

## UNETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND FOLLOWERS' DEVIANCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEPTION OF POLITICS AND INJUSTICE

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### Abstract

This paper argued that unethical leadership behavior increases followers' deviance by increasing perception of injustice and politics in organizations. More specifically, perception of politics and injustice mediates the relationship between unethical leadership behavior and followers' deviance. By using data from 262 employees of the public organizations in Ethiopia, we confirmed our hypothesis. Further, the result of multiple regression confirmed that the relationship between unethical leadership behavior and followers' deviance would be stronger when followers develop a perception of politics in the workplace.

### Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that leaders ought to be a crucial source of ethical guidance for followers and should at the same time be responsible for the development of moral values, establishing ethical standards that guide the behavior and decision making of followers (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Mihelic, Lipicnik, & Tekavcic, 2010). When these standards and values are consistently endorsed, role modeled, and supported with compatible organizational processes, rules, and procedures, they will become an integral aspect of the organization's system and culture (Schein & Culture, 1985) and when these standards and values are neglected, violated and compromised, it paves the way for organizational misbehaviors.

According to social learning theory of Bandura, individuals learn by focusing their attention on role models to determine the appropriate behaviors, values, and attitudes to display (Bandura, 1978). With this contention, it is indicated that leaders who act ethically in the workplace encourage positive followers' behaviors (Brown, 2005). On the contrary, unethical leadership as defined by (Brown & Mitchell, 2010) as dishonesty and unfairness, engagement in corruption and other criminal behaviors, low empathy, lack of responsibility, following egocentric pursuit of own interest, and manipulation and misuse of others has a negative correlation with positive followers' outcomes and behaviors, like employee well-being, individual performance, and a positive correlation with negative employee behavior, like turnover intentions, and other forms of counterproductive work behavior (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2000).

Therefore, leadership is an important factor which shapes followers' ethical behaviors (Brown et al, 2005). Ethical leadership is found to decrease employee misconduct, deviant behaviors and bullying in the organizations (Stouten et al., 2010; Walumbwa et al., 2011; Xu, Huang, Lam, & Miao, 2012) and leaders who act unethically will create the appropriate medium for followers' deviant behaviors (Trevino & Brown, 2005).

The effects of ethical leadership on followers' behavior have been at the focus of several research works (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Brown et al., 2005; Day, Zaccaro, & Klimoski, 2001; Mihelic et al., 2010), researchers have failed to give due attention for antecedents, characteristics and consequences of unethical leadership in organizational praxis. The scientific discourse has been confused with plethora of overlapping terms or adjectives to explain unethical leadership. Toxic leadership(Reed, 2004, 2015; Webster, Brough, & Daly, 2016; Whicker, 1996), abusive supervision(Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017), tyrannical leadership(Ashforth, 1994; Glad, 2002), destructive leadership(Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007), narcissism(Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006), psychopath(Boddy, 2017) and Machiavellian leadership(Gkorezis, Petridou, & Krouklidou, 2015) were the terms used by dark side organizational behavior researchers. Only very few, probably four remarkable studies constitute the current academic discourse on unethical leadership from 2010 onwards (Brown & Mitchell, 2010).

When we try to understand employees' reaction to leadership misconduct, followers' perception of injustice and politics have important mediating role. When members of an organization are implicated in ethical scandals, employees are likely to inspect top leaders responses to the misconduct, as well as other organizational practices with justice lens. In this case judgments of employees on the punishment allocation in organizational wrongdoings have important mediating role between leadership ethics and deviant workplace behavior(Trevino & Ball, 1992). Organizational politics defined as actions taken by the individuals that are directed toward the goal of furthering their own self-interests without regard for the wellbeing of others within the organization has also a mediating role between leadership ethics and deviant workplace behavior and employee reaction of ethical misconduct (Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999).

In general, unethical leadership negatively affects individuals as well as organizations. As a result of unethical behavior of executives, followers will develop feelings of anxieties, helplessness, frustration, job dissatisfaction and finally loss of trust toward the unethical leader (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Fisher-Blando, 2008; Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012). Therefore, this paper is designed to show the effects of unethical leadership on followers' organizational deviance that result from followers' perception of organizational injustice and politics.

