Work is political: Distributive injustice as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between job insecurity and political cynicism

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Abstract

The current societal climate is often characterised by a perceived lack of trust, insecurity and fear, as a result of a turbulent political and economic context. This is associated with a rise in workers worrying about job loss, as well as an increase in individuals holding politicians and politics in disrepute. This study investigates whether these two processes are linked. Being concerned about maintaining one's job may be related to the experience of distributive injustice, which reflects people's perception that they do not get what they deserve. These injustice perceptions may, consequently, bring about a cynical attitude towards the political system. Using three-wave longitudinal data in a sample of 857 British employees, we found that job insecurity was indeed indirectly related to feelings of political cynicism via the experience of distributive injustice. This study underscores the relevance of workplace experiences for the development of political (dis)engagement.

Keywords: political distrust, political inefficacy, economic insecurity, job loss, fairness, justice perceptions

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Western societies have witnessed a dual development: vast increases in anti-establishment votes and politically adverse sentiments on the one hand, and more flexible, short-term employment contracts, coupled with less economic and social security on the other hand (Hacker, 2006; Van Assche et al., 2019; Wroe, 2016). There has been ample societal debate on how these rising economic insecurities influence political attitudes and behaviour, such as extreme-right and pro-Brexit voting, and support for populist and authoritarian leaders (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Rovny & Rovny, 2017). However, research that connects these political and economic crises has remained surprisingly scarce, at least from a work-psychological perspective. Particular insight into how subjective experiences arising from both developments are associated with each other remains especially limited (Hacker et al., 2013). As a result, this paper answers the call for researchers to examine how personal experiences of insecurity might translate into political attitudes (Hacker et al., 2013; Wroe, 2014), by focusing particularly on how perceived job insecurity fosters feelings of injustice and political cynicism among individuals.

In this study we propose that political outcomes and economic uncertainty do not correlate coincidentally. Rather, leaning on models of distributive injustice, we argue that individuals' perceptions of job insecurity can trigger feelings of being treated unfairly, which can impact their expectations and attitudes to the political system more generally. An investigation of this relationship allows to study how experiences in people's working life might spill-over to the political domain. In this way, the current paper contributes to the literature in three ways.

First, we contribute to the job insecurity literature, by connecting a work-related attitude to a political attitude, thereby bridging two domains in a persons' life which have so far been kept separately. Job insecurity has been mostly analysed in its relation with stress or job related

outcomes, but research has rarely investigated the ripple-on effects of job insecurity on attitudes and behaviours outside an organizational context (see e.g., Lee et al., 2018; Shoss, 2017 for two recent reviews).

Second, the current paper constitutes an added value to the studies on the understanding and antecedents of political cynicism. While the political repercussions of cynicism have been studied extensively (e.g., its consequences for voting behaviour and political actions; Billiet & De Witte, 2008; Pattyn et al., 2012; Van Assche et al., 2019), the determinants of political cynicism have remained much more under the radar. Moreover, Hacker and colleagues (2013) argue that especially the link between labour market or occupational experiences, and political attitudes has been insufficiently investigated in the aftermath of the economic recession. The effect of job insecurity is especially interesting to examine in this regard. Job insecurity is a clear aspect of labour market disadvantage that is at the forefront of workers' mind and constitutes an important stressor triggering experiences of deprivation (Emmenegger et al., 2015; Wroe, 2014).

Last, related to the previously mentioned contributions, our analysis is relevant because it theorizes and empirically tests distributive injustice as a potentially crucial intermediary variable. There is a remarkably thin understanding of the theoretical mechanisms underlying relationships between personal economic experiences and political attitudes (Wroe, 2014), which makes it difficult to pinpoint which aspect of economic insecurity in general, and job insecurity specifically, would be responsible for heightened cynicism. Including a mediating variable related to social-exchange theory allows to explore the psychological processes that underlie the relationship between job insecurity and political cynicism (Pedahzur & Canetti-Nisim, 2004). In doing so, this study also adds to the growing field of studies that examine the theoretical explanations of employee reactions to job insecurity, and, more specifically, to the

exploration of the theoretical relevance of distributive injustice as a framework (e.g., Piccoli & De Witte, 2015).

This study employs a cross-lagged structural equation modelling approach using three-wave longitudinal data to analyse the insecurity-cynicism connection. In applying this methodology, we are among the first to answer Adman's (2008) call for research that uses panel models when investigating the effects of workplace experiences on political attitudes and behaviour. This research strategy is highly valuable, as analyses on the basis of longitudinal data allow to evaluate the causal chain, to more clearly model mediating mechanisms, and to assess assumptions about stability, nonspuriousness, and stationarity (Cole & Maxwell, 2003).

