

Remeasuring Status in the International Relations

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Abstract

This thesis develops a multidimensional framework for measuring international status, addressing the methodological gap between theoretical conceptions of status and their empirical operationalization. Drawing on insights from realism, constructivism, and social identity theory, the study conceptualizes status as comprising both attribute-based dimensions (material capabilities and institutional integration) and network-based dimensions (diplomatic recognition and prestige). Using Principal Component Analysis and network analytics on data spanning 1960-2015 for over 1,500 country-year observations, the research identifies distinct, yet correlated status dimensions and quantifies the degree of status inconsistency—the misalignment between a state's attributes and received recognition. Through cluster analysis, the study empirically validates a fourfold status typology (great powers, major powers, middle powers, and minor powers) that aligns with traditional international relations classifications. The findings confirm that status inconsistency generally decreased as the international system matured, though with significant variations across states and time periods. This research contributes theoretically by advancing our understanding of status as a multidimensional construct, methodologically by providing a replicable measurement framework, and empirically by documenting status hierarchies and their evolution over five decades. The results suggest that integrating both material capabilities and social recognition is essential for comprehending status dynamics in international relations.

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Introduction

International status—the perceived rank or standing of a state within the international system—has long been a foundational concept in global politics. From Thucydides’ articulation of honor as a motive for war, to Hans Morgenthau’s “policy of prestige,” and Robert Gilpin’s emphasis on “reputation for power,” scholars across theoretical traditions have recognized status as a powerful driver of state behavior (Morgenthau 1949; Gilpin 1981; Renshon 2017). States seek not only survival and security, but also to be acknowledged and respected by their peers.

In recent decades, status has undergone a theoretical and empirical renaissance in international relations (IR), with scholars advancing multi-dimensional frameworks that conceptualize status as both attributable and relational — rooted in objective capabilities and embedded within social systems of recognition (Larson and Shevchenko 2010; Duque 2018). This revival reflects growing recognition that status can explain state actions ranging from diplomacy and coalition-building to aggression and conflict, especially among rising and declining powers.

Despite the conceptual richness of the status literature, measuring status remains a profound challenge. Traditional approaches often rely exclusively on material indicators (e.g., GDP, military size), neglecting the relational and social foundations of international prestige. Conversely, qualitative studies emphasize symbolic recognition and identity narratives but lack empirical comparability across states and time. This study addresses this methodological gap by operationalizing international status as a multidimensional construct, combining attribute-based measures with network-based recognition metrics, and evaluating the dynamics of their alignment and divergence.

The overarching objective of this thesis is to develop a comprehensive and empirically grounded framework for measuring international status and for understanding the patterns of status inconsistency

across countries and over time. More specifically, the study aims to construct a multidimensional measure of international status by integrating both material and institutional attributes with recognition-based network indicators. It then analyzes how these two dimensions cohere or diverge in specific historical and regional contexts, assesses the prevalence and characteristics of status inconsistency, and classifies states into meaningful groupings using unsupervised clustering methods. Additionally, the study investigates how non-linear relationships and temporal variation affect the strength and direction of the link between a state's material standing and the recognition it receives.

Several research questions guide this inquiry: How can international status be effectively measured through both attribute-based and recognition-based approaches? To what extent do these status dimensions align or diverge across states and historical periods? How does status inconsistency manifest, and what patterns or historical trends does it follow? Finally, do empirically derived groupings of states correspond with traditional IR categories such as great powers, major powers, and middle powers?

This thesis makes three major contributions to the literature on international status. First, its theoretical contribution lies in synthesizing insights from realism, constructivism, and social identity theory to articulate a multidimensional theory of status in international relations. Central to this framework is the incorporation of status inconsistency—a condition wherein a state's material or institutional capabilities do not match its level of recognition in the international system. The thesis suggests that such misalignment may have significant implications for foreign policy behavior, diplomatic strategy, and systemic conflict.

Second, the thesis offers a methodological innovation by introducing a replicable framework that combines Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and network analysis to derive attribute-based and network-based status scores. It constructs a composite score to capture overall international status and introduces a metric for status inconsistency. Furthermore, clustering techniques such as k-means and

hierarchical clustering are applied to classify states into empirically grounded status groups without relying on ex ante assumptions.

Third, the empirical contribution of this thesis is based on the analysis of over 1,500 country-year observations spanning the years 1960 to 2015. This longitudinal dataset enables a robust exploration of global status hierarchies and offers insights into the dynamics of recognition, the mobility and stability of states within the international status system, and regional patterns of rising and declining powers.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 explores the theoretical foundations of status, examining competing frameworks from realist, constructivist, and social identity perspectives, while distinguishing attributable and relational dimensions. Chapter 3 reviews existing measurement approaches, comparing qualitative case studies with quantitative network and index-based methodologies. Chapter 4 presents the research methodology, detailing data sources, collection strategies, and integration techniques for creating a comprehensive status dataset. Chapter 5 outlines the analytical implementation, focusing on diplomatic network construction, PCA applications for both attribute and network dimensions, and the calculation of status inconsistency measures. Chapter 6 reports the empirical findings, presenting results from dimensional analysis, clustering techniques, and temporal patterns in status inconsistency. Chapter 7 discusses theoretical and methodological implications, highlighting contributions to status theory, addressing limitations, and suggesting analytical refinements. Chapter 8 concludes by synthesizing key insights, reflecting on their significance for understanding international hierarchies, and proposing promising directions for expanding status research in global politics.

What is Status

At its core, status in IR refers to an actor's ranking or standing in the international social hierarchy. Jonathan Renshon synthesizes that status has three fundamental attributes: it is positional (defined by one's rank relative to others), perceptual (it exists in the beliefs and perceptions of actors), and social (it is a product of collective acceptance) (Renshon 2017). In other words, a state's status is a function of higher-order collective beliefs – the shared understanding among the community of states about that state's rank. The term status itself is used in two main senses. First, it denotes sheer position – e.g. being recognized as a great power or regional leader, an ordinal rank in the hierarchy. Second, it often implies prestige or esteem – a positive valuation of a state's standing. As Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko note, “status is similar to prestige,” capturing both an objective rank and a valued reputation. They describe status as having aspects of a club good (membership in an exclusive group like the P5 or G7) and a positional good (a relative ranking that not all can share) – indicating the dual nature of status as both inclusion in elite “clubs” and position above others (Larson and Shevchenko 2010). Thus, status has an attributable dimension (tied to a state's own qualities) and a relational dimension (requiring recognition by peers). These dimensions have been emphasized to varying degrees by different theoretical approaches in IR, as we discuss below

The importance of status is deeply rooted in diplomatic history and classical realism. Thucydides famously pointed to fear, honor, and interest as the three motives of Athenian war decisions – with “honor” essentially capturing concerns for status and prestige. In the early realist canon, Hans Morgenthau devoted attention to prestige as a key element of power politics. He argued that states often pursue prestige policies to convince others of their power, noting that prestige rests on “beliefs and not objective reality” – i.e. it matters what others think about a state's power (Hans J. Morgenthau 1949). Morgenthau warned of a “policy of bluff,” where states overstate their capabilities to gain undue prestige (Kim 2004), underscoring the perceptual basis of status. In a similar vein, classical realists like E.H. Carr

and Reinhold Niebuhr acknowledged the role of national glory or moral standing in international competition, even though they prioritized material power. The English School also historically recognized status: Hedley Bull defined great powers not just by capabilities but by social recognition – great powers are states “recognized by others to have and conceived by their own leaders and peoples to have, certain special rights and duties” in managing international order (Bull 1977). This implies that without recognition, even materially powerful states may lack de facto great-power status, whereas recognized great powers enjoy legitimized influence. During the Cold War, systematic research on status emerged in the 1960s–1970s under the banner of “status inconsistency theory,” exploring how mismatches between a state’s material rank and its perceived status could lead to conflict. However, interest in status waned in subsequent decades as structural realist and liberal theories focused more on security and economic gains. It is only in the past 10–15 years that a revival or “renaissance” of status research has occurred, with scholars from various paradigms – realism, constructivism, and psychology – developing new theories and methods to understand why states seek status and how to systematically measure status dynamics.

In the following sections, we delve into the key dimensions of status, drawing on all major IR theoretical frameworks to illustrate how status is conceptualized and why it matters. We also identify how each perspective has attempted to empirically assess or measure status, setting the stage for a deeper look at methodologies later in the review.

The Attributable Dimension of Status

One way to understand status is as an attributable property of states – something a state possesses or achieves based on its characteristics. This view is most naturally associated with realist and rationalist perspectives, which emphasize material capabilities and tangible indicators of power as the basis for status. In this framing, status is often treated as a dependent variable of power: states with greater military might, economic size, population, and other power resources tend to enjoy higher standing. Status thus

flows from the attributes a state brings to the table, and enhancing those attributes is a primary way to gain status.

Realists, especially classical realists, have long noted that states seek not just security but also prestige, the outward symbol of their power. Morgenthau considered prestige one of the fundamental objectives of foreign policy, defining it as “the reputation for power” in international affairs (Hans J. Morgenthau 1949). To Morgenthau, even the powerful must display and defend their status, as prestige amplifies their deterrent influence and can reduce the need to use force. The power-transition theorist A. F. K. Organski argued that the international order is structured by a hierarchy of great powers, and rising states become dissatisfied if their status lags behind their growing power (Organski 1958). Similarly, Robert Gilpin’s theory of hegemonic war gives prestige a central role: “prestige is the reputation for power,” Gilpin writes, and it is the currency of international relations (Gilpin 1981). A dominant state’s prestige legitimizes the existing order, while a rising power’s lack of prestige (despite growing capabilities) can precipitate challenges to the status quo. Gilpin argued that differential growth of power leads to a misalignment between the hierarchy of actual power and the hierarchy of prestige, eventually forcing a costly realignment (often through war). Kenneth Waltz’s balance-of-power theory defines great powers by their relative share of capabilities, effectively equating material power with status in the system (even if Waltz did not use the term “status” explicitly) (Little 2007). In short, for realists, status is tightly coupled to material might – great powers are those with great capabilities, and shifts in the distribution of capabilities will, sooner or later, upset the distribution of status. John Mearsheimer, a leading neorealist, likewise acknowledges that great powers are not content with their current position and constantly seek to maximize their share of power; importantly, he notes they also “compete over gaining or affirming great power status,” making status itself “a strategic end” in great power rivalry (Mearsheimer 2001). This reflects the idea that being recognized as a great power can be as valuable as raw power – it confers influence and deference. Structural realists like Kenneth Waltz provided material criteria for great-power status (size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength,

political stability, etc.), effectively treating status as an outcome of measurable state attributes (Waltz 1993). In practice, membership in the great power “club” has historically correlated with industrial and military might – for example, the victorious powers of WWII became the P5 in the UN Security Council, institutionalizing their high status.

Within this attributable perspective, methodologies to measure status often rely on quantifiable indicators of national capability or influence. One straightforward approach has been to use composite indices of material capability (such as the Correlates of War project’s Composite Index of National Capability, CINC) as proxies for status rank. States can then be ranked by their share of system capabilities, and the top-tier designated as major powers (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 2012). Indeed, the Correlates of War dataset historically classified states as “major powers” based on a combination of material criteria and their involvement in great power wars – essentially coding status from attributes and behavior. Other researchers have looked at specific metrics: GDP and GDP per capita (economic stature), military expenditures and technological advancement (hard power), population size, territorial size, and more recently, even softer indicators like innovation or cultural influence (Duque 2018). The premise is that higher values on these metrics equate to higher status. For example, during the Cold War, the superpowers’ status was evident by their nuclear arsenals and bloc leadership; today, rising powers like China and India point to their economic growth and military modernization as justification for greater status. Some studies have quantified status markers such as nuclear weapons possession, space programs, or Olympic medal counts as indirect measures of a state’s prestige on the world stage. These tangible achievements serve as symbols of modernity and power, contributing to status. Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko define status in this tradition as the “collective beliefs about a state’s ranking in valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, diplomatic clout).” (Paul, Welch Larson, and Wohlforth 2014)

However, purely attribute-based measures can be misleading if taken alone, as they ignore the social recognition aspect (discussed next). Realists acknowledge this by noting that powers often demonstrate their attributes through diplomacy or limited uses of force to gain recognition. For instance, a state may undertake high-profile projects (nuclear tests, grand infrastructural projects, hosting global summits) to signal its arrival as a major player. Qualitative historical analysis shows states have often engaged in “prestige strategies”: e.g. Kaiser Wilhelm’s German naval buildup pre-WWI aimed to win Germany the status befitting its newfound industrial power; France’s insistence on grandeur (Force de Frappe, a UN veto, etc.) after WWII sought to preserve its great power status despite relative decline. Realists typically interpret such actions as rational attempts to align perceived status with material reality – either to deter threats (since a credible high status can ward off challengers) or to correct under-recognition (forcing others to acknowledge a rising power). As we will see, if a state’s attributable power outpaces the status others accord it, this status discrepancy can become a dangerous grievance. Overall, the attributable dimension emphasizes that status is grounded in what a state is or has. Yet, as the next section explores, having power is not sufficient – others must acknowledge that status.

