The Concept of Status in International Politics

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Abstract. Although there is increasing agreement that status matters in international relations, there is far less agreement about what status is. While some definitions insufficiently differentiate status from the qualities of states, and especially their material capabilities, others excessively differentiate status from closely related terms or from existing definitions in related disciplines. In this paper, I address these points of contention by using a Weberian approach to conceptualize status and map its relationship with two key concepts: identity and power. At the basic level, I define status as an actor's position in a hierarchy based on social esteem. Placing status at the intersection of identity and power, I posit that it involves two necessary dimensions: recognition (or respect) and hierarchy (or ranking). First, status requires recognition: for an actor to achieve a particular status, others need to recognize it. Second, status involves hierarchy: depending on their level of social esteem, actors gain access to certain privileges. The proposed concept reduces conceptual confusion by highlighting the distinctively social nature of status and promotes dialogue by integrating two streams of research that emphasize, respectively, the hierarchy dimension and the recognition dimension. I conclude with a discussion of implications for the measurement of status.

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1 Introduction

The last decades have witnessed renewed interest in status in International Relations (IR). During the twentieth century, as scholars privileged material factors in the study of international politics, status only appeared in two strands of research: in classic theories developed by realist scholars (Gilpin 1981; Morgenthau 1948), and in early quantitative studies of the relationship between status dissatisfaction and war (e.g., Midlarsky 1975; Wallace 1973). In the 1980s and 1990s, interest in status reached a low ebb as the discipline made a shift toward rationalism. Only at the turn of the twentieth-first century did a few studies eventually give rise to the current wave of research on status. Drawing from diverse traditions, studies in this wave provide overwhelming evidence that the search for status motivates state behavior (Gilady 2018; Mukherjee 2022; Musgrave and Nexon 2018) and may even cause wars (Barnhart 2016; Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth 2014; Renshon 2017).

But while there is increasing agreement that status matters in international politics, there is far less agreement about what status is. IR scholars agree that status is a social phenomenon. At its core, status involves a social position as recognized by others. In addition, many definitions link status to hierarchy. At the same time, a review of existing definitions reveals two points of contention. On the one hand, some definitions insufficiently differentiate status from material capabilities—either explicitly, by defining status as a function of valued attributes that typically include military and economic capabilities; or implicitly, by associating status with hierarchy or rank, which are commonly assumed to have a material basis in IR. This approach obscures the social nature of status, rendering it a residual category that is used when traditional factors like security or survival cannot adequately account for state behavior. On the other hand, some definitions excessively differentiate status either from closely related terms, such as honor and respect, or from existing definitions of status in related disciplines. The proliferation of definitions leads to conceptual confusion and an unnecessary fragmentation in the study of status, creating a divide between those approaches that emphasize hierarchy and those that emphasize recognition.

In this paper, I address these points of contention by using a Weberian approach to conceptualize status and map its relationship with two other key concepts: identity and power. At the basic level, I define status as an actor's position in a hierarchy based on social esteem. Placing status at the intersection of identity and power, I posit that it involves two necessary dimensions: recognition (or respect) and hierarchy (or ranking). First, status requires recognition: for an actor to achieve a particular status, others need to recognize it. As such, state attributes affect status only indirectly, because of what they communicate about a state's quality; moreover, the symbolic value of state attributes depends on social conventions. Second, status involves hierarchy: depending on their level of social esteem, actors gain access to certain privileges. As such, status inequalities among states have major political implications. By itself, neither recognition nor hierarchy constitutes status. Only when both dimensions are present are we dealing with status.

The proposed concept offers two advantages. First, it clearly differentiates status from the qualities of states, including their material capabilities. Rather than equating status to the things that states have, I define status based on a social process: social esteem. By analytically distinguishing status from material capabilities, this paper helps move status from its current position as a residual category to its rightful place as a concept central to the study of international politics. Second, by encompassing both recognition and hierarchy, the proposed definition integrates two streams of research that rarely come into dialogue: research inspired by the realist tradition, which usually emphasizes the hierarchy dimension; and research inspired by social psychology and political philosophy, which usually emphasizes the recognition dimension. Rather than adopting an either/or approach, I posit that status necessarily involves both dimensions. In making this argument, I build on important research that has made strides in overcoming the dichotomy between status as power and identity (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021; Bartelson 2013; Pouliot 2017; Wohlforth et al. 2018). The paper concludes by discussing implications for the measurement of status.

