Original Article

Open Questions in the Work–Politics Nexus: What Work and Organizational Psychology Can Offer

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Abstract: With increasing political polarization accompanied by various economic threats and crises, the interplay of politics and work is crucial to understanding emerging phenomena. With this position paper, we highlight what work and organizational psychology can offer in the work–politics nexus. We classify three broad streams in which we see the need for more research on the work–politics nexus: (a) politics affecting work, (b) work affecting political attitudes and engagement, and (c) political participation at work. Using these areas, we highlight the urgency for organizations and practitioners to pay attention and provide future research directions for work and organizational psychology scholars. This position paper aims to highlight initial work and organizational psychological research in the work–politics nexus and encourages work and organizational psychologists to direct more attention toward the intersection of work and the broader civic sphere.

Keywords: work and organizational psychology, civic engagement, political polarization, political (mis)fit, unions, workplace democracy, democratic attitudes, work–politics nexus

Offene Fragen im Zusammenhang zwischen Arbeit und Politik. Was die Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologie beitragen kann

Zusammenfassung: Angesichts der zunehmenden politischen Polarisierung, begleitet von verschiedenen wirtschaftlichen Bedrohungen und Krisen, ist das Zusammenspiel von Politik und Arbeit entscheidend für das Verständnis neu auftretender Phänomene. Mit diesem Positionspapier heben wir hervor, was die Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologie im Zusammenhang zwischen Arbeit und Politik leisten kann. Wir unterscheiden drei große Bereiche, in denen wir einen Forschungsbedarf zum Zusammenhang zwischen Arbeit und Politik sehen: (a) Politik, die sich auf die Arbeit auswirkt, (b) Arbeit, die sich auf die Politik auswirkt, und (c) politische Partizipation am Arbeitsplatz. Anhand dieser Bereiche betonen wir die Dringlichkeit für Organisationen, diesem Thema Aufmerksamkeit zu schenken, und geben zukünftige Forschungsrichtungen für Wissenschaftler und Wissenschaftlerinnen der Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologie vor. Dieses Positionspapier soll erste arbeits- und organisationspsychologische Forschungsarbeiten im Zusammenhang zwischen Arbeit und Politik hervorheben und Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologen und -psychologinnen dazu ermutigen, mehr Aufmerksamkeit auf die Schnittstelle zwischen Arbeit und dem breiteren zivilgesellschaftlichen Bereich zu richten.

Schlüsselwörter: Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologie, politisches Engagement, politische Polarisierung, Gewerkschaften, politische (Nicht-)Passung, Demokratie am Arbeitsplatz, demokratische Einstellungen, Arbeit-Politik-Nexus

Political polarization is increasing around the world, and in many countries, democracy seems to be under attack from a populist surge (Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022; Johansson Heinö, 2024). Simultaneously, societies face critical challenges, such as rising costs of living, the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, and threats of widespread job displacement. These occur in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic alongside political conflicts, an escalating climate crisis, and a green energy transition, all of which profoundly impact organizations and individuals' work. Organizations are starting to recognize the challenges of political division for their own operations, but their efforts to mitigate these seem to be limited to outwardly facing social messaging campaigns (see JenOptik's recent #Bleiboffen [English: #stayopen] communications campaign; Smith & Scholz, 2025). In this position paper, we argue that these efforts overlook a crucial component in the work–politics nexus: namely, the individual workers and their experiences at work. Work is affected by workers' own political stances (e.g., workers' values can affect the decision of where to work; Kohn & Schooler, 1969) and can in turn also affect how workers think and act politically outside work (Selenko et al., 2025; Swigart et al., 2020). As the discipline dedicated to studying individuals' experiences and behavior in organizational contexts, it is time for work and organizational (W-O) psychology to direct attention toward researching the interconnection between the workers' experiences at work and the political sphere.

Almost 80 years after Kornhauser's (1947) seminal call for W-O psychology to recognize its societal responsibility, we want to encourage our discipline to honor that call with respect to the political sphere. W-O psychology is optimally equipped to understand the work–politics nexus: W-O psychology has generated a substantial body of insights into the interplay between structure and agency – how people are both shaped by and in turn shape the contextual conditions and relationships in which they operate. Given the long research tradition on the work–nonwork interface, W-O psychology researchers also bring expertise to investigating spillover processes from working conditions into civic life. Furthermore, W-O psychology researchers are knowledgeable about the processes that drive political engagement inside organizations (e.g., through trade union engagement, voice, participation, and leadership). To better understand the consequences of work design and work experiences and given the current risk of increasing polarization and divergence in society, it is time for W-O psychology to recognize its societal responsibility, step forward, and examine the extent and mechanisms by which work and individual political engagement intersect.

Research on the intersection of work and politics has a long-standing tradition in political science, sociology, and employment relations, but it is only starting to attract the attention of researchers in W-O psychology. For example, research is now recognizing the relevance of political signaling in the recruitment process through social media profiles or voluntary activities mentioned on CVs or social media profiles (Roth et al., 2017). Others examined the effects of political discussions at work or divergent political opinions on work behaviors and relations (Kim et al., 2022; Rosen et al., 2024; Schilbach et al., 2022). Furthermore, political ideology and civic engagement can influence social dynamics within organizations and strategic decision-making (see Swigart et al., 2020). There is a growing body of literature on the effects of work experiences on democratic attitudes or political engagement outside of work (e.g., Kiess & Schmidt, 2025; for an overview, see Selenko et al., 2025). These examples highlight that politics can play a role in various organizational processes, from recruitment and selection to work interactions, and vice versa, that work experiences can fuel political behavior outside of work and beyond one's workplace. Furthermore, we acknowledge and respect the efforts of critical psychology in highlighting the role of political ideology in the enquiries and methods of W-O psychology. Our focus here is not on ideology per se, but on understanding the psychological mechanisms that connect individual political ideology, attitudes, participation, and the work sphere.

