The Concept of Status in International Politics

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Abstract. Although there is increasing agreement that status matters in international politics, there is far less agreement about what status is. Existing definitions insufficiently differentiate status from material capabilities or excessively differentiate status either from closely related terms or from existing definitions in the social sciences. In this article, I draw on the concept formation methodology in the tradition of Giovanni Sartori to conceptualize status. Following the Weberian tradition in the social sciences, I define status as an effective claim to social esteem that involves privileges. As a concept at the intersection of identity and power, status involves two necessary dimensions: recognition (or respect) and hierarchy (or ranking). First, status requires recognition: for a state to achieve a particular status, others need to recognize it. Second, status involves hierarchy: depending on their level of social esteem, states become entitled to certain privileges. The proposed concept offers important advantages: (1) it emphasizes the fundamentally social nature of status; and (2) it integrates research traditions that rarely come into dialogue: the mainstream literature on status and conflict, which usually treats status as a means to an end; and the literature on recognition, which usually treats status as an end in itself.

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1 Introduction

The last decades have witnessed a ressurging interest in status in International Relations (IR). During the twentieth century, as scholars privileged material factors in the study of international politics, status 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., East 1972; Midlarsky 1975; Wallace 1973). In the 1980s and 1990s, interest in status reached a low ebb as the discipline made a shift toward rationalism, focusing on individual choice and material factors (Markey 1999, 130-32; Wohlforth and Kang 2009, 1). Only at the turn of the twentieth-first century did a few studies give rise to the current wave of research on status (Larson and Shevchenko 2003; Schweller 1999; Wohlforth 2009). 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; Murray 2010; Renshon 2017).

But while there is increasing agreement that status matters in international politics, there is far less agreement about what status is. In particular, a review of existing research reveals two limitations. On the one hand, mainstream definitions tend to 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 explicitly, by associating status with hierarchy or rank, which are commonly assumed to have a material basis. As a result, status remains a residual category in the study of international politics, used when traditional factors like security or survival cannot adequately account for state behavior. On the other hand, existing definitions excessively differentiate status either from closely related terms—such as honor, recognition, and respect—or from existing definitions of status in the social sciences. The proliferation of definitions leads to conceptual confusion and an unnecessary fragmentation in the study of status, creating a divide between approaches that treat status (1) as a means to other ends or (2) as an end in itself.

In this article, I draw on the concept formation methodology in the tradition of Giovanni Sartori (1970, 1975) to conceptualize status in international politics. Following the Weberian tradition in the social sciences (Lamont 2001; Ridgeway 2014; Weber 1978), I define status as an effective claim to social esteem that involves privileges. As a concept at the intersection of identity and power, status involves two necessary dimensions: recognition (or respect) and hierarchy (or ranking). On the one hand, status requires recognition: for a state to achieve a particular status, others need to recognize it. On the other hand, status involves hierarchy: depending on their level of social esteem, states become entitled to certain privileges. By itself, neither dimension constitutes status. Rather, both dimensions are necessary for status. Only when both dimensions are present are we dealing with status.

The proposed concept offers two important advantages. First, it clearly differentiates status from material capabilities. Rather than equating status to the qualities of states or they things that they have, I define status based on social processes (recognition and social esteem). By analytically distinguishing status from material capabilities, this article 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, the proposed concept promotes scholarly dialogue. By developing a concept of status that encompasses both recognition and hierarchy, I integrate two research traditions in IR that rarely come into dialogue: the mainstream literature on status dissatisfaction and conflict, which usually treats status as a means to an end; and the literature on recognition, which usually treats status as an end in itself. Rather than adopting an either/or approach, I posit that status—much like power (Baldwin 2002)—can be either an end in itself or a means to other ends.

The first section below begins by discussing existing definitions of status in IR. Next, the second section introduces the methodology I use to conceptualize status. To define status, I consciously explore the trade-offs among the desirable features in a concept (Gerring 1999, 2012). In addition, I use the framework of three-level concepts and the structure of necessary and sufficient conditions (Goertz 2006). At the abstract level, I define status as an effective

claim to social esteem that involves privileges. At the intermediate level, status involves two necessary dimensions: recognition and hierarchy. The third section of the article discusses the recognition dimension, while the fourth section discusses the hierarchy dimension. In both sections, I define the semantic field of status by examining the relationship between status and two important concepts in the study of politics: identity and power. In particular, I locate status as a concept at the intersection of identity and power.

