Status Deficits and War

Jonathan Renshon

Abstract Despite widespread agreement that status matters, there is relatively little in the way of focused research on *how* and *when* it matters. Relying on the assumption that it "matters" has provided few extant theories of variation in states' concern for status and little understanding of its specific implications for international conflict. I introduce a theory of status dissatisfaction (SD) that clarifies who forms the basis for status comparisons in world politics, when status concerns should be paramount, and how they are linked to international conflict. I demonstrate the viability of conflict as a strategy for status enhancement: both initiation and victory bring substantial status benefits over both five- and ten-year periods. Using a new, network-based measure of international status, I demonstrate that status deficits are significantly associated with an increased probability of war and militarized interstate dispute (MID) initiation. Even internationally, status is local: I use "community detection" algorithms to recover status communities and show that deficits within those communities are particularly salient for states and leaders.

Scholars from disparate traditions in political science and international relations (IR) agree that status—standing or rank in a hierarchy—is a critical element of international politics.[1] The first aspect of this consensus is scholars' strong belief that status affects outcomes of interest across IR, including behavior related to international organizations, nuclear proliferation, and international political economy.[2] Horowitz and colleagues are typical of this assumption and conclude that "status seeking and dominating behavior may be as important as raw aggression in affecting the likelihood of international conflict."[3] The second element is general agreement that status has been

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1. See Morgenthau 1948; and Tetlock 1985; or more recently, Wohlforth 2009; Lake 2013; and Larson and Shevchenko 2014.

2. See Hafner-Burton and Montgomery 2006; Levite 2003; O'Neill 2006; and Elkins and Simmons 2004, respectively. A related belief is that status concerns are particularly important to certain countries, such as Russia, Norway, India, China, or France. See Mandelbaum 1998; Leira 2015; Miller 2013; Larson and Shevchenko 2010; and Hecht 2009, respectively.

3. Horowitz, McDermott, and Stam 2005, 267. This perspective unites realists and constructivists alike. For example, Schweller (1997, 927) states outright that "all realists share a pessimistic worldview that

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an important factor in particular cases of real-world importance, where scholars have been confident in attributing status-seeking motives to states and leaders. For example, Mastanduno, in describing the Cold War dynamic, states that "US officials worried greatly, some would say obsessively, about the costs to US credibility and prestige of failed or aborted interventions."[4]

Although there is considerable agreement within the political science discipline and the foreign policy community that status matters in world affairs, there is little focused research on how and when it matters. Qualitative work has been illuminating, but unable to establish patterns across time and space, while cross-national research on status and conflict has established a foundation for future inquiries, but has yet to generate concrete, replicable findings on the subject.[5] Recent experimental work on political and military leaders has touched on the subject as well, though without the direct link to international conflict that is still the gold standard in IR.[6]

I present a series of methodological and theoretical innovations intended to break new substantive ground in the study of status and world politics. On the theoretical side, I clarify the relationship between status and conflict through a theory of "status dissatisfaction." Although the desire to show that status matters has been a valuable building block, I propose an approach that focuses on status concerns that vary over time and context, rather than the traditional focus on status-seeking or general preferences for status. This is critical because, while preferences for higher status can be taken as a constant, the level of concern over relative status is not and thus provides far greater analytical leverage in examining the effects of status in world politics.

posits perpetual struggle among groups for security, prestige and power." Lebow (2008, 284) argues that for several hundred years, "honor and prestige were even more important than security and wealth" and in a later work he declares prestige to be the driving motive in 62 percent of wars fought since 1648 (171). In his chapter on the relationship between status-seeking, dominance, and war, Rosen (2007, 71) notes that "it is the observation of European diplomatic historians that status issues … were central to questions of peace and war in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." Nor is the importance of status confined to great powers; Neumann and de Carvalho (2015, 1) argue that "status is a key driver in the policies of small states."

4. Mastanduno 1997, 57. This case is often substantiated via public and private statements of leaders. For example, General Ridgeway wrote to his superiors concerning strategy in Korea that the official US policy was "particularly debilitating to our prestige" (quoted in Stueck 1997, 241); for more on prestige issues in the Korean war, see Whiting 1968. In another example, Lloyd George described Britain's position during the 1911 Agadir crisis: "Britain should at all hazards maintain her place and prestige among the Great Powers of the world … if a situation were to be forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position Britain has won … peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure" (quoted in Onea 2014, 148). In a similar, earlier crisis (again centered on Morocco), Friedrich von Holstein, an influential German diplomat, asserted "If we let ourselves be trampled on in Morocco we invite similar treatment elsewhere. Not for material reasons alone, but even more for the sake of prestige must Germany protest against the intended appropriation of Morocco by France" (quoted in Snyder 1991, 78).

5. For examples of excellent qualitative work, see Markey 2000; Hymans 2006; Wohlforth 2009; Larson and Shevchenko 2010; and Murray 2010. For quantitative research, see Wallace 1971; Ray 1974; Volgy and Mayhall 1995; and Maoz 2010.