### **Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development**

**Unethical leadership:** The role of leadership in promoting ethical conduct and positive employees' behavior in organizations has been widely recognized by researchers (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Hartog, & Folger, 2010; Ünal, Warren, & Chen, 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2011; Zhu, May, & Avolio, 2004).However, researchers have given less attention for the antecedents, characteristics and consequences of unethical leadership practice in organizations. Although recently, there is a growing interest to understand the concept of unethical leadership, the current conceptualization of the construct is confused with various overlapping terms like toxic leadership(Reed, 2004, 2015; Webster et al., 2016; Whicker, 1996), abusive supervision(Mackey et al., 2017; Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2017), tyrannical leadership(Ashforth, 1994; Glad, 2002), destructive leadership(Einarsen et al., 2007), narcissism (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006), psychopath(Boddy, 2017) and Machiavellian

leadership(Gkorezis et al., 2015). Only very few influential studies constitute the current academic discourse in unethical leadership (Brown & Mitchell, 2010).

The first conceptualization of the construct was drawn by Brown and Mitchell (2010) from American management school of thought who based their definition on legal and moral grounds. According to them, unethical leadership was defined “*as behaviors conducted and decisions made by organizational leaders that are illegal and/or violate moral standards, and those that impose processes and structures that promote unethical conduct by followers*” (Brown & Mitchell, 2010).However, one of the limitations of this definition is the universality of legal or moral standards; a behavior, action or decision found to be legal might be illegal in other situations or a behavior, action or decision found to be morally right in one view might be immoral in others view. In other words, we might not have universally accepted moral or legal standards of behavior.

Second, Ünal, Warren and Chen investigated and provide their definition of unethical leadership based on the Ethical or normative theories of deontology, ethics of justice, utilitarianism and ethics of virtues. Accordingly, they define unethical supervision as “*supervisory behaviors that violate normative standards*”(Ünal et al., 2012). The authors in this study evaluated the correctness or inaccuracy of the leaders’ behavior based on universal ethical principles. The center of investigation was focused on the violation of the normative standards, including. Among the manifestations of unethical leadership behavior considered by the authors are violation of employee rights, unjust treatment of employees, prioritization of self-interests or interests of a group at the expense of organizational interests, and finally, the weak character of leaders(Brown & Mitchell, 2010).

The third study was conducted by the German based scholars Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck(2012). In this study, authors defined unethical leadership as“ *dishonesty and unfairness, engagement incorruption and other criminal behaviors, low empathy, lack of responsibility, following egocentric pursuit of own interest, and manipulation and misuse of others*”. This study indicated that unethical leadership includes violations of legislative rules and ethical principles and that both of these aspects of unethical leadership are often inseparable.

Finally, Anna Lašáková and Anna Remišová identified seven types of manifestations or symptoms of unethical leadership. These are; a) behaviors that violate ethical principles are being displayed, b) processes and practices in work environment that support or enable unethical behavior are being instilled, c) deliberate management of ethics at workplace is not employed, d) the aspect of leading others is absent at all, e) personal gain and profit are being held above everything else, f) rules and processes that were set in an organization are not being uphold, and g) attainment of organizational goals is hindered by leader’s lack of professional abilities and skills(Lašáková & Remišová, 2015). Although all the above studies identified overlapping constructs and concepts underlying unethical leadership behavior, the definitions given by Lašáková and Anna Remišová is reasonably found to be acceptable as all the constructs and concepts identified in other studies are incorporated in this new definition. This definition will be used throughout this study.

It is now clear that leaders, who engage in, fostering unethical actions within their organizations do not display ethical leadership as defined above(Brown et al., 2005). In summary, the above are the remarkable works of scholars in the quest for conceptualizing unethical leadership and its consequence in organizational praxis showing a deep lack of empirical works.

**Organizational politics and deviant behavior:** Follower organizational deviance is defined as “*voluntary behavior that violates organizational norms and thereby threatens the well-being of the organization, its members, or both*”(Robinson & Bennett, 1995).According to them, the deviance includes behaviors such activities as dragging out work to receive payment for overtime, or taking

property of the organization without permission. Organizational deviance at work is recognized as a source of massive damage for businesses(Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Brown & Trevino, 2006).