2 Existing Definitions of Status

Table 1 shows the definitions of status and related terms in the IR literature, mapping the background concept of status. To begin, Table 1 reveals important points of agreement. Most scholars agree that status is a social phenomenon. In particular, status involves a social position as recognized by others. In addition, many definitions mention aspects related to hierarchy and power—such as rank, deference, privileges, and legitimacy. At the same, Table 1 also reveals two points of contention in the study of status.

2.1 Problem One: Insufficient Differentiation

First, some definitions insufficiently differentiate status from material resources, as they define status as a function of valued attributes that typically include military or economic capabilities. Foundational work by realist scholars defines prestige as a state's reputation for military strength, explicitly linking status to material capabilities. Building on this work, the first definitions of status shown in Table 1 connect status to the possession of valued attributes, which typically include material capabilities. But as Duque (2018) notes, this approach mistakes social relations for the qualities of actors, assumes that social inequalities result from the qualities of actors, and often equates status with the possession of material resources—ultimately reducing the concept's analytical usefulness. Insufficiently differentiated from material resources, status remains a residual category, invoked when a given phenomenon cannot be explained using other factors.

Other definitions of status shown below in Table 1 start to address this problem by adopting a more relational approach—defining status based on social position, and especially position in a social hierarchy. But because materialist conceptions of hierarchy are still dominant in the discipline, it would be useful to further differentiate status from material resources by specifying the kind of hierarchy that status involves. As Weber (1978) notes, social hierarchies may be based on different dimensions. Drawing on these insights,

Table 1. Definitions of Status and Related Terms in the IR Literature

Term	*Definition*	*Author(s)*
Status	A group's standing on some trait valued by society	Larson and Shevchenko (2010, 69)
	Collective beliefs about a state's ranking in valued attributes	Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014, 7)
	Attributes of an individual or social roles, especially those attributes related to position in a deference hierarchy	Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth (2014, 373)
	Collective perceptions of one's position vis-à-vis a comparison group, based on estimations of how one's characteristics rank relative to others	Barnhart (2020, 16)
	An actor's position within a social hierarchy, as recognized by others based on consensually valued characteristics	Ward (2017, 35)
	An actor's standing or rank in a hierarchy composed of the group of actors that a state perceives itself as being in competition with	Renshon (2017, 4)
	A role that entails symbolic equality with higher-status actors	Mukherjee (2022, 22)
	A successful claim to social esteem that involves privileges	Duque (2018, 580)
Prestige	A reputation for power, and military power in particular	Gilpin (1981, 31)
	The reputation for power, which is based on military strength	Morgenthau (1948, 55)
Honor	The desire to stand out among one's peers	Lebow (2008, 5)
	A quality within the individual as perceived by the group	O'Neill (2001, 244)
Recognition	An inter-subjective relation constructed through rapport between an actor's asserted image and the image returned by others	Lindemann (2011, 70)
	A social act in which another actor is constituted as a subject with legitimate social standing	Murray (2010, 660)
	Acceptance by others of one's existence as a subject of a certain kind	Ringmar (2002, 119)
Respect	Acceptance by others of the position one expects to deserve	Wolf (2011, 106)

IR scholars observe that states can differentiate themselves based on different dimensions: material resources, social esteem, or authority (Keene 2014; Schulz 2019). Incorporating their insights, I propose below a concept of status that builds on these relational approaches by highlighting the distinctive features of status hierarchies.

2.2 Problem Two: Excessive Differentiation

Second, some definitions excessively differentiate status either from closely related terms or from existing definitions of status in related disciplines. As Table 1 shows, IR scholars use many different terms—ranging from status to honor and respect—to discuss a similar notion, creating what Sartori (1975, 7-9) calls a "Tower of Babel trend."[1]

To be sure, a concept should be bounded or differentiated from other concepts. A clear conceptualization delineates the semantic field in which a concept is located, differentiating it from neighboring concepts (Gerring 1999, 375-79). Under certain circumstances, further differentiation may be desirable—for example, if there are aspects of a phenomenon that are important enough to justify the creation of subtypes. As Collier and Levitsky (1997, 435) note, the creation of subtypes of democracy, such as parliamentary or federal, provides an example of useful differentiation: while each subtype can be included in the general definition of democracy, it also highlights important aspects that the broader concept of democracy neglects. However, the strategy of making a definition more specific to highlight certain aspects or to capture new cases should be used with caution, for three reasons: (1) it unsettles the semantic field in which scholars are working; (2) it tends to provoke definitional gerrymandering, or scholarly disputes over definitions; and (3) it is bound to create confusion and miscommunication (Collier and Levitsky 1997, 444-45).