Defining Political Cynicism

Political cynicism is generally seen as a particular form of mistrust towards the political process and political actors, which are deemed to be largely driven by Machiavellian interests and acting in a self-serving manner (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; de Vreese, 2008). It thereby can be understood as a specific form of a more general cynicism, which encompasses a profound distrust in the sincerity and goodness of human motives and nature (Caldwell, 2007; de Vreese, 2008). Political cynics combine a lost belief in the altruistic and pure motives of politicians with an extremely pessimistic view of society as a whole (Chaloupka, 1999; Stanley, 2007). This is closely connected to a sense of estrangement from the political system and a feeling of powerlessness in bringing about political change (Pattyn et al., 2012).

Unearthing political cynicism is not only important to capture feelings of discontentment among electorates, but also to understand a wide range of societal consequences that are associated with it. Experiences of political cynicism have for instance been linked to voting behaviour and the organization of political actions (Pattyn et al., 2012; Van Assche et al., 2019). Political cynicism drains public confidence in politics and creates the

impression that ‘what we see is not what it seems’ (Capella & Jamieson, 1996). As a result, to understand the basis of these broader political sentiments, we aim to uncover how job insecurity in particular relates to political cynicism.

Defining Job Insecurity

Job insecurity may be defined as the perceived likelihood, and general concern, of losing one’s job (Hartley et al., 1991). A key element of this definition is *subjective perception*, which entails that the same objective situation may be evaluated differently between individuals. Prior research has demonstrated that some employees remain optimistic about maintaining their jobs despite a threatening organisational situation, while other employees are worried about being laid off when there is little objective job insecurity in their organisation (van Vuuren, 1990; van Vuuren & Klandermans, 1990). In general, job insecurity is a subjective perception of the objective labour market position of individuals (De Witte et al., 2015). This is, for instance, reflected by higher levels of insecurity among agency workers, blue-collar workers, and workers with temporary contracts (Keim et al., 2014; Klandermans et al., 2010).

Furthermore, the job insecurity experience is associated with *feelings of powerlessness*: employees are not in a position to counteract threats to their job (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). Finally, many definitions emphasise that job insecurity is an involuntary phenomenon. Individuals who willingly change to another organisation, or who do not worry about losing their job, or the consequences thereof, would not experience powerlessness to maintain continuity in their job situation, and, consequently, would not respond with job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Sverke et al., 2002). Powerlessness is also an inherent element of political cynicism. In that sense, there are conceptual parallels between job insecurity and political cynicism, as both constructs refer to feelings of powerlessness, be it about one’s job or about the political system.

The Relationship between Job Insecurity and Political Cynicism

Changes in working life and in the employment system have been argued to shape political attitudes and behaviour (Flecker, 2007). Most research on this topic focuses on the impact of labour market disadvantage, which covers situations such as being un-, under- or insecurely employed, underpaid, working involuntarily part-time or under a temporary contract. Conceptually, these worsening employment conditions have in common that they bring about worries about the future, and therefore operate as prominent stressors (Emmenegger et al., 2015). These stressors may translate into political orientations by fuelling individuals' perceptions that the political system is nonresponsive to their personal interests (Emmenegger et al., 2015). Emmenegger and colleagues (2015), for instance, demonstrated that labour market disadvantage decreased confidence in, and satisfaction with, political institutions, which translated into abstention from voting. Furthermore, prior research indicates that American citizens who worry about their economic situation have lower levels of political trust when compared with more secure individuals (Wroe, 2016).

Previous research has demonstrated that precarious employment may influence political behaviour not only on the level of the labour market, but also on an individual level. For instance, Mughan and colleagues (2003) showed that job insecurity is significantly associated with voting for a populist party, and is an even stronger antecedent than anti-statism and racism, which are commonly acknowledged predictors of a populist reaction. Additionally, research in Belgium demonstrated that job insecurity links to preference for extreme right-wing parties (De Witte & Meuleman, 2007). While these studies looked into right-wing support as outcomes, the present study examines whether job insecurity also brings about distrust and cynicism towards political parties. Political cynicism has been shown to be a determinative component of anti-political attitudes and to be related to a wide array of consequences, ranging

from intolerance and racial prejudice to protest and extreme-right voting (e.g., Billiet & De Witte, 2008; Pattyn et al., 2012).

Although job insecurity has been linked to political attitudes and behaviour, the theoretical mechanisms underlying this relationship have not been sufficiently identified (Wroe, 2014). As a result, more insight into the theoretical explanations for the job insecurity-political cynicism relationship is warranted, as recognized by several scholars. Wroe (2014), for instance, proposes an underlying mechanism for the link between job insecurity and political trust, and suggests that psychological contract breach by the employer may translate into perceived breach by the government, to which employees respond with a decline in trust. Other authors have also highlighted the importance of explaining variables when investigating the linkage between workplace and political behaviour (Greenberg et al., 1996), and emphasize the need for a mediating mechanism in the relationship between job insecurity and voting attitudes or behaviour (De Witte & Meuleman, 2007). Therefore, the current study advances distributive justice as an indirect pathway that explains the relationship between job insecurity and political cynicism.