Our aim with this position paper is to identify current open research questions in the work–politics nexus and encourage other W-O psychology colleagues to join us in working on them. The following sections are structured as follows: First, we give a short overview of W-O psychology research that has been conducted in the work–politics nexus. Second, we showcase practical implications for W-O psychology practitioners based on the research described. Finally, we end this position paper by highlighting the potential for impactful future W-O psychology research in this area. Our overarching aim is to encourage our field to devote more attention to the work–politics nexus in research and practice.

Literature Overview of W-O Psychology Research on the Work–Politics Nexus

In the following, we refer to the *political engagement of workers* as an umbrella term for various constructs such as political attitudes, political values and ideologies, political

trust, and political behavior of workers. We thereby rely on the conceptualization of political participation by van Deth (2014) and Selenko et al. (2025) as well as on the relationships between value dimensions and ideological orientations (De Witte, 2004). On an individual level, the political engagement of workers intersects with the work sphere in several ways. First, there is a spillover from the private to the work context: Private political engagement and ideology can affect strategic decision-making and social dynamics at work (e.g., Swigart et al., 2020). Second, there is a spillover pathway from the work context to private political engagement: Job quality and working conditions can shape private political engagement, participation, attitudes, and trust outside work (see Selenko et al., 2025). Third, there is a growing body of research on political activism at work about labor topics, for example, through union activities or targeted work democracy (Vesper et al., 2024, 2025) and the effects of organizational democracy, for example, in the form of structurally anchored employee participation (Weber et al., 2020). In conclusion, existing W-O psychology research in the work–politics nexus can be summarized into three streams: (a) politics affecting work, (b) work affecting political attitudes and engagement, and (c) politics at work (i.e., employee political engagement for the collective interest at work in the form of strike participation, engagement in unions or works councils, or actively advocating for worker interests). These streams are embedded in a broader institutional, economic, societal, and political context, moderating when, how, and why private or organizational political engagement is necessary. For example, in coordinated market economies with employment protection and strong unionization, grievances against an employer can be solved quickly and efficiently, through institutionalized processes and with the help of strong employee-representing political actors. By contrast liberal market economies, where unions and collective agreements tend to be weaker, employees may have limited collective avenues for redress and may instead need to rely on costly and individualized legal action to resolve employer-related grievances (see Hall & Soskice, 2001, for varieties of capitalism theory).

Politics Affecting Work

Political ideology – on an individual or on a collective, country level – can shape individual-level work experiences, relationships, behavior, and attitudes at work in a variety of ways.

First, policy-making, such as labor market and public health policy-making, can impact workers' experiences and working conditions. In the European Union, working conditions and wages are regulated by multiple high-level employment directives, as well as a longstanding tradition of collective bargaining agreements in individual countries. Still, Europe, like most of the world, has witnessed a deregulation of labor markets over decades, increasing the prevalence of temporary contracts and other nonstandard employment forms (International Labour Organization, 2016). The relative shift of market risks from organizations to individuals has made employment security and precarity salient experiences for many workers (Allan et al., 2021; Hünefeld et al., 2020). In regions with less worker protection, workers are also much more exposed to sudden changes in policy. A recent special issue in the journal *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice* illustrates how recent US policy shifts directly affect return-to-office mandates (Allen et al., 2025; Kalmanovich-Cohen, 2025), equal employment opportunities (Keith et al., 2025), and the rights of minorities at work (Fletcher & Stephenson, 2025; Jaramillo et al., 2025). We also point readers to other disciplines for a better understanding of the macro-political influence on micro-level work experiences (e.g., Gospel & Pendleton, 2003; Hall & Soskice, 2001).

The present discussion focuses on individual-level relationships of attitudes, values, ideology, and political behavior with work outcomes. Here, political orientation and ideology are understood as mirroring underlying attitudes, values, and beliefs (Swigart et al., 2020). These deep-seated values can influence cognition (Jost et al., 2009) and high-level decision-making. For example, politically left-leaning individuals have been found to advocate for social change versus tradition, for equality versus hierarchy, and for emphasizing contextual factors versus personal agency in explaining outcomes. These underlying value positions can influence how people manage resources and relationships, how they react to uncertainties and change, and how they evaluate organizational resource allocations (see Swigart et al., 2020).

Aside from value positions, individuals' political ideology can influence the social dynamics and interpersonal relationships at work. Psychologically, a differentiation or labeling of individuals into, for example, "left-wing" and "right-wing" (or others) provides a basis for structuring the social environment (Bantel, 2023). This categorization might then, following social categorization and social identity processes, contribute to ingroup liking and outgroup discrimination among colleagues (Roth et al., 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Politically dissimilar views can also be perceived as a symbolic threat to one's value system (Hickman & Yang, 2025; Roth et al., 2025) and thereby elicit negative responses.

