beikzad et al., 2021). For instance, aligning political tactics with organizational virtue and jihad management principles has been shown to enhance human resource productivity and collective morale (Beikzad et al., 2021).

In Iran and other developing contexts, scholars have increasingly sought to model and categorize political behaviors in the public sector. For example, the interpretive structural modeling approach has been used to clarify the internal relationships between causes and strategies of political behavior (Khazaei Poul et al., 2023), while mixed-method approaches have helped reveal latent factors influencing managers’ political conduct (Izadi et al., 2024; Taheri et al., 2024). Studies show that cultural values, such as collectivism and ethical frameworks, strongly influence how politics manifest in public organizations (Khazai Kouhpar et al., 2021; Namati et al., 2020). Likewise, resource constraints and competitive climates push employees to rely on informal networks and alliances to achieve goals (Alavi & Doosti, 2022; Farmani & Rashidi Koochi, 2022). By integrating these insights, scholars aim to build models that both explain and predict political actions, enabling managers to respond proactively rather than reactively.

Technological and socio-economic changes further complicate the political landscape. Digital transformation in public administration has created new arenas for influence and control, altering how employees gather information, form alliances, and exert power (Berenji et al., 2024; Junior et al., 2020). Tools such as social media and internal communication platforms increase transparency but can also amplify manipulation and rumor-spreading (Deep et al., 2025; Junior et al., 2020). At the same time, shifting public expectations and governance reforms require managers to practice political skills ethically and strategically (Khazai Kouhpar et al., 2021; Salehi Koocheh et al., 2021). This environment demands robust conceptual frameworks that incorporate both classical and emerging forms of political conduct.



Leadership style and organizational culture significantly shape how political behavior evolves. Studies highlight that authentic leadership and responsible leadership can moderate the adverse effects of politics by fostering ethical climates and shared purpose (Haque et al., 2019; Milon & Lishchinsky, 2021). Conversely, weak ethical anchors and fragmented cultures create fertile ground for opportunistic and manipulative politics (Esmaeili Ranjbar & Salajegheh, 2019; Tatari et al., 2019). In this regard, building moral capital, promoting organizational virtue, and encouraging transparent decision-making can reduce the need for covert or destructive political strategies (Namati et al., 2020; NamjooFard et al., 2025). As governmental organizations face mounting pressure to be accountable, such cultural reforms become indispensable.

In addition to internal culture, the external environment plays a critical role. Political risk, socio-economic volatility, and regulatory ambiguity increase the salience of political skills and behaviors among managers (Alavi & Doosti, 2022; Khazaei Poul et al., 2023). Government agencies often operate under intense scrutiny and changing mandates, which encourage risk-averse or defensive political conduct (Sanai et al., 2022; Taheri et al., 2024). Yet these pressures can also motivate constructive political engagement, such as coalition-building to secure resources or drive policy innovation (Beikzad et al., 2021; Berenji et al., 2024). The challenge lies in distinguishing and nurturing forms of politics that serve collective objectives while controlling those that compromise fairness and efficiency.

Given these complexities, contemporary scholarship increasingly turns to meta-synthesis approaches to integrate scattered knowledge and propose coherent models (Izadi et al., 2024; Torkzadeh & Firoduni, 2018). Rather than merely summarizing past findings, meta-synthesis enables interpretive integration of diverse studies, producing conceptual frameworks that are greater than the sum of their parts (Taheri et al., 2024). This methodology is particularly valuable in exploring political behavior, where diverse disciplinary perspectives—from organizational psychology to sociology and public administration—have produced fragmented insights (Deep et al., 2025; Khazaei Poul et al., 2023). By synthesizing these strands, researchers can define robust dimensions, such as the black–gray–white spectrum, and develop actionable guidance for practitioners.

Another critical insight from the literature is the ethical dimension of politics in organizations. Researchers argue that fostering a culture of ethical reasoning and Kantian duty-bound norms can significantly reduce harmful political actions and promote justice (Haque et al., 2019; Namati et al., 2020). Integrating ethical standards into political practice encourages transparency, accountability, and alignment with organizational values (Milon & Lishchinsky, 2021). At the same time, simply discouraging politics altogether is unrealistic and counterproductive; instead, organizations should channel political energy toward positive, mission-driven objectives (Abun, 2022; NamjooFard et al., 2025). This balance requires both structural interventions—such as fair reward systems and clear role definitions—and individual development—such as training in political and emotional intelligence (Feyz et al., 2020; Kiakojouri, 2024).