2 Existing Definitions of Status

Table 1 shows the definitions of status and related terms in the IR literature, establishing the background concept of status—that is, "the constellation of potentially diverse meanings associated with" (Adcock and Collier 2001, 530) status in the discipline. To begin, the table reveals common themes in the study of status, highlighting its fundamental aspects. On the one hand, mainstream definitions emphasize the positional nature of status (or prestige), associating either term with hierarchy or rank. On the other hand, related definitions emphasize the symbolic nature of status, focusing on dimensions like honor, recognition, or respect. In addition, Table 1 reveals two limitations in the study of status. First, mainstream definitions tend to insufficiently differentiate status from material capabilities, since they define status as a function of valued attributes that typically include military and economic capabilities. Insufficiently differentiated from material capabilities, status becomes a residual category in the study of international politics. Second, existing definitions excessively differentiate status either from closely related terms—such as honor, recognition, and respect—or from existing definitions of status in the social sciences. The proliferation of definitions leads to conceptual confusion and an unnecessary fragmentation in the study of status. Next, I discuss each of these limitations in turn.

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

Term	*Definition*	*Author(s)*
Status	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)
	Attributes of an individual or social roles, especially those attributes related to position in a deference hierarchy	Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth (2014, 373)
	Collective beliefs about a state's ranking in valued attributes	Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014, 7)
	A group's standing on some trait valued by society	Larson and Shevchenko (2010, 69)
	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)
	An actor's position within a social hierarchy, as recognized by others based on consensually valued characteristics	Ward (2017, 35)
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); Morgenthau (2006, 89-90)
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)

2.1 Problem One: Insufficient Differentiation

On the one hand, mainstream definitions emphasize a fundamental aspect of status: its positional nature. But in doing so, these definitions tend to insufficiently differentiate status from material capabilities. To begin, foundational work by realist scholars defines prestige

as a state's reputation for military strength, explicitly linking status to material capabilities. Building on this early work, more recent definitions connect status with the possession of valued attributes, which typically include material resources such as military or economic capabilities. But as Duque (2018) notes, this approach leads to generalized fetishism, as it mistakes social relations for actors' properties; incurs a fallacy of composition, since it assumes that social inequalities result from the properties of actors; and induces material reductionism, as it often equates status with material resources. If status refers to material capabilities plus an error term, it is not clear why we need the concept of status in the first place. By equating status with the possession of material resources, scholars reduce the analytical usefulness of status. Insufficiently differentiated from material capabilities, status remains in the background in IR theories, invoked when a given phenomenon cannot be explained using traditional factors like security or survival.

Some definitions partially address this problem by equating status to a state's position in a hierarchy. For example, Renshon (2017, 4) defines status as "*standing or rank in a status community*," whereas a status community refers to "a hierarchy composed of the group of actors that a state perceives itself as being in competition with." Similarly, Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth (2014, 373) define status as "attributes of an individual or social roles, especially those attributes related to position in a deference hierarchy." However, these definitions stop short of specifying what kind of hierarchy status involves; as a result, they fall back into materialist conceptions of hierarchy, which are dominant in the discipline. But as sociologists have long noted, social hierarchies may be based on different dimensions (Weber 1978). In the international context, states can differentiate themselves based on three dimensions: material resources, social esteem, or authority (Keene 2014; Schulz 2019). To increase the analytical usefulness of status, we thus need to specify the kind of hierarchy it involves. Specifically, an effective differentiation of status requires specifying how status hierarchies are analytically distinct from hierarchies based on material resources.