Empirical evidence supports these mechanisms. It appears that organizations' political stances impact appli-

cants' decisions to apply to these organizations (Roth et al., 2022). Additionally, research on the effects of perceived political (dis)similarity in recruitment and selection finds that perceived dissimilarity in political affiliations or values can reduce candidates' hiring chances (e.g., Mönke et al., 2024; Roth et al., 2025; Sinclair et al., 2023). Hence, personal characteristics such as political affiliations might affect hiring decisions.

Furthermore, perceived political misfit can also affect people at work in that they identify less with their occupation (Zacher & Rudolph, 2023), are less satisfied with their job (He et al., 2019), or report higher turnover intentions (Bermiss & McDonald, 2018). Detecting political differences at work can happen very subtly: Simply hearing or initiating political discussions at work was observed to increase employees' negative affect (Rosen et al., 2024) as well as reducing employees' resources and increasing withdrawal behavior (Kim et al., 2022). Relatedly, Schilbach and colleagues (2022) found that holding a minority opinion on a controversial macro-political issue (in this case, Brexit) within an organization can negatively affect interpersonal relationships at work. Finally, a stronger person-group political orientation fit was associated with more job satisfaction, stronger organizational identification, and higher-quality friendships at work (Zacher et al., 2026).

In sum, politics at various levels – ranging from high-level policymaking to organizational political stances to individual-level political values, attitudes, and behaviors – can shape the experiences of employees at work. For example, policymakers can shape workers' experiences through regulations, such as increasing precarity and insecurity. Organizations can affect job applicants' intentions to apply due to their public statements. Additionally, political dissimilarity at the individual level can affect hiring decisions and work attitudes, such as job satisfaction and organizational identification.

Work Affecting Political Attitudes and Engagement

Understanding how experiences at work may motivate political engagement of workers (attitudes/values/ideologies, behaviors, and trust; Selenko et al. 2025) outside work has been of interest to political scientists and sociologists ever since the early worker movements in the 19th century. Political scientists like Carol Pateman (1970) argued that autonomy and participating in work decision-making would "spill over" and encourage employees to engage as citizens, thus fostering political participation and belief in democracy. Others have suggested that work could be understood as a place of political socialization (Almond & Verba, 1963; Karasek, 2004; Peterson, 1992), where workers learn the skills needed and gain access to networks to engage successfully in politics in their free time.

Empirical evidence across 25 years of research from various disciplines shows that the working conditions that workers experience can influence their political thinking (see Selenko et al., 2025): Enabling jobs (those that require more skill use, more autonomy, are better paid, with good social relationships) as well as jobs that create a grievance (e.g., insecure jobs) and low-quality jobs (characterized by job and financial insecurity) seem to motivate more political participation in workers' free time – albeit with differing ideological orientations (Selenko et al., 2025). Workers with higher-quality, more enabling jobs tended to report more political trust and higher levels of political participation. They also expressed more openness toward immigration. By contrast, workers with jobs that created grievances showed more political participation but had lower political trust and were sometimes more skeptical about immigration (Selenko et al., 2025). Interestingly, it is not only workers' own direct work experiences that matter, but also their perceptions of others' working conditions that shape their attitudes toward the government (Shoss et al., 2023).

W-O psychology researchers have only begun to explore psychological mechanisms that might translate experiences at work into political engagement outside work: Karasek (2004) proposed that active behavior at work would build an appetite for active leisure-time behaviors (among them political activism). Van Hootegem and colleagues (2022) explored the role of distributive injustice as a mediator between job insecurity and political trust. Selenko and De Witte (2021) suggest that identification with the working population might be an important factor to explain the association between job insecurity and antiegalitarian attitudes. Recent research has also found that uncertainty mindsets, which can be shaped by organizational environments (Griffin & Grote, 2020), predicted support for right-wing populism (Takizawa et al., 2025). Not only uncertainty mindsets, but also job insecurity (De Witte & Meuleman, 2007; Stynen & Witte, 2011) and personal control (De Witte, 1999) were associated with political right-wing and conservative views. Moreover, perceptions of power distribution matter: Perceived democracy at work, which can be fostered by experiences of unionization and co-determination (Budd & Lamare, 2021), is associated with fewer right-wing extremist attitudes (Kiess & Schmidt, 2025).

In conclusion, various work experiences can influence workers' political engagement outside of work. The quality of employment and working conditions, the experience of autonomy, socialization at work, and the acquisition of

relevant skills can all be associated with political outcomes such as engagement in protests or voting behavior.

Politics at Work

Finally, there is also a growing body of literature on employee political engagement at work, aimed at the collective interest. For this position paper, we define political behavior at work as participating in collective political action at work (e.g., strikes), joining a union or works council, and actively furthering collective worker interests (e.g., through lobbying or social dialogue with management). Other forms include pro-social types of employee voice behavior, which aim to communicate worker dissatisfaction and grievances as well as voice as a form of co-determination (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016). Meta-analytical findings show that organizational democracy in the form of employee participation is associated with greater civic and prosocial orientations outside work (Weber et al., 2020). These forms of work-related political engagement are also influenced by working conditions beyond organizational democracy and individuals' work experiences (although only very little is understood about these associations, e.g., Sverke et al., 2023; Sverke & Goslinga, 2003). Notably, union membership has also been shown to be associated with political ideology (De Witte, 1996; McAleese & Day, 2022) and a higher likelihood of voting in general (Flavin & Radcliff, 2011). Hence, workplace representation and unions can be interpreted as bridging the work and political sphere by advocating for improved conditions and promoting workplace health and safety (Vesper et al., 2025).