Status as a Relational and Recognitional Phenomenon

While material power provides a basis for status, many scholars stress that status is fundamentally a relational construct – it exists only through social recognition. A state cannot unilaterally award itself status; it must be conferred (or at least accepted) by the relevant community of states (Buzan and Falkner 2022) (Renshon 2017). This perspective is championed by constructivist theories, the English School, and those drawing on social psychology. In these views, status is less an intrinsic property and more a position in a social hierarchy, dependent on mutual understandings and identity. Here, status is about who knows you, how they see you, and what rights they accord you. In this view, status is something that exists between states, as a social contract or collective perception, rather than something a state simply “has.” Max Weber’s classic definition captures this: status is an “effective claim to social esteem in terms of privileges”, meaning an actor is believed by others to deserve certain privileges or respect (Weber 1978).

IR scholars adopting this approach argue that what matters is the beliefs and attitudes of the international community: a state's status is the rank or esteem granted to it by its peers, not automatically the rank implied by its raw capabilities (Duque 2018). As one analysis puts it, status ultimately reflects common beliefs about a state's qualities held by other states (O'Neill 1999)(Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014) (Duque 2018). For example, being recognized as a "Great Power" has historically required acknowledgement from other great powers – inclusion in the elite club – beyond simply meeting material criteria.

The English School's conception of international society explicitly highlights recognition. Hedley Bull's definition of a great power (cited above) requires that a state be recognized by others and by itself as having a special position (Bull 1977). This two-way recognition (external and internal) creates a social reality of status. Great powers, in Bull's view, form a kind of club with both privileges (e.g. decisive say in major settlements, permanent UNSC seats) and duties (to maintain international order). English School scholars point to historical moments – such as the Concert of Europe in 1815 – where mutual recognition solidified a hierarchy of status independent of pure power metrics (for example, post-Napoleonic France, though defeated, was admitted as a great power to maintain stability). Constructivists generalize this logic: status is a social fact, created by collective beliefs. As Renshon observes, a state's status position "is determined by the collective beliefs" of the community it cares about (Renshon 2017). We can think of international status as akin to a reputation or role that is meaningful only within a social context. Alexander Wendt noted that state identities (e.g. "great power," "leader of the free world," "rogue state") are constituted by social interactions and shared knowledge – status attaches to these identities within the social structure of international politics. A rising power's quest for status is thus a struggle for recognition, a concept with roots in Hegel's philosophy (Wendt 1992). Alexander Wendt famously argued that even power itself gains meaning through social interaction, international relations cannot be studied on the basis of the distribution of power alone, since the meaning of power is mediated by ideas and norms (Wendt 1992). Extending this logic, status is seen as constituted by intersubjective judgments.

Wendt contends that states, like individuals in a Hegelian “struggle for recognition,” seek acceptance from others as a certain kind of actor (Wendt 2003). A “great power” identity, for instance, only solidifies when others confer that role through recognition and deference. This struggle can be seen in cases like Imperial Germany or Meiji Japan, which sought acknowledgment by European powers as equals, or contemporary India’s campaign for a UNSC seat to validate its global role. Constructivist analyses (e.g. Michelle Murray’s work on rising powers) show that conflicts often erupt not merely from power transitions but from the failure of timely recognition – when established powers deny rising states the status they seek, the latter may resort to confrontation to gain acknowledgement as peers (Götz 2021).

A significant inflection of the recognition perspective comes from social psychology, particularly Social Identity Theory. Introduced to IR by scholars like Deborah Welch Larson, Alexei Shevchenko, and Jonathan Mercer, SIT posits that states (like individuals) derive self-esteem from membership in positively valued groups and from favorable comparisons to others (Larson and Shevchenko 2010) (Mercer 2017). States naturally categorize themselves into reference groups (great powers, middle powers, regional blocs, etc.), termed “status communities”, and they care deeply about their relative rank within these groups (Røren 2024). Tajfel and Turner’s classic work showed that actors seek a positive social identity by achieving higher status for their group or by gaining entry into higher-status groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Applied to IR, this yields distinct status-seeking strategies: social mobility (emulating the practices of higher-status states to gain inclusion – for example, a rising state adopting the norms of the great powers hoping to be accepted as one of them), social competition (directly challenging higher-status states, perhaps via arms races or forming rival blocs, to improve one’s rank – e.g. Germany and Japan’s confrontational approach in the 1930s when denied equality), and social creativity (finding alternative dimensions of status or creating a new “club” where the state can excel – for instance, Brazil positioning itself as leader of the Global South or a “norm entrepreneur” to gain moral authority when it cannot rival great powers militarily)(Parlar Dal 2019). Larson and Shevchenko have documented how states like post-Soviet Russia and rising China experimented with these strategies: Russia in the 1990s

attempted social mobility (integrating with Western institutions) before turning to social competition in the 2000s when it felt rebuffed; China largely pursued social mobility through economic integration, but also some creativity by championing new institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as a way to assert status (Larson and Shevchenko 2010).

SIT-inspired research underscores that status is inherently comparative and relative. Status is a positional good – if everyone has it, it ceases to distinguish. Therefore, efforts by one state to climb the ladder may inherently threaten others' sense of standing, potentially creating a status dilemma analogous to the security dilemma. Recent constructivist works point to the existence of multiple hierarchies (military, economic, normative) that states navigate: for example, a state might be high-status in the economic hierarchy (a rich G20 country) but lower in the security hierarchy (not a nuclear power), complicating how it perceives its overall status and which peer group it prioritizes (some states may care more about recognition from powerful Western states, others about regional peers, etc.). The concept of “status communities” captures this – a state primarily measures its status against those it considers its peers or rivals (Renshon 2016). For instance, Brazil might principally seek recognition among other regional leaders and emerging powers, whereas France seeks to maintain status among the established great powers.

Even liberal IR theories, which traditionally emphasize absolute gains and cooperation, have had to contend with status dynamics, particularly as they play out in international institutions. Liberal institutionalists note that states often covet leadership roles in institutions (e.g. chairing committees, hosting secretariats, contributing to peacekeeping) not just for influence but for status benefits – being seen as a “responsible stakeholder” or a norm-setter confers legitimacy (Viola 2020) (Ikenberry and Nexon 2019). Status in a liberal sense can derive from reputation for being a good citizen of international society – for example, Canada's self-image as a middle power is tied to its contributions to peacekeeping and mediation (status via moral leadership) (MacDonald and Parent 2021). However, liberal theorists also

warn that status competition can be a stumbling block to cooperation: if states become too obsessed with relative position, they may forego mutually beneficial arrangements (a classic example is arms control negotiations stalling because each side fears looking weaker). This concern is implicit in liberal critiques of zero-sum power politics (Towns and Rumelili 2017). Some liberal thinkers celebrate the idea of status through integration: states can achieve prestige by joining exclusive clubs like the OECD, NATO, or the EU, suggesting a cooperative pathway to recognition (often tied to adopting certain political-economic standards) (Ikenberry and Nexon 2019). Yet even in these contexts, relational dynamics are evident: existing members gatekeep entry as a way to preserve their own status, and newcomers sometimes chafe at a lack of equal say (as seen when rising powers push for greater voting shares in the IMF or World Bank to match their economic weight).

Scholars like Iver Neumann have explored how discourse and narrative construct status. Neumann's study of Russia argues that Russian elites consistently frame their country as a "Great Power" and perform practices to claim that status, but Western audiences have often been reluctant to grant full recognition, especially when Russia's economic and institutional credentials lag behind its military clout (Neumann 2008). This creates a tension that makes Russia still trying to pursue Great Power status, but by many indicators proven, it is moving the opposite way, which led to frequent Western criticism that Russia is not living up to great-power standards. The Russian public, however, perceives things differently, believing that President Putin "restored" Russia's great-power standing (Levada, 2018). Such examples underscore that status is a perception, and those perceptions can diverge between different audiences (internal vs. external), highlighting the inherently social nature of status. States thus engage in "recognition games" – they undertake diplomatic gestures, rhetoric, and policies aimed at getting others to acknowledge their desired status (Ringmar 2002). This can range from seeking admission to prestigious institutions (e.g. G7, NATO, WTO), to adopting valued norms and behaviors for approval, to forging alliances or patron-client ties that demonstrate influence. Studies show that states often recognize others who appear similar in values or regime type, creating cliques of mutual deference: for instance,

democracies may more readily accord respect to fellow democracies, which partly explains why major Western powers form a tight status community (Duque 2018). Status thus has a club-like quality, involving social closure – insiders versus outsiders. High-status groups differentiate themselves by exclusive privileges and distinctive values, and outsiders must be socially admitted to rise in status (Scotson and Elias 2012).

The relational perspective has given rise to new methods of measuring status through social markers. Rather than just counting a state's tanks or GDP, researchers examine patterns of diplomatic interaction and recognition. One innovative approach uses network analysis of diplomatic ties. For example, Marina Duque (2018) measures status by the network of embassies a state receives, positing that each embassy is a "recognition tie" indicating esteem. In her study, the number of embassies accredited to a country served as an aggregate indicator of the status others confer on it – a practice dating back to how newly independent states seek legitimacy by exchanging embassies. Notably, Duque finds this relational measure diverges from pure capability-based rank: states like Brazil, India, or Cuba received a surprisingly high number of diplomatic missions relative to their material power, illustrating that attributes alone cannot explain status outcomes. Instead, who one is connected to and shared values play a big role. Her results show that "*status recognition depends on a state's relations, and only indirectly on its attributes*". Once states begin to receive recognition, the process is self-reinforcing – being treated as high-status leads others to copy that behavior, creating a feedback loop (Duque 2018). Other scholars, such as Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, also stress the social dimension: they note that status is *positional* (relative rank), *collective* (requiring consensus), and often *institutionalized* (through great-power clubs, veto rights, honorific titles) (Paul, Welch Larson, and Wohlforth 2014).

In sum, the relational/recognition-based understanding of status highlights social validation. It is not enough to be powerful; one must be seen and accepted as a member of the elite. This perspective directs our attention to diplomatic practices (how states signal respect or disrespect), to narratives of

identity (how states define their role and seek others' acknowledgment), and to social structures like clubs, alliances, and patron-client relations that constitute hierarchies. Methodologically, it means measuring status requires looking at recognition indicators: who acknowledges whom as a great power? How do states rank each other? We will see concrete measures (like diplomatic ties and voting patterns) in the methods section. First, however, we consider how status ties into states' sense of self – their ontological security – and what happens when states experience a mismatch between their desired and actual status.

Status Inconsistency and Its Implications

A crucial concept linking the above themes is status inconsistency (also termed status disequilibrium or status discrepancy). This occurs when different indicators of a state's status are misaligned – typically when a state's material power has grown or declined faster than the status accorded to it by others. In other words, there is a mismatch between achieved status (status a state might merit based on its capabilities or accomplishments) and ascribed status (status as recognized by the international community) (Volgy and Mayhall 1995). Classic examples include rising powers whose influence outstrips their formal standing (e.g. China in the early 2000s, which had become the world's #2 economy but still lacked commensurate leadership roles) or declining powers clinging to past status (e.g. the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, still treated as a great power long after it became the “sick man of Europe”). Status inconsistency has been theorized to be a major driver of international tension and war, as states seek to resolve the inconsistency – either by forcefully demanding higher status or by being challenged by others who feel their privileges are unwarranted.