2.2 Problem Two: Excessive Differentiation

While mainstream definitions insufficiently differentiate status from material capabilities, the proliferation of definitions produces the opposite limitation: excessive differentiation. In particular, existing definitions tend to excessively differentiate status either (1) from closely related terms, such as honor, recognition, and respect; or (2) from existing definitions of status in the social sciences. 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) calls a "Tower of Babel trend."[1] As Gerring (2012, 113) puts it:

> Older concepts are redefined, leaving etymological trails that confuse the unwitting reader. New words are created to refer to things that were perhaps poorly articulated through existing concepts, creating a highly complex lexical terrain (given that old concepts continue to circulate). Words with similar meanings crowd around each other, vying for attention and stealing each other's attributes. Thus, we play musical chairs with words, in Giovanni Sartori's memorable phrase.

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 ones (Gerring 1999, 375-379; Gerring 2012, 127-30). In some cases, 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

[1] See also Sartori 1975, 9; Sartori 1984, 38, 52-53.

gerrymandering, or scholarly disputes over definitions; and (3) it is bound to create confusion and miscommunication (Collier and Levitsky 1997, 444-445).[2]

As Gerring (1999, 2012) 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 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 get 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.

In the case of status, excessive differentiation compromises the other desirable features in a concept. To begin, the proliferation of definitions causes conceptual confusion, reducing the concept's familiarity and parsimony. Moreover, it leads to an unnecessary fragmentation of the study of status, reducing the concept's field and theoretical utility. In particular, 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, mainstream approaches emphasize hierarchy or rank, treating status (or prestige) as a means to an end. Foundational work in the realist tradition draws from economics research to highlight the positional nature

[2]See also Collier and Mahon 1993; Sartori 1970.

of prestige. This approach informs more recent research using the term "status." On the other hand, alternative approaches emphasize honor, respect, or recognition—treating status as an end in itself. Drawing from political theory or social psychology, these approaches place status as an intrinsic human motivation, rather than as a means to achieve goals like security or wealth. But by focusing on specific dimensions of the same phenomenon, existing definitions ultimately reduce the concept's depth.

3 Concept Formation Methodology

In this article, I move from a background concept of status to a systematized concept based on an explicit definition (Adcock and Collier 2001, 530). To conceptualize status, I rely on the methodology of concept formation in the tradition of Giovanni Sartori, which allows me to consciously explore the trade-offs involved in the process of defining status. In addition, I draw from a rich tradition of research in the social sciences. My point of departure is Weber's landmark definition of status, extensively used in sociology (Lamont 2001; Ridgeway 2014; Scott 1996). Weber (1978, 305) defines status as "an effective claim to social esteem in terms of positive or negative privileges." Based on this definition, I develop a concept of status that encompasses two dimensions: recognition and hierarchy. I understand each dimension as a necessary but insufficient condition of status. By itself, neither dimension constitutes status; only when both dimensions are present are we dealing with status. As shown in Figure 1, I consider status to operate at the intersection of both dimensions.

To define status, 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, most abstract level, I define status as an effective claim to social esteem that involves privileges. At the secondary level—which connects the basic level to the more concrete indicator level—the proposed concept involves two key dimensions: recognition and hierarchy. The two dimensions constitute status, rather

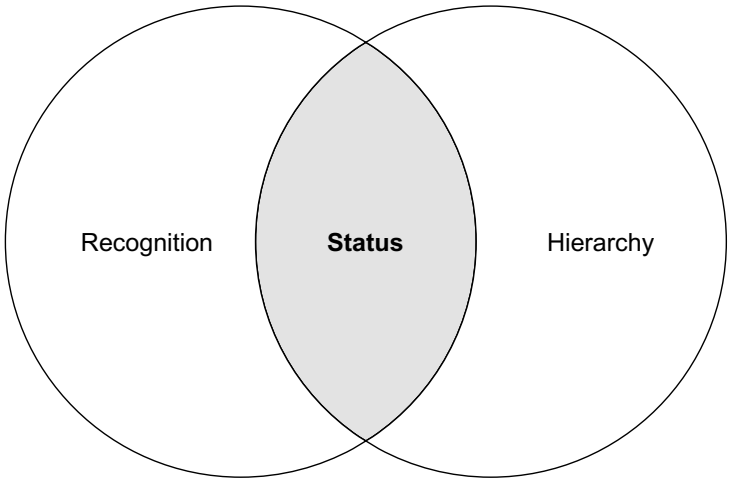

Figure 1. Necessary Dimensions of the Concept of Status

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. I construct the concept of status as an ideal type, such that its extension (or the range of cases it covers) is zero or almost zero (Goertz 2006, 83-85; Sartori 1970, 1041).