The Mediating Role of Experiences of Distributive Injustice

In the present study, we focus exclusively on experiences of distributive injustice, as it most closely connects to the investment-return imbalance and might, consequently, be most relevant to understand how job insecurity translates into cynicism (cf. Piccoli & De Witte, 2015). Distributive injustice is experienced when people feel that they do not get what they deserve, based on who they are or what they have done (e.g., Lerner, 1977, 1987; Mikula, 2003). These violations of deservingness can happen in all areas of a person's life, but are more likely to have an effect if they concern an important area.

There is merit in analysing job insecurity from a distributive justice lens. The guarantee of job security is one of these crucial and implicit expectations that people have of their employment (Piccoli & De Witte, 2015; Randall & Mueller, 1995). It also forms a part of the unwritten psychological contract that an individual has with the organisation they work for: in return of work effort, time and energy, a worker expects promised benefits such as pay, promotion, long-term career possibilities and appreciation (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). In the traditional psychological contract, which is dominant in Western societies, the exchange of job security (by the employer) for loyalty (by the employee) is essential (Robinson et al., 1994). In that sense, job security could be understood as an important expectation workers have, something they feel they *deserve* based on their status as workers at a certain organisation. Essentially, the employment relationship encompasses a form of social exchange where efforts on the part of the employee are expected to be traded for both economic and symbolic rewards provided by the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Seen in that light, job *in*security constitutes a violation of this unwritten deservingness expectation, and the implicit social exchange relationship that individuals have with their organisation. When individuals fear that they might lose their job, this violates the security-loyalty exchange expectation and can therefore result in the perception of injustice and unfair treatment (Piccoli & De Witte, 2015). There is already some empirical evidence in support for this assumption. In a study among Belgian workers, Bernhard-Oettel and collegueas (2011) found that people who were more job insecure felt less fairly treated. This relationship was even stronger when workers expected high job security from their employer. We thus expect job insecurity to relate positively to perceptions of distributive injustice.

Hypothesis 1: Job insecurity is positively related to distributive injustice.

Perceptions of distributive injustice trigger a number of appraisal processes (e.g. Lerner, 2003; Mikula, 2003), which can lead to political cynicism. In the heat of the injustice

perception, people will first have a more automatic emotional reaction, which can later develop into more systematic cognitive evaluations. Initially, there is often an automatic appraisal of who or what is to blame for the current unjust situation and an attempt to re-establish justice, "no matter the circumstances" (e.g. Lerner, 2003, p. 389). Further down the line, injustice can also lead to more thoughtful, systematic appraisal processes, which will, for example, involve withdrawal, future evaluations of deservingness, of responsibility for the injustice and more. Both these processes, the quick-search for someone to blame as well as the careful re-evaluation of deservingness can be linked to political cynicism.

The automatic quick-search for someone to blame is often guided by strong emotions such as anger and a desire for punishment (Lerner, 2003). The emotion of anger, however, is not without political consequences: it is deemed to be at the affective basis of political conservativism (Jost et al., 2003). Studies in politics, using electoral data as well as experimental evidence, further show that anger has the power to mobilise politically (Valentino et al., 2011). In our case, employees' perceptions that they deserve more security and have been unrightfully disadvantaged, is expected to translate into generalized anger and resentment (cf. Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012). This might then not only be directed towards the organizational level and stimulate organizational cynicism (Bernerth et al., 2007; Chiaburu et al., 2013), but be aggregated to society in general, and the political domain in particular.

Moreover, the quick-search for someone to blame, is likely to be informed by principles of perception: people or groups that stand out, or that are traditionally given the blame will be blamed more easily. Indeed, there is evidence that blaming within an organisation follows a proxy logic: the leader of an organisation is blamed as they personify the organisation (Zemba et al., 2006). Job insecurity, at least in public discourse, is often blamed on the state of the economy, the change in employment legislation, or the loss of employment protections (e.g.,

Michael & Hannon, 2019). These developments are difficult to pinpoint to an individual, except perhaps political leaders who failed to set protective legislative measures.

On the more systematic side, the perception of entitlement violation and injustice would encourage a more thoughtful re-evaluation of deservingness and blame (Lerner, 2003). The perception that the exchange relationship has been violated and that the organization (and its leaders) are to blame, could create a sense of withdrawal and disengagement (Cole, Bernerth, Walter, & Holt, 2010; Huang, Wellman, Ashford, Lee, & Wang, 2017). Perceived injustice leads to decreased group or organizational identification, and creates the expectation that future outcomes will also be unfair (Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2001). As work is a central aspect of individuals' self-image as well as of being a member of the working society as a whole (Selenko et al., 2018; Selenko, Mäkikangas, & Stride, 2017; Wroe, 2014), this disidentification might spill-over to other domains of society. In this way, distributive injustice might create a more long-lasting and systematic cynical attitude that includes a withdrawal from society and the expectation that future outcomes will be unfair no matter what.