In the 1960s and 70s, “status inconsistency theory” emerged as a systematic approach in IR, borrowing from sociology (where status inconsistency was studied at the individual level). Early quantitative studies, for example by Michael Wallace and Jacek Kugler, attempted to operationalize status gaps and correlate them with conflict propensity (Wallace 1971) (Kugler and Lemke 1996). For example,

one hypothesis (attributed to Johan Galtung) suggested that states whose military rank exceeded their economic rank – a kind of status disparity – would be more likely to start wars, as they seek to translate military might into recognized status or to redress the imbalance (Galtung 1964) (Wallace 1971) (Kugler, Tammen, and Swaminathan 2001). The dominant proposition, as summarized by Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, was that status inconsistency provides incentives for states to behave aggressively, often leading to war (Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014). The logic is straightforward: a state that believes it deserves more respect (given its power) will be dissatisfied and may use coercion to extract recognition or reshape the hierarchy; conversely, other states may preempt or resist a state that is “punching above its recognized weight.” Status inconsistency was linked to the idea of revisionist states in realist theory – states unsatisfied with their position in the status quo. For example, rising Germany prior to World War I and rising Japan prior to World War II can be seen as status-dissatisfied powers, as is China today in the eyes of some analysts. Empirical studies have yielded mixed results, however. Some research on the 19th and early 20th centuries did find that status inconsistent states were more likely to start wars. Yet, other studies noted that in the Cold War period, the relationship might invert or weaken, possibly because bipolarity and nuclear weapons constrained direct great-power war (Volgy and Mayhall 1995).

Contemporary scholarship has refined the concept with better data and theory, often referring to “status deficits” or “status dissatisfaction.” Jonathan Renshon distinguishes between status dissatisfaction – a state’s subjective unhappiness with its status – and the objective mismatch of status inconsistency (Renshon 2016). In his book *Fighting for Status*, Renshon develops a theory linking status deficits to conflict initiation. He provides evidence that when states perceive a status deficit (believing their worth is higher than others acknowledge), they tend to initiate militarized disputes at higher rates (Renshon 2017). In essence, when a state’s power has grown but its rank or respect in the international pecking order has not, it often tries to force a revision of that order. This helps explain why rising great powers frequently adopt assertive foreign policies – not only to secure resources, but to gain the recognition and deference

commensurate with their newfound capabilities. China's strategy in recent decades, for example, can be partly seen as closing the status gap between its economic might and its still-evolving international status: through military modernization, greater voice in international institutions, and high-profile initiatives, it seeks the status of a true peer of the United States. Renshon's findings echo an older observation by Robert Gilpin that hegemonic wars erupt when a dissatisfied challenger's power overtakes the dominant state's, shattering the existing hierarchy of prestige (Gilpin 1988). The difference is that status inconsistency research explicitly quantifies the gap and focuses on the psychological motive – dissatisfaction – as a driver of conflict, rather than treating war as an automatic outcome of power shifts. This finding supports the long-held intuition that status grievances can spark aggression. Notably, Renshon and colleagues also employ experiments that show leaders are willing to incur costs to achieve or defend status, even in scenarios detached from immediate security or economic gains.

Status inconsistency can manifest in various ways with distinct implications:

- **Rising Powers Underrecognized:** A state's power rises but institutions and norms lag in recognizing it. The state may then push for institutional reform (e.g. Germany and Japan's bid for UNSC permanent seats, India's campaign for Nuclear Suppliers Group membership before it was recognized as a nuclear weapons state). If peaceful avenues are blocked, it could resort to unilateral force or forming rival blocs (as revisionist tactics). The international order faces pressure to accommodate the newcomer or risk conflict. Power Transition Theory intersects here: Organski's idea of a dissatisfied challenger aligns with status under recognition – the challenger's power has grown faster than the status quo can accommodate, fueling resentment (Organski 1958).
- **Declining Powers Overprivileged:** A once-dominant state declines in actual power but retains disproportionate status (often through institutional inertia or victory prestige). This can breed instability as well – rising states or rivals might test the declining power's resolve, leading the latter to fight to prove it still deserves its status (MacDonald and

Parent 2021) (Barnett and Lake 2010). The Crimean War saw Russia challenge the weakening Ottoman Empire hastening its decline; more dramatically, if a hegemon is in relative decline but clings to exclusive rights, it might overextend to assert its old status. Declining states may also engage in risky behavior out of status fear – a phenomenon some tie to the concept of “imperial overstretch” or late-stage preventive wars.

- **Multiple Hierarchies Misaligned:** A state might be top-tier in one domain but not others, causing internal or external friction (Duque 2018) (Volgy et al. 2011). For instance, Japan today is an economic giant but has a pacifist military posture and no permanent UNSC seat, which served as markers of lower status. This inconsistency creates debates within Japan about taking on a larger security role to “normalize” its status. It also leads to awkward situations where Japan is courted for its economic aid but not fully included in strategic decision-making – a subtle form of status discord.

The implications of status inconsistency are not only conflictual. Some states respond via status-seeking behaviors short of war: increased diplomatic activism, propaganda campaigns to boost prestige, or forming coalitions to demand status changes (e.g. the G4 alliance of Brazil, Germany, India, Japan for UNSC reform). Others may engage in social creativity to sidestep the gap – for example, if global recognition is not forthcoming, a state might double down on regional leadership where its status is more secure (as Brazil often does in Latin America when its global aspirations stall). Status inconsistency can also create psychological stress domestically: leaders of underappreciated rising states often speak of a “chip on the shoulder” or a desire to “claim our rightful place in the world,” which can become a nationalistic rallying cry. On the flip side, leaders of declining states with still-elevated status may face imposter syndrome or international skepticism, leading them to take harsh measures to silence critics or prove competence.

In academic debates, a key question is how and when the international system can peacefully manage status inconsistencies. One concept is “status accommodation” – whereby established powers deliberately grant concessions or honors to rising powers to mitigate their dissatisfaction (e.g. the U.S. engaging China in institutions like the G20 to reflect China’s new stature). T. V. Paul has discussed how timely status accommodation (such as Britain’s relatively peaceful handoff of global leadership to the U.S.) can prevent war (Paul, Welch Larson, and Wohlforth 2014). Conversely, failures of accommodation (the classic case being Britain’s inability to fully accept Germany’s rise before 1914) are seen as contributing factors to conflict. Another debate centers on multiple status hierarchies: some argue the international system is not one singular pyramid but several overlapping ones (military, economic, normative, demographic). A state might face status inconsistency in one hierarchy but not in another, muddying the causal link to aggression. For example, China is under-recognized in the post-WWII security order (no additional veto for it despite its power) but arguably over-recognized in economic institutions (it was given a huge voting share in the AIIB it created). How these intersect is complex.

Methodologically, status inconsistency has been measured in creative ways. Early studies created indices of status separate from power indices, then took their differences. For instance, one might rank states by material power (GDP or CINC score) and separately rank them by some status metric like diplomatic standing or membership in prestigious clubs, then compute the gap. A famous proxy has been diplomatic recognition and exchange: a state’s level of diplomatic representation (e.g. how many embassies/high commissioners it hosts or sends abroad) can indicate its perceived importance. If State A is very powerful but other states maintain only low-level or few diplomatic missions with it, that suggests ascribed status lagging achieved status. As Steven Ward cautions, however, using diplomatic exchange as a status measure requires care – smaller states’ recognition can inflate counts in misleading ways (Ward, n.d.). Another measure is leadership in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs): e.g. how many top posts a country holds in UN agencies or how often it is part of coalitions of the willing. Researchers like Volgy have compiled “status attribution scores” combining such indicators (UNSC membership, G7/G20

membership, etc.) to rank states' recognized status (Ward, n.d.). Comparing those rankings to GDP or military rankings reveals who is under- or over-recognized. These quantitative measures have improved our ability to test status inconsistency hypotheses across many cases and years. Qualitatively, scholars examine specific episodes of status frustration – for instance, the 1956 Suez Crisis can be read as Britain and France acting out a sudden realization of their reduced status (post-U.S. rebuke, their great-power pretensions were exposed), a case often discussed in light of status inconsistency and ontological insecurity combined.

In summary, the literature on status inconsistency highlights that any disconnect between various facets of status – whether power and prestige, self-image and other-image, or different status hierarchies (military, economic, normative) – can be destabilizing. States strongly prefer that their status be in harmony with their capabilities and identity. When it is not, they experience what psychological theory would term cognitive dissonance or status anxiety, which they attempt to resolve, sometimes through drastic means. This line of research provides a nuanced understanding of when and why status concerns lead to conflict: not all status-seeking is dangerous, but status incongruence is often a warning sign. It also suggests policy solutions, such as offering rising powers peaceful avenues to higher status (greater voice in institutions, symbolic recognition) to mitigate the temptation to use force for status gains (MacDonald and Parent 2021). The challenge, as history shows, is that established powers are often reluctant to yield status, and rising powers impatient to obtain it – a dynamic at the heart of power transitions. Thus, status inconsistency remains a crucial concept for understanding power shifts and the potential for war. Modern scholars like Renshon, Larson, and Schweller integrate this idea into broader theories of foreign policy: for example, Randall Schweller argues that revisionist states are often motivated by “lopsided” gains – they accrue power faster than prestige – making them push for a new status equilibrium (Schweller 1999). As long as multiple hierarchies (material, moral, institutional) exist in world politics, the problem of status inconsistency and its implications will persist as a key research focus.

Measuring Status in IR

Measuring an abstract, socially constructed concept like status is inherently challenging. Unlike tangible metrics (GDP, troop numbers), status involves perceptions, reputations, and intersubjective beliefs that are not directly observable. Over the decades, IR researchers have employed a variety of methodologies – qualitative, quantitative, and mixed – to operationalize and assess state status. Below, we outline the major approaches, noting their contributions and limitations, and highlighting recent innovations.

Qualitative Approaches to Status

Much of the foundational understanding of status comes from qualitative historical analysis. Scholars have delved into archives, memoirs, diplomatic correspondence, and speeches to infer the role of status in decision-making. Classic case studies – such as the origins of World War I, the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Cold War superpower rivalry, or regional power interactions – have been reinterpreted through the lens of status motivations. For example, Lebow's *Why Nations Fight* compiles historical evidence on war motives, categorizing wars as driven by standing, security, or interest, and finds a preponderance of standing/status motives (Lebow 2010). These qualitative judgments required deep knowledge of each case: reading leaders' statements for references to honor or prestige, examining whether territorial or security gains were negligible (implying other motives), etc. Similarly, constructivist case studies, like Michelle Murray's work on Wilhelmine Germany or republican China, trace narratives of recognition: how leaders articulated their status claims and how other powers responded (Götz 2021). The value of qualitative approaches lies in contextual nuance – they can capture the subjective experience of status (e.g. national humiliation, pride, ambition) and link it to specific actions. Through process tracing, scholars have uncovered sequences where status considerations clearly influenced choices (such as the Soviet Union's relentless pursuit of parity with the US in nuclear weapons partly for status, or France's decision to develop the bomb to maintain great power standing). Qualitative

analysis also helps distinguish sincere status motives from convenient rhetoric; for instance, a leader might invoke prestige to rally support for a policy that also has material benefits – discerning the true driver requires judgement that numbers alone can't provide.

One rich approach is to analyze speeches, texts, and discourse for how states articulate status claims or confer status on others. Scholars examine diplomatic correspondence, leader speeches, strategy documents, and even media narratives to see how status is talked about and constructed. For example, Iver B. Neumann scrutinized Russian elite discourse from 1815–2007 to show how Russian identity is built around the idea of being a “Great Power,” and how language of recognition or denial by others (Europe, the West) affected Russia’s self-concept (Neumann 2008). Through content analysis of official statements, one can track references to status (“leading nation,” “regional power,” “respected member of...”) and demands for recognition or complaints of disrespect. Discourse analysis has been especially useful for understanding ontological security and identity aspects of status – e.g. how Britain’s post-imperial narratives justified retaining global military reach to maintain status, or how emerging powers like India and Brazil frame their UN reform demands in terms of deserved status. This approach is inherently qualitative and interpretive, illuminating the meaning of status in particular contexts and the rhetorical strategies states use in the “status contest.” It often complements historical case studies, as seen in Lebow’s work where historical narratives are parsed to identify honor motives (Lebow 2010). Discourse analysis, a more interpretive variant, examines how the idea of status is constructed in national narratives – for example, Ayşe Zarakol’s work *After Defeat* explores how Turkey and Japan coped with lost wars and stigma, trying to reintegrate into international society by reshaping narratives (a lot of which is about regaining respectable status) (Zarakol 2011).