Taken together, there is a growing body of empirical studies and evidence that links work and the political sphere, and research interest in this field is growing. In the following section, we explain what practitioners can learn from these findings.

The Practical Relevance of the Work–Politics Nexus

The research described highlights the practical relevance of the work–politics nexus for leaders, managers, and organizations. First, research in the *politics affecting work* stream shows that even when political ideology is supposedly unimportant for doing the job itself, it can still be highly influential during recruitment and selection processes (Mönke et al., 2024; Roth et al., 2025), during management decisions and resource allocation decisions (Rice et al., 2025; Swigart et al., 2020), and even more subtly during informal contact between individuals at work (e.g., water cooler conversations; Rosen et al., 2024). Introducing clear policies on how to mitigate these influences at work may be an important first step. From a theoretical point of view, organizations need to be careful not to create fault lines along political divergencies (Lau & Murnighan, 1998; Thatcher et al., 2024). Organizations can be understood as places of cross-cutting political discourse, where people of different political ideologies might meet and interact (Mutz & Mondak, 2006). This presents a great opportunity to burst bubbles and reduce societal division. However, such a dialogue needs to be enabled first: As the recent Leipzig Authoritarianism Study 2024 (Decker et al., 2024) shows, extremist attitudes are on the rise, accompanied by increases in anti-immigration sentiments and dissatisfaction with democracy. These polarizing developments may impede constructive dialogue across political fault lines at work. More research is needed to understand how a constructive cross-cutting dialogue in organizations can be enabled or when a "no politics at work" policy may be the preferred option (see also Steinhorst, 2025). Also, insights from W-O psychological interventions research (see Nielsen et al., 2006; Nielsen & Randall, 2013) could help to develop participatory multi-level interventions – at organizational, leadership, group, and individual levels – that ensure an ethical, respectful, satisfying, and psychologically safe work environment for all stakeholders involved.

Research on *work affecting political attitudes and engagement* also entails a significant lesson for practice: Organizations can have a pervasive societal impact through employees' political engagement, which, at least in part, may be shaped by their work experiences. This means that employers' responsibility toward wider society comes through the working conditions they create. Experiences of work democracy (Vesper et al., 2025) can have positive effects not only on work outcomes but also on political attitudes and behaviors outside of work (e.g., civic engagement). By providing beneficial and participatory working conditions, organizations may strengthen employees' well-being and contribute to democratic resilience by fostering employees' self-efficacy beliefs, consistent with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory.

Finally, for *politics at work*, initial research highlights that workers' political engagement at work can be beneficial both for employees in improving conditions and for organizations by highlighting opportunities to enhance organizational functioning via voice behavior (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016). Hence, organizations should encourage employees to voice their grievances. Furthermore, having unions or works councils in place can foster employee health and safety (Vesper et al., 2025), which also benefits

organizations at large. Additionally, some studies showed that there is organizational benefit if works councils were in place (Addison et al., 2000). This was also supported by research based on the representative German IAB establishment panel showing that the positive effect of introducing autonomous work groups and teamwork on productivity was stronger for organizations with works councils as compared to those without (Zwick, 2004). Hence, in an ideal world, organizations would recognize their responsibility as public places of democratic participation (Van Den Berg et al., 2024).

A Call for More Research From W-O Psychology

We contend that W-O psychology has a lot to offer to the work–politics nexus. As psychologists, W-O psychology researchers are familiar with the individual worker, their traits, motivation, attitudes, skills, knowledge, social relations, behavior, and further aspects. As W-O psychologists, we understand how working conditions affect workers; how workers react to working conditions; and how workers steer, select, and influence work itself. W-O psychology researchers also bring the methodological skillset needed to do so: with the understanding of valid and reliable measurement, quantitative and qualitative study designs, and statistical techniques that facilitate disentangling intraindividual processes, interindividual differences and contextual influences.

Our primary aim is to clarify the psychological processes that are relevant for understanding the work–politics nexus. Advancing this aim requires careful attention not only to empirical questions, but also to the epistemic positions from which such questions are asked. We recognize that W-O psychologists, like all researchers, bring their own ideologies and political perspectives to their investigation, which may implicitly influence the topics we choose to research and the perspectives we take. We need rigorous scrutiny of how our own value positions shape standards of evidence and proof, particularly when it comes to making pronouncements involving ideology and practical recommendations (see Tetlock, 2007). Hence, we would encourage researchers to incorporate reflexivity in their research process (see Jamieson et al., 2023; Seubert et al., 2023). These concerns resonate with broader debates about the political leanings of psychology as a whole (Redding, 2001, 2023), including subfields such as social psychology (Inbar & Lammers, 2012; Tetlock & Mitchell, 2015). From a critical perspective, some scholars have claimed that W-O psychology would hold neoliberal assumptions, with its focus on individual agency, organizational outcomes, and a neglect of the structural constraints (Bal & Dóci, 2018). Such claims, however, have been heatedly debated in the field, with other scholars firmly rejecting them (Rudolph & Zacher, 2018). We contend that research progress is unlikely to be advanced by broad generalizations about what particular groups purportedly think or assume. We caution against broad generalizations that portray groups within our discipline as thinking or behaving in uniform ways because such assumptions are unlikely to advance research.