According to Ferris (1989), organizational politics is considered as social influence behaviors intended to maximize one's self-interest. In this definition, politics is treated as unsanctioned influence attempts that seek to promote self-interest at the expense of organizational goals(Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). It is further explained as actions taken by individuals that are directed toward the goal of satisfying an individual's own self-interests without regard for the well-being of others within the organization(Kacmar & Baron, 1999). The concern is that, in a highly politicized organizations, an employee's rewards, career progress, and even well-being may be put at risk by other influential members seeking to safeguard their own self-interests(Poon, 2004).Employee compensations and benefits such as rewards may be tied to relationships, power, and other less objective elements(Zivnuska, Kacmar, Witt, Carlson, & Bratton, 2004). In this case, the organization's climate becomes more political, people are more likely to adopt a competitive and self-serving style of behavior whereby they may band together to fulfill their aspirations without regards for the needs of others and paves the way to act unethically(Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997).

Drawing on Jesty Adam's equity theory (1965), in order to maintain and restore their equity employees is likely to reciprocate their behavior (Adams & Freedman, 1976; Mowday, 1991; Mowday & Colwell, 2003). This may be shown by employees engaging in various forms of deviance including theft, interpersonal aggression, vandalism, and work slowdown (Rousseau, 1995). There is also an empirical support for the direct positive influence of organizational politics on employees' aggressive behavior (Vigoda & Cohen, 2002).Therefore, it is impressive to assume that, **organizational politics positively influences employees' deviance.**

**Organizational Justice and Deviant Behavior:** According to Jesty Adams (1965), beliefs of injustice in organizations will evoke one's feelings of dissatisfaction and resentment. These unpleasant emotions will motivate the aggrieved individual to restore equity by altering their behaviors, attitudes, or both(Greenberg, 1993; Shapiro & Kirkman, 1999). Employees also retaliate against unjust work outcomes by engaging in behavior that harms the organization and/or other employees (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002; Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999; Dalal, 2005; Greenberg, 1990; Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999).

In general, the absence of fair decision-making procedures in organizations by top officials will degrade and deplete employees' positive feeling on fair distribution of rewards, leading to negative emotions such as feelings of dissatisfaction. As argued by Aquino et al, (1999), when employees are dissatisfied with the fairness of procedures used by leaders, they are more likely to violate organizational norms and commit acts of deviance. Therefore, it is possible to assume that: **Perception of organizational injustices have a significant positive influence on employee deviance.**

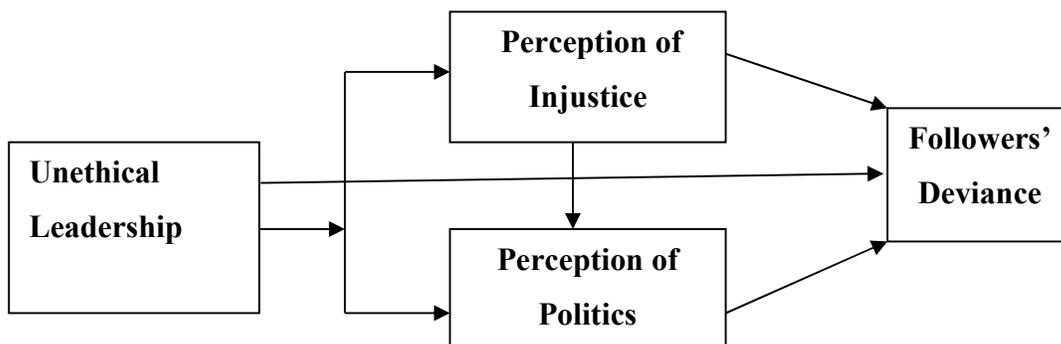
**Unethical leadership and Employee Deviance:** Leadership has been found to be a driving or inhibiting force in shaping followers' behavior. In particular, a lack of ethical leadership has been identified as one of the main antecedents of follower organizational deviance (Tepper et al., 2009; Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, & Marrs, 2009). The basic argument is that leaders influence their followers through social learning and exchange and hence the ethicality or unethicality of the leader cascaded to followers at the lower hierarchical levels (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009; Schaubroeck et al., 2012). Thus, behavior of leaders has been suggested to impact followers' behavior across different levels of the organization. According to Trevino and Brown (2005), leaders who act unethically will create the appropriate medium for employees' deviant behaviors. It is therefore,

impressive to assume that; **Unethical leadership has strong positive influence on followers' deviance.**