Many key works on status are deeply historical or case-oriented, using process tracing to connect status motivations with foreign policy decisions. For instance, Lebow’s *Why Nations Fight* compiles case narratives of wars over several centuries, coding each war’s primary motives – a qualitative judgment

based on historical evidence – to demonstrate the prevalence of standing and prestige motives (Lebow 2010). Similarly, Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko provide case studies of Russia and China’s foreign policies as “quest for status,” tracing how each country employed different tactics (emulation, assertiveness, norm entrepreneurship) to elevate their status (Larson and Shevchenko 2019). These case studies rely on archival documents, memoirs, and diplomatic records to reveal decision-makers’ intent. They allow nuanced insight into causal pathways – how exactly a status concern led to a specific action: for example, the USSR launching Sputnik partly to claim superpower prestige. Although qualitative, case studies can be systematic and comparative, building generalizable theories, like patterns of status-seeking under certain conditions. Such work often identifies intervening variables like domestic politics or leader psychology that mediate the relationship between status aspirations and outcomes.

In summary, qualitative methods provide depth and capture the richness of status as lived by states. They are indispensable for theory generation – many hypotheses about status (like “states fight more when they have status dilemmas” or “rising powers will initially seek inclusion before turning revisionist”) came from historical analysis. Their limitation, however, is generalizability and potential selection bias: one can always find a historical anecdote to illustrate a point, but the challenge is knowing if it generalizes or is an outlier. Also, interpreting motives can be subjective; hence, the need to complement qualitative insights with more systematic data.

Quantitative Approaches to Status

Motivated by the desire to test status theories across many cases and to quantify elusive concepts, IR scholars have developed a variety of quantitative measures for state status. These range from proxy indicators extracted from historical data to innovative surveys and experiments.

One longstanding approach is to proxy status with observable variables that plausibly reflect it. A classic is diplomatic exchange data – the number and level of diplomatic missions between countries. The

idea is that important, high-status states will host embassies from many countries (others seek ties with them), and they themselves will send embassies widely as they have global interests. Conversely, lower-status or minor states might have only a few embassies and often of lower rank (e.g. a chargé d'affaires instead of an ambassador). Singer and Small's data on diplomatic representation has been used as a surrogate for status recognition (Small and Singer 1973). For example, if in year X, Britain is one of only a handful of states that almost every country sends an ambassador to, Britain clearly has high ascribed status. Steven Ward, however, highlighted pitfalls in using raw diplomatic counts: they can over-count recognition from very small states while underweighting recognition from the most "prestigious" states. In an extreme scenario, whether Honduras recognizes you counts the same as whether the US or China does in a simple count, which might skew status rankings. Researchers have worked to refine this by weighting recognitions – e.g. recognition by already high-status states is given more significance (since being acknowledged by the powerful is more status-significant than being acknowledged by everyone else). This aligns with intuitive examples: in 1905, Japan cared far more about being respected by Great Britain than by, say, Honduras (Ward, n.d.).

Other proxies include treaty signatures and alliance networks. High-status states tend to be at the center of alliance webs or be signatories to many agreements (indicating others seek their partnership). Network analysis has been applied to alliance data or UN voting patterns to identify central nodes (often the great powers). Institutional positions are another metric – e.g., counting how many key international institutions a state belongs to, or whether it's part of informal elite groups (P5, G7, OECD, BRICS). These can be summed into a status index. For example, one could assign points for being a permanent UNSC member, a G7 member, a G20 member, etc., to create a composite status score. Volgy, for example, did something along these lines for major and regional powers, trying to quantify status in both global and regional contexts (Volgy et al. 2011). The limitation of this is deciding which institutions count how much – a somewhat subjective exercise – and the fact that these memberships are relatively few in number (leading to coarse measurements).

In recent years, network techniques have become popular for measuring the recognition dimension of status. By treating states as nodes and interactions (diplomatic ties, alliances, trade, etc.) as links, scholars can derive centrality measures that often correlate with informal status. One influential example is diplomatic network centrality: States that are highly central (many embassies or high-level visits from others) can be seen as enjoying broad recognition and importance (Duque 2018). Brian Kinne and Marina Duque both use network models of diplomatic exchange to infer status hierarchies, finding that network position explains outcomes like who gets invited to form alliances or lead coalitions (Kinne 2014) (Duque 2018). Network analysis has also been applied to treaty co-signatures, UN voting alignments, and international organization memberships – yielding measures of prestige based on how connected or clubbed-in a state is. For example, a state with many alliance connections to major powers might be considered part of the inner circle of high-status states, whereas an isolated state with few ties is low-status. These measures can be quantified and compared over time, allowing researchers to track status mobility and test hypotheses. The advantage of network measures is their explicit relationality – they capture status as something emergent from the structure of relations, aligning with the constructivist view (Duque 2018). Moreover, network data (like diplomatic missions) often exist in historical archives, letting scholars extend quantitative status analysis back to the 19th century or earlier (e.g., counting embassies in 1900) (Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery 2009). The limitation is that these measures still need interpretation – centrality correlates with status but is not identical (some ties are routine or mercenary). Nonetheless, social network analysis has significantly advanced the quantitative study of status, moving it beyond static capability lists to more sociological metrics.

To capture the psychological aspect of status, some scholars use survey experiments and behavioral games. Jonathan Renshon and collaborators have pioneered this approach by conducting experiments with both ordinary participants and elites to see how status considerations affect decision-making. In one study, Renshon assembled a sample of political and military leaders and had them play

simulated international crisis scenarios (Renshon 2015) (Renshon, Yarhi-Milo, and Kertzer 2023). By manipulating whether the participants' "country" had high or low status, or whether an outcome entailed status loss, the study measured changes in risk-taking and aggression. The results provided evidence that actors in a low-status or status-threatened position were more willing to take risks to improve or defend their state's standing (Renshon 2015) (Renshon, Yarhi-Milo, and Kertzer 2023). Other experiments have been done on general public samples, asking people to choose policies for a hypothetical country. These find that concerns about national status (for example, not wanting one's country to "lose face" after a concession) can increase public support for tougher foreign policy stances. Survey experiments have also been used to measure perceptions of status: for instance, asking respondents to rank countries by prestige or to allocate "respect points," which can reveal consensus or divergence in status perceptions (Ferry, O'Brien-Udry, and Ferry 2022). Such methods bring a micro-level, psychological dimension to status research, validating that status motivations operate not just in abstract theory but in the minds of decision-makers and citizens. They offer causal leverage by isolating status as a variable and observing behavior in controlled settings, complementing the observational findings from case studies and statistical models.

A straightforward method is to use rankings or composite indices to represent status hierarchies. This aligns with the attributable view and has been a mainstay in quantitative IR. Researchers compile indicators (GDP, military personnel, technological output, etc.) and create a weighted index to score states, then rank them from most to least powerful/prestigious. The top tier might be labeled great powers, next tier middle powers, etc., effectively assigning status categories. The Correlates of War project's designation of "Major Powers" from 1816 onward (based on a mix of military, economic, and global reach criteria) is one influential example, used in countless studies ("State System Membership (V2016) – Correlates of War," n.d.). Other indices, like the Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index or various "global influence" rankings published in recent years, similarly present an ordered list that doubles as a status hierarchy. Some scholars focus on specific prestige indices – for instance, nuclear status (nuclear vs non-nuclear powers), spacefaring nations, or members of elite clubs (NATO allies, OECD members) – as

binary markers of belonging to a high-status group. Rankings can also come from expert surveys or reputational polls: for example, periodic surveys asking experts to identify the most influential countries or leaders. These directly gauge perceived status. An interesting quantitative approach combined survey data with indices – O’Brien and Yamashita had respondents rate countries’ global status and found two underlying factors: perceived influence and respect, which together formed a status score. This kind of work ties the concept back to the idea of status as collective belief (Ferry, O’Brien-Udry, and Ferry 2022). The advantage of rankings and indices is clarity and coverage – every state gets a number, allowing large-n analysis (e.g., correlating status rank with conflict initiation). They make status tangible for statistical models, as seen in studies that include a “status score” or “dyadic status difference” to predict war or alliance patterns. The downside, as critics note, is that such indices might oversimplify or reify status – treating it as an objective fact rather than a social construct (Duque 2018). To mitigate that, some newer indices incorporate relational data (like number of diplomatic ties or leadership positions held in IOs) alongside material data, producing a more nuanced composite. Ultimately, whether through simple rankings or complex indexes, the quantitative measurement of status continues to evolve to capture both power and recognition facets.

A cutting-edge methodology is experimentation. While we obviously cannot experiment with actual states, researchers have used simulations and surveys with policymakers or the general public to gauge reactions to status variables. For instance, one experiment presented participants with a wargame scenario where their state could either gain a military advantage or a status boost (like international praise), to see which they value more. Others have tested how people respond to status threats: do they become more risk-acceptant? (Ferry, O’Brien-Udry, and Ferry 2022) Renshon, in one experiment, found that subjects playing the role of state leaders were more likely to choose military options when their state’s status was portrayed as low or declining, versus when it was high – mirroring the hypothesis that status insecurity breeds aggression. (Renshon 2017)

Each method has trade-offs. Quantitative measures bring precision and allow broad comparisons (e.g. ranking 50 states by status and seeing how that correlates with conflict involvement), but they risk oversimplifying (does counting embassies really capture status?) and often require assumptions (like weighting schemes). Qualitative approaches capture meaning and context but can get bogged down in idiosyncrasies and are hard to replicate systematically. Increasingly, scholars call for mixed-methods: using quantitative data to identify patterns (say, a set of states that appear status-dissatisfied) and then examining those cases qualitatively to verify the causal narrative. An example is Paul's *Status in World Politics* volume, where some chapters use quantitative data to classify rising powers and others do deep dives into single cases like India or Russia, explaining how status concerns played out (Paul, Welch Larson, and Wohlforth 2014). Such triangulation strengthens confidence in findings.

Research Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this research is deeply embedded in the rich body of literature addressing international status within international relations theory. International status is understood here as a multidimensional construct composed primarily of attribute-based and network-based dimensions. Drawing extensively from past work (Lake 2009) (Renshon 2017) (Duque 2018), this framework posits status as a synthesis of both objective state capabilities and subjective recognition by other states. The interaction between these dimensions forms the basis for assessing a state's position within the international hierarchy.

Attribute-based status encompasses tangible and institutional capabilities that states possess, serving as objective indicators for status claims. This approach aligns with classic power transition theories emphasizing material capabilities as core determinants of state status (Organski and Kugler 1980). Material capabilities include military power (military expenditures and personnel), economic strength (energy consumption, iron and steel production), and demographic factors (total and urban populations). Additionally, institutional attributes, notably international governmental organization (IGO) memberships, reflect a state's degree of institutional integration and influence within global governance structures, thus contributing significantly to its international status.

Conversely, network-based status is conceptualized through the lens of social recognition and prestige accorded to states by other international actors. Grounded in social identity theory (Larson & Shevchenko 2010) and enriched by recent methodological advances in network analysis (Hafner-Burton et al. 2009; Kinne 2014), this dimension emphasizes diplomatic recognition patterns. Indicators for this dimension include diplomatic network metrics such as eigenvector centrality, PageRank scores, authority

scores, and betweenness centrality, which collectively capture how states are socially constructed and perceived within the international community.

A crucial theoretical aspect addressed by this thesis is the concept of "status inconsistency," where disparities occur between the two primary status dimensions. Status inconsistency is anticipated to influence state behavior significantly, potentially leading to adjustments in foreign policy, alliances, and overall diplomatic strategy. (Volgy and Mayhall 1995) (Ward 2017) Investigating the causes and effects of status inconsistency thus forms a pivotal aspect of the analytical framework.

This research addresses critical questions regarding the measurement and implications of international status: 1) How can a multidimensional framework effectively measure international status by integrating attribute-based capabilities and network-based recognition? 2) To what extent do these status dimensions align or diverge across states and historical periods? 3) Can empirical data-driven methods produce status classifications that reflect traditional international relations typologies?