6. Renshon 2015b.

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Status dissatisfaction also explains how status is linked to international conflict, beginning with the critical issue of how states make status comparisons. In particular, it focuses on how states group themselves into "status communities" of peer competitors. Although previous work has noted that status is relative, it has failed to ask: relative to whom? Thus, one notable advancement of this theory is its treatment of these reference groups, long cited as one of the key elements of status by virtually every other field in the social sciences, but severely neglected in IR.

Finally, the theory provides an explicit link between status dissatisfaction—a heightened concern for status triggered by status deficits within a given status community—and conflict. Previous theories have relied on "frustration" or "unthinking" aggression that presupposes a degree of irrationality that is difficult to prove and serves to underemphasize the strategic nature of status-seeking in world politics, one that is consistent with both psychological and rationalist accounts of IR.[7] States seek status commensurate with their abilities because it is a valuable resource for coordinating expectations of dominance and deference in strategic interactions. Rather than a response to failing to change an actor's status position, the initiation of conflict is better conceptualized as one way that states seek to alter the beliefs of other members of the international community. This strategy works: states that initiate and win conflicts receive substantively and statistically significant boosts in their status ranks after both five and ten years.

The ephemeral (that is, ideational and social) nature of status implies that several methodological issues must be tackled to provide a convincing demonstration of status dissatisfaction. The two most prominent are the measurement of status itself and the identification of "status communities." Following previous work, I use the diplomatic exchanges between countries as a measure of status, but I identify three issues that have limited the usefulness of these data thus far:

1. All countries are equal (representation from smaller states "counts" as much as representation from superpowers).
2. All diplomats are equal (previous work has ignored the different levels of diplomatic representation by collapsing the data into binary form).
3. There is only one hierarchy, composed of all states.

To rectify the first issue, I innovate by measuring status through a network centrality measure that—unlike previous work—sensibly takes into account the importance of the sending country so that states are allowed differential abilities to confer status on other actors. To address the latter two issues, I use a "community detection" algorithm that weights edges (connections between states) by the level of diplomatic representation to form "status communities" based on the number and intensity of real-world interactions between states.

7. For an example of this, see O'Neill 2006.

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Status in International Relations

In empirical IR, the most prominent manifestation of status has been the idea that conflict arises from status "inconsistency," a disjuncture between the status attributed by the international community and the status one actually deserves.[8] Attributed status was indexed using the number of diplomatic representatives received and achieved status—what countries would feel they "deserved"—was measured as military and industrial capacity.[9] Findings in this tradition were mixed: some research found greater inconsistencies associated with the onset and severity of international conflict while others found either no relationship or a negative relationship between status inconsistency and war.[10] Still others argued that these mixed results might be explained by temporal shifts in the relationship between status inconsistency and conflict.[11]

In Table 1, what at first glance seem to be many "failed" replications are an agglomeration of different research designs, hypotheses, and subsets of data: no analysis has examined the entire international system over the entire span of time for which data exist. And while some studies examined the overall levels of status inconsistency and its relationship to levels of international violence, most works examine status inconsistency for individual states.[12] This means that we have little sense of whether the mixed results are the "fault" of the general intuition, the specific theory (based on frustration and aggression), or the multiple and conflicting ways it has been tested.

Related work can be found in the "causes of war" literature as well as research on the acquisition and demonstration of both conventional and nuclear weapons.[13] In power transition and hegemonic war theory, status has been a focus of the theories, but neglected in empirical efforts. Gilpin and Organski and Kugler have all argued for the importance of prestige as one of the central benefits denied to rising powers by the reigning hegemon who "locks in" a hierarchy of prestige that may no longer accurately reflect the balance of capabilities.[14] Yet, "satisfaction" with the system has been measured—not directly through careful construction of status dissatisfaction measures—through second- or third-order implications, such as an alliance portfolio that aligns with that of the "system leader."[15]

A growing literature on status in IR has drawn from Social Identity Theory (SIT), a particularly useful lens that focuses our attention on social comparison. Larson and Shevchenko have used SIT to explore strategies that great powers have used to maintain or increase their status, such as emulating the practices of higher-status groups.[16]

8. On status in IR theory, see Markey 2000. On status "inconsistency," see Galtung 1964.
9. Singer and Small 1966.
10. See Wallace 1971 and 1973; Ray 1974; and East 1972, respectively.
11. See Gochman 1980; and Volgy and Mayhall 1995.
12. Some, including one of the most serious modern efforts—Maoz 2010—have measured status using alternative measures, making "apples-to-apples" comparison difficult.
13. See Lebow 2010; Eyre and Suchman 1996; Sagan 1996; and O'Neill 2006.
14. See Gilpin 1988; and Organski and Kugler 1980.
15. Signorino and Ritter 1999.
16. See Larson and Shevchenko 2003 and 2010.