As Gerring (1999) observes, excessive differentiation tends to compromise the other desirable features in a concept. First, excessive differentiation compromises a concept's *familiarity*, or the extent to which it resonates with established use. Since closely related terms are

[1] See also Sartori 1984, 38, 52-53.

used interchangeably in everyday language, fine-grained distinctions among them tend to be idiosyncratic, and therefore hard to understand and recall. Second, excessive differentiation compromises a concept's *parsimony*, since strict definitions tend to involve an extensive list of attributes used to distinguish one term from another. Third, fine-grained distinctions tend to reduce a concept's *depth*, or its "ability to bundle characteristics" (Gerring 1999, 380). As a concept gets more differentiated, it emphasizes more specific aspects of a phenomenon, therefore providing a narrower picture of that phenomenon. Fourth, excessive differentiation undermines a concept's *field utility* because it unnecessarily limits both (1) the range of scholarly communities using the concept and (2) the range of phenomena the concept is meant to cover. By highlighting certain aspects of a phenomenon while ignoring others, definitions that privilege differentiation ultimately narrow the scope of enquiry. Finally, and as a result, the *theoretical utility* of such definitions—that is, their usefulness for theory development and assessment—also becomes restricted.

Accordingly, excessive differentiation compromises other desirable features in the concept of status. The proliferation of definitions causes conceptual confusion, reducing the concept's familiarity and parsimony; and leads to fragmentation in the study of status, reducing the concept's field utility and theoretical utility. A review of existing research reveals a lack of dialogue between two camps, which roughly map onto the different terms shown in Table 1. On the one hand, some approaches emphasize the positional nature of status. Foundational work in the realist tradition, which treats status as a means to an end (Morgenthau 1948, 550-56), informs recent research using the term "status." On the other hand, some approaches emphasize honor, respect, or recognition—treating status as an end in itself. Drawing from political philosophy or social psychology, these approaches treat status as an intrinsic human motivation. Because each approach focuses on different dimensions of the same phenomenon, fragmentation ultimately reduces the concept's depth.

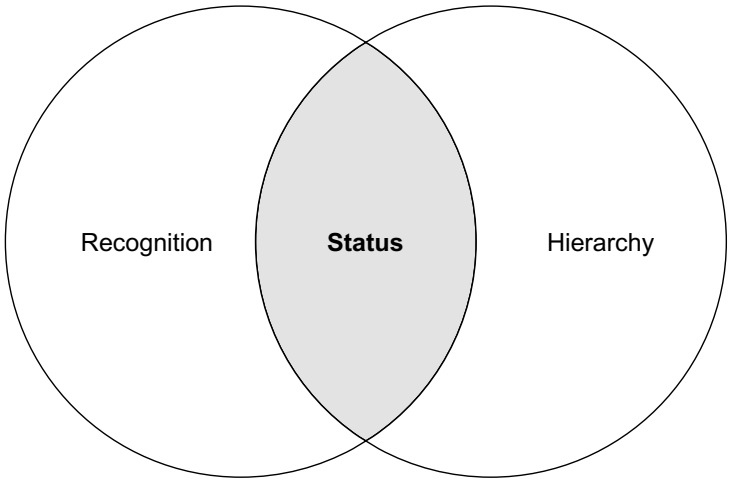

Figure 1. Necessary Dimensions of the Concept of Status

3 The Necessary Dimensions of Status

In this paper, I address these points of contention by consciously exploring the trade-offs involved in the process of defining status. To move from a background concept to a systematized concept based on an explicit definition (Adcock and Collier 2001, 530), I integrate relational approaches in IR with Weberian approaches in sociology (Lamont 2001; Ridgeway 2014; Scott 1996). I use the framework of "three-level" concepts, whereby a concept comprises three levels ranging from most to least abstract: the basic level, the secondary level, and the indicator level (Goertz 2006). At the basic level, I define status as an actor's position in a hierarchy based on social esteem. At the secondary level, the proposed concept involves two necessary dimensions: recognition and hierarchy. I understand each dimension as a necessary but insufficient condition of status. As such, status operates at the intersection of both dimensions, as shown in Figure 1. The two dimensions constitute status, rather than causing it. That is, the relationship between the basic-level concept and the secondary-level dimensions is one of identity rather than one of causation.