The study also examines several testable hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework:

H1: Attribute-based and network-based status measures are positively correlated yet represent distinct dimensions.

H2: Status inconsistency diminishes as the international system matures, reflecting a convergence between material capabilities and social recognition.

H3: Empirically derived clusters based on status dimensions align closely with established IR classifications such as great powers, major powers, and middle powers.

Data Sources and Collection

The research utilizes comprehensive datasets covering multiple dimensions essential to international status analysis. The first dataset used is the Diplometrics Dataset (1960-2020). This dataset

provides annual data on diplomatic representation between countries, including detailed classifications of embassy levels and diplomatic exchanges, covering over 200 states. The granularity of diplomatic representation captured in this dataset is essential for accurately measuring the network-based dimension of international status. This dataset, developed by Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, provides detailed annual information on diplomatic representation between countries, including embassy levels and representation quality. The dataset covers 209 sending countries and 205 destination countries, with multiple levels of diplomatic representation coded (from 1-6).

The second dataset is the National Material Capabilities Dataset (NMC v6.0). Maintained by the Correlates of War project (COW), the NMC dataset contains the components of material capabilities, including military expenditure (milex), military personnel (milper), iron and steel production (irst), primary energy consumption (pec), total population (tpop), and urban population (upop). However, rather than using the composite Composite Index of National Capability (CINC), this study employs the individual components to allow more dimensionality analysis.

The third dataset is the Intergovernmental Organizations (v3) maintained by the COW. The dataset comprises comprehensive records of state memberships in international governmental organizations, distinguishing full, associate, and observer statuses. The membership is coded as full membership (1), associate membership (2), or observer status (3). The dataset includes over 500 IGOs, allowing for the calculation of various membership metrics.

The fourth dataset is the Polity5 dataset. It provides essential regime characteristics and governance metrics, including democracy and autocracy scores, polity scores, and executive constraints. These indicators facilitate understanding the political institutional attributes that influence a state's international status.

Data Integration and Preparation

First, all datasets were harmonized using Correlates of War country codes (ccode) as the primary identifier. This required creating a crosswalk between Diplometrics country names and COW country codes using both automated matching via the countrycode package and manual verification.

Secondly, the datasets were aligned temporally, focusing on the 1960-2016 period for which all datasets had overlapping coverage. For network analysis, benchmark years were selected at 5-year intervals (1960, 1965, 1970, etc. through 2015).

Given the inherent complexity of international datasets, there are three specific strategies employed to handle missing data. First, countries with significant gaps in Polity data across multiple years were excluded from the core PCA and regression analyses. This decision was made because political institutional variables—specifically polity2 and xconst—play a central role in measuring the institutional dimension of attribute-based status. These variables serve as proxies for regime type and executive constraint, both of which are conceptually linked to a state’s legitimacy and recognition within the international system. Including countries with irregular or absent values would have introduced noise into the dimensionality reduction process and undermined the empirical coherence of the attribute-based status construct.

Second, historical contextualization and manual adjustments were applied to address country-specific data gaps arising from geopolitical transitions. In particular, special care was taken when handling cases involving the breakup or reunification of states, such as the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the unification of Vietnam, or the division and reintegration of Germany. Rather than treating such transitions as missing at random, these adjustments acknowledged the substantive historical realities behind data discontinuities. This approach ensured that politically meaningful transformations were incorporated into the dataset without resorting to artificial continuity or arbitrary data stitching.

Third, missing data in the Intergovernmental Organization (IGO) dataset—approximately 4.8%—was explicitly acknowledged but deliberately not imputed. The rationale for this decision stems from the nature of IGO membership data: participation in IGOs is a categorical, discrete event tied to deliberate state decisions, geopolitical alignments, and eligibility. Imputing missing values would risk generating false signals of institutional engagement or non-engagement, thereby distorting one of the core components of institutional status. Instead, analyses involving institutional dimensions were based on complete cases to preserve the integrity of the underlying structural signal. This approach aligns with best practices in political science and comparative international studies, where theoretical considerations take precedence over statistical completeness.

Fourth, a range of derived variables were constructed to better capture the multidimensional nature of international status and to align empirical indicators with the theoretical framework proposed in this study. These derived variables reflect the institutional engagement and patterns of diplomatic recognition. For institutional dimensions, several IGO membership metrics were generated, including `prestigious_memberships`, `regional_memberships`, `global_memberships`, `security_memberships`, `economic_memberships`, and `political_memberships`. These subcategories allow the analysis to differentiate between types of institutional participation, recognizing that not all memberships contribute equally to a state's perceived status. For example, membership in high-profile global organizations (e.g., the UN Security Council or G7) likely signals greater status than participation in regional or functionally narrow bodies. Institutional status was further disaggregated using variables such as `institutional_status` (a cumulative measure of IGO engagement) and `functional_balance` (an indicator capturing the diversity of participation across different governance domains). For the network-based dimension, additional metrics were constructed to analyze diplomatic representation patterns. These include `recognition_percentage`, `recognition_balance`, and `recognition_ratio`, each of which captures a different aspect of how states are recognized or reciprocate recognition in the international system.

The final integrated dataset contained 8,276 country-year observations for 176 countries across 46 variables before subsetting for network analysis years

Methodological Overview

To empirically assess the multidimensionality of international status, this study employed a combination of quantitative methodologies, each selected to address a specific component of the research framework. At the core of the analysis is network analysis, which was used to construct annual diplomatic recognition networks. From these networks, a series of centrality measures—such as in-degree, eigenvector centrality, PageRank, and betweenness centrality—were computed. These metrics collectively capture the structural and prestige-based aspects of diplomatic relations, serving as the foundation for the network-based dimension of status.

To reduce the dimensionality of the data and extract latent structures from both attribute-based and network-based variables, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was applied. PCA allows for the construction of composite status scores by generating empirically derived weights for each input variable, thereby avoiding arbitrary or theory-imposed assumptions about the relative importance of individual indicators. This method was implemented separately for both status dimensions to ensure internal coherence.

Following the extraction of principal components, composite scores were created by standardizing and averaging the PCA results from the attribute and network dimensions. This approach enabled the generation of a unified, multidimensional status measure for each state-year. To capture the divergence between these two dimensions, a metric of status inconsistency was computed as the absolute difference between standardized attribute-based and network-based scores. This additional measure

allows for empirical investigation into misalignments between a state's material capabilities and the recognition it receives internationally.

To classify states into meaningful groups, cluster analysis was employed using both k-means and hierarchical clustering (Ward's method). These unsupervised machine learning techniques facilitated the identification of status categories based on observed similarities in the composite dimensions. The resulting clusters were then compared with traditional international relations typologies—such as great powers, major powers, and middle powers—to evaluate their conceptual validity.

Finally, a series of validation and statistical tests were conducted to assess the robustness and explanatory power of the constructed measures. This included linear and non-linear regression analysis to examine relationships between dimensions, ANOVA tests to determine significant differences across status groups, and visual diagnostics to explore the data's structure and support the substantive findings.

Analytical Approach and Implementation

Diplomatic Network Construction

The analytical approach commences with constructing diplomatic networks for each benchmark year (1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015). Each network is represented as a directed graph, where nodes represent individual states, and edges indicate diplomatic recognition. Edges are weighted based on the Level of Representation (LOR), which reflects the hierarchical quality of diplomatic representation, ranging from simple consular representation to full ambassadorial presence.

Multiple network metrics were calculated to comprehensively represent various facets of diplomatic recognition and prestige. In regard to the Recognition Metrics, in-degree centrality refers to the number of diplomatic ties received; weighted in-degree refers to the sum of LOR values from incoming ties, and the recognition rate refers to the normalized recognition count. In regard to the Prestige Metrics, eigenvector centrality measures influence based on the quality of diplomatic ties; PageRank is the prestige measure accounting for both quantity and quality of recognition; and authority scores are derived using the Hyperlink-Induced Topic Search (HITS) algorithm to assess the prestige of recognition. In regard to the Brokerage Metrics, the betweenness centrality measures states' ability to act as diplomatic intermediaries or brokers – the extent to which a country bridges different parts of the diplomatic network. Lastly, in regards to the Self-recognition Metrics, outgoing ties refers to the number of diplomatic representations extended by a country. Recognition balance is the difference between incoming and outgoing ties. Recognition ratio is the ratio of incoming to outgoing tie.

PCA-Based Composite Network Status Scores

To derive a robust and interpretable measure of network-based international status, this study applied Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to a series of diplomatic recognition network metrics. PCA

was used to reduce the dimensionality of the data and to identify latent components that capture the underlying structure of international recognition. The analysis was conducted across multiple benchmark years, and separate PCAs were performed for different conceptual subdimensions of network status: recognition, prestige, and brokerage. These components were then synthesized into an overall network status score.

The Recognition PCA included input variables such as recognition count, weighted recognition, and recognition rate. The Prestige PCA focused on network centrality measures that reflect the quality rather than just the quantity of recognition. Specifically, it included eigenvector centrality, PageRank, and authority scores. The Brokerage PCA was constructed using betweenness centrality and recognition count, aiming to capture a state's ability to act as a diplomatic intermediary or bridge within the international system.

To create a unified measure of network-based status, an Overall Network Status PCA was performed using all six core network metrics—spanning recognition, prestige, and brokerage dimensions. The first principal component from this comprehensive PCA consistently explained over 80% of total variance, and was therefore retained as the primary measure of network status for each country-year. This resulting score, referred to as the `overall_status_network_pca`, offers a single, empirically grounded metric that captures the multifaceted nature of diplomatic recognition and prestige in global politics.

Attribute-Based PCA Implementation

To operationalize the attribute-based dimension of international status, this study employed Principal Component Analysis (PCA) on a carefully curated set of variables reflecting states' material capabilities, institutional memberships, and political characteristics. The selection of variables was informed by both theoretical expectations and empirical precedent in the international relations literature. This approach ensured that the resulting status measure would comprehensively capture the structural

capacities and institutional roles that underpin a state's potential for international influence and recognition.

The attribute variables were organized into three broad, interrelated domains: material capabilities, institutional memberships, and political institutional characteristics. Each of these reflects a distinct facet of the structural foundations upon which status claims are often based.

First, material capabilities encompass a state's core resources for power projection, economic development, and demographic influence. The variables selected for this dimension include military expenditure (milex), representing a state's investment in defense capacity, and military personnel (milper), indicating the size of a state's standing armed forces. Iron and steel production (irst) serves as a proxy for industrial capacity and latent military potential, while primary energy consumption (pec) captures the state's overall industrial and economic throughput. Finally, total population (tpop) and urban population (upop) provide demographic measures reflecting both overall scale and urban-based economic and diplomatic density. Together, these indicators reflect the traditional realist emphasis on tangible material resources as key determinants of international status.

Second, institutional memberships were incorporated to capture the social and organizational embedding of states within the international system. This domain recognizes that participation in international governmental organizations (IGOs) serves not only as an indicator of influence but also as a marker of legitimate standing among peers. The variables include the total count of full IGO memberships, the number of prestigious memberships in organizations of particularly high normative or strategic value (e.g., the United Nations Security Council, the G7), regional and global memberships that reflect the geographic and functional breadth of influence, and functional memberships categorized into security, economic, and political roles. These measures align with the literature emphasizing that

institutional integration constitutes an important component of perceived status, supplementing material capabilities with normative legitimacy and organizational reach.

Finally, political institutional characteristics were included to account for the domestic structures that shape both internal governance and external perceptions. In particular, the Polity2 score (polity2), an aggregate measure of democratic and autocratic tendencies, and executive constraints (xconst), which represent the extent to which executive authority is checked by other institutional actors, were incorporated. These variables reflect the growing recognition that domestic political structures can affect international prestige, particularly in an era when governance norms have become central to how status is perceived and granted.

Integration of Status Dimensions

To integrate the network and attribute measures. First, the attribute-based PCA was performed on the full integrated dataset with complete cases. The network-data with PCA-based network status scores was then merged with the attribute scores. Only country-years present in both datasets were retained (n=1,505)

To produce a unified measure of international status, network and attribute PCA scores were standardized using z-scores, facilitating meaningful comparisons. These standardized scores were then combined equally into a single composite status score as the simple average of these standardized scores:

$$\text{Combined Status Score} = \frac{(\text{Attribute Status PCA}_z + \text{Network Status PCA}_z)}{2}$$

This equal weighting gives balanced representation to both material/institutional attributes and network recognition in the overall status measure.