Instead, in the tradition of the value pluralism model (Tetlock, 2007), we believe it is beneficial to the integrative complexity of our knowledge when a problem activates opposing but equally valid value positions with opposing policy implications – as long as there is still opportunity for intellectual and constructive engagement, and disagreement is expressed without foreclosing dialogue (see Tetlock, 2007). In this spirit, we welcome constructive disagreement within W-O psychology, insofar as it contributes to clarifying the psychological processes that connect work and political outcomes.

We also acknowledge that research in the work–politics nexus will not be independent of the institutional societal context within which it happens: A given political and institutional context may make certain approaches and research questions more pressing, some irrelevant, and others riskier or even impossible to study. This means we need to employ a degree of self-reflection when it comes to the generalization of our research findings. It also means that we need to work together to enable academic freedom, which can be threatened when researchers face political pressure to avoid addressing specific research questions. To that end, we encourage the academic and public community not to politicize the research efforts of the work–politics nexus. Researchers need to feel at liberty to study specific research questions in this area in a descriptive-explanatory way, without fear of being scrutinized or attacked, in the interest of knowledge creation.

We are optimistic that W-O psychology is capable of contributing to the work–politics nexus by empirically addressing new questions that have so far only been speculated about by other disciplines. The working person is the point at which work and the political arena intersect – someone who contributes to work and contributes to society, who experiences these two connected worlds and reacts to them. Focusing on the worker is essential to better understand the work–politics nexus, and doing so from a psychological perspective makes good sense. One fruitful line of enquiry is, for example, to apply existing work-psychological explanations of how work characteristics can influence not only work-related but also politics-related outcomes. Another line of enquiry is to apply

political-psychological variables and link them to the work context: For example, a central individual-level variable for understanding work behavior in organizations is political interest, which describes the extent to which individuals value politics as an important aspect of their lives. Interests matter because they represent a relatively stable, trait-like underlying disposition that becomes activated in specific situations (Harackiewicz et al., 2016). Political interest has been identified as a strong predictor of political behaviors (Prior, 2010). Furthermore, political interest may shape both the influence of politics on work, and work on politics, and even also the willingness to organize collectively at work. In other words, political interest may function as a key overarching third variable in these mechanisms. For individuals high in political interest, political identities may become salient more readily, thereby strengthening the link between political cues and work-related outcomes (Brenner et al., 2014; Mönke et al., 2024). Employees with high political interest may also benefit more from politically similar colleagues, for example, experiencing greater well-being or even enhanced contextual performance. Still, research on political interest or other individual characteristics in the work–politics nexus is sparse, offering substantial opportunities for future W-O psychology-guided inquiry.

Aside from more research on overarching political traits and skills and their relationship with work, there are also many open research questions concerning the specific connections between work and politics. In the following, we will outline open research questions alongside our structure of the three streams: politics affecting work, work affecting political attitudes and engagement, and politics at work. In Table 1, we summarize key research questions and provide suggestions for research designs.

Open Research Questions on Politics Affecting Work

Most fundamentally, we are only beginning to understand the direct effects of macro-level events (e.g., so-called mega-events such as the rise of AI or the climate crisis) on workers' experience and perception of their work from a psychological perspective. For that, we need a better understanding of how individual-level work experiences, demands, and resources are connected to wider human resource management (HRM) systems and strategies as well as country-level political contexts and institutional frameworks. Inspiration may be found in sister disciplines like HRM (see Boxall, 2021) or entrepreneurship (see Stephan et al., 2015, 2025), where researchers have outlined pathways to connect the political context to specific work-related demands and behaviors. More research is needed that compares relationships of the work–politics nexus across different institutions, political systems, and market and economic systems. For example, scholars have argued that the effect of political engagement at work might vary depending on whether the country has a two-party system or a multi-party system (Bantel, 2023; Mönke et al., 2024). As most European countries are characterized by the latter (Carter & Farrell, 2010), solely focusing on party affiliation or partisanship might fall short in explaining observed processes. In multi-party countries, the underlying mechanisms related to work and politics might not be driven by being a member of a specific party but instead depend on the perception of shared beliefs and values (Mönke et al., 2024). Research on employability perceptions in different democratic systems shows that the type of market and economic system (liberal or coordinated market economy) matters for workers' employability strategies (see Andresen et al., 2024). A better understanding of the connections between political systems, employment systems, and subsequent influences on work-political relationships would be a fruitful area for further research. This could, for example, be achieved by using existing large-scale, cross-country datasets or by collecting purpose-built data across countries (see Table 1).

There is also a need to better understand how political norms outside of the organization might interact with organizational culture. In countries where free speech is under attack and programs promoting diversity, inclusion, and equality are no longer government-supported, organizational culture and work well-being may suffer. Relatedly, interpersonal political conflicts with significant others, such as family or friends, could also spill over to work and affect workers' performance and well-being as well as contribute to interpersonal conflict about politics with colleagues and supervisors. One fruitful approach for future research could, for example, be the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018), which explains how stress and motivational factors spill over from one domain (e.g., home) to another (e.g., work) and how these factors can also crossover to significant others (e.g., romantic partners, friends, children). Applying this model might help explain, for example, how political disagreements with family members could be considered a stress factor that spills over into the work domain, thereby affecting work behavior. Conversely, if employees have political conflicts with their colleagues, the associated effects may also spill over to their partners. To examine these effects, researchers could, for example, draw on their experience in dyadic sampling, such as collecting data from employees and their romantic partners, or conduct experience sampling (see Table 1).