**Organizational politics and injustice:** Researchers had established a strong correlation between perceived organizational justice and perceived organizational politics(Cropanzano et al., 1997). More specifically, when employees perceive their working environment is found to be unfair and biased where promotion is contingent on the politics within an organization, rather than on established rules and regulations, which in turn will feed the perception that organizational justice is dysfunctional(Andrews & Kacmar, 2001).) Employees' political perceptions are low if their individual perceptions about justice within an organization are high(Harris, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2007). Moreover, researchers suggested that the perception of organizational justice will eliminate any negative effect of organizational politics and vice versa(Byrne, 2005; Tyler, Rasinski, & McGraw, 1985). Therefore, we assume that: **There is a significantly positive relationship between organizational politics and perceived organizational injustice.**

**Unethical leadership and Organizational politics:** Although other contextual variables have been identified as important determinants of politics perceptions in organizations(Ferris & Kacmar, 1992), given the dominant role of leadership in shaping and setting the tone of the work environment(Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Colquitt, LePine, Piccolo, Zapata, & Rich, 2012), leadership plays an important role in influencing followers' perception of organizational politics(Davis & Gardner, 2004) (Davis & Gardner, 2004; (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007).Kacmar and colleagues also found that ethical leadership negatively related to perception of politics whereas unethical leadership positively related to perception of politics suggesting that perceived organizational politics might serve as an important mechanism in the ethical or unethical leadership process(Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris, & Zivnuska, 2011). It can be drawn from this assumption that unethical leadership will be positively related to perception of politics.

In summary, the extant literature discussed above shows that organizational justice and perception of politics are correlated and go together. Unethical leadership behavior, perception of justice and organizational politics jointly predicts followers' deviant behavior in the workplace. Moreover, perception of politics and injustice together predict deviant behavior in organizations. Finally, we integrated all the variables to build the following conceptual framework to guide the entire study.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

**Table 1: Summary of Hypotheses**

***H1: Unethical leadership has strong positive influence on followers' deviance***

***H2: Perception of politics mediates the relationship between unethical leadership and followers' deviance.***

***H3: Perception of organizational injustice mediates the relationship between unethical leadership and followers' deviance.***

***H4: Perception of politics is significantly affected by a) unethical leadership and b/perception of injustice.***

From the above conceptual framework, the functional relationship between the variables is estimated in equation 1 below(The main model for predicting deviant behavior) and the estimation process was carried out based on ordinary least squares estimation process and multiple regression was conducted in each model.

$$DB = \beta_0 + \beta_1 UELS + \beta_2 POP + \beta_3 POIJ + \epsilon \text{----- (1)}$$

Where DB = deviant behavior, UELS = Unethical leadership, POP = perception of politics, POIJ=perception of injustice and  $\epsilon$  is the error term for any missing variable in behavior of human account. The error term  $\epsilon$  is assumed to distribute normally with zero mean and  $\sigma$  standard deviation and is independent of the error terms associated with all other observations.  $\beta_0$ , is the intercept value of the regression surface. In addition to the model described in equation above the following models were derived from the above model to see the independent effect of each variable on the dependent variables.

$$POP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 UELS + \beta_2 POP + \epsilon \text{----- (2)}$$

$$POP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 UELS + \epsilon \text{----- (3)}$$

$$DB = \beta_0 + \beta_1 UELS + \epsilon \text{----- (4)}$$

**Methods**

This research was a correlational quantitative type of research. The impact of unethical leadership, Perception organizational injustice and organizational politics on employees deviant work behavior is correlational type of research. The relationship of these factors was investigated taking employees deviant work behavior as dependent variable and others as independent variables. Besides, treating perception of injustice and organizational politics as mediating variable, the impact of unethical leadership on followers' deviant behavior was observed. This was done to enable researchers to see the separate impact of these variables on followers' deviance.