Furthermore, cultural adaptation remains a central concern. Political behavior is not universal; it is deeply embedded in socio-cultural contexts. For instance, in collectivist cultures like Iran, loyalty networks and informal alliances are more salient, while in Western contexts, individual agency and formal lobbying play stronger roles (Haque et al., 2019; Khazai Kouhpar et al., 2021). Understanding these nuances is crucial for designing political behavior models that are both theoretically robust and practically applicable. Comparative studies have shown that managerial success in politically complex settings depends on context-sensitive competencies, including relational intelligence, foresight, and adaptive communication (Deep et al., 2025; Farmani & Rashidi Koochi, 2022).

Finally, the managerial implications of studying political behavior extend beyond diagnosis to strategic action. Scholars recommend that public sector leaders cultivate political intelligence and ethical influence strategies to navigate their organizations effectively (Izadi et al., 2024; NamjooFard et al., 2025). At the same time, they should institutionalize mechanisms for transparency, participatory decision-making, and fair conflict resolution to reduce harmful politics (Khazaei Poul et al., 2023; Torkzadeh & Firoduni, 2018). Training programs that integrate political skill development with emotional intelligence and ethical reasoning are also seen as critical for building resilient and adaptive public organizations (Feyz et al., 2020; Kiakojouri, 2024).



Building upon this body of knowledge, the present research aims to develop a comprehensive model of political behavior in governmental organizations through a meta-synthesis approach, systematically integrating prior studies to classify political behaviors into constructive (white), destructive (black), and ambiguous (gray) domains.

2. Methods and Materials

To achieve the objective of identifying the components of political behavior using the meta-synthesis method, this study employed the seven-step approach of Sandelowski and Barroso (2007), the summary of which is illustrated in Figure 1. Meta-synthesis is a qualitative study that examines the data and findings extracted from other studies with related and similar topics. Accordingly, the sample for meta-synthesis is formed from previously selected studies based on their relevance to the research question. Meta-synthesis provides a review of the historical background of the subject under investigation. Rather than offering a simple aggregated summary of findings, meta-synthesis creates an interpretive synthesis of results. By systematically integrating previous research, meta-synthesis allows researchers to identify dimensions and components, thereby advancing current knowledge and providing a comprehensive and broader perspective on the issues. Conducting a meta-synthesis requires the researcher to perform an in-depth and meticulous review and integrate the findings of related prior studies. By analyzing the results of primary research papers, researchers reveal and create terms that present a more comprehensive representation of the phenomenon under study. Similar to a systematic review, meta-synthesis yields an outcome greater than the sum of its parts.

The statistical population of this study included scientific articles, academic theses, and books. A total of 157 sources were examined, and finally, 60 sources were confirmed for analysis. Using the purposive meta-synthesis method, the components related to political behavior were identified.

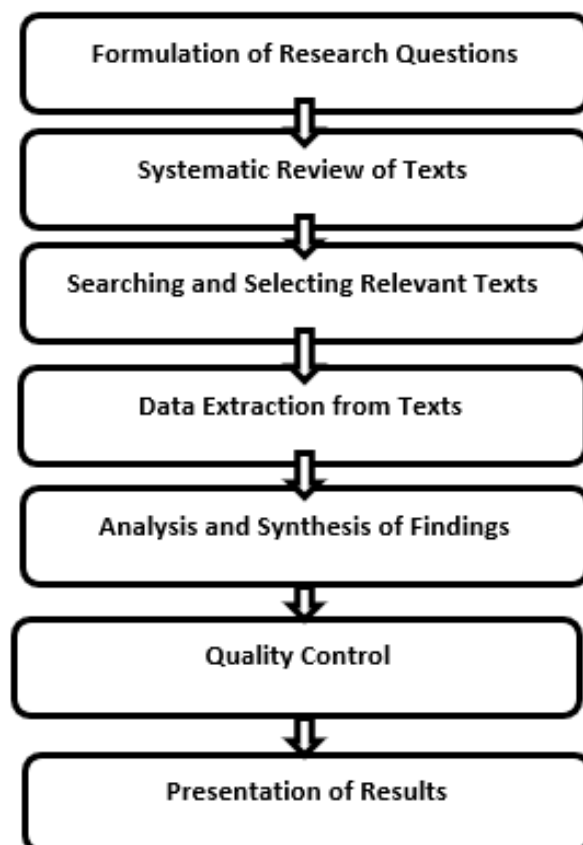


Figure 1. The Seven-Step Method of Sandelowski and Barroso (Systematic Literature Synthesis Process).