Empirically, perceived distributive injustice has indeed been shown to lead to withdrawal, a lack of commitment, a decline in trust and negative opinions towards authorities (Colquitt et al., 2001; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). While this might especially manifest itself in organizational spheres (Bernerth et al., 2007; Chiaburu et al., 2013), perceived distributive injustice might also translate into a more general negative attitudes towards leaders, a profound distrust towards the altruistic intentions of others and a withdrawal from society. As a result, we expect experiences of distributive injustice to relate positively to political cynicism.

Hypothesis 2: Distributive injustice relates positively to political cynicism.

While organizational experiences of distributive unfairness have been linked to work outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction and commitment; Randall & Mueller, 1995), the examination

of its transfer to political outcomes has been limited. Our central argument is that subjective experiences of distributive injustice offer a valuable theoretical explanation of how job insecurity translates into political cynicism. To give meaning to the feeling that one has been unfairly exposed to an experience of job insecurity, individuals are prone to blame others for the input-output imbalance and to retract from the unjust context. We thus expect experiences of distributive injustice to mediate the relationship between job insecurity and political cynicism. Our conceptual model is visualized in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 3: Distributive injustice mediates the relationship between job insecurity and political cynicism.

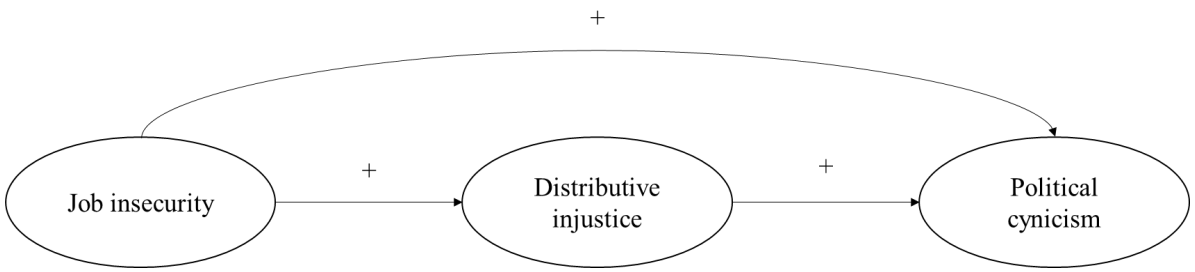

Figure 1. Conceptual model

Method

Procedure and Participants

Data were collected by means of a multi-wave longitudinal design with a four-month time lag starting in June 2016, in collaboration with a survey company; the present results refer to the first three waves of the study. At T1 the company invited people from their pool of respondents who were over 18 years of age, UK residents, and currently employed. People who were interested in participating clicked on a link, and were redirected to an external, secure survey platform hosted by the researchers. The survey company itself did not have access to the data. Participation in the study was anonymous, voluntary, and encouraged via bonus-points as well

as a raffle. The study gained ethics approval from the third author's home institution. At T1, 1,001 employees took part in the study. These individuals were then invited to participate again at T2 and T3. Individual responses could be matched with the help of identifier codes.

We removed all individuals who became unemployed or retired during the course of the study (n = 20). In addition, across waves, we omitted all employees who were or became portfolio workers (n = 5) or self-employed individuals (n = 119), as the focus of this study is on individuals within an employment relationship. The sample consisted of all individuals who were part-time or full-time employed and filled in the survey at least once across three waves (N = 857): 31% only participated at T1, 17% responded at T1 and T2, 5% at T1 and T3, and 47% completed the survey at all three waves.

At T1, the respondents' mean age was 43.7 years (SD = 11.32). The majority of the sample was male (55%), and most employees had a permanent contract (90%). A total of 81% indicated they worked full-time. Of the sample, 2% had no completed education, 21% had a General Certificate of Secondary Education (secondary schooling up to age 16), 20% finished the A-level (additional two years of studying up to age 18), 20% obtained a technical or professional qualification, 24% completed a bachelor's degree, and 13% obtained a postgraduate degree.

Measures

Job insecurity. Employees' perception of job insecurity was measured by means of four items that tap into the perceived risk of losing one's job in the future. This scale has been validated by Vander Elst and colleagues (2014) across five European countries. A sample item is "I think I might lose my job in the future". Response alternatives ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

Distributive injustice. Distributive injustice was measured with three items based on Van Yperen (1996). An example item is "I give a great deal of time and attention to the organization, but get very little appreciation". Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

Political cynicism. Individuals' political cynicism was measured using three items developed by Billiet and De Witte (2008). These items assess a sense of political apathy, distrust and cynicism. A sample item is "There's no sense in voting: the parties do what they want to do anyway". Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale (totally disagree – totally agree).