My conceptualization seeks a balance among the desirable features in a concept: differentiation, familiarity, parsimony, depth, field utility, and theoretical utility (Gerring 1999, 2012). On the one hand, I *differentiate* status from related terms in three ways. First, I differentiate status from material capabilities by developing a concept that emphasizes social esteem rather than the qualities of states or the things that they have. Second, I differentiate status from hierarchy by connecting status to a specific kind of hierarchy, based on social esteem rather than based on material resources or authority. Finally, I define the semantic field of status by examining the relationship between status and 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, I locate status as a concept 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 curtail excessive differentiation by incorporating both recognition and hierarchy into my definition of status. Instead of differentiating status from closely related terms—such as prestige, honor, recognition, or respect—I conceive of status as a complex phenomenon with two deeply interrelated dimensions: recognition and hierarchy. Drawing on the Weberian tradition in the study of status (Fraser 2000, 2001; Ridgeway 2014), I posit that both recognition and hierarchy constitute necessary conditions of status, rather than independent dimensions that should be studied separately. This approach enables me to reduce not only conceptual confusion but also the unnecessary fragmentation of the study of status. As a result, my definition of status offers an important advantage: it integrates two research traditions in IR that rarely come into dialogue. In particular, my definition straddles the divide between (1) mainstream approaches that emphasize the hierarchy dimension, treating status as a means to an end; and (2) alternative approaches that emphasize the recognition dimension, treating status as an end in itself.

By seeking just the right amount of differentiation, the proposed concept meets the criteria that make for a good concept in the social sciences. First, my definition of status is consistent with a rich tradition of research in the social sciences while avoiding the use of jargon—thus enhancing the concept's *familiarity*. Second, my conceptualization reduces a complex phenomenon to two dimensions with a few well-defined attributes, ensuring the concept's *parsimony*. Third, I bundle two aspects usually considered in isolation in IR—hierarchy and recognition—to develop a *deeper* concept that captures the fundamental aspects of status. Fourth, 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, my definition enhances the concept's *field utility*. Finally, by highlighting the distinctive features of status, my definition enhances the concept's *theoretical utility*.

In the next two sections, I discuss in more detail each of the necessary dimensions of my concept of status—recognition and hierarchy.

4 The First Dimension: Recognition (or Respect)

Recognition is the first necessary dimension in my concept of status. As Weber notes, status involves "an effective claim to social esteem": 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 depends on whether other states consider that claim as legitimate. In fact, the historical record contains 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 2018; 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.

As Weber (1978, 932) observes, status involves social esteem, or a "social estimation of honor" that may be connected with any type of symbol—that is, an attribute with a socially recognized meaning. 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 (Form and Stone 1957; Goffman 1951). 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. In fact, high-status groups 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 access to the same privileges as does old money.

Status primarily involves identification processes in which an actor gains admission into a club once 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.[3] 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 typically result in disapproval from the group, potentially culminating in expulsion from the group. For example, since it invaded Crimea in 2014 and Ukraine in 2022, Russia has been suspended from international fora such as the G7, the Council of Europe, and the UN Human Rights Council.

The symbolic value of a given attribute—that is, what it communicates about an actor's quality—depends on social conventions that shape a group's way of life, or its membership standards (Weber 1978, 34, 307, 319-24). Social conventions regulate status recognition, determining the kinds of symbols and privileges that should go together. Conventions are socially shared, and can be written or unwritten. As social psychologists note, 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 (Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren 1990; Shaffer 1983). When it comes to status recognition, social conventions reflect prevailing interpretations of what it means to be an upstanding group member entitled to the corresponding privileges.