To ensure the quality of the study, the Kappa index was used. Additionally, to validate the extracted concepts from the reviewed studies, the researcher compared their interpretations with the opinion of another expert (holding a PhD in Public



Administration and specializing in organizational behavior). For this purpose, a 90-item questionnaire was designed to measure the factors constituting political behavior. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 19 to calculate the Kappa coefficient.

3. Findings and Results

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Step One: Formulation of Research Questions

For this step, a four-question algorithm was employed. Table 1 presents the four questions used to identify the factors constituting political behavior, covering the aspects of what, who, when, and how.

Table 1. Research Questions

Row	Four-Question Algorithm	Research Four-Question Algorithm
1	What – What is the focus of the meta-synthesis study?	What are the components related to political behavior?
2	Who – What is the study population?	The population includes credible books and scientific articles in Persian and English.
3	When – What is the temporal scope of the study?	The study covers the period from 2010 to 2025 (Gregorian calendar) and 1390 to 1404 (Solar Hijri calendar).
4	How – How is the study conducted?	Data collection is performed by analyzing prior research articles.

Step Two: Systematic Review of Texts

At this stage, the researcher conducted a systematic search of published articles and studies in various reputable domestic and international scientific journals, as well as public sources and the websites of recognized domestic and foreign organizations, to identify valid, reliable, and relevant documents within the appropriate timeframe. Initially, relevant keywords were selected and are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Research Keywords

Row	English Keywords	Persian Keywords
1	politics	سیاست
2	political behavior	رفتار سیاسی

Then, by using search engines and credible databases, articles, theses, and resources were searched in both English and Persian with these keywords. The search engines and recognized databases used are summarized in Table 3. Prior studies and articles related to political behavior were examined across several domestic and international databases.

Table 3. Databases Reviewed on Political Behavior

English Databases	Persian Databases
Emerald Insight	Magiran (Iranian Journal Database)
ScienceDirect (Elsevier)	Scientific Information Database (SID)
Springer	IranDoc
Taylor & Francis Online	Civilica
Wiley Online Library	—
Google Scholar	—

Step Three: Searching and Selecting Relevant Texts

In this step, the quality of the studies was assessed. The purpose of this stage was to eliminate articles and books whose findings were unreliable. The researcher collected suitable articles and repeatedly reviewed the set of selected studies. In each review cycle, some articles were excluded if they were inconsistent with the research topic. In total, 157 studies were initially reviewed; 97 studies were excluded, and 60 studies were finally selected for in-depth analysis in the meta-synthesis process.

The reasons for rejecting the 97 studies included: irrelevant abstracts, content misalignment with the research topic, lack of author information, and inconsistency of the title with the subject of the study.

Step Four: Data Extraction from Texts



The findings of the reviewed studies were extracted, and the information for each article was classified based on its reference, including the name(s) of the researcher(s), country, article title, and year of publication. At this stage, the final articles were analyzed using the content analysis method. The results obtained from this step are presented in the tables below.

Table 4. Identification of Dimensions and Components Related to Political Behavior

Row	Researchers	Year	Country	Title	Influencing Factors
1	Ghasempour	2025	Iran	Components of Imam Khomeini's Political Behavior in Attracting Individuals Based on Alfred Adler's Perspective	Interaction, foresight, self-creativity, lifestyle
2	Namjofard et al.	2025	Iran	Designing a Political Behavior Management Model Based on Organizational Citizenship Behavior	Perceptual error, communication contamination, lack of informational transparency, conflict and disputes, personality traits, monitoring and evaluation, unlearning, educational planning, development of governance, organizational convergence and coherence
3	Taheri et al.	2024	Iran	Analyzing the Pattern of Political Behavior in Governmental Organizations Using a Mixed Approach	Pressure from the organizational political environment for decision-making, lack of structural clarity of activities, role ambiguity, destructive organizational culture
4	Izadi et al.	2024	Iran	Designing and Explaining the Political Behavior Model of Managers in Governmental Organizations	Power maneuvering, political camaraderie, networking, mediation, ambiguous interactions, time manipulation, shared language, avoidance of destructive political behaviors, honesty in communication, proper tone and speech, accountability, gaining support and influence, building stable and predictable interactions, consistency between claims and actions, flattery, using power based on expertise and skills, using power to advance group objectives, using power to enhance team performance, having high concentration power, capturing emotions
5	Gholamhosseini	2023	Iran	The Impact of Political Risk and Political Uncertainty on the Financing Behavior of Companies Listed on the Tehran Stock Exchange	Uncertainty
6	Alavi & Doosti	2022	Iran	Designing a Political Behavior Pattern in Strategic Decision-Making of Iranian Sports Managers	Unprincipled behavior with colleagues, self-serving organizational behaviors, using support groups, being praised, creating powerful groups in the organization, networking with influential individuals, and the necessity of ethical compliance
7	Faramani & Rashidi Koochei	2022	Iran	Ranking the Factors Influencing the Political Behavior of Shiraz District Six Municipality Employees Using the Relative Importance Index	Concentration of power, fairness, and participation in decision-making
8	Mirzaei et al.	2022	Iran	The Relationship Between Managers' Political Skills and Organizational Citizenship Behavior of Primary School Teachers in Nair County	Individual alertness and networking ability
9	Soltani et al.	2022	Iran	Presenting a Model to Identify Political Behavior Styles of Managers in the Private Sector	Belief in political behavior and reaction to political behavior
10	Sanaei et al.	2022	Iran	Political Behavior of Government Managers and Its Causes	Access to information, demonstrating calmness, resistance to change, pleasing others, time manipulation, group formation, blaming and attacking others, reverse confrontation, strengthening desirable influence, creating communication networks, support and empathy, self-promotion through powerful individuals
11	Hazeri et al.	2022	Iran	Empirical Evaluation of Collective Action and Collective Behavior Theories in Explaining Political Protest Potential: Case Study of Southern Tehran Counties	Individual perception
12	Hamouni et al.	2021	Iran	Patterns of Internal and External Political Behaviors of Managers in the Public Sector with a Political Intelligence Approach (Case Study: Municipalities of Razavi Khorasan Province)	Influence, flattery, high concentration power, capturing emotions