Covariates. We included several sociodemographic variables to control for possible third variables. For instance, previous research has demonstrated that employees with a fixed contract report greater job insecurity than those with a permanent contract (Keim et al., 2014), and that a precarious employment situation is associated with political distrust (Haugsgjerd & Kumlin, 2020). It may therefore be important to control for contract type, as to ensure that the experience of job insecurity itself is related to political cynicism, rather than the precarious situation which job insecurity reflects. Similarly, both job insecurity and political cynicism or distrust have been related to gender (de Bustillo & de Pedraza, 2010; Hanson et al., 2010), age (Keim et al., 2014; Porter, 2008) and educational level (de Bustillo & de Pedraza, 2010; Pattyn et al., 2012; Wroe, 2014). Consequently, we controlled for age (in years), gender (1 = female), educational level (dummy 1: 1 = highest education GCSE; dummy 2: 1 = highest education A level; dummy 3 = highest education technical/professional education; dummy 4 = highest education bachelor's degree; reference category: postgraduate degree), and contract type (1 = permanent contract).

Analysis

Our data were analysed by means of structural equation modelling, using Mplus version 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). We employed full information maximum likelihood estimation (FIML) for missing data. FIML estimations in structural equation modelling decrease the risk of selective attrition (Asendorpf et al., 2014). In addition, simulation studies have indicated that FIML estimates are more likely to be unbiased and to yield the lowest rate of convergence failures when compared to pairwise or listwise deletion (Enders & Bandalos, 2001).

First, we assessed the factorial structure and fit of our measurements by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis. All items loaded on their respective latent factor at every time point. Item residuals were allowed to correlate with those of corresponding items over time points. Second, we examined the measurement invariance of the scales across the different waves. This is important to ensure that questionnaires measure the same underlying construct with the same structure across time (van de Schoot et al., 2012). This invariance is assessed by comparing a sequence of models, in which the number of restrictions is gradually increased. The initial three-factor measurement model (i.e., configural model; no other constraints) is compared to a model in which factor loadings (i.e., metric invariance), intercepts (i.e., scalar invariance), residual variances (i.e., strict invariance), and correlations between item residuals at adjacent time waves (i.e., full invariance) are fixed to be equal over time.

After evaluating the level of measurement invariance, we added structural paths between the constructs using a cross-lagged panel design. Autoregressive paths between constructs were added to minimize bias in the estimation of the cross-lagged pathways (Cole & Maxwell, 2003). The proposed causal pathways were also added, as well as a direct effect from job insecurity at T1 to political cynicism at T3, since mediation analysis requires controlling for the direct effect when estimating the indirect effect (Rucker et al., 2011). All endogenous variables were regressed on the covariates.

Lastly, we examined whether the effects in the structural model were invariant across time. We first fixed the autoregressive pathways of constructs to be equal across time, after which the paths from job insecurity to distributive justice, and from distributive justice to political cynicism were subsequently fixed. We employed bootstrap analysis (5,000 resamples) based on the best fitting model of this sequence. Bootstrapping treats the sample as a representation of the population, and generates repeated calculations to empirically reconstruct the sampling distribution of the indirect effect (Hayes, 2009). In our analyses, this process was repeated 5,000 times, which results in 5,000 estimates of the indirect effect that are used to generate a *ci*% confidence interval (Hayes, 2009). This method does not require the assumption that the sampling distribution is normal, which is especially useful in determining significance of the indirect effect, since confidence limits for the indirect effect tend to be asymmetric (Hayes, 2009; MacKinnon et al., 2004).

We used the following goodness of fit indices and their respective cut-offs to evaluate model fit: the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR), the two first of which should be above .95, and the two latter of which below .06 and .08, respectively (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Measurement invariance was assessed by using the difference in the CFI and RMSEA, for which a cut-off of ΔCFI 0.01, and ΔRMSEA .015 have been recommended (Chen, 2007; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Time invariance was assessed by means of the Satorra–Bentler scaled difference chi-square test (Satorra & Bentler, 2001). In addition, time invariance was also evaluated by the ΔCFI, as $\chi 2$ statistics are overly sensitive to large sample sizes and might lead to an overly stringent rejection of a model (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations, which were calculated using IBM SPSS 25. All of the relationships were in the expected direction.