Table 1. Key future research questions and suggestions for research designs

Area	Examples of open research questions	Suggestions for research designs
Politics affecting work	Relationships between political attitudes and work • How are personal political ideology, ideological diversity, macro-level political environment, and work behaviors, attitudes, decisions, and relationships – especially in teams and leader–follower dyads – connected? • How are political attitudes/behaviors, political context, and individual well-being and other workplace outcomes associated over time? • To what extent do political norms interact with organizational cultures? • Can the observed relationships between political ideology and workplace variables be found for political moderates?	• Qualitative studies • Longitudinal surveys • Experience sampling
	Processes, mediators, and moderators • What are processes/mediators and moderators between political ideologies and work outcomes, and their boundary conditions? • How do employees react to mega-threats or changes in the political context at work?	• Experimental and field testing • Longitudinal surveys
	Crossover and spillover effects • Do crossover/spillover effects between politics and work contexts exist? • Does political interpersonal conflict with family and friends spill over into work? • Through which interpersonal processes (e. g., value reinforcement, conflict, social influence) do close others' private values shape employees' political values and behaviors at work? • Which effects do political conflicts with colleagues have on work outcomes?	• Experimental and field testing • Dyadic designs obtained from employees and their family/romantic partners or friends to explore the interplay of private values and political values at work
	Effects of different contexts • Are the associations between politics and work comparable across political systems? • What are the effects of different political contexts (e. g., work-related government policies, employment protection legislation, etc.), societal contexts (e. g., economic crises, wars/conflicts, climate crisis), or of specific policies by comparing countries that differ in their policy or within a country over time (before/after introduction/policy change) on workplace experiences and outcomes	• Multi-level panel studies
	Effects of political events, political misfit, and political interactions • Do daily political events affect employees' workplace behaviors? • How does political misfit affect work satisfaction, OCB, or voice? • How do political interactions at work or self-censoring affect workplace experiences and work outcomes such as application intentions or turnover intentions?	• Experience sampling • Scenario-based experimental designs manipulating political (mis)fit or need to self-censor
	Potential interventions • Can political biases be reduced?	• Intervention studies, e. g., during recruitment
Work affecting political attitudes and engagement	Development of political engagement • Which work events and experiences are of a "politically activating" nature?	• Qualitative studies
	Relationships between work and political attitudes and engagement • How are work experiences and behaviors associated with political attitudes and engagement outside work? • To what extent do occupations or social status play a role? • What about cross-level effects: How does the behavior of leaders and CEOs affect employees' engagement outside work?	• Longitudinal surveys to examine the chronological order of effects associated with the work-politics nexus, • Experience sampling to track work experiences and political engagement in free time, • Experimental scenario-studies, for example, manipulating identity threat or organizational justice

Table 1. Key future research questions and suggestions for research designs (Continued)

Area	Examples of open research questions	Suggestions for research designs
	• What are the underlying mechanisms of work experiences influencing political engagement? Can these be explained by, for example, identity processes, workplace learning, organizational justice perceptions, insecurity?	
	Effects of different contexts • Do the relationships between work and political attitudes and engagement vary, for example, by industry, occupation, or employment quality?	• Multi-level studies
	Effects of work identities • How do shared political identities at work affect political attitudes and engagement outside of work? • Can shared workplace identities overcome political dissimilarities?	• Scenario-based experimental designs manipulating shared political identities
	Potential interventions • How can the workplace contribute to political depolarization?	• Intervention studies at work aimed at reducing political polarization
Politics at work	Relationships between work experience and political engagement at work • How are the experience of work and political engagement at work connected? • How are political participation at work and workplace experiences and outcomes intertwined? • How does political participation at work shape behavior at work and political engagement beyond work?	• Qualitative studies • Longitudinal surveys
	Predictors, moderators, mediators, and consequences of political engagement at work • What motivates employees to engage in political participation at work? • What are contingencies and consequences of individual engagement in employee representation? • What are the mechanisms that explain the association between workplace democratic experiences and political attitudes?	• Qualitative studies • (Longitudinal) surveys
	Effects of different contexts • Do the effects of politics at work on workers and organizational outcomes differ across organizations?	• Comparative studies

Note. OCB = organizational citizenship behavior.

Previous research has shown that political events can affect the emotions of workers (Ford et al., 2023). Indeed, political scientists have long highlighted the spillover of affective polarization in the political sphere to other domains in life (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2019). Testing such an affective spillover effect might be worthwhile for explaining work behavior and well-being, which can be achieved by sampling employees' daily, weekly, or monthly experiences. If individuals are already negatively affected by the daily politics they consume via news or social media, this might lead them, for instance, to take more breaks at work, be aggressive toward coworkers, or show other forms of withdrawal or counterproductive work behavior. Aligning with this, Swigart et al. (2020) emphasized that W-O psychology needs to develop conceptual models to test contextual circumstances that increase the saliency of employees' political views. Some of these contextual circumstances could be very subtle, ranging from an inobtrusive TV running in the background broadcasting political news, overhearing ambient political discussions at work, or noticing political paraphernalia such as stickers or badges worn at work. More obvious cues, such as political elections, might increase the saliency of political ideology at work as political debates and controversies are constantly in the news (Iyengar et al., 2012; Morgeson et al., 2015), highlighting differences between political camps and increasing awareness of these differences among employees (Swigart et al., 2020).