**Data Sources, Measurement, Types and Collection Techniques**

The primary data was collected from employees of government owned development enterprises in Ethiopia (office of land administration, public procurement agency, revenue and tax collection agency, municipalities of metropolitan cities, road construction enterprises, and housing development agencies) using questionnaires. These enterprises were selected due to the fact that they are screened by the Ethiopian ethics and anti-corruption commission as having

serious ethical outrages. A total of 285 questionnaires were distributed for the employees of these enterprises and finally 262 usable questionnaires were returned providing a response rate of 92%

The variables considered in this research were measured using a 5-likert scale measurement developed by researchers. Besides, unethical leadership was measured by adopting the previous operational definition given by (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014; Lašáková & Remišová, 2015; Ünal et al., 2012), organizational justice scale developed by (Niehoff & Moorman, 1993) was used as a tool to measure organizational justice by developing a negatively worded scale to measure perception of injustice and organizational politics was measured using the scales developed by (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992) and organizational deviance was measured by using scales developed by (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal consistency or how closely related a set of items are as a group (Mayer et al., 2009). An item analysis of the instruments indicated that a satisfactory internal consistency was found in each constructs that is, unethical leadership ( $\alpha= 0.93$ ), deviant behavior ( $\alpha= 0.88$ ), perception of politics ( $\alpha= 0.71$ ) and perception of justice ( $\alpha= 0.91$ ).

**Result and discussion**

Inferential statistics (multiple linear regression analysis) was employed for this study using SPSS V.20. The impact of independent variables on the dependent variable was measured by multiple linear regressions using the variables specified in the model above. An independent regression analysis was applied against each model to best determine the linear combination of the variables under consideration. The result for the first model indicated by tables 1, 2 and 3. Multiple regressions analysis was carried out for this model using the three variables: unethical leadership, perceived organizational politics and perceived organizational injustice as the independent variables and deviant behavior as the dependent variable. This was done to determine the best linear combination of the constructs for predicting deviant behavior.

**Table 2 : Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.650 <sup>a</sup>	.423	.416	.63961	.423	63.189	3	259	.000	2.131

*a. Predictors: (Constant), POIJ, UELS, POP*

*b. Dependent Variable: DB*

**Table 3: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	77.553	3	25.851	63.189	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	105.958	259	.409		
	Total	183.511	262			

*a. Dependent Variable: DB*

*b. Predictors: (Constant), POIJ, UELS, POP*

**Table 4: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error				Beta	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance
(Constant)	.078	.228		.341	.733	-.371	.526					
UELS	.432	.054	.415	7.956	.000	.325	.539	.544	.443	.376	.819	1.220
POP	.304	.056	.289	5.388	.000	.193	.415	.506	.317	.254	.778	1.286
POIJ	.212	.055	.187	3.852	.000	.104	.321	.271	.233	.182	.944	1.060

a. Dependent Variable: DB

It can be inferred from table 2 above that the R-square value for the main model showed that 42.3% of the variation in followers' deviance behavior is resulted from the three variables under consideration namely; unethical leadership, perception of politics and perception of injustice. The value of R-square change also indicated that the model is valid if it is drawn from the total population.

Referring the ANOVA report from table 3 we can see the general significance of the model. The result shows the model is found to be significant as  $p$  is less than the critical value of 0.05. Thus, it is imperative to assume that the combination of the variables included in this model (unethical leadership, perception of politics and perception of injustice) jointly and significantly predict followers' deviance ( $F = 63.189$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). From table 4 the standardized beta coefficients indicated that the contributions of each variable to the model while the  $t$  and  $p$  values showed the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable. It can be inferred from these values that the construct unethical leadership had the highest impact on deviant behavior (the dependent variable). The large  $t$ -value ( $t = 7.956$ ) and corresponding low  $p$ -value ( $p < 0.01$ ) supports the result for unethical leadership which had the highest beta coefficient (both standardized and unstandardized,  $\beta = 0.415$  and  $0.432$ ) respectively. On the other hand there is a small beta values for perception of organizational justice with a  $p$ -value of less than the critical value, which shows the effect of organizational justice is relatively weak, compared to unethical leadership and organizational politics.