13	Ramazani Rad et al.	2021	Iran	Designing a Political Behavior Management Model Based on Ethical Principles	Personal power, environmental feedback, organizational appointments and elections, religious behavior
14	Taheri & Ataei	2021	Iran	Designing a Political Behavior Model in Iranian Governmental Organizations	Personal background, resource scarcity, monetary incentives
15	Nourollahi & Ghanbari	2021	Iran	Political Behavior: Conceptualization, Antecedents, and Consequences in Organizations	Emotional intelligence
16	Taheri Lari	2020	Iran	Identifying Dimensions, Components, and Indicators of Internal and External Political Behavior Patterns of Managers Using the Delphi Technique	Political intelligence
17	Jafari et al.	2020	Iran	A Model for Managing Deviant Political Behavior in the Banking Industry: A Qualitative Approach	Career path management and employee empowerment, attitude and behavior management, establishing transformational management systems, organizational culture management, fair compensation systems, managing organizational environment interactions, fostering professional ethics
18	Shibak	2020	Iran	Examining Political Behavior Toward Clients in the Administrative System (Case Study: Sepah Bank, Kerman Province)	Political use of information, creating ethical obligation, interacting with stakeholders, building support networks when dealing with clients
19	Rahbar & Shariati	2019	Iran	Conceptual Model of Realism in Political Thought and Behavior of Imam Ali	Integration of realism with rationality, balancing realism with idealism, conceptualizing realism, environmental and social situational analysis
20	Eslami et al.	2018	Iran	Comparing Political Behavior Among Shiite and Sunni Citizens (Case Study: Gorgan City)	Behavioral dimension, attitudinal dimension
21	Zahedi & Moradi Koochei	2018	Iran	Political Power and Its Impact on Political Behavior in Organizations	Individual perception differences, illegitimate behaviors
22	Parsa Moghadam et al.	2018	Iran	Studying and Explaining Factors Related to Managing Political Behavior in the Banking System Considering the Mediating Role of Organizational Silence	Organizational factors, managerial factors, individual factors
23	Rezaei et al.	2018	Iran	Factors Influencing the Formation of Political Behavior in Managers	Environmental perception and nature of decision-making
24	Gorjipour et al.	2018	Iran	The Role of Political Behavior in Organizational Policies	Influence in decision-making and attempts to create conflict
25	Garavand & Soori	2018	Iran	Analysis of Political Behavior of Iranian Officials in Parliamentary and Civil Institutions from Formation to Reza Shah's Rise to Power	Power structure, factionalism, ideological conflicts
26	Eslami	2017	Iran	Examining Political Behavior and Its Impact on Organizational Decision-Making in Mazandaran Province Gas Company	Reduced formalization, lack of defined job descriptions
27	Tableli & Reyhani Yasauli	2015	Iran	Moderating Role of Personality Types in the Relationship Between Managers' Political Behavior and Counterproductive Work Behavior of Mashhad University of Medical Sciences Staff	Persuasion, appeal to values, blaming and threats, support networks, ambiguous and covert conduct
28	Abbaspour et al.	2016	Iran	The Effect of Political Behavior on Employee Performance Controlling the ACHIEVE Model Elements in a State Bank	Task awareness, feedback, organizational support
29	Lashgari & Shahriari	2016	Iran	Explaining Natural Factors Affecting Political Behavior and Ethnic Risks in Sistan and Baluchestan Province	Resource scarcity
30	Baghkhassti & Zamani	2016	Iran	Examining the Relationship Between Managers' Power Sources and Employees' Political Behavior	Expert power, reward power, referent power