Measurement Invariance and Time Invariance

Table 2 presents an overview of the fit of the measurement model and its measurement invariance across time. The measurement model of the configural model demonstrated good fit, with all fit indices adhering to the recommended cut-offs ($\chi 2$ (339) = 502.284, CFI = 0.982, TLI = 0.976, RMSEA = 0.024, SRMR = 0.038). Moreover, the fit of the model did not decrease when sequentially imposing the restrictions of each form of measurement invariance, as demonstrated by the ΔCFI and ΔRMSEA never exceeding the threshold of .01 and .015, respectively. In addition, the Satorra–Bentler scaled difference chi-square test demonstrated that there was no significant difference between the competing models which were compared. We therefore proceeded with the most parsimonious model, namely the full invariance measurement model.

Next, we assessed whether our structural model was invariant across time. As Table 3 demonstrates, the fit of the model did not decrease when constraining the different pathways to be equal over time. In addition, the Satorra–Bentler scaled chi-square difference test indicated that gradually fixing the autoregressive and causal pathways to be equal across waves did not lead to significant differences between the models. Hence, we chose the most parsimonious model of this sequence, that is, a model in which the effects between our study variables are invariant across time.

Hypotheses Tests

After establishing time invariance, we reran our structural model using 5,000 bootstrap resamples, to calculate confidence intervals for the indirect effects. The unstandardized coefficients and confidence intervals of these pathways are demonstrated in Figure 2. The

structural model provided a satisfactory fit to the data ($\chi 2$ (589) =1155.884, CFI = 0.950, TLI = 0.946, RMSEA = 0.034, SRMR = 0.060).

Our results indicate that job insecurity is positively related to distributive injustice, suggesting that job insecure individuals are more likely to experience distributive injustice within their organisation. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, the results showed that feelings of distributive injustice sparked individuals' mistrust in politics, as we found a significant and positive association between distributive injustice and political cynicism, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 2. Last, we hypothesized that distributive injustice would act as an explaining mechanism in the relationship between job insecurity and political cynicism. To test this hypothesis, we calculated confidence intervals for the indirect effect by means of bootstrapping analysis. The results showed that the indirect effect of job insecurity via distributive injustice on political cynicism was significant (B = 0.01, SE = .01, bootstrapped 95% CI [0.001, 0.019]). This lends support to Hypothesis 3, and corroborates the mediating role of distributive injustice. The direct effect from job insecurity at T1 on political cynicism at T3 was not significant (B = -.052, SE = .06, p > .05).

Discussion

This study theorized that being worried about losing one's job would cause employees to feel a deservingness violation in the sense that their employer did not keep their end of the deal, (i.e., by providing job security). We expected that perceived injustice would trigger a blaming posture characterised by mistrust, and, more specifically, cynical feelings (Colquitt et al., 2001). This cynical attitude may spill over to the government and the political parties that stand for it and manifest itself as political cynicism, as prior research has demonstrated that distributive injustice relates to cynical attitudes towards leaders and institutions (e.g., Dirks &

Ferrin, 2002). Hence, we expected distributive injustice to function as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between work (i.e., job insecurity) and politics (i.e., political cynicism).

We provided a unique assessment of our hypotheses by analysing longitudinal data by means of cross-lagged structural equation modelling, thereby allowing for a robust appraisal of the mediating role of distributive injustice in the job insecurity – political cynicism relationship. Our results are in line with our hypotheses, as our findings suggest that job insecurity is positively related to distributive injustice, which is, subsequently, positively associated with political cynicism, across time. The results also provided support for the mediation hypothesis, since distributive injustice mediated the relationship between job insecurity and political cynicism. We did not find a significant direct effect between job insecurity at time 1 and political cynicism at time 3, but only found an indirect effect. Hence, it appears that especially the social-psychological experiences of disadvantage and deprivation arising from a job insecure situation fuel politically adverse attitudes. This is in line with prior research, which suggests that experiences linked to precariousness (e.g., job insecurity) relate to societal and political attitudes in an indirect way (Meuleman et al., 2019; Pettigrew et al., 2008; Van Hootegem et al., 2018).

Our study has a number of theoretical implications. First, we contribute to the political cynicism literature by demonstrating that the work domain contributes to the way in which political attitudes are shaped. By advancing job insecurity and distributive injustice as important antecedents of political cynicism, we evidenced how personal work-related experiences shape political sentiments both indirectly and directly, respectively. Second, our study provides new insights for the job insecurity literature. While previous research has demonstrated that job insecurity might cause employees to become cynical about their job (e.g., Shoss et al., 2016) and about their organisation (e.g., Brandes et al., 2008), the current study is, to our knowledge, the first to demonstrate that job insecurity may also cause employees to

become cynical about the political landscape. By considering an outcome outside the spheres of the job and the organisation, we extend research on the consequences of job insecurity. Third, related to these contributions, our study demonstrates how experiences related to contemporary political and economic developments might feed into each other. This indicates that rather than being independent, the rise of economic and political insecurities seem to be intrinsically connected (Hacker et al., 2013; Wroe, 2014). Rather than assuming that economic interests unambiguously explain political behaviour, as is often done in public discourse, this study provides an empirical assessment of the complex relationship between economic precariousness and political attitudes. Consequently, our study opens the door for future studies to more systematically examine the link between job insecurity and the electoral consequences of political cynicism, in terms of, for instance, extreme right-wing voting (Van Assche et al., 2019).