Additionally, with the increasing salience of politics in everyday life, politics can also be part of conversations at work. Research indicates that overhearing political conversations at work can influence positive and negative affect of employees (Rosen et al., 2024). W-O psychology researchers understand too little about what happens when employees with unwanted political attitudes and perspectives start to self-censor at work, and what the consequences for well-being and career outcomes are. Employees might consider the confrontation with politically diverging perspectives at work as a threat to valued resources such as social interactions or support among colleagues. Hence, following the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), employees could aim to defend their resources by self-censoring at work or avoiding political discussions. Political interpersonal conflict with work colleagues could also increase turnover (intentions) or spill over to engagement with politics outside of work. Future research should examine in general the prevalence and effects of conflicts based on politics.

Given the potential negative effects of political divergencies on social dynamics and social relationships at work, we need more research on how to mitigate discrimination and exclusion. So far, research on the effects of political (mis)fit on work-related outcomes has also been limited. Initial studies found that misfit decreases occupational identification (Zacher & Rudolph, 2023); is associated with fewer workplace friendships, less job satisfaction, and lower organizational identification (Zacher et al., 2026); and increases turnover (Bermiss & McDonald, 2018). Other variables, such as work satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, or voice, have not been examined yet and could be studied through survey-based and/or scenario-based experimental designs. Learning about these associations could then help to develop interventions to mitigate the negative effects of politics at work. For example, in recruitment and selection, providing training for recruiters on how to avoid political bias might be useful for organizations. According to Costa (2024), interventions could, for example, focus on increasing accountability to effectively reduce bias in selection. We understand that inner-organizational political differences and their consequences play out against an organizational context (e.g., ethical work climate, policies, demands) and a wider political context. More research is needed to explore how organizational-level and political-contextual-level influences shape the impact of potential political disagreements between employees.

Much research has focused on left-leaning and right-leaning individuals, neglecting political moderates (i.e., individuals adopting a political center position) or individuals who are politically ambivalent or disengaged (Busenbark et al., 2025) or who fall outside the traditional party spectrum. We do not know how politically ambivalent or politically moderate employees may be affected by or react to work events. For example, if moderate political views in contrast to more extreme views are a sign of an underlying trait, political moderates might be more tolerant of perspectives on both sides and hence in any work conflict and perhaps may also exhibit less political bias in selection – an important question for addressing political discrimination at work.

Finally, a growing body of research suggests that leaders' political orientations shape organizational decision-making in systematic ways, with downstream implications for work design and possibly even worker political engagement (for an overview, see Busenbark et al., 2025). Semadeni et al. (2022) reported that a leader's organizational decision-making is influenced by whether their political ideology stands in opposition to that of the current government. Other research shows that the leader's ideology (being conservative or liberal) has direct consequences for their willingness to advance corporate social responsibility (Chin et al., 2013). Some critical research has even raised concerns that the political ideology of corporate leaders may run counter to humanistic values in liberal democracies, with negative implica-

tions for worker well-being (e.g., see Baldissarri et al., 2022). Much of this research, however, relied on experimental studies that infer stable ideological or dehumanizing mindsets, rather than examining how they are developed, enacted, and experienced in real organizational settings. More research is needed to understand the contingencies and consequences of leaders' political ideologies for subordinates, by exploring the influence of political contexts on CEOs' ideologies and value positions, as well as by capturing the effect of such ideologies on workers' well-being and their organizational and political engagement. W-O psychology brings useful theories that describe how work affects people, along with the quantitative and qualitative research expertise needed to approach such questions.

Open Research Questions on Work Affecting Political Attitudes and Engagement

While there is evidence that work influences political engagement, we still hardly understand *how* and through which *psychological mechanisms* this happens. One plausible avenue is identity processes (e.g., Roth et al., 2017; Selenko et al., 2025; Swigart et al., 2020), but evidence of such identity-related effects is still limited (see, e.g., Mönke et al., 2024; Roth et al., 2025; Selenko & De Witte, 2021; Wade et al., 2020, for exceptions). Other mechanisms are also plausible: workplace learning could be another route; justice perceptions could be relevant, alongside emotions and well-being. Work offers the opportunity to gain skills (e.g., communication, organizing, persuasion) and to train associated psychological characteristics (e.g., self-esteem, mastery, competence), all of which are necessary for political proactivity outside work. Furthermore, work can also shape the perceptions of control that in turn might affect political trust or political engagement outside work (De Witte, 1999). Work is also an important place of resource allocation (such as income, promotion, career opportunities), and workers are significantly affected by organizational justice (being treated fairly, respectfully, procedurally just; see Colquitt, 2001). Injustice and perceived entitlement violations in the work context might generate attributions of blame toward wider, employment-related institutions (e.g., the government). Finally, work and working conditions have a significant impact on negative and positive affect, mental health, and depression (e.g., Sonnentag et al., 2023). These well-being outcomes are likely to affect the capacity but also the perception and attitudes related to wider society and the community: To give an example, someone who is chronically exhausted from work may well have the skills and interest to participate in civic or local engagement initiatives in their community but simply lack the energy to do so. Over time, this may shape their sense of control over democratic participation. Taken together, there is a clear need for empirical studies to explore how psychological processes of identity, perceptions of control and justice, and affect and well-being inform people's capacity and motivation to engage politically in their free time.