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TABLE 1. *Previous research on status inconsistency*

Study	*Temporal domain*	*Spatial domain*	*Dependent variable*	*IV*	*Finding*
Wallace 1971 and 1973	1820–1964	"Central system" ($n = 26$)	Amount of conflict in system in a given year	Status inconsistency (aggregated)	Positive relationship between status inconsistency and war, lagged 15 years
Doran, Hill, and Mladenka 1979	N/A	United States, Japan, and Finland	Threat perception	Status inconsistency (individual)	Positive: in a survey of individuals from three nations, status "disequilibrium" was a significant predictor for feelings of threat
Midlarsky 1975	1870–1945		War involvement	Mean status inconsistency (state) over 75-year period	Positive relationship between status inconsistency and war involvement
Maoz 2010	1816–2000	All states	Conflict involvement (monadic and dyadic) and amount of conflict in system in a given year	Status inconsistency (state, dyad, and system)	Positive relationship between status inconsistency and war involvement at monadic, dyadic, and system level
Gochman 1980	1820–1970	Major powers ($n = 9$)	War involvement	Status inconsistency (state)	Mixed: status inconsistency associated with conflict for some states in some time periods
Volgy and Mayhall 1995	1950–87	All states	Amount of conflict in system in a given year	Status inconsistency (aggregated)	Mixed: positive relationship between overall levels of status inconsistency in international system and international violence during period 1950–64, but negative relationship during period 1964–80
Ray 1974	1816–1970	European powers ($n = 10$)	War involvement	Status inconsistency (state)	No relationship
East 1972	1946–65	All states	Amount of conflict in system in a given year	Status inconsistency (aggregated)	Negative relationship between overall levels of status inconsistency in international system and international conflict

In a similar vein, Wohlforth has proposed a theory of great power status competition that predicts more "status conflict" (wars whose motivating factor is competing for primacy in the status hierarchy) in multipolarity than in bipolar or unipolar systems.[17] Related work has focused on the dynamics of status recognition, how status concerns affect the decision making of political and military leaders and how states balance trade-offs between status and material capabilities.[18]

17. Wohlforth 2009.
18. See Greenhill 2008; Wolf 2011; Murray 2012; Renshon 2015b; and Renshon and Warren 2015.

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Many of these works are bounded by a strict set of conditions, such as an equal power distribution among major powers.[19] In other cases, they rely on a set of assumptions that consider status-seeking irrational or noninstrumental, despite evidence that there are strategic rationales for acquiring status.[20] While many of the ideas generated by a SIT-based approach are valuable, they have proven difficult to test systematically in IR. For example, experimental findings on social comparison and "which of many possible identity-maintenance strategies they [states] will choose" have been difficult to operationalize in the context of world politics.[21]

A much larger problem, however, is that we have ignored several key conceptual features of status that would help us to refine both our theoretical and empirical work. Here, a large body of literature on status in economics and psychology helps in generating more definitive hypotheses about social comparison, the most important feature of status still unaccounted for in existing work. Frank, for example, has argued that human beings are motivated by a biological mechanism to improve or maintain their status and that this mechanism is far more responsive to local rather than global comparisons.[22] "Local" in this case implies comparisons to actors that are similar along a range of dimensions, or ones that are forced upon the actor through proximity (such as workplace associates, or countries in a similar region).

A related area in need of improvement is our measurement of status itself. Although there is general agreement that the diplomatic exchange data set provides a crucial window into status dynamics in world politics, all previous research has simply counted the total number of diplomats a state has received (the more diplomats received, the higher status that state is).[23] This, too, ignores several important features of status, foremost among them that the status of the sending state matters; status is more effectively gained from high—not low—status actors. To rectify this, I use the tools of network analysis to provide a measure of diplomatic importance that conforms to the conceptual requirements of status far better than previously used measures. In response to the importance of "local" status, I extend the network-based analysis using the formal method of community detection to recover "status communities" in the international system.

Status Dissatisfaction

One basic problem that must be addressed before a useful theory of status in IR can be developed is the entanglement of status with related terms like *honor* and *reputation*,

19. As in Wohlforth 2009.
20. See Eyre and Suchman 1996; and Gilady 2004. On strategic rationales for status, see O'Neill 2006.
21. Wohlforth 2009, 36. For more on the difficulty of applying SIT to status concerns in politics, see Ward 2015.
22. Frank 1985, 8. See also Heffetz and Frank 2011.
23. The exception is Maoz 2010, who uses a similar network centrality measure derived from state's placement in networks of alliances, IGOs and trade, not diplomacy.

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both of which are often used interchangeably with "status."[24] This problem has been exacerbated by the varying understanding of these terms in different historical eras and cultures, complicating our ability to use historical quotations as evidence.

One way to disentangle these concepts is to imagine a hierarchy of beliefs, as suggested by O'Neill.[25] The 0th level of beliefs is the objective situation, for example, the number of nuclear missiles possessed by the United States. First-order beliefs are one actor's beliefs about another actor (more specifically, beliefs about how an actor will behave in a particular situation or beliefs that another actor possesses a certain quality or trait). China's belief about whether a US president would use those nuclear missiles in a crisis over the Taiwan strait would be a first-order belief. First-order beliefs do not require agreement among a group of actors, nor do they require knowledge of what any other actor believes or thinks.