In conceptualizing status, I seek a balance among the desirable features in a concept: differentiation, familiarity, parsimony, depth, field utility, and theoretical utility (Gerring 1999). I differentiate status from related terms in three ways. First, I differentiate status

from the qualities of states by developing a concept that emphasizes social esteem rather than state attributes. Second, I differentiate status from hierarchy by linking status to a specific kind of hierarchy, based primarily on social esteem rather than material resources or authority. Finally, I define the semantic field of status by examining its relationship with two important concepts in the study of politics: identity and power. I understand status as closely related to identity and power, such that in practice they are rarely found in isolation. Specifically, because status necessarily involves both recognition and hierarchy, it lies at the intersection of identity and power. Yet analytically, status cannot be reduced to either identity or power because each concept involves distinctive dimensions.

At the same time, I limit differentiation by incorporating both recognition and hierarchy into the concept of status. Instead of differentiating status from closely related terms such as recognition or respect, I conceive of status as a complex phenomenon with two interrelated dimensions. I understand recognition and hierarchy as necessary conditions of status, rather than as independent dimensions that should be studied separately. This enables me to reduce conceptual confusion and promote scholarly dialogue, straddling the divide between those approaches that emphasize the hierarchy dimension and those approaches that emphasize the recognition dimension. Next, I discuss each dimension in more detail.

4 The First Dimension: Recognition (or Respect)

Recognition is the first necessary dimension in the proposed concept of status. For an actor to achieve a particular status, others have to recognize it. The mere aspiration for a given status is not enough to achieve it; rather, a successful claim to status requires external recognition. While a state may claim to be a great power, for example, great-power status requires that other states accept such claim as legitimate. In fact, existing research highlights prominent examples of aspiring great powers, such as Wilhelmine Germany or Russia since the time of Peter the Great, who failed to achieve the desired recognition (Murray 2010; Neumann

2008; Renshon 2017). As such, status cannot be reduced to the intentions or aspirations of a given actor; rather, it requires recognition from a broader community.

Status involves social esteem, or a "social estimation of honor" that may be connected with any type of symbol—or attribute with a socially-recognized meaning (Weber 1978, 932). Because status depends on social esteem, actor attributes play only an indirect role in the process of status recognition: they convey information about an actor's quality. As Weber (1978, 926, 936) notes, material resources do not determine status, even though the two dimensions may correlate in practice. Status relations are analytically distinct from class relations: whereas wealth is the currency in the latter, social honor is the currency in the former. High-status actors adamantly oppose claims to base social ranking exclusively on material resources, as the fulfillment of these claims would undermine the status hierarchy. If material resources determined status, status relations would collapse into class relations, and the nouveau riche would enjoy the same privileges as old money.

At its core, status involves identification processes in which an actor gains admission into a club if they are deemed to follow its membership standards (Clunan 2014, 279). As Weber (1978, 305, 538, 932) notes, the main expression of status refers to the identification with a group's way of life—that is, a set of behaviors and practices expected from group members (see also Scott 1996, 31). In the international context, for example, admission into formal clubs such as the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) depends on standards like liberal democracy. What is more, deviations from a group's standards tend to evoke disapproval from the group, potentially culminating in the actor's expulsion. Since Russia started to invade Ukraine in 2014, for example, it has been suspended from international fora such as the G7, the Council of Europe, and the UN Human Rights Council.

Actor attributes become relevant for status recognition because of their symbolic value, which depends on the social context. In particular, symbolic value depends on social conventions that shape a group's way of life (or its membership standards), determining the kinds

of symbols and privileges that should go together (Weber 1978, 319-24). Social conventions reflect prevailing interpretations of what it means to be an upstanding group member entitled to the corresponding privileges. As social psychologists note, social conventions provide the basis for informational social influence: they describe what is commonly done and inform behavior via example (Deutsch and Gerard 1955). During social interactions, actors use the behavior of others as evidence of reality; by observing what others do, one can choose how to act in a given context (Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren 1990).

Because status symbols vary across societies, are frequently chosen arbitrarily, and may lose relevance over time, the search for the ultimate status symbol is of little interest (Weber 1978, 387). What is puzzling, instead, is how social divisions can perpetuate themselves even after the initial reasons for status distinctions are forgotten (Scott 1996, 32). Because social conventions depend on the social context, they are bound to change along with the prevailing practices and discourse in a group. As Elster (1989, 12) notes, conventions work like equilibria: they matter because actors converge around them, rather than because of their specific content. Neither do conventions reflect an actor's superior taste or intrinsic status: "The snob follows the social norm, while believing that he simply has superior taste. When the norm changes, his preferences change with it. It is not that he has a taste for conformity, only that his tastes conform to those of others. The behavior of others is the cause of his utility function, not an argument in it" (Elster 1989, 108).