31	Neistani	2015	Iran	Political Behavior and Power in Media Organizations	Political skills
32	Ghavi Bazou et al.	2015	Iran	Impact of Organizational Conflicts on Employees' Political Behavior in Mashhad Governmental Offices	Relational conflict, task conflict
33	Fani et al.	2014	Iran	Exploring Factors Influencing the Formation of Political Behavior in Organizations	Political will, perception of organizational politics, political skill
34	Kamasi et al.	2014	Iran	Identifying and Ranking Factors Influencing Political Behavior (Case Study: Abfa Company Employees)	Individual and organizational factors
35	Ebrahimi Pour et al.	2013	Iran	Measuring the Relationship Between Political Culture and Political Behavior of Female Students at the University of Isfahan	Cognitive orientation, affective orientation, evaluative orientation
36	Hogg et al.	2025	Italy	Education and Political Behavior: Predicting GAL/TAN Voting	Political literacy, egocentrism
37	Clenden	2025	USA	Beyond Rational Choice: Modeling Political Behavior Through Value Distance and Emotional Dynamics	Exaggeration, multiculturalism
38	Anum et al.	2024	Pakistan	Impact of Social Gap and Media Use on Political Behavior: Case Study of Pakistan	Political participation, voting behavior
39	Goose & Munger	2023	USA	Digital Literacy and Online Political Behavior	Political knowledge, application of power
40	Tripathi et al.	2023	India	Power Values, Political Will, and Hierarchy	Organizational politics, organizational structure
41	Yildirim	2023	Bulgaria	Factors Affecting Political Preferences of Communities	Political participation, personal information resources
42	Balan	2022	Brazil	Political Behavior of Family-Owned Businesses	Political influence, in-group trust, intergenerational capital transfer
43	Olliila & Yström	2022	Western Europe	Political Behavior in Collaborative Innovation Spaces: Drivers, Behaviors, and Shaping Mechanisms	Control over resources, lack of transparency, coalition building
44	Alikum Eshiabi	2021	Ghana	Political Awareness in Ghana's Democratic Consolidation: Critical Mass, Political Behavior, and Actor Selection	Political culture, democratic consolidation, power shift, low civic culture
45	Blackman & Jackson	2021	Tunisia	Gender Stereotypes, Political Leadership, and Voting Behavior in Tunisia	Patriarchy, gender differences
46	Lyons et al.	2021	USA	Self-Affirmation and Identity-Based Political Behavior	Political attitudes or policy positions, factual beliefs, conspiracy beliefs, affective polarization, news source evaluation
47	Abdullah et al.	2021	Indonesia	Building Students' Political Behavior in the Context of Elections	Social characteristics, political attitudes, biased attitudes
48	Askew	2020	UK	Perceived Discrimination and Political Behavior	Social discrimination, political discrimination
49	Saeed Ahmad	2020	Pakistan	Political Behavior in the Virtual Environment: Role of Social Media Intensity, Internet Connectivity, and Political Dependency in Online Persuasion Among Students	Political participation, liking political pages, political awareness, insistence on political participation, ideological justification
50	Brown et al.	2020	Germany	Political Behavior in the EU Multilevel System	Party competition, protest politics, accountability, interest groups, government-opposition dynamics, parliamentary behavior
51	Shepherd	2020	Australia	Political Behavior and Strategic Decision-Making	Power decentralization, behavioral integration
52	Junior et al.	2020	Brazil	Determinants of Political Behavior and the Role of Technology in the Classroom: An Empirical Investigation in Brazil	Degree of political knowledge, positive feelings toward political agents, negative feelings toward political agents