From a theoretical standpoint, social conventions are the most interesting feature of status. To Weber (1978, 387), the search for the ultimate status symbol—or the attribute originally used for status distinctions—is of little interest. Status symbols vary across societies, are frequently chosen arbitrarily, and often become less relevant over time. What is puzzling, instead, is how conventions can perpetuate social divisions, even the initial reasons for status distinctions are forgotten (Scott 1996, 32). Because conventions depend on social legitimation, they are bound to change over time, along with the prevailing practices and

[3] See also Scott 1996, 31.

discourse within 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. Counterintuitively, conventions do not reflect an actor's intrinsic superior taste or 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, recognition and conventions do not obviate one another. On the one hand, 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.[4] The political act of recognition cannot reduced to a technical issue just because certain standards of membership exist. On the other hand, membership standards do not become irrelevant just because recognition is a discretionary or political act. To the contrary: to be legitimate, acts of recognition typically have to be grounded on the pertinent standards of membership.[5] 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).

4.1 Status and Identity

Because recognition is a necessary dimension of status, the concepts of status and identity partially overlap. To clarify the conceptual relationship between status and identity,

[4]The literature on state creation in international law makes a similar point. Even though membership in international society is usually conditioned on criteria such as control over a territory and population, state recognition remains a matter at the discretion of the recognizing state. See Kelsen 1941, 605, 609-10. See also Coggins 2011; Österud 1997.

[5]The literature on state creation in international law makes a similar point. The recognition of a new state that does not fulfill the criteria for statehood is considered a violation of international law, as it infringes upon the rights of the existing state from which the new state attempts to separate. See Kelsen 1941, 610; Lauterpacht 1944, 391-396. It is no coincidence that states usually coordinate their acts of recognition, so as to avoid positions that may be perceived as illegitimate. See Crawford 1996.

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, Brubaker and Cooper 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.[6] Given their active and processual nature, these terms provide the added advantage of highlighting *who* conducts the identification or categorization of a given actor. For these reasons, I choose Brubaker and Cooper's taxonomy as a baseline for comparison.

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual relationship between status and identity. As the figure shows, 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 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.

But 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 conditions of status. To begin, status does not necessarily involve *self-identification*, or how the actor identifies themselves. As Brubaker and

[6] 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.

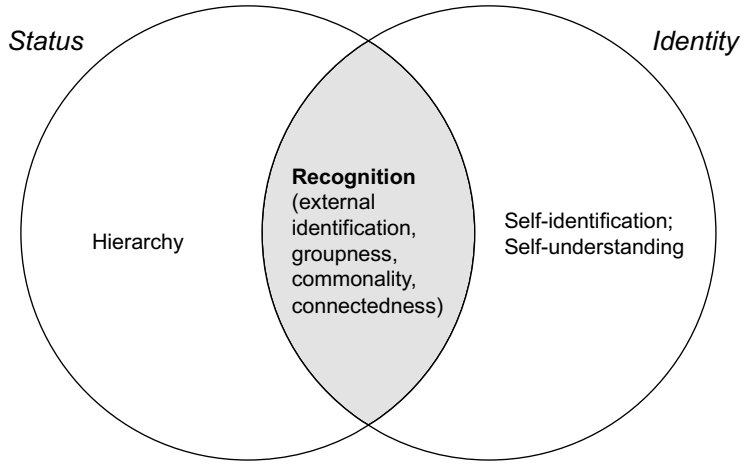

Figure 2. Conceptual Relationship Between Status and Identity.
Notes: Comparison between my concept of status and the concept of identity proposed by Brubaker and Cooper (2000).

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 processes that occur at the actor level. In fact, the distinction between status (a social-level process) on the one hand, and self-identification or understanding (actor-level processes) on the other hand, enables us to understand why the two sometimes mismatch in practice. The distinction between 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 understanding. To account for status dissatisfaction, we thus need to keep status analytically distinct 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 a necessary for identity. To understand why, it is useful to consider the distinction sociologists draw between symbolic boundaries 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, hierarchy is the second necessary dimension of status. As Weber (1978, 305) puts it, status refers to "an effective claim to social esteem *in terms of positive or negative privileges*."[7] Crucially, status involves privileges: depending on their level of social esteem, actors acquire differential access to certain opportunities and resources. As such, status inequalities among states 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; Bull 2002, 196; Gilpin 1981, 34-39). By virtue of their status as great powers, some states got a permanent seat at the table—enjoying