**Table 5: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.506 <sup>a</sup>	.256	.253	.72313

a. Predictors: (Constant), POP

**Table 6: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	47.028	1	47.028	89.934	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	136.482	261	.523		
	Total	183.511	262			

a. Dependent Variable: DB  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), POP

Tables 5 and 6 present the results from the regressions carried out using perception of politics alone to predict followers’ deviance. This was done to determine the independent effect of perception of organizational politics on followers’ deviance. From Table 4, it can be seen that the R-square value for the model showed that 25.6% of the variance in followers’ deviance can be predicted from the perception of organizational politics as a result of unethical leadership behavior. Table 5, gives the ANOVA test on the general significance of the model. As *p* is less than 0.05, the model is significant. Thus, perception of politics significantly mediate the relationship between unethical leadership behavior and followers deviance ( $F = 89.934; p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 7: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.271 <sup>a</sup>	.073	.070	.80721

a. Predictors: (Constant), POIJ

**Table 8: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.445	1	13.445	20.634	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	170.066	261	.652		
	Total	183.511	262			

a. Dependent Variable: DB  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), POIJ

Tables 7 and 8 present the results from the regressions carried out using perception of injustice, as a mediating variable between unethical leadership behavior and followers’ deviant behavior. This was done to determine the mediating role of perception of organizational injustice between unethical leadership behavior and followers deviance. From Table 6, it can be drawn that the R-square value for the model showed that 7.3% of the variance in followers’ deviance can be predicted from the perception of organizational injustice as a result of unethical leadership behavior. Table 7, gives the ANOVA test on the general significance of the model. As *p* is less than 0.05, the model is significant. Thus, perception of injustice mediate the relationship between unethical leadership behavior and followers deviance ( $F = 20.634; p < 0.05$ ). The results of regression analysis showed that Deviant behavior is individually and co-jointly predicted by unethical leadership behavior ( $\beta = 0.415, p < 0.01$ ) perceived organizational politics ( $\beta = 0.289, P < 0.01$ ), and organizational injustice ( $\beta = 0.187, P <$

0.01). These variables together explain 42.3% of the variance in deviant behavior. Hence, Hypotheses 1, and 3 were supported.

**Table 9: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.472 <sup>a</sup>	.222	.216	.70278

a. Predictors: (Constant), UELS, POIJ

**Table 10: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.714	2	18.357	37.168	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	128.412	260	.494		
	Total	165.126	262			

a. Dependent Variable: POP

b. Predictors: (Constant), UELS, POIJ

**Table 11: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.222	.238		5.126	.000
	POIJ	.228	.059	.212	3.876	.000
	UELS	.407	.054	.412	7.533	.000

a. Dependent Variable: POP

The regression result also showed that perception of organizational politics is jointly affected by unethical leadership behavior and perception of injustice. Tables 9, 10 and 11 present the results from the regressions carried out using unethical leadership and perception of injustice, as a predictor variables between followers’ perception of politics. This was done to determine the best combination of unethical leadership and perception of injustice to predict perception of politics. From Table 9, it can be drawn that the R-square value for the model showed that 22.2% of the variance in followers’ perception of politics is from the perception of organizational injustice and unethical leadership behavior. Table 10, gives the ANOVA test on the general significance of the model. As *p* is less than 0.05, the model is significant. Thus, perception of injustice and unethical leadership behavior positively affects followers perception of politics ( $F = 37.168$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Considering table 11, the regression result shows that perception of politics is individually and co-jointly predicted by unethical leadership behavior ( $\beta = 0.412$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and perception of organizational injustice ( $\beta = 0.212$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). These variables together explain 22.2% of the variance in organizational politics. Hence, Hypotheses 4, (a) and (b) were supported.

**Conclusions**

Most of the findings of this study were in line with previous empirical studies. The result of the study confirmed that unethical leadership has a significant effect on followers’ workplace deviance mediated by perception of organizational politics and injustice. Results also revealed that the variable unethical

leadership plays the most important role, followed by perception of politics and perception of injustice in predicting followers' deviance. Further the result indicated that perception of politics is jointly predicted by unethical leadership and perception of injustice in organizations.

### **Limitations and future research implications**

The results of this study will have important implications and is believed to be helpful for understanding the effect of unethical leadership developing countries like Ethiopia. Although this study has interesting results, it is necessary to bear in mind its limitations related to its sample size. Although we believe that this study is deep, it is still believed that it can be further extended to include more variables from different theories and models as well as additional social issues. Moreover, it can be extended to greater sample size than considered in this study so that conclusions can be made at the macro level.

### **Declarations**

#### **Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

Approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the Bahir Dar University, College of Business and Economics.

#### **Consent for Publication**

Participants were made aware in the consent form that the results of the study would be published, but that no data would be presented to allow the identification of individuals.

#### **Competing Interests**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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