Additionally, a status inconsistency metric was developed as the absolute difference between these standardized dimensions, explicitly capturing disparities between perceived recognition and tangible capabilities. It is calculated as the absolute difference between standardized attribute and network status.

$$\text{Status Inconsistency} = |\text{Attribute Status PCA}_z - \text{Network Status PCA}_z|$$

Higher values indicate greater divergence between a country's material/institutional position and its diplomatic recognition.

Status Classifications

To enhance analytical clarity and interpretability, this study developed a system of status classifications based on both composite scores and individual status dimensions. Two complementary strategies were employed to categorize states within the international hierarchy: quartile-based classification and unsupervised clustering techniques.

The first approach involved assigning countries to four status categories based on their relative position within the distribution of standardized scores. Specifically, each country-year observation was categorized into one of four quartiles for attribute-based, network-based, and combined status scores. These quartiles were labeled as follows: “High Status” (4), “Upper-Middle Status” (3), “Lower-Middle Status” (2), and “Low Status” (1). This method allowed for straightforward, intra-year comparisons that captured relative positioning within the global status distribution and ensured temporal consistency by adjusting for shifts in the international system over time.

To complement this ordinal framework, the study also employed clustering techniques, including k-means clustering and hierarchical clustering using Ward’s method, to derive empirically coherent

groupings of states. These unsupervised learning methods identify natural clusters in the multidimensional status space without relying on ex ante assumptions. The results revealed clear and interpretable groupings that closely aligned with traditional IR categories, including great powers, major powers, middle powers, and minor powers. The convergence of cluster-based classifications with historically grounded typologies provides strong empirical validation for the measurement framework and reinforces the conceptual coherence of the status dimensions.

Together, these classification strategies—one ordinal and relative, the other empirical and structural—form a detailed and rigorously implemented analytical framework. This dual approach not only enhances the interpretability of the empirical findings but also effectively bridges the gap between theoretical conceptualizations of international status and robust, data-driven categorization of states within the global hierarchy. As such, it lays the foundation for the subsequent analysis of status inconsistency, group dynamics, and temporal evolution in the international system.

Research Findings

Status Dimensions Identified by PCA

The use of Principal Component Analysis (PCA) on both attribute-based and network-based variables revealed a robust multidimensional structure underlying international status. These results not only support the theoretical expectation that status is composed of distinct but related dimensions, but also offer empirical clarity on how these dimensions can be captured quantitatively.

Attribute-Based PCA Results

The PCA conducted on attribute variables produced two dominant components that account for a substantial proportion of the variance and reflect key theoretical dimensions of state status. The first principal component (PC1) captured approximately 35.05% of the variance, characterized by strong positive loadings from institutional integration indicators such as full memberships (0.82), global

memberships (0.81), and prestigious memberships (0.77). Additionally, it included moderate positive loadings from key material capability indicators (ranging from 0.44 to 0.68). This dimension, termed the “Institutional-Material Dimension,” thus robustly represents a state’s institutional prominence combined with its material power. It reflects a state’s overall weight in global governance institutions and its tangible power resources. This dimension aligns closely with traditional views of state power, which emphasize both institutional participation and material strength as bases for international status.

The second principal component (PC2), accounting for about 24.14% of the variance, emphasized demographic and military power with strong positive loadings from military personnel (0.72), total population (0.71), and urban population (0.70). In contrast, institutional membership variables exhibited negative loadings (ranging from -0.30 to -0.47), clearly distinguishing this dimension from institutional integration. This dimension is thus labeled as the “Demographic-Military Dimension,” emphasizing a distinct facet of material capabilities driven primarily by demographic and military factors. This component, termed the Demographic-Military Dimension, aligns more closely with classical realist perspectives, which prioritize population size and military readiness as foundational elements of state power and status.

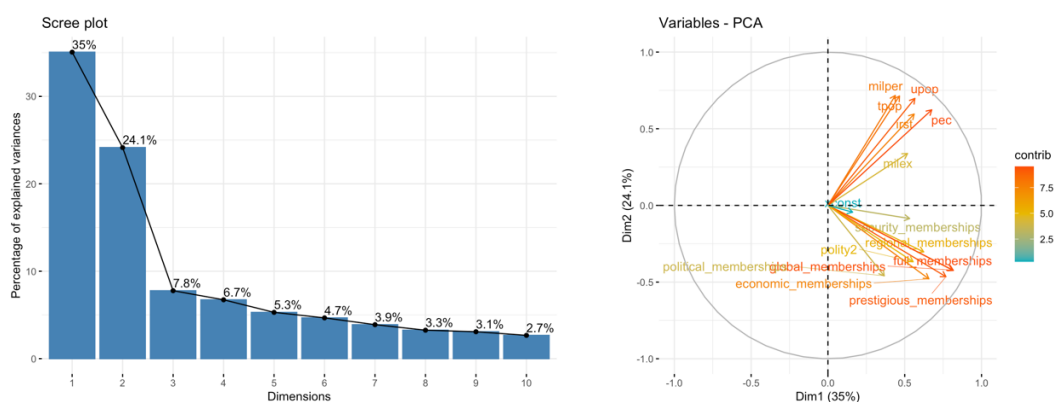


Figure 1 Scree Plot and PCA Variable Contribution Plot for the Attribute-Based Status: The scree plot visualizes the proportion of variance explained by each principal component extracted from attribute-based variables. The first two components account for a substantial share of the total variance—35% and 24%, respectively—validating the retention of these dimensions for further analysis. The first component captures institutional-material capacity, while the second reflects demographic-military strength. The correlation circle maps the contributions of individual attribute-based indicators to the first two principal components. Institutional variables (e.g., prestigious_memberships, global_memberships) load heavily on the first dimension, while

demographic and military indicators (e.g., milper, tpop, upop) dominate the second. This supports the identification of distinct Institutional-Material and Demographic-Military dimensions of international status.

Together, these two components explain nearly 60% of the total variance in the dataset and clearly validate the multidimensional nature of international status. These empirical results strongly support Hypothesis 1 (H1)—that attribute-based and network-based status are positively correlated but analytically distinct. While related (with a moderate correlation of $R^2 = 0.432$), the dimensions capture unique and complementary aspects of international status, highlighting the necessity of analyzing them jointly rather than substituting one for the other.

Network-Based PCA Results

The PCA applied to the network-based metrics also produced interpretable components that mirror key functional roles states play within the diplomatic system. The results highlight three distinct but interconnected dimensions: Recognition, Prestige, and Brokerage.

The Recognition Dimension—derived from variables such as in-degree centrality, weighted recognition, and recognition rate—exhibited exceptionally high explanatory power, consistently accounting for more than 96% of the variance across years. This reflects the stability and centrality of basic diplomatic recognition in structuring international relations.

The Prestige Dimension, constructed from prestige-weighted metrics like eigenvector centrality, PageRank, and authority scores, also demonstrated strong internal coherence and variance explanation above 96%, capturing the quality of recognition—i.e., being recognized by prestigious and influential states.

The Brokerage Dimension, based on betweenness centrality and recognition count, captured 60–73% of the variance depending on the year. This dimension reflects the strategic positioning of states that

serve as bridges or intermediaries in the diplomatic network, highlighting a more dynamic and temporally variable aspect of status.

The integration of these three network-related PCA scores into an overall network status PCA score produced a coherent and comprehensive measure of a state's position in the diplomatic network. This composite score consistently explained over 80% of the total variance and serves as the primary operationalization of network-based status in this study.

Cluster Analysis and Status Typology

Clustering analyses yielded four empirically grounded groupings that align closely with traditional international relations typologies. Guided by the silhouette and elbow methods, k-means clustering with $k = 4$ was identified as the optimal solution for segmenting the status space. The resulting clusters were clearly differentiated by levels of attribute-based and network-based status. **Cluster 2 (n = 15)** includes states with extremely high attribute status and the highest levels of network-based recognition, corresponding to traditional great powers. **Cluster 4 (n = 198)** consists of states with high levels of both status dimensions, reflecting major powers. **Cluster 3 (n = 519)** includes states with moderate scores on both dimensions and represents middle powers. Finally, **Cluster 1 (n = 773)** encompasses states with low levels of both attributes and recognition, corresponding to minor or peripheral powers.

Table 1 Cluster-Based Typology of International Status Groups

Cluster	Number of Observations (n)	Attribute Status	Network Status	Corresponding IR Typology
Cluster 2	15	Extremely High	Highest	Great Powers
Cluster 4	198	High	High	Major Powers

Cluster 3	519	Moderate	Moderate	Middle Powers
Cluster 1	773	Low	Low	Minor Powers

The hierarchical clustering with Ward's method produced similar results, confirming the robustness of this four-cluster solution.

The four clusters identified through k-means analysis exhibit clear and interpretable characteristics that align closely with traditional international relations status typologies. These empirically derived groupings provide strong support for Hypothesis 3 (H3), which posits that states can be meaningfully categorized into status hierarchies using combined attribute-based and network-based measures.

Cluster 2, which corresponds to great powers, includes states such as the United States, China (post-2000), and Russia. These countries exhibit the highest levels of both attribute-based and network-based status, reflecting their massive economic and military capabilities, extensive institutional integration, and near-universal diplomatic recognition. Their average attribute status score is 10.89, and their mean network status score is 0.92. These states occupy the apex of the international system and are characterized by both structural dominance and symbolic prestige.

Cluster 4, broadly identified as major powers, includes countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan. While these states possess substantial material capabilities and broad institutional memberships, their scores are slightly lower than those of great powers. Nonetheless, they maintain strong diplomatic networks and high levels of international recognition. The average attribute status for this group is 2.76, and the mean network status is 0.67, indicating their continued relevance in global governance and alliance systems.

Cluster 3 represents middle powers or regional influencers. This group includes states such as Brazil, Canada, Sweden, and Turkey, which exhibit moderate levels of material and institutional capacity but often exert influence through regional leadership, niche diplomacy, and functional specialization within global institutions. Their average attribute status is -0.26 , and their mean network status is 0.40 . These countries are typically active participants in multilateral organizations and are often seen as norm entrepreneurs or coalition-builders.

Finally, Cluster 1, the largest group, corresponds to minor powers. Comprising a wide range of countries with limited capabilities, this cluster reflects states with lower institutional integration and relatively weak diplomatic networks. These states often play peripheral roles in global governance and tend to be more reactive than agenda-setting in international affairs. Their average attribute status is -1.70 , and their mean network status is 0.17 , underscoring their relatively marginal position in the international hierarchy.

Together, these results affirm that data-driven classification methods can produce status groupings that strongly correspond to longstanding theoretical distinctions in international relations. By empirically validating these categories, this study demonstrates the analytical utility of multidimensional status measurement and its ability to clarify the structure of international order.

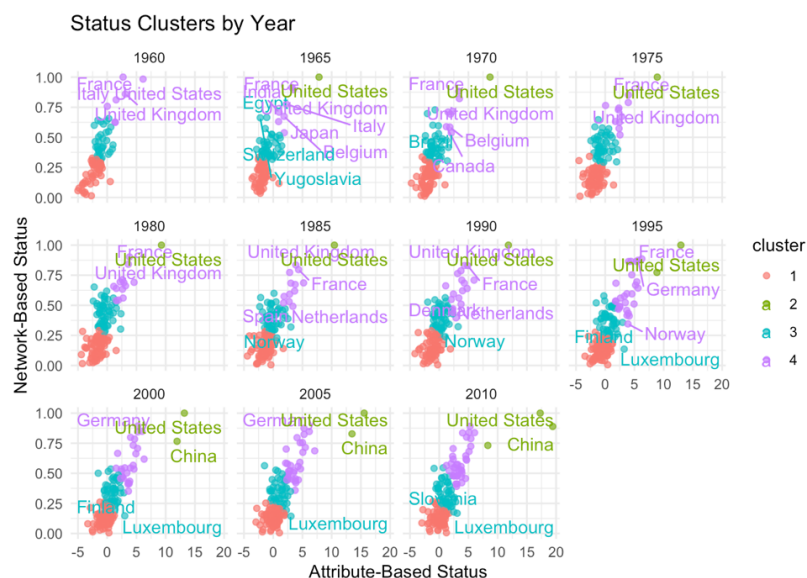


Figure 2 Temporal Distribution of Status Clusters: This figure displays the distribution of countries across four empirically derived status clusters over time, based on attribute-based and network-based status scores. Each panel represents a benchmark year between 1960 and 2010. The x-axis denotes standardized attribute-based status, and the y-axis represents standardized network-based status. Clusters were determined using k-means clustering ($k=4$) and correspond to traditional international status categories: Cluster 1 (red) = Minor Powers, Cluster 3 (blue) = Middle Powers, Cluster 4 (purple) = Major Powers, and Cluster 2 (green) = Great Powers.