53	Hall & Yoder	2019	USA	Does Ownership Affect Political Behavior? Evidence from Administrative Data	Economic conditions, individual influence
54	Ivanchenko et al.	2019	Ukraine	Personality Traits as Determinants of Political Behavior: Electoral Tendencies and Voting in Ukraine	Positive attitude toward elections, political ambition, political discussion, protesting habits, protest activity
55	Elbanna	2018	Qatar	Constructive Aspects of Political Behavior in Strategic Decision-Making	Functional diversity, competency diversity, level of agreement among group members
56	Schwartz	2017	USA	Political Alienation and Political Behavior	Value conflict, perceived personal inefficacy, perceived systemic inefficacy
57	Verba	2015	UK	Small Groups and Political Behavior: Leadership Study	Bridging gaps, political experiences
58	Ponce et al.	2014	France	Determinants of Political Behavior	Reduced obligations, low socioeconomic status, party attention
59	Atinc et al.	2010	USA	Perceptions of Organizational Politics: A Meta-Analytical Review of Theoretical Antecedents	Machiavellianism, locus of control, positive affect, negative affect
60	John et al.	2010	—	Moderation Model in Political Behavior	Political skill, emotional intelligence

Step Five: Analysis and Synthesis of Findings—Identifying the Constituent Factors of Political Behavior

From the set of Persian-language articles, 70 components were identified, and from the set of English-language articles, 48 components were identified. After removing duplicate factors, 90 components were selected from the remaining factors as the constituent elements of political behavior.

Step Six: Quality Control

To maintain the quality of the study, Cohen's kappa index was used. For this purpose, a 90-item questionnaire covering the constituent factors of political behavior was designed and provided to an expert. The resulting data were analyzed using SPSS 19 to compute the kappa coefficient.

Table 5. Kappa Coefficient Calculations for the Components of Political Behavior

Measure	Approximate Standard Error	Approximate t Value	Approximate Significance
Kappa Measurement	1.000	0.000	4.720

The results of the calculations showed that the kappa index for the components of political behavior was 1.000, which, according to the table, falls within the level of excellent agreement.

Step Seven: Presentation of Results

After the final review, the components related to political behavior were identified and categorized into three spectra—white, black, and gray—which are presented in the following table.

Table 6. Final Categorization of Dimensions and Components of Political Behavior in Governmental Organizations

Category	Components
Black Political Behavior	Lack of transparency in behavior; Role ambiguity; Patriarchy; Social discrimination; Political discrimination; Secrecy; Political ambition; Value conflict; Flattery; Factionalism; Clique building (group formation); Capturing emotions; Communication contamination; Exaggeration; Perceived personal inefficacy; Uncertainty; Concentration of power; Gender differences; Negative affect; Protest activity; Sycophancy; Relational conflict; Task conflict; Perceived systemic inefficacy; Ideological conflicts; Unprincipled behaviors; Illegitimate behaviors; Time manipulation; Lack of structuring of activities; Selective interpretation of laws to justify managerial decisions
Gray Political Behavior	Political camaraderie; Blaming and threatening colleagues in meetings; Using informal networks to advance organizational objectives; Creating intermediaries (brokerage); Applying a political outlook to forecast events; Functional diversity in dealings; Biased attitude; Access to information; Competitiveness; Associating with powerful individuals; Reverse confrontation; Personal power; Political use of information; Reduced formalization; Ambiguous conduct; Application of power; Socializing with stakeholders; Power formation; Political influence
White Political Behavior	Interaction; Insistence on participation in the organization's political processes; Observing the principle of honesty in communication; Individual influence for group interests; Use of appropriate tone and speech; Accountability; Creating stable and predictable interactions; Consistency between claims and actions; Trust in organizational politics; Competency diversity; Attention to parties; Using power grounded in expertise and skill; Using power to advance group goals; Positive affect; Control over resources; Awareness of political trends for optimal decisions; Ideological justification; Positive feelings; Participation in decision-making; Networking ability; Political literacy; Political participation; Attention to feedback; Understanding emotional intelligence in behavior; Appropriate use of political intelligence; Accurate perception of the environment in personal behavior; Individual alertness; Persuasion; Supporting group interests; Efforts to address resource scarcity; Reliance on expert power; Reliance on referent power; Proper application of political skills; Political will to attract group benefits; Applying political knowledge toward non-personal interests; In-group trust; Clarifying managerial decisions to reduce ambiguity and foster political assurance