[7]Emphasis added.

considerable latitude in determining which political units become recognized as sovereign states; which instances of force are deemed as legitimate acts of self-defense or violations of international norms; and who becomes the object of multilateral sanctions or military intervention. 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; Schroeder 1986)—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; Hurd 2007; Thompson 2009). Penned mostly by delegates from the U.S., Britain, and the USSR, the UN Charter has universalistic ambitions nonetheless (Hoopes and Brinkley 1997; Simpson 2004, Ch. 6). Signed by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill as Britain gradually transferred the baton of global hegemony to the U.S., the Atlantic Charter laid out a set of goals for the entire world once the Second World War came to an end.

While high status implies exorbitant privilege, low status brings severe disadvantage: it implies exclusion (Adler-Nissen 2014; Zarakol 2011, 2014), reaching its nadir with restrictions to state sovereignty itself. To begin, most states lack the prerogatives associated with great power status, exerting only limited influence over the formation of international order or its management (Lascurettes 2020; Mukherjee 2022; Viola 2020). In 1814, for example, as European diplomats gathered in the Congress of Vienna to negotiate a continental treaty that would shape the international order, deliberations mostly happened during informal meetings among representatives from the great powers of the time—Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia. Even though 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 founding members of the UN voted on a foundational treaty whose key principles had largely been defined by the Big

Four—the U.S., Britain, the USSR, and China—in the previous year at Dumbarton Oaks (Hoopes and Brinkley 1997; Simpson 2004, Ch. 6; Steil 2013). Since then, non-permanent members in the UNSC participate in deliberations on a rotating basis, for a limited two-year period, and without the ability to veto draft 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 military force to impose bilateral treaties with 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 (Gong 1984; Schwarzenberger 1955). As Keene (2002) notes, whereas sovereign equality and mutual toleration served as cornerstones for relations among Europeans, relations with outsiders took the form of a civilizing mission. Unlike the sovereignty of Europeans, 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, moreover, the international community restricted the sovereignty of "outlaw" states—those deemed to violate international norms, such as Iraq in 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 international intervention has expanded since 1945. Those states deemed as disrespecting human rights, such as South Africa during the apartheid or Syria under the Bashar al-Assad regime, are subject to multilateral sanctions and military intervention (Donnelly 1998). In recent decades, the Responsibility to Protect doctrine has legitimized intervention

in those states deemed unable to protect human rights. As these examples indicate, states need to maintain a certain way of life in order to be recognized as sovereign and enjoy the corresponding privileges. For those who fail to meet international standards, restrictions to sovereignty may be perceived as legitimate and even necessary.

5.1 Hierarchy Based on Social Esteem

While status involves hierarchy, it cannot be reduced to hierarchy for two reasons. First, status requires not only hierarchy but also recognition. Second, status involves a specific kind of hierarchy—one based on social esteem, rather than based on material resources or authority. As Weber (1978) notes, actors differentiate themselves based on different dimensions.[8] Accordingly, some IR scholars posit that states can differentiate themselves based on three dimensions: material resources, social esteem, or authority (Keene 2014; Schulz 2019). Although the different kinds of hierarchy may influence one another, each type corresponds to an analytically distinct domain. Because hierarchies may be based on dimensions other than social esteem, status is not the same as hierarchy.

Importantly, hierarchies based on social esteem differ from hierarchies based on material resources. As Goode (1978) notes, the realm of status differs fundamentally from the realm of the market (constituted by the competitive exchange of material resources). Status relations contrast with competitive exchange because each operates under a distinct logic. To begin, status relations involve primarily social groups rather than individual actors (Goode 1978, 8, 13, 65). Status evaluations rely on standards established at the group level, as an emerging property. No single actor chooses the standards that the group will use to evaluate status claims; rather, the group reaches a working consensus about how to evaluate status claims. Likewise, no single actor determines the status of a given actor; rather, the group is the ultimate evaluator of status claims. What is more, the group also evaluates the responses of its members to specific status claims: if the group judges a member's response as "incorrect,"

[8]See also Scott 1996.

the member's credibility within the group may be compromised. As Saunders (2006) notes in the international context, many countries rejected the use by U.S. policymakers of the "rogue state" label to categorize countries like Iran and North Korea in the 1990s—and accordingly, opposed the policies proposed by Washington towards these countries.