Status Inconsistency

A core component of this study is the examination of status inconsistency, defined as the absolute divergence between a state's attribute-based status and its network-based status. This measure captures the degree of misalignment between a state's material and institutional capabilities and the recognition it receives in the international system. The distribution of status inconsistency across the dataset reveals a right-skewed pattern: while the majority of states demonstrate relatively modest inconsistency scores, a small number exhibit extreme deviations, indicating significant disparities between their capabilities and their recognition.

Among the countries with the highest average inconsistency scores are Yugoslavia (mean = 2.04), Luxembourg (1.69), Czechoslovakia (1.68), Cuba (1.66), and Northern Cyprus (1.63). These cases exemplify different forms of imbalance. Some states, like Belgium, Switzerland, and Singapore, possess positive inconsistency, meaning their recognition in the international system exceeds what would be

expected based on their material and institutional attributes. Conversely, countries such as China (prior to 2000) show negative inconsistency, wherein their tangible capabilities outpace the level of international recognition they receive. These divergences are theoretically important, as they may be indicative of either under-recognition or over-inflated prestige in international diplomacy and status signaling.

The analysis also identifies important temporal patterns in the distribution and magnitude of status inconsistency. Using regression models with year fixed effects, the results indicate a general decline in inconsistency over time, with all year coefficients significantly negative relative to the baseline year of 1960. This suggests that as the international system has matured, the alignment between state capabilities and recognition has become more coherent and stable.

A closer examination of specific historical periods reveals further nuance. The highest levels of inconsistency were observed during the 1960–1965 interval, a period characterized by Cold War polarization and the existence of parallel diplomatic hierarchies. The lowest levels of inconsistency occurred in the late 1980s (1985–1990), coinciding with the waning of Cold War competition and increasing convergence in global diplomatic norms. However, a slight uptick in inconsistency has emerged in the post-2000 era, likely reflecting the rise of new powers, shifting recognition patterns, and contestation over established hierarchies in a multipolar world.

These findings provide strong support for Hypothesis 2 (H2), which posits that status inconsistency has generally decreased as the international system has matured, reflecting greater institutionalization and normative convergence in how states confer and receive status. Nevertheless, the persistence of certain outlier cases and the recent post-2000 increase also underscore the fluid and evolving nature of status recognition, particularly in a changing global order.

Validation and Statistical Analysis

To assess the relationship between attribute-based and network-based measures of international status, both linear and non-linear regression models were employed. The linear model demonstrates a statistically significant positive relationship between the two dimensions, with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.058$ and a p-value < 0.001 , indicating strong evidence against the null hypothesis. However, the model exhibits moderate explanatory power, with an R^2 value of 0.432 and a residual standard error of 0.153, suggesting that while there is a clear relationship, substantial variance remains unexplained within a purely linear framework.

To account for potential complexities in the relationship, a Generalized Additive Model (GAM) was estimated. The GAM model significantly outperforms the linear model, as evidenced by a reduction in the Akaike Information Criterion ($\Delta AIC = -118.08$), from -1367.998 (linear) to -1486.076 (GAM). This substantial improvement in model fit confirms the presence of non-linearities in the relationship between attribute-based and network-based status dimensions. Specifically, the GAM identifies a pattern of diminishing returns at high levels of attribute-based status, revealing a plateau effect among the most materially capable states. These findings indicate that beyond a certain threshold, increased material or institutional capacity does not proportionally translate into greater network-based recognition.

Furthermore, temporal variation in the strength of the relationship was observed. Regression coefficients were strongest in the early Cold War era, peaking around 1960 at approximately 0.10, and gradually declined over the following decades. By 2010, the coefficient dropped to around 0.06, suggesting a weakening association between material/institutional capabilities and diplomatic recognition. This trend implies that while capabilities were once a more direct predictor of recognition, recent decades have witnessed a more complex and diffuse structure of status attribution, potentially shaped by evolving global norms, regional dynamics, and the diversification of diplomatic strategies.

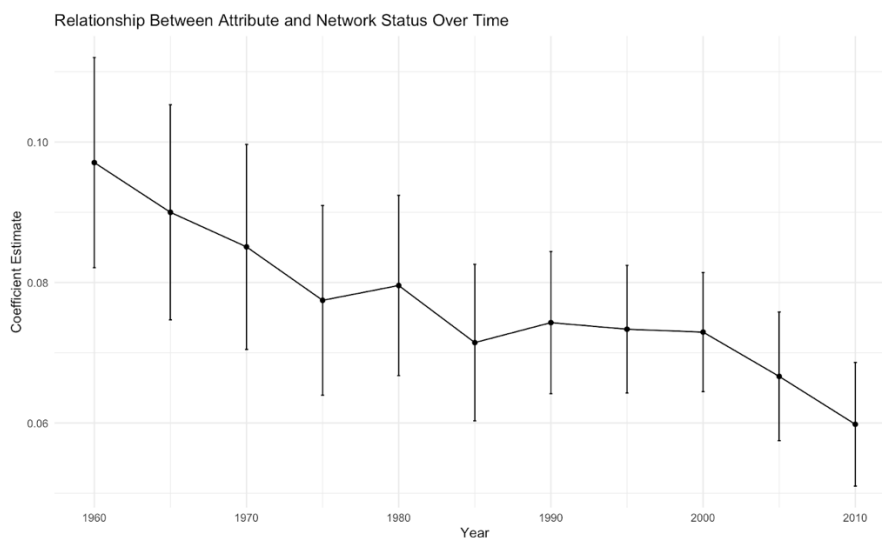


Figure 3 Temporal Variation in the Relationship between Attribute-Based and Network-Based Status (1960-2010): This figure plots the estimated regression coefficients capturing the relationship between attribute-based status and network-based status across selected benchmark years from 1960 to 2010. The vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals for each estimate. The coefficients indicate a consistently positive but gradually weakening association over time. In the early decades, such as 1960 and 1965, the strength of the relationship approached 0.10, suggesting stronger alignment between material capacity and diplomatic recognition. However, by 2010, the coefficient had declined to approximately 0.06, reflecting increased divergence and potential rise in status inconsistency. These temporal patterns suggest that while the two dimensions remain correlated, the degree of congruence has diminished in recent decades.

Collectively, these results confirm that while a robust relationship exists between attribute-based and network-based status, it is non-linear and temporally contingent, reinforcing the conceptualization of international status as both dynamic and structurally complex.

ANOVA Tests for Cluster Differences

To determine whether the empirically derived status groups—great powers, major powers, middle powers, and minor powers—represent statistically distinct categories, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted across all primary dimensions of status.

The results reveal highly significant differences in attribute-based status across all groups ($F = 424.7, p < 0.001$), with clear separation between each of the four categories. Similarly, network-based status exhibits extremely significant differentiation ($F = 1572, p < 0.001$), suggesting that states' positions

in the diplomatic network are meaningfully stratified along status lines. The analysis of combined status scores further supports this conclusion, with an ANOVA F-statistic of 1278 ($p < 0.001$). Follow-up post-hoc tests confirmed that all pairwise comparisons between groups were statistically significant at $p < 0.0001$, reinforcing the empirical robustness of the status typology.

Table 2 ANOVA Results for Status Dimensions

Dimension	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr (>F)
Attribute Status	3	3633	1211.0	424.7	<2e-16
Residuals	1501	4279	2.9		
Network Status	3	47.23	15.74	1572	<2e-16
Residuals	1501	15.04	0.01		
Combined Status	3	895.7	298.55	1278	<2e-16
Residuals	1501	350.6	0.23		

Table 3 Post-Hoc Tukey Test – Pairwise Comparisons Across IR Categories

Contrast	Estimate	SE	df	t.ratio	p.value
Great Power – Major Power	1.116	0.0354	1501	31.562	<.0001
Great Power – Middle Power	1.600	0.0353	1501	45.306	<.0001
Great Power – Minor Power	2.086	0.0353	1501	59.135	<.0001
Major Power – Middle Power	0.484	0.0352	1501	13.748	<.0001
Major Power – Minor Power	0.970	0.0352	1501	27.583	<.0001

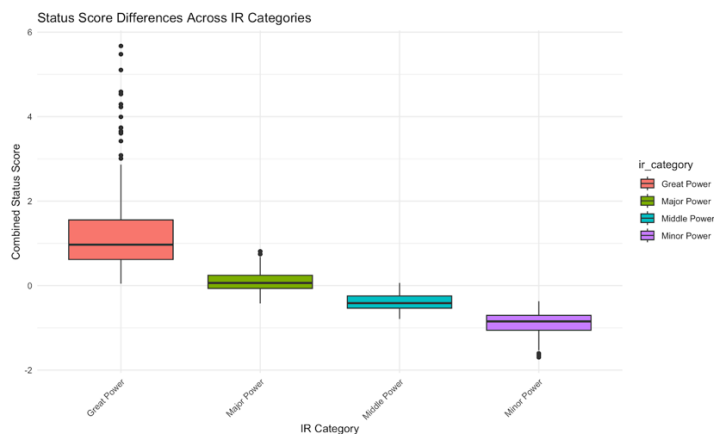


Figure 4 Combined Status Score Distribution Across IR Categories: Boxplot visualization of the empirically derived status scores across Great, Major, Middle, and Minor Powers shows clear stratification and significant variance between groups.

Analysis of status inconsistency across groups also yielded important insights. Although the absolute magnitude of difference was less pronounced than with the primary status dimensions, the variation was still statistically significant ($F = 18.03, p < 0.001$). Interestingly, the great powers exhibited the highest average levels of status inconsistency, followed by major powers. This trend suggests that more powerful states may experience greater tensions between their material capacities and the recognition they receive—possibly due to lag effects in diplomatic adjustment or contested claims to international leadership.

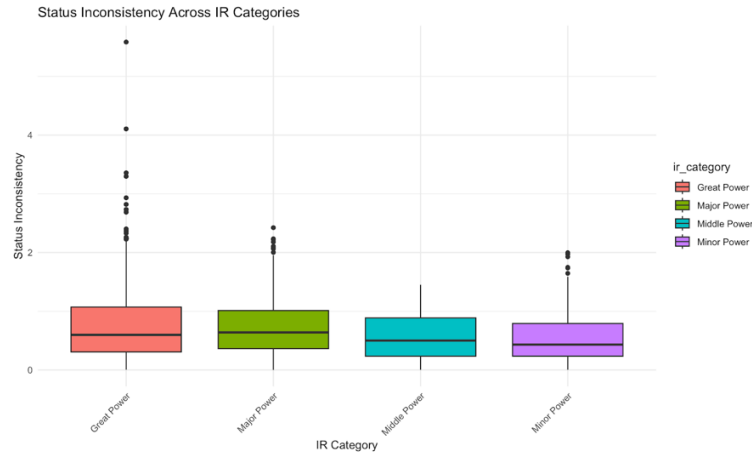


Figure 5 Status Inconsistency by IR Category: Boxplot displaying the distribution of status inconsistency scores across four international relations (IR) status categories: Great Power, Major Power, Middle Power, and Minor Power. While all groups exhibit internal variability, Great Powers show both the highest median inconsistency and the widest spread, suggesting greater divergence between material capabilities and diplomatic recognition. These results support the hypothesis that powerful states may experience more complex alignment challenges between attribute-based and network-based status.

In sum, these statistical tests provide compelling evidence that the clustered status categories identified in this study are not only conceptually valid but also empirically and statistically distinct, thereby supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3) and reinforcing the utility of the multidimensional measurement framework proposed in this research.