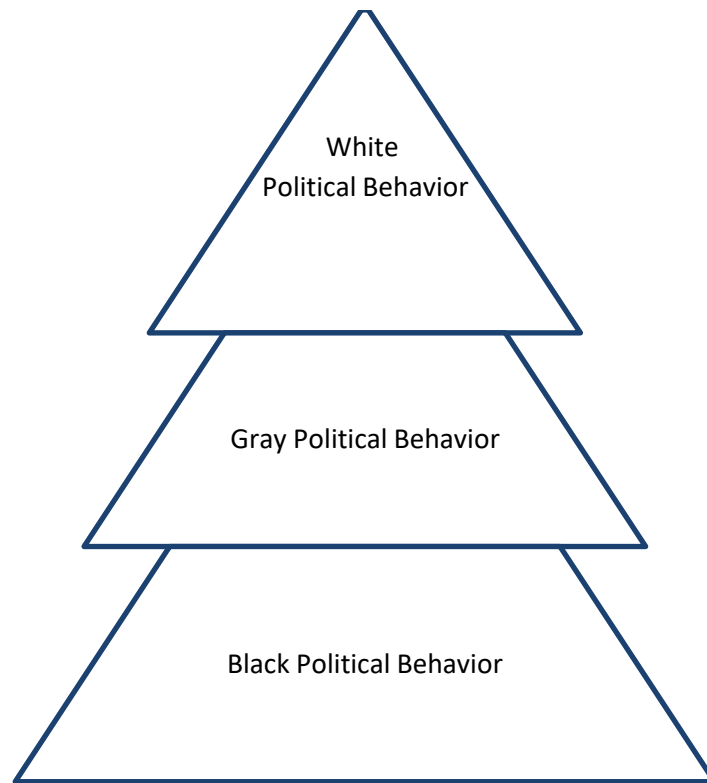


Figure 2. The Triangle of Political Behavior in Governmental Organizations

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to build a comprehensive understanding of political behavior in governmental organizations through a meta-synthesis of prior research. By systematically reviewing and integrating the findings of 157 sources and finalizing 60 high-quality studies, 90 distinct components of political behavior were identified and classified into three broad spectra: black, gray, and white. This classification provides a clear and actionable framework for managers and scholars who seek to understand, predict, and ethically influence political dynamics in complex public-sector environments.

One of the most salient findings is the prevalence of black political behaviors, which included actions such as lack of transparency, role ambiguity, social and political discrimination, power concentration, ideological conflicts, flattery, factionalism, and manipulative time management. These behaviors echo prior studies that have linked destructive political dynamics to mistrust, unfair decision-making, and declining organizational health (Esmaeili Ranjbar & Salajegheh, 2019; Tatari et al., 2019). In particular, manipulative tactics and value conflicts were found to be deeply embedded in contexts where formal rules are unclear or weakly enforced (Sanai et al., 2022; Torkzadeh & Firoduni, 2018). Such conditions often emerge in public organizations where complex hierarchies and shifting priorities lead to ambiguous job roles and overlapping authority (Khazaei Poul et al., 2023; Taheri et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the argument that structural weaknesses and cultural acceptance of informal influence can create fertile ground for harmful political conduct (Alavi & Doosti, 2022; Khodadadnejad et al., 2021).

At the same time, the study highlights the existence of a significant “gray zone” of political behaviors. These behaviors—such as forming informal networks, seeking alliances with influential individuals, functional diversity in interactions, and applying political foresight to predict organizational events—are ethically ambivalent. Prior scholarship suggests that such behaviors can be adaptive when aligned with organizational goals but become counterproductive when driven by self-interest (Izadi et al., 2024; NamjooFard et al., 2025). For instance, networking and brokerage can facilitate resource acquisition and information flow, but without ethical oversight, they may marginalize outsiders and reinforce exclusivity (Deep et al., 2025;



Junior et al., 2020). The identification of these gray political behaviors confirms the need for nuanced managerial approaches that neither suppress nor blindly encourage informal influence but channel it toward transparency and collaboration (Berenji et al., 2024; Namati et al., 2020).

Perhaps most importantly, the study shows that white political behaviors are not only possible but essential for healthy organizational functioning. This category included constructive actions such as maintaining honesty in communication, aligning claims with actions, exercising power through expertise and skill, fostering predictable interactions, supporting group interests, and clarifying managerial decisions. These behaviors align with findings that political skill, when guided by ethical norms and organizational virtue, can improve coordination, build trust, and enhance public value creation (Beikzad et al., 2021; NamjooFard et al., 2025). Responsible political engagement is particularly critical in public organizations, where transparent decision-making and service orientation are vital for public legitimacy (Abun, 2022; Haque et al., 2019). By distinguishing between constructive and destructive politics, this study provides evidence that not all political behaviors should be discouraged; rather, they should be shaped and integrated into ethical and strategic leadership practices (Milon & Lishchinsky, 2021; Namati et al., 2020).