Importantly, external recognition and social conventions do not obviate one another. On the one hand, social conventions do not imply that recognition is merely declaratory—or that club membership follows automatically once an actor meets certain standards, regardless of external recognition. The political act of recognition cannot reduced to a technicality just because certain standards of membership exist. As Davis (2023) notes, for example, international organizations maintain flexible rules of accession by design, so that accession ultimately remains a matter at the discretion of existing members. On the other hand, membership standards do not become irrelevant just because recognition is a discretionary act.

On the contrary: to be legitimate, acts of recognition typically have to be grounded on the pertinent standards of membership. Social conventions thus work as legitimating heuristics in the inherently political process of recognition. Status recognition often involves public processes of justification—that is, the giving of reasons that requires acceptance (publicly if not privately) from the broader community (see Goddard 2018; Jackson 2002). As Mukherjee (2022) observes, instability arises when actors start to challenge institutions they perceive as closed to newcomers and procedurally unfair.

4.1 Status and Identity

Because status requires recognition, the concepts of status and identity partially overlap. To clarify their conceptual relationship, I compare them using Brubaker and Cooper's conceptualization of identity. As Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 14, 20) note, the term "identity" has disparate meanings in the social sciences, which results in ambiguity and conceptual confusion. To address this problem, they propose a set of terms that focus on specific meanings associated identity, disaggregating the general concept of identity into five terms: (self- and external) identification, self-understanding, commonality, connectedness, and groupness.[2] Given their active and processual nature, these terms provide the added advantage of highlighting *who* conducts the act of identification.

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual relationship between status and identity. While the two concepts partially overlap, each concept involves distinctive features. On the one hand, status overlaps with identity through the recognition dimension, which is a necessary condition of status. In particular, recognition maps onto four of the dimensions of identity. First, since effective claims to status require recognition, status implies *external identification*—or how an actor is identified by others. Second, because the principal expression of status refers to the identification with a group and its distinctive way of life, status also involves *groupness*—or "the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group" (Brubaker

[2]We can treat each of these terms as a sufficient condition for the concept of identity, since each term can be used separately, in lieu of the more general concept of identity.

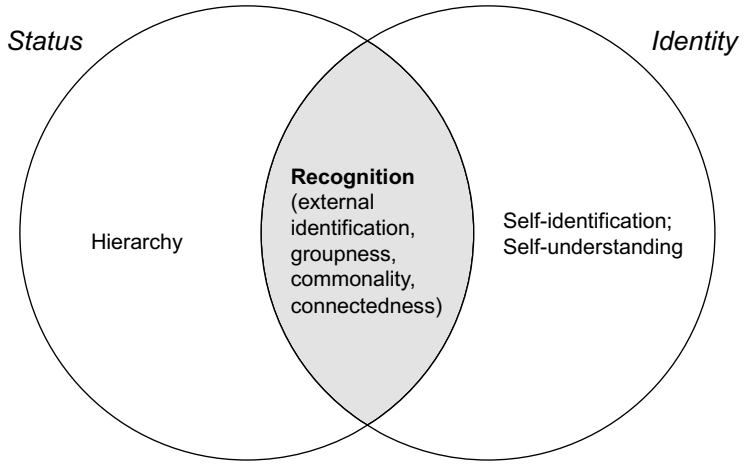

Figure 2. Conceptual Relationship Between Status and Identity.
Notes: Comparison between the proposed concept of status and the concept of identity proposed by Brubaker and Cooper (2000).

and Cooper 2000, 20). Third, because high-status groups differentiate themselves from outsiders by adopting distinctive symbols, status involves *commonality*—or the sharing of common attributes. Fourth, because identification with a group often imposes restrictions on social contact, relations tend to become dense within the group but sparse with outsiders. As such, status also involves *connectedness*—or the sharing of relational ties.

While status partially overlaps with identity, each concept also involves distinctive dimensions. On the one hand, identity involves two dimensions—self-identification and self-understanding—that are not necessary for status. To begin, status does not necessarily involve *self-identification*, or how the actor identifies themselves. As Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 15) note, self- and external identification need not converge, even though the two aspects influence one another. Likewise, status need not involve *self-understanding*—that is, "one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 17). While status involves identification processes that occur at the social level, both self-identification and self-understanding refer to identification processes that occur at the actor level. In fact, the distinction between status (a social-level process) and self-identification or understanding (actor-level processes) enables us to understand why the two aspects sometimes mismatch in practice. The distinction be-

tween these terms captures precisely the notion of status dissatisfaction that is central in IR scholarship: Status-dissatisfied states lack the recognition they expect from other states—that is, they are treated in a way that does not comport with their self-identification or self-understanding. To account for status dissatisfaction, it is therefore useful to keep status analytically distict from these actor-level processes.