Because status relations involve primarily social groups, they lack the voluntaristic character of competitive exchange. As Goode (1978, 14) observes, "one can leave the economic market, except for consumption, but one cannot leave the realm of prestige." An actor cannot opt out of status relations, since they will be evaluated even if they try to seclude themselves. In fact, the very act of secluding oneself will be considered in status evaluations. For example, while North Korea may sever its economic ties with most countries in the world, opting out of the global trading system, it cannot opt out of status evaluations. Pyongyang's seclusion does not prevent other countries from evaluating it as an autocratic or deviant state. As the example indicates, status evaluations encompass all kinds of action, across domains or issue areas. And because status evaluations necessarily involve the group, actors are not free to renegotiate the terms of their status evaluations in the same way they are free, in the market, to renegotiate the terms of their contracts.

In addition, while competitive exchange is a means to an end, status relations are not purely instrumental, for two reasons (Goode 1978, ix–xi, 6–11). First, in status relations, the violation of group expectations elicits disapproval, disesteem, or exclusion; that is, it affects the relationship itself, rather than involving a mere penalty. Whereas competitive exchange is a means to obtain benefits, status relations are valued intrinsically. Without social relations, actors cannot form a stable sense of self—which is a necessary condition for preference formation in the first place. As such, an actor's identity or self-worth does not merely correspond to another term in their utility function. As research on ontological security shows, states may become attached to certain relationships even at the expense of their very physical security (Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2005). Similarly, status-seeking (or disrespected) states may be willing to compromise their very security or

survival for the sake of recognition (Barnhart 2016; Lanoszka and Hunzeker 2015; Murray 2010). These patterns are puzzling from an instrumental standpoint, since states cannot enjoy status if they do not exist to begin with. But more broadly, they indicate that status motivations do not always comport with instrumental reasoning.

Second, unlike competitive exchange, status relations require an element of authenticity. As Goode (1978, ix) notes, an actor cannot will admiration or respect; rather, status evaluations "must rely on beliefs about *worth*, or the justice of giving rewards to this or that organization or person, the rightness of privileges that are enjoyed by different [groups]." If status motivations were purely instrumental, one would expect every actor to strive for the highest standing possible, with an eye on the corresponding privileges. But instead, psychology research finds that actors often opt for a lower status rank. In particular, actors settle for low status when they believe that they would fail to meet the group's expectations toward high-status actors (Anderson et al. 2012). In the international context, we likewise observe that not all states seek great power status. Rather, aspiring great powers tend to be those states who could plausibly fit the prevailing expectations for great power status. It is no coincidence that the salience of status motivations often varies with a country's performance. For example, while status motivations were salient in Brazil's foreign policy during the first Lula administration—that is, under the favorable economic conditions of the 2000s—they waned as economic conditions subsequently worsened. Overall, status relations involve a sense of fairness that escapes a purely instrumental logic.

5.2 Status and Power

Because hierarchy is a necessary dimension of status, the concept of status partially overlaps with the concept of power. To clarify the conceptual relationship between status and power, I compare the main dimensions of each concept using Barnett and Duvall's conceptualization 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

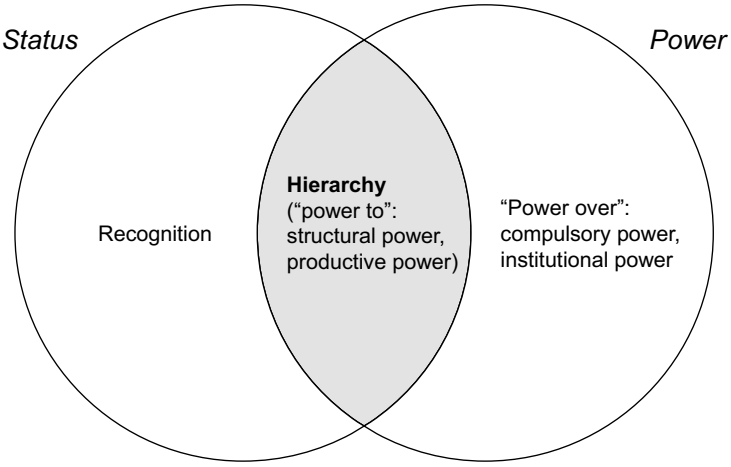

Figure 3. Conceptual Relationship Between Status and Power.
Notes: Comparison between my concept of status and the concept of power proposed by Barnett and Duvall (2005).