Second-order beliefs are one actor's beliefs about the beliefs of another actor or group of actors. For O'Neill, prestige is located at this second level.[26] An actor has status with a group for a certain quality if

1. The members generally believe that they generally believe that the actor has the quality.
2. They generally believe that they see the quality as desirable.
3. They generally believe on account of the considerations in [a] and [b] that the party holds power within the group.

Although it is reasonable to view status as a second-order belief, a small but important modification is in order. Status is not one actor's beliefs about one other actor. Rather, status describes many actors' beliefs about what many other actors also believe. At this level of higher-order beliefs, it is probably easier to refer to status beliefs as "common" or "shared beliefs," with the addendum that these beliefs are not just convergent, but shared (and that the actors know that they are shared). It is at this level that beliefs about status reside, since they rely on shared agreement among a community about where each actor stands in some hierarchy.[27]

"Status" is typically used as shorthand for one of two specific concepts, the most common of which is *standing*: an actor's position in a social hierarchy.[28] It is in this

24. See, for example, Morgenthau 1948; Singer and Small 1966; and Gilpin 1983. Some of this section draws from collaborative work published by Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014. It is also largely in accordance with other works on the subject, including Wood 2013; and Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014.

25. O'Neill 2006. See also Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 374.

26. O'Neill 2006, 8.

27. It is distinguishable from honor, which—following O'Neill 2001—refers to either the fact of an individual possessing some positive characteristics ("personal" honor) or a group's beliefs about an individual person's honor ("social" honor).

28. As in Wohlforth 2009. See also the definition in Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 374; and Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, 7. Both see status as reflecting collective beliefs about where a given state stands (or ranks) with respect to comparison groups, and both agree that it can be about belonging to a given group or ranking in a hierarchy, but that in either case, positionality is critical. Broad agreement with this conception of status can also be found in Wood 2013.

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sense of *rank* that we can speak of status as a unidimensional metric: for example, "German leaders in 1908 sought higher status." Notice that even when the emphasis is on rank, the rank itself is important only insofar as it clarifies what rights, respect, and patterns of deference the actor should expect from others, as well as how the actor is expected to behave with respect to others of higher or lower rank.[29]

Status is also sometimes used to refer to an *identity* or membership in a group, for example: "status as a major power."[30] Some have gone further to argue that status is either not zero-sum, or is better conceptualized as a "club good."[31] However, the positional nature of status is still a critical factor in those situations. First, the status associated with becoming a member of a group is to a large extent fixed and thus every additional member of the group inevitably lessens the value associated with it (being a "major power" becomes less meaningful the more major powers there are); this is the classic definition of "zero-sum." Membership in the group still relies upon the notion of positionality, only the unit of observation has changed: in these cases it is about the relative position of members and nonmembers of the group, or perhaps the relative rankings of different groups to which they might belong.

Other key features of status are that it is perceptual, positional, and social. It is positional in the sense that absolute values do not matter as much as comparisons to salient "reference groups." This matters both theoretically (it helps us distinguish status from similar concepts like honor, which is not inherently positional) as well as empirically (by suggesting the importance of distinguishing between different reference groups). That it is both perceptual (based on beliefs) and social (in that it requires some shared consensus about relative position) aids in empirical investigation since these qualities imply what is termed the "visibility" or "publicity" hypothesis: the only way to obtain status is through actions that can be seen by others or actions that have visible consequences.[32]

Status here is compatible with many of the dominant approaches in IR, including psychological and constructivist accounts, but also rationalist paradigms. O'Neill writes that "it is important even within a strategic approach to international relations since states may use it [prestige] to judge quality or they may bandwagon, choosing who to support depending on what they expect others to do."[33] More broadly, as Dafoe and colleagues write, status "informs patterns of deference and expectations

29. It may be possible to distinguish some minor, conceptual differences between *status* and *prestige*, such as in Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 376, where they argue that although both have normative components, prestige differs in that it is generally more under the control of the actor than status: "actors can seize, acquire and invest in their reputation and prestige. Status, on the other hand, is more often regarded as a function of the community." Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014, 16) argue that, of the two concepts, only status connotes ranking in a hierarchy. Here, I follow Wohlforth (2002, 4) and Wood (2013) in noting that many IR scholars use these concepts interchangeably, but that "status" fits better conceptually and ties this work to the past large-N research on the subject.

30. As in Larson and Shevchenko 2010; and Volgy et al. 2011.

31. See Clunan 2014, 376; and Lake 2014, respectively.

32. Heffetz and Frank 2011, 20.

33. O'Neill 2006, 1. To the extent that the common denominator in rationalist approaches is "individual goal-seeking under constraints," and that these "goals are not restricted to self-regarding or material

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of behavior, rights and responsibilities."[34] Status-oriented behavior does not have to be irrational. Status is a valuable resource, and conflict is status enhancing, so states deprived of the status they deserve may well turn to conflict (among other strategies) to attain their goals. Thus, though this is not a self-consciously rationalist theory, it fits in easily with such approaches insofar as they take into account nonmaterial stakes or preferences, such as other work on prestige, reputation or honor.[35]

Status refers to the actual position or identity of a state. While either position or identity might have some explanatory power on its own, my focus is on *status concerns*. Status concerns denote the level of focus on status-related issues, and the likelihood of acting to advance or salvage one's status. A concern for status might be sparked by a perceived threat to one's status position or rank, but this is not a necessary condition. In this manner, status concerns are a larger conceptual category that includes "status threats" as one precipitating cause among several. Put slightly differently, status concerns may lead to *status seeking*—behavior or actions undertaken to gain status—but may also lead to actions designed to preserve one's current position or slow one's decline (neither of which is accurately captured by the term "status-seeking"). Status concerns are orthogonal to status itself, since both high- and low-ranked actors may evince powerful status concerns.