On the other hand, while status partially overlaps with identity, it involves a second necessary condition—hierarchy—that is not necessary for identity. To understand why, it is useful to consider the distinction sociologists draw between symbolic and social boundaries. As Lamont and Molnár (2002, 168) put it, *symbolic boundaries* are "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space," while *social boundaries* are "objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities." That is, while social boundaries imply social exclusion, symbolic boundaries do not. Therefore, we can think of symbolic boundaries as a necessary but insufficient condition for social boundaries. Likewise, social psychologists draw a similar distinction between social categorization and prejudice (Brewer 1999; Duckitt 2003). On the one hand, social categorization refers to an automatic process whereby people are classified into groups. This basic cognitive process simplifies the social world and gives it meaning. In and of itself, social categorization does not imply positive or negative affect. By contrast, prejudice refers to a negative attitude toward a group. We can thus think of social categorization as a necessary but insufficient condition for prejudice. Drawing on these insights, I understand recognition as a necessary but insufficient condition for status.

5 The Second Dimension: Hierarchy (or Ranking)

Besides recognition, status involves hierarchy—a specific kind of hierarchy, based on social esteem rather than material resources directly (Keene 2014; Schulz 2019). Status implies

privileges: depending on their level of social esteem, actors acquire differential access to certain opportunities and resources. In the formation of the modern international system, for example, European territorial states gradually consolidated their position as legitimate political actors, at the expense of non-state and non-European actors; even as the system's institutions eventually expanded to include non-European polities, recognition hinged on assimilation into European standards (Naylor 2022; Viola 2020).

Status inequalities have major political implications. On the one hand, high status comes with important privileges. During the twentieth century, for example, those states recognized as great powers acquired special rights and responsibilities, consolidated in institutions like permanent membership in the UN Security Council (UNSC) (Bukovansky et al. 2012, 26-34; Gilpin 1981, 34-39). By virtue of their status as great powers, some states got a permanent seat at the table—enjoying considerable latitude in determining which political units become recognized as sovereign, which instances of force are deemed violations of international norms, and who becomes the object of multilateral sanctions. Not only do the great powers of an era manage international relations through institutions like the UNSC, but they also set the foundations of international order in the first place (Gilpin 1981; Ikenberry 2001)—typically in their own image, based on their own practices and values (Kupchan 2014; Pitts 2018). In so doing, great powers arrogate to themselves the ability to act in the name of the international community as a whole (Clunan 2014, 281-87; Thompson 2009). Penned mostly by delegates from the U.S., Britain, and the USSR, the UN Charter has universalistic ambitions nonetheless (Simpson 2004, 165-93; Steil 2013).

While high status implies exorbitant privilege, low status brings severe disadvantage: it implies exclusion (Adler-Nissen 2014; Zarakol 2014). To begin, most states lack the prerogatives associated with great-power status, exerting limited influence over the formation of international orders or their management. For example, as European diplomats gathered in the 1814 Congress of Vienna to negotiate a continental treaty that would shape international order, deliberations mostly happened during informal meetings among representatives

from the then great powers—Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia. Although the Congress's Final Act (1815) paid lip service to the principle of sovereign equality, the other delegates in attendance merely signed a treaty prepared by the great powers, without being afforded the right to a formal vote (Jarrett 2013, 69-157; Simpson 2004, 112-13). Similarly, at San Francisco in 1945, the UN founding members voted on a foundational treaty whose key principles had largely been defined by the Big Four (the U.S., Britain, the USSR, and China) the previous year at Dumbarton Oaks (Simpson 2004, 165-93; Steil 2013). Since then, non-permanent members in the UNSC participate in deliberations on a rotating basis, for a limited period, and without the ability to veto resolutions.

In addition, marginalized states have often been denied basic rights associated with statehood itself. Since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) codified the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign actors, those states deemed as "uncivilized" or "outlaw" states have enjoyed limited sovereignty nonetheless. In the nineteenth century, European states used force to impose treaties on China, Japan, and Siam—who ceded land, opened trade ports, or granted extraterritorial rights to European citizens, despite not obtaining similar privileges in return (Kayaoğlu 2010; Cassel 2012). Europeans justified such actions based on a self-proclaimed standard of civilization, which divided the world between "civilized" Europeans and "uncivilized" non-Europeans (Keene 2002). Whereas sovereign equality and mutual toleration served as cornerstones for relations among Europeans, relations with outsiders took the form of a civilizing mission. The sovereignty of non-Europeans became divisible, as they were considered sovereign enough to sign bilateral treaties but not to retain autonomous control of their own territories or policies.