A notable insight from the findings is the interaction between organizational culture and political conduct. Studies have shown that ethical and participatory cultures reduce the prevalence of black politics by fostering fairness and discouraging opportunistic behavior (Haque et al., 2019; Namati et al., 2020). Conversely, fragmented or cynical cultures increase manipulative tactics and erode trust (Esmaeili Ranjbar & Salajegheh, 2019; Tatari et al., 2019). The present meta-synthesis reinforces these claims by showing that organizations with unclear decision processes and low moral anchoring tend to be dominated by negative and ambiguous politics. Additionally, leadership style emerged as a powerful factor; authentic and responsible leaders can mitigate harmful politics while encouraging constructive influence (Deep et al., 2025; Milon & Lishchinsky, 2021). These results support calls to integrate leadership development with political and emotional intelligence training (Feyz et al., 2020; Kiakojouri, 2024).

The study also underscores the role of structural and environmental conditions in shaping political behavior. Resource scarcity and job insecurity were consistently associated with opportunistic and self-protective behaviors (Alavi & Doosti, 2022; Farmani & Rashidi Koochi, 2022; Taheri et al., 2024). Uncertainty about policy direction and organizational survival further increases the tendency toward defensive maneuvering and power concentration (Khazaei Poul et al., 2023; Sanai et al., 2022). At the same time, environmental complexity and change can encourage constructive politics, such as coalition-building and foresight, when paired with ethical frameworks and participatory governance (Beikzad et al., 2021; NamjooFard et al., 2025). These dynamics highlight the double-edged nature of politics: while environmental turbulence cannot be eliminated, its negative impact can be mitigated through structural clarity and moral culture.

Another critical contribution is the integration of digital and technological factors into the understanding of politics. As public organizations adopt digital transformation and new communication tools, the arenas of political interaction expand (Berenji et al., 2024; Junior et al., 2020). Technology can democratize access to information and reduce secrecy but can also be exploited to spread misinformation or amplify manipulation (Deep et al., 2025; Junior et al., 2020). This reinforces the need to integrate digital literacy and governance into strategies for managing organizational politics (Khazai Kouhpar et al., 2021; Salehi Koocheh et al., 2021).

Finally, the study confirms the value of meta-synthesis as a methodology in this domain. Past research on political behavior has often been fragmented across disciplines such as organizational psychology, sociology, and public management. By synthesizing these diverse studies, this research generated a coherent, three-dimensional model that accounts for cultural, structural, ethical, and technological influences (Izadi et al., 2024; Torkzadeh & Firoduni, 2018). This approach not only organizes existing knowledge but also creates an integrated theoretical foundation for future inquiry and practice (NamjooFard et al., 2025; Taheri et al., 2024).



Despite its comprehensive approach, this study faces several limitations. First, the meta-synthesis method inherently relies on the quality and scope of existing research. Although 157 sources were initially reviewed and 60 rigorously selected, the available literature may not fully capture all relevant cultural and structural variations, particularly from non-English and non-Persian contexts. Additionally, some studies may have used inconsistent definitions of political behavior, leading to conceptual overlap or ambiguity in categorization. The exclusion of non-peer-reviewed yet potentially insightful practitioner reports or case studies could also limit the richness of the findings. Moreover, while Cohen's kappa provided robust reliability for the final coding, qualitative interpretation remains partly subjective, and other reliability techniques could complement these measures. Finally, the study's focus on governmental organizations may limit the generalizability of the proposed model to hybrid or semi-public institutions where governance dynamics differ.

Future studies should expand the cultural and sectoral diversity of the evidence base. Comparative meta-syntheses across different national administrative systems could illuminate how cultural norms, governance structures, and levels of political stability influence the black–gray–white spectrum. Longitudinal designs are also needed to track how political behaviors evolve under conditions of reform, crisis, or technological disruption. Quantitative validation of the identified 90 components through large-scale surveys and structural modeling could test the stability and predictive power of the model. Moreover, deeper exploration of the gray zone, including when and how ethically ambiguous behaviors shift toward constructive or destructive outcomes, could help managers make more nuanced decisions. Finally, integrating neuroscience and behavioral economics perspectives might offer fresh insights into the cognitive and emotional processes underlying political actions.

Practically, managers in governmental organizations should focus on creating transparent structures and clear role definitions to reduce the conditions that give rise to harmful politics. Leadership development programs should integrate training in ethical influence, political intelligence, and emotional regulation, equipping leaders to model and encourage white political behaviors. Encouraging participatory decision-making and fair reward systems can redirect political energy toward constructive goals while reducing cynicism. Monitoring digital communication channels and fostering digital literacy can mitigate manipulation and enhance transparency in technologically evolving workplaces. Finally, organizations should cultivate cultures of trust and accountability, where informal influence is neither suppressed nor left unchecked but aligned with ethical standards and public service missions.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

Acknowledgments

Authors thank all who helped us through this study.

Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding/Financial Support

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

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