use their conceptualization as a baseline for comparison because it integrates, under a unified framework, different uses of the concept of power.[9]

Figure 3 illustrates the conceptual relationship between status and power. As the figure shows, while the two concepts partially overlap, each concept involves distinctive features. On the one hand, status overlaps with power through the hierarchy dimension, which is a necessary condition of status. In particular, status involves a specific kind of 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).[10] As Barnett and Duvall note, "power to" is present in social relations of constitution. Likewise, status concerns primarily identification processes in which actors are recognized as members of a group, therefore gaining access to the corresponding privileges.

[9]Barnett and Duvall's taxonomy roughly maps onto Digeser's four faces of power. To Digeser (1992, 980), each face of power addresses a different question: "Under the first face of power the central question is, 'Who, if anyone, is exercising power?' Under the second face, 'What issues have been mobilized off the agenda and by whom?' Under the radical conception, 'Whose objective interests are being harmed?' Under the fourth face of power the critical issue is, 'What kind of subject is being produced?'"

[10]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).

As such, 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 of these 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—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.

But 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).[11]

[11] See also Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Baldwin 2002.

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 Conclusion

Using concept formation methodology, this article develops a systematized concept of status. At the basic level, I define status as an effective claim to social esteem that involves privileges. As such, status involves two necessary dimensions. First, status requires recognition: for a state to achieve a certain status, others have to recognize it. Because status requires recognition, state attributes affect status only indirectly, because of what they communicate to others about a state's quality. Moreover, the symbolic value of state attributes depends on social conventions. Second, status involves another necessary dimension: hierarchy. In particular, status involves hierarchy based on social esteem, rather than based on material resources or authority. Depending on their level of social esteem, states acquire differential access to privileges. Status inequalities among states thus have major political implications: while high status comes with privileges, low status implies disadvantage.

Because status involves both recognition and hierarchy, it partially overlaps with the concepts of identity and power. First, status maps onto four dimensions of identity: external identification, or how an actor is identified by others; groupness, or the sense of belonging to a distinctive group; commonality, or the sharing of common attributes; and connectedness, or the sharing of relational ties. At the same time, each concept involves distinctive dimensions. While status involves identification processes that occur at the social level, identity also involves processes that occur at the actor level. On the other hand, status involves a necessary

dimension (hierarchy) that is not a necessary condition of identity. Second, status and power partially overlap because status involves "power to"—that is, the socially produced power of an actor that derives from how actors, their practices, and their capacities are constituted in social relations. At the same time, each concept involves distinctive dimensions. On the one hand, the remaining dimension of power—"power over," or the exercise of control over other actors—is not a necessary condition of status. On the other hand, status involves another dimension (recognition) that is not a necessary condition of power.

Seeking a balance among the desirable features in a concept, my conceptualization addresses limitations from existing definitions that either (1) insufficiently different status from the material capabilities of states or (1) excessively differentiate status from closely related terms or from existing definitions in the social sciences. Instead of reducing status to material capabilities, I emphasize its fundamentally social nature. By showing that status is analytically distinct from material capabilities, I lay the conceptual groundwork to consider the role that status plays in important phenomena in international politics that are still rarely associated with status, such as international cooperation and the maintenance of international order. At the same time, my conceptualization draws on broader research in the social sciences to integrate two research traditions in IR that rarely come into dialogue: mainstream approaches that treat status as a means to an end; and alternative approaches that treat status as an end in itself. Rather than adopting an either/or approach, I define status as a concept at the intersection of identity and power. Defined in this way, the concept of status can reach its full capacity in the study of international politics.

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