Although this study has a number of contributions, there are also a few limitations to consider. A first limitation concerns the relatively small effect size of the indirect effect via distributive justice. This might partly be explained by the autoregressive stability of our variables over time, as most of their variance was explained by their prior assessment. Since we were still able to find significant effects despite the stability of our constructs, we believe the studied relationships are relevant to investigate. Second, our study was conducted in a particular national context, which might complicate the generalizability of our findings to other countries. The United Kingdom, where our data were collected, is not only characterized by a rather steep increase in perceived of job insecurity relative to other European countries (Lübke & Erlinghagen, 2014), economic securities caused by austerity are also deemed to be strongly linked to political behaviour such as the Brexit-vote (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2018). Consequently, future research would benefit from adopting a comparative lens that can determine whether the found effects are specific or diffuse across countries. Last, in

determining the relationship between work experiences and political attitudes, our scope was necessarily restricted. Although job insecurity is clearly at the forefront of employees' mind and is hence important to investigate (Wroe, 2014), other work stressors might be equally important in studying political cynicism and behaviour. To further grasp how work experiences and economic insecurities spill-over to the political domain, the investigation of other work stressors would thus prove to be fruitful.

Conclusion

The current study advanced an explanatory mechanism for the relationship between job insecurity and political cynicism. In particular, drawing on social-exchange principles, we investigated the mediating role of distributive injustice. Our results indicate that employees who experience job insecurity feel that they did not get what they deserve (i.e., distributive injustice). These injustice perceptions subsequently fuel into political cynicism, in which workers distance themselves from politicians and the political system. These research findings highlight the importance of work-conditions in shaping political behaviour, and indicate that, indeed, work is political.

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Table 1

Means. standard deviations and correlations for the study variables

		M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1.	Age	43.70	11.3	-															
2.	Male	.45	.50	-.09*	-														
3.	Permanent contract	.90	.30	.07*	-	-													
4.	GCSE	.23	.42	.22**	-	-	-												
5.	A level	.20	.40	-.14**	-	-	-	-											
6.	Technical/professional	.20	.40	.16***	-	-	-	-	-										
7.	Bacherlor's	.24	.43	-.12**	-	-	-	-	-	-									
8.	JIT1	2.78	.63	.01	.02	-.09**	.01	-.02	-.04	-.01	-								
9.	JIT2	2.80	.65	-.04	-.04	-.06	.03	-.03	-.08	.01	.62**	-							
10.	JIT3	2.78	.62	-.08	-.01	-.14**	-.03	-.03	.00	-.01	.47**	.58**	-						
11.	DIT1	3.18	1.05	-.06	-.03	.01	-.07*	.04	-.02	.05	.31**	.32**	.35**	-					
12.	DIT2	3.22	.98	-.03	.00	.02	-.02	-.02	-.06	.00	.29**	.39**	.33**	.65**	-				
13.	DIT3	3.18	.99	-.04	.04	.00	-.04	.03	-.01	-.05	.33**	.37**	.35**	.61**	.65**	-			
14.	POLCYNT1	2.90	.86	-.18**	-.07*	.01	.09**	.01	-.02	-.05	.12**	.13**	.13**	.14**	0.08	0.09	-		
15.	POLCYNT2	2.85	.93	-.11*	-.06	-.03	.09*	-.04	.02	-.04	.16**	.18**	.18**	.21**	.17**	.12*	.63**	-	
16.	POLCYNT3	2.86	.96	-.09	-.08	-.08	.06	.02	.03	-.10*	.14**	.14**	.16**	.19**	.13*	.16**	.64**	.65**	-

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01; T = time point; JI = job insecurity; DI = distributive injustice; POLCYN = political cynicism

Table 2

Measurement invariance

Model no.	Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	ΔRMSEA	SRMR	CFI	ΔCFI	TLI	Comparison to model no.
1	Configural invariance	502.284	339	0.024		0.038	0.982		0.976	
2	Metric invariance	544.885	353	0.025	.001	0.042	0.979	.003	0.974	1
3	Strong invariance	571.146	367	0.025	0	0.043	0.978	.001	0.974	2
4	Strict invariance	591.317	387	0.025	0	0.046	0.977	.001	0.974	3
5	Full invariance	610.637	397	0.025	0	0.046	0.977	0	0.974	4