Discussion and Theoretical Implications

Theoretical Contribution

The findings clearly underscore international status as inherently multidimensional, effectively bridging theoretical divides between material and ideational perspectives within international relations (IR) scholarship. The attribute-based and network-based dimensions show a moderately strong positive correlation ($R^2 = 0.432$), yet remain analytically distinct, precisely confirming Renshon's proposition that status comprises both tangible capabilities and social recognition processes. (Renshon 2017) This empirical validation resolves a longstanding theoretical tension between realist conceptions of status-as-capability and constructivist understandings of status-as-recognition, demonstrating that these perspectives capture complementary rather than competing dimensions of the same phenomenon.

Empirical observations of status inconsistency—the disparity between attribute-based capabilities and diplomatic recognition—reveal patterns with critical theoretical implications. The most extreme cases, such as Yugoslavia (mean inconsistency = 2.04), Luxembourg (1.69), and Cuba (1.66), demonstrate how distinctly different forms of inconsistency manifest in foreign policy behavior. For instance, China's pre-2000 negative inconsistency (high capabilities, lower recognition) correlates with its aggressive pursuit of institutional membership and expanded diplomatic presence, while Belgium's positive inconsistency (moderate capabilities, high recognition) enabled it to secure hosting rights for major international institutions despite its limited material power. The temporal trend shows inconsistency peaked during the 1960-1965 Cold War period (mean = 0.76) before declining to its lowest point during 1985-1990 (mean = 0.41), providing quantitative evidence for Volgy and Mayhall's (1995) theoretical prediction that status hierarchies stabilize as international systems mature. The recent uptick in inconsistency post-2000 (mean increasing to 0.52) specifically challenges theoretical expectations of linear convergence, suggesting instead that periods of systemic transition reintroduce status disequilibrium.

One of the most significant theoretical contributions is the robust empirical validation of traditional IR status categories through data-driven clustering. The four clusters identified correspond precisely to established typologies: Cluster 2 (n=15, mean attribute status=10.89, mean network status=0.92) encompasses classic great powers including the United States, Russia, and post-2000 China; Cluster 4 (n=198, mean attribute status=2.76, mean network status=0.67) captures major powers such as France, the UK, and Japan; Cluster 3 (n=519, mean attribute status=-0.26, mean network status=0.40) includes middle powers like Brazil, Canada, and Sweden; while Cluster 1 (n=773, mean attribute status=-1.70, mean network status=0.17) comprises minor powers with limited capabilities and recognition. This empirical confirmation of Buzan's categorical framework transforms what were previously intuitive or historically-based classifications into statistically verified groupings with clear dimensional boundaries.

This research advances theoretical understanding in three specific ways. First, the PCA results demonstrate that attribute-based status is itself multidimensional, with institutional-material elements (explaining 35.05% of variance) distinct from demographic-military factors (explaining 24.14% of variance)—a finding that refines the conventional understanding of material status as unidimensional. Second, the network analysis reveals that diplomatic recognition consists of distinguishable recognition, prestige, and brokerage components, with recognition consistency explaining over 96% of variance across years while brokerage exhibits greater temporal variability (60-73% variance explained)—evidence that challenges simplistic conceptions of recognition as uniform. Third, the non-linear relationship between attribute and network status ($\Delta AIC = -118.08$ between linear and GAM models) reveals a previously untheorized plateau effect whereby extremely high material capabilities yield diminishing returns in recognition—a finding that reconciles competing theories about how power translates into status by showing this relationship changes across different segments of the status hierarchy.

Methodological Contribution

This research makes several important methodological contributions to the study and measurement of international status. By developing a comprehensive, empirically grounded strategy that integrates multiple data sources and analytical techniques, the study moves beyond traditional single-dimensional approaches. In doing so, it offers a replicable framework for understanding how different forms of power and recognition interact in the international system.

A central innovation lies in the integration of network analysis and principal component analysis (PCA) to measure network-based status. By drawing on a rich set of diplomatic recognition metrics—including centrality measures such as eigenvector centrality, PageRank, and betweenness—the study captures both the breadth and quality of international recognition. PCA then reduces these complex and potentially collinear indicators into a composite measure, providing a parsimonious yet powerful representation of a state’s network-derived status.

Equally important is the explicit modeling of attribute-based status, which encompasses material capabilities, institutional integration, and political institutional characteristics. By applying PCA to this multidimensional attribute space (consisting of 16 variables), the research avoids the arbitrary weighting schemes that characterized earlier status indices. The final two-component solution identified an Institutional-Material dimension explaining 35.05% of variance and a Demographic-Military dimension explaining 24.14% of variance—dimensions that would have remained conflated in traditional additive indices. This data-driven approach conventional CINC-based measures in capturing the multidimensional nature of attribute-based status.

The construction of composite status scores through standardized integration of the network and attribute dimensions represents a significant methodological advance over prior measurement approaches. Unlike previous measures of status discrepancy that primarily focused on objective indicators, this study’s status inconsistency metric—calculated as the absolute difference between standardized attribute and

network scores—provides a more refined empirical measure while still acknowledging the psychological and social dimensions emphasized in theoretical work like Ward's status immobility framework. (Ward, 2017) This approach enabled the identification of both positive inconsistency cases (like Belgium, Switzerland, and Singapore, whose recognition exceeds their material capabilities) and negative inconsistency cases (like pre-2000 China, whose capabilities exceeded its recognition), revealing patterns that complement and extend existing theoretical understandings

The application of cluster analysis techniques enhances the empirical rigor of status classification. Using silhouette scores to determine optimal cluster numbers (with the highest average silhouette width of 0.67 achieved with $k=4$) and validating results through both k -means and Ward's hierarchical method, this research provides a replicable, data-driven alternative to the subjective expert coding employed in COW's Major Power classification. The resulting clusters demonstrated statistical distinctiveness through highly significant ANOVA tests across all dimensions ($F=424.7$ for attribute status, $F=1572$ for network status, $p<0.001$ for both), with all pairwise comparisons significant at $p<0.0001$ in post-hoc tests.

Beyond these core innovations, the research addresses methodological challenges that have hindered previous quantitative status studies. The integration of temporally discontinuous datasets (like those for Yugoslavia, Vietnam, and Germany) required careful historical contextualization rather than statistical imputation, preserving the substantive meaning of geopolitical transitions. Similarly, the decision to use Generalized Additive Models (GAMs) to capture non-linear relationships between status dimensions (resulting in an AIC improvement of 118.08 points over linear models) represents a methodological sophistication rarely seen in international relations research on status hierarchies.

Taken together, these methodological contributions significantly advance the empirical toolkit available to international relations scholars. They enable a more nuanced, multidimensional, and

theoretically informed understanding of how states are positioned—and perceive themselves to be positioned—within the global status hierarchy.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study advances a comprehensive and empirically grounded framework for measuring international status, it is important to acknowledge several methodological and theoretical limitations. These limitations, however, do not undermine the validity of the findings; rather, they open valuable avenues for future research.

First, the temporal scope of this analysis is limited to the years 1960–2015, constrained by the availability and completeness of source datasets. As more comprehensive and temporally extensive data become available, particularly for earlier historical periods and the most recent decade, the framework developed here can be expanded to enable more nuanced longitudinal comparisons and to assess status dynamics in real-time global developments.

Second, while this study utilized detailed formal diplomatic representation data, it does not incorporate informal modes of recognition, such as symbolic gestures, summit participation, bilateral visits, or recognition through soft power mechanisms. Future work could enrich the measurement of network-based status by incorporating qualitative diplomatic engagements and unstructured recognition events, capturing the broader spectrum of status signaling beyond formal institutions.

Methodologically, while Principal Component Analysis (PCA) provided an efficient and transparent tool for dimension reduction, it is inherently linear and may not fully capture the non-linear interactions among complex status indicators. Future research could experiment with non-linear techniques such as kernel PCA, t-SNE, or deep learning-based autoencoders to uncover latent structures

in high-dimensional status data and to validate the robustness of dimensional findings through alternative embeddings.

Similarly, the use of k-means and hierarchical clustering for status classification could be enhanced by exploring alternative clustering methods, such as DBSCAN, spectral clustering, or model-based approaches. These may be better suited to detect non-spherical or probabilistically defined groupings, thereby improving the analytical sensitivity and theoretical relevance of status groupings.

An important theoretical extension that this study only partially engages with is the temporal dimension of status inconsistency itself. While the empirical analysis identifies time trends, it does not explicitly model time as an interacting variable. It is plausible that the non-linear relationship observed between attribute-based and network-based status is partly moderated by temporal dynamics—such as evolving international norms, system-level institutionalization, or punctuated moments of change. A future model could incorporate this by proposing a function of the form:

$$S = f(\text{Status}_{\text{attribute}}^z, \text{Status}_{\text{network}}^z, \text{Status}_{\text{temporal}}^z)$$

Finally, this study is primarily based on objective indicators of capability and recognition. However, international status is also deeply embedded in subjective perceptions—how states view their own position and how others perceive them. Future research can incorporate "text-as-data" methodologies to analyze domestic elite discourse, diplomatic rhetoric, or media portrayals, thereby illuminating the cognitive and ideational dimensions of status. This could bridge the current gap between empirical status measurement and constructivist theories of international identity, role performance, and status-seeking behavior.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore one of the most conceptually rich yet empirically underdeveloped areas of international relations: the measurement and analysis of international status. It argued that status is a multidimensional phenomenon, shaped by both a state's material and institutional attributes and the social recognition it receives from others. By synthesizing insights from realism, constructivism, and social identity theory, the study conceptualized status as both a structural position and a social construction—and critically, one that may not always align across dimensions.

To operationalize this framework, the study introduced a novel methodology that integrates Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and network analysis across more than 1,500 country-year observations from 1960 to 2015. Two primary dimensions were derived: an attribute-based status score, capturing material capabilities and institutional integration; and a network-based status score, capturing a state's embeddedness and prestige within the diplomatic recognition network. These two dimensions were standardized and combined to form a composite status score, and their divergence was measured through a status inconsistency index.

The findings of this study support all three central hypotheses. First, the PCA results validated the distinct yet positively correlated nature of attribute-based and network-based status (H1). Second, the analysis of status inconsistency revealed both its presence and its variation across time and space, with evidence that inconsistency declined during the post-Cold War era, as the international system became more institutionalized and normative convergence increased (H2). Third, the study employed both k-means and hierarchical clustering techniques to classify states based on their combined attribute and network status scores. These unsupervised learning methods identified four empirically grounded clusters that closely correspond to traditional IR categories—namely, great powers, major powers, middle powers, and minor powers. The use of multiple clustering algorithms and validation criteria, including the

silhouette and elbow methods, confirmed the robustness of the four-cluster solution. This finding not only supports Hypothesis 3 but also demonstrates how machine learning methods can strengthen and formalize typologies that are often treated as intuitive or historically fixed in international relations scholarship.

Beyond its empirical insights, the thesis makes several important contributions to the field. Theoretically, it advances our understanding of status not merely as a derivative of power but as a socially embedded and dynamic construct, with implications for state behavior, hierarchy formation, and systemic stability. Methodologically, it offers a scalable and replicable framework for status measurement that avoids arbitrary thresholds and instead draws from the data itself. This approach allows for temporal and cross-sectional comparisons that are both rigorous and adaptable. Empirically, the thesis contributes a comprehensive dataset and a nuanced portrait of the global status hierarchy, illuminating the trajectories of rising and declining powers and the dynamics of international recognition.

At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations. The temporal range (1960–2015) excludes both earlier historical periods and the most recent geopolitical developments. The use of formal diplomatic representation as the sole basis for recognition may omit informal or symbolic forms of status signaling. Furthermore, the measurement of recognition remains grounded in objective diplomatic ties, while subjective perceptions—such as national narratives or elite discourse—are not incorporated.

These limitations point toward promising directions for future research. Scholars could build on this framework by incorporating textual data (e.g., speeches, UN General Debate statements, or elite media discourse) to capture subjective status claims. Additionally, non-linear and machine learning approaches—such as autoencoders or temporal clustering—could further refine the analysis of status evolution. Finally, the connection between status inconsistency and foreign policy behavior remains a fertile area for exploration, especially in the context of rising powers, contested recognition, and institutional reform.

In sum, this thesis offers a theoretically grounded and empirically validated approach to understanding international status as a multidimensional and evolving phenomenon. It invites scholars to move beyond static and power-centric accounts and to engage more deeply with the social dynamics that structure the international system.

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