Aside from the psychological mechanisms involved in the transfer, we still know very little about specific work experiences or working conditions that matter for political engagement in one's free time, as well as the effect of individual and demographic differences in this process. For example, position in the organizational hierarchy might play a role, as higher positions are often associated with more job autonomy and more resources. According to self-determination theory (Deci et al., 2017), experiencing autonomy, competence, and relatedness increases employee performance and well-being. Satisfaction of needs regarding safety and security was also associated with voting intentions (Sindermann & Montag, 2023). Therefore, meeting these needs may also provide employees with the necessary resources to engage politically outside of work. Plausibly, this would go hand in hand with more political trust and satisfaction with democracy. This could be examined by comparing the responses of leaders and their followers, or by comparing the responses of people in different occupations. Also, the role of "shock" events at work and the temporality of influences are poorly understood. Does organizational change matter for political engagement? Does the activism of others matter for one's own activism? According to the stakeholder alignment model (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021), the sociopolitical activism of CEOs can affect employee engagement as well as the organizational ideological composition, with non-aligned workers deciding to leave the organization.

From a more interventionist perspective, more research is needed to explore how working conditions could potentially foster social and societal cohesion: For example, given the link between work, identity, and political engagement in free time, one avenue for future enquiry could be to explore to what extent shared work identities such as being an employee of a specific organization, industry sector, or occupational role could foster similarity across political divergences. Research indicates that supra-ordinate identities can help to reduce ingroup–outgroup thinking among politically dissimilar individuals (Norman & Green, 2025). Work offers a unique sphere for workers to exit their political bubbles and for cross-cutting political dialogue (Mutz & Mondak, 2006). Based on the contact hypothesis (Allport et al., 1954), intergroup prejudices might be reduced by interacting with outgroup members (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), provided that the interactions are perceived as positive (McKeown & Dixon,

2017). Future research could examine the potential of work as a place for depolarization, given its political heterogeneity and frequent interactions among employees (Nair et al., 2025; Solomon & Hall, 2023). Studies could examine how the extent of everyday political conversations employees have at work is related to tolerance toward political opponents, using either longitudinal surveys or experience sampling. According to intergroup contact theory (Allport et al., 1954), having the opportunity to learn about and communicate with other-minded individuals should foster mutual understanding and acceptance. Furthermore, being confronted with opposing political views could reduce resentment and affective polarization by learning about the perspectives of political opponents. Future research could therefore consider implementing interventions that facilitate cross-cutting dialogues at work by using small-scale interventions such as daily tasks that employees are asked to fulfil. Reducing political polarization or developing strategies to reduce (or even prevent) political fault lines at work can be understood as a key task of W-O psychology in the work–politics nexus. Managers could also be key to this, as they could encourage employees to engage in open dialogues. However, they should also be aware that political conversations might lead some employees to withdraw and disengage if they feel uncomfortable or have a minority position. Theories of minority influence (Nemeth, 1986) and power (Keltner et al., 2003) could guide research in understanding who participates and engages in open dialogue and who self-censors in political discussions at work. Managers, therefore, need the skills to tackle different ways in which political conversations at work can develop. Hence, future research could examine how leaders can facilitate cross-cutting dialogue and contribute to depolarization by their actions.

Open Research Questions on Politics at Work

Finally, we need a better understanding of the role of political activism at work, in the form of employee representatives, unions, or works councils, or even more informal interest groups. This includes knowledge on (a) what motivates individuals to join in this form of democratic participation, and (b) how they might shape behavior at work and political engagement beyond work. Integrating established theories from W-O psychology can help explore this area. For example, little is still known about what motivates workers to join established unions at work. Contrary to expectations, experienced job precarity and poor working conditions seem to be an insufficient predictor of joining unions (see Sverke et al., 2023). Comparative surveys among workers who are engaged versus not engaged in workplace representation could provide initial insights into underlying motivational processes (see Table 1). These surveys could be supplemented by longitudinal studies examining how workplace and broader political participation co-develop over time. Similarly, there is some evidence that experiencing work democracy may relate to lower right-wing extremist attitudes in Germany (Kiess & Schmidt, 2025), but this does not suggest that unionized workers are immune to such attitudes. Some might argue that this association could also be explained by the attraction–selection–attrition paradigm (Schneider, 1987) in that employees who do not share the values at work decide to leave. Another possibility is that having social role models, such as workplace representatives who symbolize democratic participation, foster political self-efficacy among employees. This would align with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and may affect employees' willingness to engage both at work and outside of work.

More research is needed to understand the role of unions as training grounds for political participation more widely and as bridges between work and the political sphere. By experiencing how working conditions and fair treatment can be shaped through collective engagement at work, workers might broaden their outlook to apply those skills also in the wider democratic context.

Conclusion

With this position paper, we aim to open discussion and raise awareness of how work and politics are interconnected and how researchers and practitioners in W-O psychology can engage with the work–politics nexus. Rather than offering definitive answers, this paper demonstrates that W-O psychology research is only beginning to understand the reciprocal links between work and politics, leaving substantial conceptual, empirical, and methodological questions unanswered. By providing a brief overview of existing research, identifying research gaps across three central streams, and outlining practical relevance, we hope to stimulate scholarly attention and cumulative research efforts within W-O psychology. We highlight that W-O psychology is well-positioned to contribute to this emerging field through its theoretical focus on understanding individual-level phenomena, its attention to contextualized work experiences, and its sophisticated quantitative empirical methods. Understanding how politics shape work experiences—and how work, in turn, shapes politics—represents a promising and necessary frontier for the discipline. In light of ongoing political polarization and societal transformation, expanding W-O

psychology research on the work–politics nexus is not only timely but essential for advancing both scientific understanding and socially relevant scholarship.

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