Note: all models fitted using a robust maximum likelihood estimator; Model 2 = factor loadings equal across time; Model 3 = factor loadings and intercepts equal across time; Model 4 = factor loadings, intercepts, and residual variances equal across time; Model 5 = factor loadings, intercepts, residual variances and correlations between item residuals at adjacent time waves are fixed equal over time

Table 3

Time invariance of the structural model

Model no.	Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	ΔCFI	TLI	Comparison to model no.	Satorra-Bentler corrected $\Delta\chi^2$
1	Baseline model (all causal paths free to differ across time)	1038.154	584	0.031	0.059	0.953		0.948		
2	Autoregressive paths fixed equal across time	1040.863	587	0.031	0.060	0.953	0	0.948	2	2.613
3	Paths from JI to DI fixed equal across time	1040.876	588	0.031	0.060	0.953	0	0.948	3	.102
4	Paths from DI to PC fixed equal across time	1044.468	589	0.031	0.060	0.953	0	0.948	4	3.342

Note: all models fitted using a robust maximum likelihood estimator; JI = job insecurity; DI = distributive injustice; PC = political cynicism

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

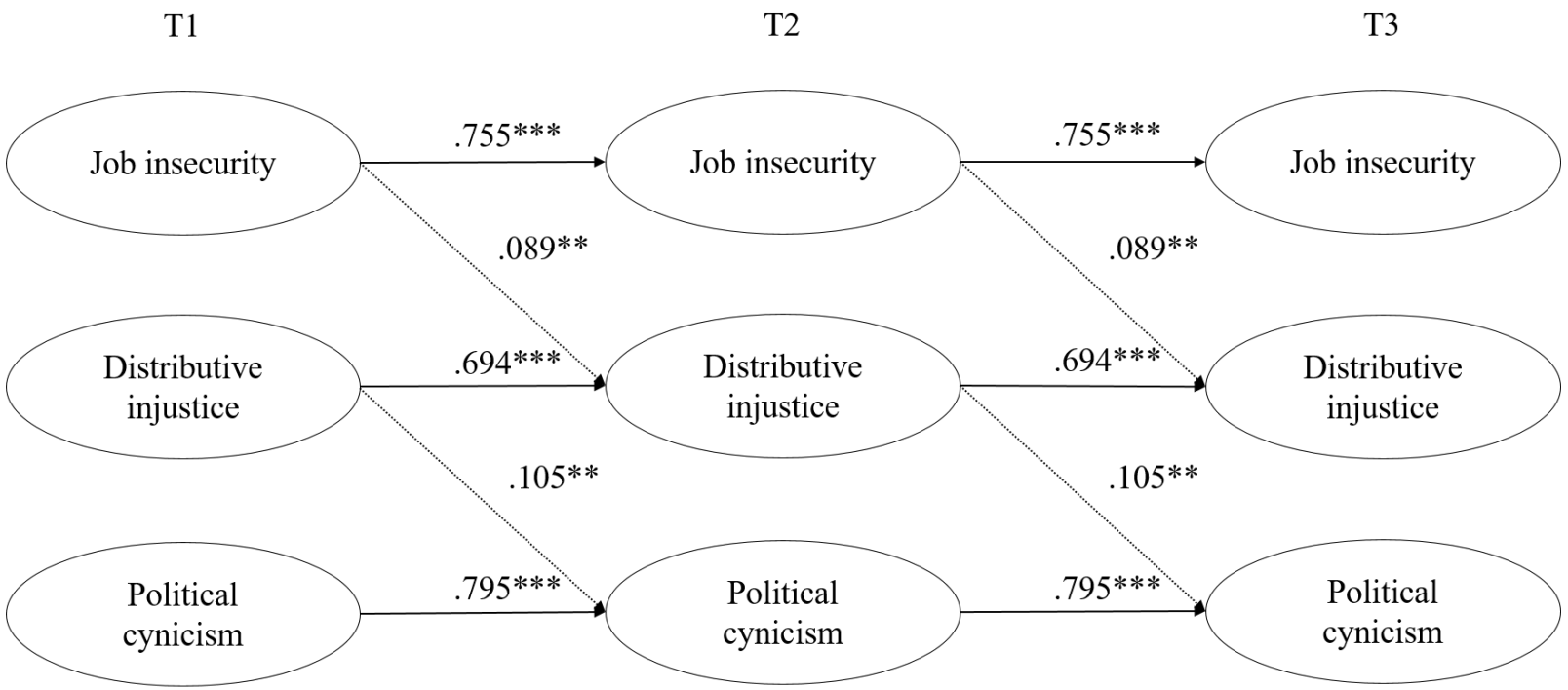

Figure 2. Structural equation model with unstandardized path coefficients and confidence intervals. Control variables are omitted for clarity, as well as the direct effect between job insecurity at T1 and political cynicism at T3, which was insignificant.