Motives for Status

Early social scientists such as Veblen saw status as an intrinsically valued social good and some in IR have taken similar positions.[36] Others see its value as instrumental, for example, in its ability to signal competence or provide access to power and resources.[37] Evidence for this comes from the laboratory, where even weak and artificial inductions of "high status" provide significant material benefits to its holders.[38] In IR, these benefits have been summarized as "decision-making autonomy and deference on the part of others."[39] Additionally, there may be explanations from evolutionary biology that help to elucidate the larger sense in which status is instrumentally valuable, for instance, as a costly signal of other characteristics.[40]

In reality, actors may pursue status for either, or both of these reasons. Although actors sometimes pursue status for the intrinsic psychological benefit that it confers, this does not mean that actors do not also sometimes pursue status because they believe it will confer direct benefits in the near future (or even indirect

interests but could include other-regarding and normative or ideational 'goals,'" this claim seems rather uncontroversial. See Snidal 2002, 74–75; emphasis in original.

34. Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 374–75.
35. See O'Neill 2006; Guisinger and Smith 2002; and Dafoe and Caughey 2015, respectively.
36. Veblen 1899. See also Lebow 2010; and Markey 2000.
37. Plourde 2008.
38. Ball and Eckel 1996.
39. Wohlforth 1998, 26.
40. See Henrich and Gil-White 2001; and Plourde 2008.

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benefits in the long term). In fact, to the extent that high status is evolutionarily adaptive, status might be "instrumental" (in the broader sense) even when actions provide no discernible material benefit to the actor seeking increased status. This is, if anything, further evidence that an exclusive focus on the dichotomy between the instrumental and intrinsic benefits of status is unlikely to be fruitful.[41]

Status and Reputation

Although beliefs about status are second-order, or shared beliefs, reputations are first-order beliefs about how an actor will behave in a particular situation or that another actor possesses a certain quality or trait. Status is thus distinguishable from reputation in that the former is inherently social. Reputations can form in interactions with only two actors, while it makes little sense to talk about status with fewer than three actors. More to the point, a status hierarchy cannot be said to form with only two actors. Of course, once formed (with $n > 2$), a status hierarchy can affect dyadic interactions.

While any number of actors may acquire reputations for a particular trait or behavior (for example, "standing firm") without affecting any other actors' reputations, status is inherently positional, and one actor moving up in a hierarchy requires some other actor's downgrading. Actors can also manipulate and affect their own reputation to a greater extent than status. While actors manipulate their reputations by taking particular actions, changing one's status requires changing the beliefs of multiple other actors, and since it is positional, there are both winners and losers in this process. In other words, while actors "invest in or seize" their reputations, status is "accorded by others."[42]

Of course, reputations (for example, for toughness) can affect an actor's status. But because status is a multidimensional attribute in which there are many inputs (reputations, but also a host of other material and ideational factors), it is not itself determinative. Thus to the extent that we are able to measure status, such ranks will encompass information about important reputations as well. Of course, both reputations and standing—along with myriad other factors—influence expectations about how actors will behave in the future.

All Status Concerns Are Not Created Equal

There is evidence, on both the individual and the state level, that political actors care a great deal about status. "If there is one feature of … status that scholars are in

41. One's perspective on this issue is likely to be shaped by the choice of empirical strategy. Large-N studies that use proxies for status or status-seeking are likely to find it extremely difficult to rule out the possibility that status was sought instrumentally. Qualitative work offers more promise in this regard, but disentangling the motivations for status is incredibly difficult even with access to the documentary record.

42. Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 376.

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agreement upon, it is that leaders, policy elites, and national populations are often concerned, even obsessed, with their status."[43] But knowing that leaders have strong preferences for status does not provide much inferential leverage; we must know when status moves up the list of priorities. In short, we must focus on variation in preferences for status. To do so, and following my earlier experimental work, I propose a focus on status concerns and suggest that (1) those concerns will be especially sharp when states experience "status deficits" (a status ranking that falls below a level set by expectations); (2) those expectations will be viewed through the prism of "local" comparisons to some salient reference group; and (3) dissatisfied states will take actions to alter their rankings in the hierarchy, which in turn requires changing the shared beliefs of a group of actors.[44]

Status communities and local comparisons. The first thing one learns about status in a college economics course is that it is a positional good, and relative, but relative to whom? Earlier works noted that a state's position in a hierarchy was important, but stopped short of specifying which hierarchy we should examine. Instead, states were all placed in a de facto global hierarchy.[45]