In the twentieth century, the international community restricted the sovereignty of "outlaw" states—those deemed to violate international norms, such as Iraq during the Gulf War—and subjected to forms of protection or guarantee those entities seen as less than states due to their perceived weakness, backwardness, or decay—such as Bosnia or Afghanistan (Donnelly 2006, 146-51; Simpson 2004). In fact, the range of domestic actions that may elicit

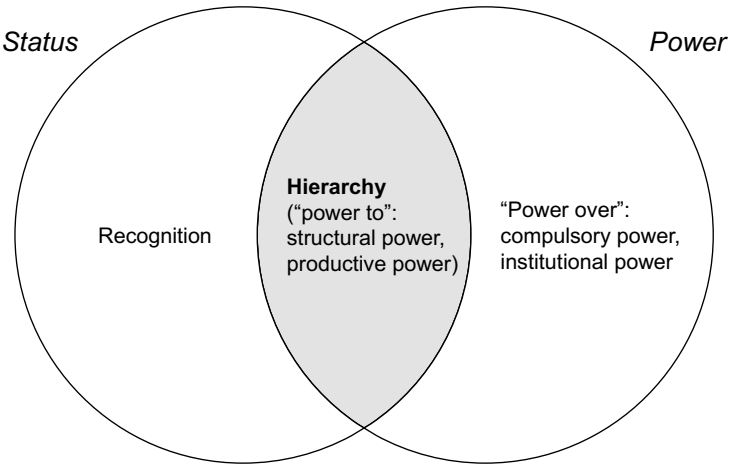

Figure 3. Conceptual Relationship Between Status and Power.
Notes: Comparison between the proposed concept of status and the concept of power proposed by Barnett and Duvall (2005).

international intervention has expanded since 1945. Those states deemed as disrespecting human rights, such as South Africa during the apartheid or Syria under Bashar al-Assad, are subject to multilateral sanctions and military intervention (Donnelly 1998). As the examples indicate, states need to maintain a certain way of life to be recognized as sovereign and enjoy the corresponding privileges. For those who fail to meet such standards, restrictions to sovereignty may be perceived as legitimate and even necessary.

5.1 Status and Power

Because hierarchy is a necessary dimension of status, the concept of status partially overlaps with the concept of power. Barnett and Duvall (2005, 45) define power broadly as "the production, in and through social relations, of effects on actors that shape their capacity to control their fate." I use their conceptualization as a baseline for comparison because it integrates, under a unified framework, different uses of the concept of power.

Figure 3 illustrates the conceptual relationship between status and power. While the two concepts partially overlap, each involves distinctive features. On the one hand, status overlaps with power through the hierarchy dimension, which is a necessary condition of

status. Specifically, status involves hierarchy based on social esteem. This type of hierarchy maps well onto the notion of "power to"—the socially produced power of an actor that derives from "how social relations define who the actors are and what capacities and practices they are socially empowered to undertake" (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 46).[3] Much like "power to" is present in social relations of constitution, status involves identification processes in which actors are recognized as members of a group and thus gain access to the corresponding privileges. Status involves the socially produced power of an actor that derives from how social relations constitute actors' identities, practices, and social capacities.

In Barnett and Duvall's taxonomy, "power to" takes two forms: structural and productive power. Both forms of power are related to status. First, status hierarchies involve structural power—that is, the mutual constitution of actors' social positions in direct relation to one another (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 52-55). Structural power shapes the circumstances and fates of actors by constituting their interests and differentially allocating social privileges and capacities. Accordingly, in status hierarchies, actors obtain differential access to privileges depending on their levels of social esteem. On account of being recognized as great powers, for example, certain states become entitled to privileges like permanent membership in the UNSC. Second, status hierarchies involve productive power—that is, the diffuse constitution of social subjects in systems of signification and meaning through discursive practices (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 55-57). Productive power shapes the circumstances of actors by situating their everyday practices, thus defining the imaginable and the possible; and by discursively constituting social identities and capacities. Accordingly, in status hierarchies, discursive practices constitute social identities and capacities by determining the kinds of symbols and privileges that should go together. Since the nineteenth century, for example, a Western standard of civilization has served to categorize certain states as "modern" or "civilized," and therefore entitled to privileges like indivisible sovereignty.

[3]In John Scott's taxonomy, power that works in relations of social constitution is termed "persuasive influence" and is considered to have two main forms, signification and legitimation, which "operat[e] respectively through shared cognitive meanings and shared value commitments" (Scott 2001, 129).