This is acceptable to the extent that one assumes the global hierarchy to be the most salient structure for all states. However, in the context of world politics, such a perspective would imply some odd rivalries. Do small island nations in the Pacific care about a struggle for relative status in Eastern Europe? Did major powers in the 1800s (primarily located in Western Europe) care about the jostling for relative standing that took place on the periphery of the system? Decades of research have demonstrated that actors construct reference groups that are similar to them on important dimensions. Or, to paraphrase Frank for the political domain: even internationally, status is local.[46]

The oft-cited maxim that status is "positional" is thus true, but incomplete. Status is positional (in that comparisons are intrinsically important) but this does not tell us anything about the relevant "status community," the reference group that actors see themselves belonging to and competing against. In theory, actors can compare their status with a multitude of targets along an almost infinite array of dimensions. However, work on social comparison suggests that the most important comparisons will be on dimensions that are widely regarded as important (for example, size of house or salary on the individual level; economic or military capability on the international level) and the comparisons will be made against some salient reference group.

This has important implications for our research design and theory: status communities will be more salient as the number or importance of shared attributes

43. Ibid., 381.
44. Renshon 2015b.
45. Such as the "central system" as defined by Singer and Small 1966.
46. Frank 1985, 7–8.

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increases. The logic is straightforward: a hypothetical IR scholar at a research institution is more likely to see other IR scholars at similar institutions as their reference group, rather than broader groups sharing fewer attributes in common (for example, political theorists at similar institutions, or IR scholars in think tanks). Thus, one innovation of this research is to identify status communities other than the global system that might be relevant to states. Although there are many candidate possibilities (as a first cut) I operationalize this in two ways: (1) regional geographic hierarchies and (2) detected communities—groups of states in which the internal diplomatic links are more numerous and intense than those links to external states.

What triggers status dissatisfaction? Even when we have a theory of how status communities are formed, we need a clearer understanding of how actors evaluate whether they have "enough" status. Where do beliefs about our own status come from? Status dissatisfaction theory focuses on *expectations*—what actors believe they "deserve"—which are then filtered through a comparison to the most salient *reference group*.

Although there are any number of possible comparisons that political actors might make—status quo, goals, aspirations, or even past states—there are significant gains to be made by modeling comparisons as a function of expectations, which subsume these other categories. A large body of work in psychology and political science has demonstrated the importance of expectations in evaluating prospects, or in this case, comparisons.[47]

To say it is expectations that matter only pushes us one level deeper: on what are those expectations based? Here, we are on firmer ground—a number of theories from both IR and individual decision making suggest that actors' beliefs about how much status they deserve will be set by their "asset levels" of other attributes, such as power or economic capacity. For example, power transition theory suggests that wars occur when status does not match up to material capabilities, while earlier work on status inconsistency suggested that it was specifically material or military capabilities that set an expectation level for status.[48] On the individual level, experimental work has corroborated some of these ideas: for example, a disjuncture between status and levels of other attributes is psychologically aversive and causes both decreased cognitive functioning and increased risk seeking.[49]

How do actors know where they each stand with respect to one another? Broadly, beliefs about where each actor stands in a hierarchy are formed via observation of interactions between a group's members. Some attributes of status (for example, strength or wealth) are easily visible and accounted for. In other cases, there are

47. See Köszegi and Rabin 2006; and Niven 2000, respectively.

48. While military capabilities seem likely to be the most broad and powerful proxy for expectations, other assets (for example, social welfare or normative authority) might be relevant for certain groups of states in certain time periods.

49. See Josephs et al. 2006; and Zyphur et al. 2009.

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unobservable elements, such as "toughness," "influence," or "quality" that must be inferred through patterns of deference and dominance behavior.[50]

Just as important, there is considerable evidence that human beings are rather good at detecting where they stand. The scourge of overconfidence is not omnipresent, and "status considerations offer an important exception to predictions made by the theory of positive illusions."[51] In fact, individuals seem to be just as good at judging where they themselves stand as they are at determining where others stand, both difficult tasks that require inferring the mental states and interactions of numerous other actors.[52] While our motivation for accuracy might be to avoid social sanctioning, our ability to be accurate likely derives from the evolution of our cognitive and neural architecture, which has developed to help us interpret myriad, subtle cues related to status.[53]

How Do States Seek Status?