While status partially overlaps with power, each concept involves distinctive dimensions. On the one hand, status involves a necessary dimension (recognition) that is not necessary for power. On the other hand, the second dimension of power is not necessary for status. "Power over," which is present in social relations of interaction among previously constituted actors, takes two forms: (1) compulsory power, or the ability to exert direct control over another state by means of coercion; and (2) institutional power, or the indirect control by one actor of another through the use of institutions (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 49-52). In practice, status may correlate with compulsory or institutional power: High-status actors may acquire privileges that enable them to coerce other actors, or may set their privileges in stone using institutions like the UNSC. However, neither type of power is necessary for status. Status works primarily through relations of constitution, which involve "power to" rather than "power over." At its root, status involves the creation of categorical differences among actors that serve to justify their differential access to privileges.

6 Implications for Future Research

This paper considers the tradeoffs involved in defining status. By defining status based on social esteem, it differentiates status from the qualities of states, including their material capabilities. To enhance familiarity, it proposes a definition of status that is consistent with a rich tradition of research in allied disciplines while avoiding the use of jargon. To ensure parsimony, the proposed concept reduces a complex phenomenon to two dimensions—hierarchy and recognition—with well-defined attributes. By bundling two aspects traditionally considered in isolation, the concept acquires depth. The proposed definition enhances the field utility of status by broadening the range of scholarly communities that can use the concept as well as the range of phenomena the concept is meant to cover. Integrating approaches that emphasize recognition and hierarchy respectively, this definition places status at the intersection of identity and power. While status partially overlaps with either concept, it

also involves distinctive dimensions. By highlighting the distinctively social nature of status, the proposed definition enhances the theoretical utility of status.

This paper establishes conceptual foundations for future research. To begin, it opens new avenues for theorizing the role of status in world politics—laying out the foundations for studying status not only as a motivation for state behavior, but also as a potential mechanism for international cooperation and the maintenance of international order on the one hand, or international conflict and instability on the other. Because status lies at the intersection of identity and power, it can be understood both as an end in itself and a means to other ends. As an increasing body of research demonstrates, moreover, the search for status may produce not only aggression and conflict, but also cooperation and engagement with international institutions (Mukherjee 2022; Wohlforth et al. 2018).

In addition, the proposed definition has implications for the operationalization of status in empirical studies. One of the main empirical challenges lies in linking the more abstract concept to observations intended to capture its main ideas (Adcock and Collier 2001, 531). At the abstract level, I define status as an actor's position in a hierarchy based on social esteem. At the secondary level, status involves two necessary dimensions: recognition and hierarchy. At the indicator level, a concept becomes concrete enough to guide data collection and analysis (Goertz 2006, 50-53). Because status involves both recognition and hierarchy, a good measure of status should capture both dimensions. More precisely, a valid measure of status should capture acts of recognition that create social inequalities.

That is, operationalizations of status should take into account two crucial features. First, status is a social phenomenon, which emerges from social relations rather than directly from the qualities of actors. While actors may rely on status symbols to evaluate one another, status ultimately depends on social recognition. Accordingly, good measures of status should reflect social relations rather than actor attributes. Though intuitive, attempts to measure status based on certain attributes considered important for status attainment—for example by ranking states based on their resources in a given issue area—fail to capture

the social nature of status. Second, status has fundamental behavioral implications: it implies the differential treatment of actors depending on their levels of social esteem. Because international hierarchies of status emerge from international practices—such as granting recognition or withholding it, attaching symbolic meaning to certain state attributes, or granting exclusive privileges to those states recognized as great powers—the measurement of status should focus on practices rather than perceptions (Pouliot 2014, 192-200). Attempts to measure status based on actors' complaints about how they are treated capture a mismatch between self- and external identification, rather than status per se.

To effectively capture the necessary dimensions of status, future research would benefit from the use of relational and behavioral measures. As Agné et al. (2013, 101) note, international law "is the primary resource for identifying empirical acts of recognition" in international relations. In International Law, recognition refers to the "acknowledgement of the existence of an entity or situation indicating that full consequences of that existence will be respected" (Peterson 1997, 1). Three acts of recognition create inequalities among actors, and could therefore provide valid measures of status: (1) the recognition of a state, (2) the establishment of diplomatic relations, and (3) the establishment of diplomatic representation (Brown 1936; Kelsen 1941, 605). The admission of states into clubs—via international agreements or accession to international organizations—likewise combines recognition and hierarchy, providing another valid measure. Operationalized in this way, the concept of status can reach its full capacity in the study of international politics.

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