We are on safe ground in assuming that leaders and states care about status in general, and I have provided a rationale for why certain situations—namely status deficits within a given "status community"—might trigger particularly sharp status concerns. But what are the implications of these status concerns for international behavior? Research on status inconsistency has coalesced around an answer, summarized by Volgy and Mayhall:

> Countries may diverge on a number of status dimensions which are considered salient for decision makers. For example, a country may rank relatively high on economic and/or military capabilities (i.e., achieved status) but may be accorded little prestige (i.e., ascribed status) by the international community. Under such conditions … it is plausible that a nation's decision makers would evidence a strong desire to change the status quo, and failing to do so, to engage in conflict and violence.[54]

In this formulation, dissatisfied states resort to violence only after failing to change the status quo, that is, out of frustration. This explanation can be traced to the "frustration-aggression" hypothesis in psychology on which much of the status-inconsistency research in IR was originally based.[55]

However, positing that states act out of "frustration" or "negative feelings" is a rather weak mechanism by which status might be linked to war. It presupposes an

50. In fact, humans (as well as other species) are quite skilled at inferring status rankings and dominance/deference behavior, even from an early age. See Mascaro and Csibra 2014.
51. Anderson et al. 2006, 1094.
52. Srivastava and Anderson 2011.
53. See Marsh et al. 2009; and Koski, Xie, and Olson 2015.
54. Volgy and Mayhall 1995, 68 (emphasis added).
55. Miller 1941.

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irrationality (acting out of frustration rather than strategic interests) that obscures the more likely way in which status concerns might relate to conflict. Because states can expect to profit from higher status and because status is positional (and thus other states can be expected to be reluctant to cede status voluntarily), violence may be one way of achieving higher status, rather than a last resort after having failed to do so.[56] It also attributes individual-level emotional states ("frustration") to state actors, confusing the levels of analysis even further while also playing a role in de-emphasizing the strategic rationale for violence described earlier.

Why would violence bring higher status? To answer this, we must ask a more basic question: What types of events are capable of changing our status position? Because actors' status rankings are based on the collective beliefs of the community to which they belong, changing their position requires changing other actors' beliefs. This suggests the need to take into account how exactly beliefs are updated. In fact, a number of cognitive limitations affect our ability to update our beliefs in response to new information.

Chief among these restrictions is that beliefs are updated sporadically—not continuously—and only in response to large events.[57] Since beliefs about status require some consensus in the international community, events are not likely to change a state's position unless they are highly public (visible to all actors in the community), dramatic or salient (to capture the attention of potential observers), and convey unambiguous information. This last requirement is perhaps the most important. Status requires a shared consensus on a given state's "standing" in the relevant community—it requires agreement among multiple actors. To the extent that no two actors in a system agree on which actors have the highest status, there is no group consensus and thus no discernible status hierarchy. Thus, for an event to change status beliefs, it must change all (or the vast majority) of observers' beliefs in the same way. Events that might be interpreted differently by different observers are unlikely to cause shifts in status beliefs.

Taking these conditions into account, one likely candidate—though not the only possibility—for an event that is capable of changing a state's place in a status hierarchy is the initiation of a military conflict. Rationalist scholars have argued that war reveals private information on relative strength otherwise unavailable to potential belligerents. I propose a variant on this argument. Although war (or militarized disputes in which force is used) does reveal private information about capabilities, it also reveals other things. The capabilities, along with behavior of the two opponents and the outcomes observed by the international audience, combine to influence the status beliefs of others in the hierarchy. Militarized conflicts—which are public, dramatic, and salient—are thus a chance for the international community to simultaneously calibrate their judgments concerning how much international standing a given state possesses (or should possess).[58]

56. This is hinted at by Gilpin 1983, 32.
57. Peffley and Hurwitz 1992.
58. The initiation of violent international conflict is not likely to be the only strategy used by states dissatisfied with their status position. I focus on it here both for its fit with our conceptual understanding of status and to link the current research to past work on status inconsistency.

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Research Design: Status by the Numbers

I follow the convention of using the diplomatic exchange data set to generate a measure of status.[59] Everything other than the actual raw data, however, represents a series of innovations designed to more closely align a cross-national measure of status with its conceptual foundations. There are a number of ways one might use such data to construct a measure of international status, but in practice, it has often been done by counting the number of diplomats sent or received by each state in a given year and transforming that into a ranking.[60]

However, this neglects one critical aspect of status: who sends diplomats to an actor matters as much as (perhaps more than) the raw number of diplomats the state receives. All diplomats are not created equal: a diplomat from the United Kingdom was a greater indicator of status in 1817 than one from Sweden. But how do we operationalize this? How much value a diplomat from i has in year t could be based on i's status at $t-1$, but such a system still requires initial starting values for status that risk being arbitrary.

To account for the sending country's importance, I use a simple network centrality measure of status based on Google's PageRank algorithm. This class of network centrality measure has enjoyed growing popularity as a tool for constructing hierarchies of influence and prestige in varied applications, such as doctoral programs or citation networks.[61] It also follows naturally on efforts to model the international diplomatic system using the tools of network analysis and Maoz's efforts to use network measures to construct status rankings.[62]

This measure assumes that each diplomat sent by j to i is a "vote" for i's importance. For every year, the algorithm calculates this by picking a random starting point in the system and tracing all the diplomatic connections (based on the receipt of diplomats), repeating this process 10,000 times, and calculating, for that year, how much time was spent at each state relative to all other states in that year. Because the algorithm will spend comparatively more time at states that receive many diplomats (higher-status states), states will benefit more from being connected to those higher-status states than lower-status states. In this way, the importance of the

59. These data were originally compiled in Singer and Small 1966; and Small and Singer 1973; and updated in Bayer 2006. Data are available for the years 1817, 1824, 1827, 1832, 1836, 1840, every five years between 1844 and 1914, every five years between 1920 and 1940, and every five years between 1950 and 2005. The original collectors suggested that researchers requiring annual data either use the diplomatic exchange data from the last available date until the next observation, or interpolate the missing years. The latter method was chosen here. See Small and Singer 1973.

60. For example, in East 1972; and Volgy and Mayhall 1995. The diplomatic exchange data set includes data on whether i sent diplomats to j and whether j sent diplomats to i in a given year. Codings are: 0 = no evidence of diplomatic exchange, 1 = chargé d'affaires, 2 = minister, 3 = ambassador, 9 = other. Codings of 9 can indicate interest sections, interests served by another country, address (with no further information), etc.

61. Schmidt and Chingos 2007.

62. See Kinne 2014; and Maoz 2010.

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sending state is taken into account in a sensible manner. This process is repeated for every year in the data set. The end result is a value [0, 1] which is then transformed into an ordinal rank, since that more closely conforms with our notion of status as inherently positional.[63]

Two possible concerns are of note. First, PageRank might do an adequate job separating very low- from very high-status countries, but a poor job discriminating at the very top or very bottom of the hierarchy. I note that no state in the data ever receives diplomats from all other states (so it is not the case that states at the top have identical profiles of diplomatic representation, effectively tying them all for first place). Even at the top, there are significant differences. For example, in 2005, the top five ranked countries received 145, 179, 154, 151, and 134 diplomats, respectively. The focus on local hierarchies should assuage this concern even more because high-status countries are spread out across both geographic regions and status communities, so that within a given region or community, the differences are even starker than in the global hierarchy.

A second concern is that my measure of international status may reflect only a noisy measure of material capabilities. Although recent work would suggest that this is unlikely to be true, more systematic analysis might uncover other patterns.[64] In fact, the correlation between material capabilities and status typically hovers between 0.5 and 0.75, though with considerable variation over time.[65] The variation over time differs for different types of states; major powers, for example, see a substantial decline in the correlation between their material capabilities and international status in the twentieth century. Put more directly, status is manifestly not just material capabilities. Of course, strength is a factor in determining status, but there are also other inputs.[66] It is for this reason that there are countries with "normative" or "soft" power, or moral authority, that are high-status without being militarily powerful.[67] It is also for this reason that some instruments of hard power or military capabilities are not only not status-enhancing, but actually detrimental in some cases.[68]

Detecting Status Communities

If status is local, we must ascertain where status concerns lie, and, for every state, *i*, which group of states forms the relevant comparison group. Previous works assumed

63. PageRank algorithms require a "damping" factor [0,1] to deal with nodes that have incoming, but no outgoing, links. Based on the way the network algorithm works, all of the value would end up in these nodes, so a scaling factor [0,1] is added. PageRank centrality is a variant of Eigenvector centrality, which produces equivalent substantive results when tested with these data.

64. See Neumayer 2008; and Kinne 2014.

65. Figure 4 in online appendix E plots the correlation between status and power ranks for all states over time, as well as major powers and nonmajor powers.

66. Von Rueden, Gurven, and Kaplan 2008.

67. See Hall 1997; and Nye 2004.

68. Glaser 1998, 120.

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that all states are in competition with all other states in one immense global hierarchy.[69] However, my theory of status implies that status concerns should matter most among reference groups, or status communities, in which states have salient attributes in common.

In a perfect world, we could survey leaders of every state in the system, past and present, to ascertain which states they view as peer competitors. Practically, however, there are two broad approaches. The first is to hypothesize salient attributes that might correlate with communities. It is easy to imagine that geography might matter a great deal in determining the reference groups of states: countries located close to one another would share languages, culture, and history in such a way that makes them obvious comparison groups. This approach is not perfect, however, since some salient communities (for example, major powers, or those based on ideological movements) would cut across regional geographic boundaries.

The second broad approach is inductive and relies on observations of interstate interactions. Earlier, I showed how one can use network analysis methods to provide centrality or authority scores that are more meaningful than simply counting the number of diplomats a state has received. Here, I continue along that track by using formal "community detection" methods developed in network science that are designed precisely to detect underlying communities of actors "in a way that is both methodologically rigorous and produces results that are substantively meaningful."[70]

Broadly speaking, a community is "a group of nodes with more and/or better interactions amongst its members than between its members and the remainder of the network."[71] Whether the interactions are, in fact, more and/or better is measured through the concept of modularity, or Q. Formally, modularity is expressed as

$$Q = \sum_i \left(e_{ii} - a_i^2\right), \tag{1}$$

where Q is the proposed community grouping's quality, e_i is the fraction of all edges (connections) that exist entirely within community i, and a_i is the expected fraction of all edges that would exist across communities if edges were assigned to communities at random. As modularity increases, the proportion of edges that connect two actors in a single community (e_{ii}) increases relative to the proportion that would be found if the edges were assigned randomly (a_i).

69. Although some scholars have analyzed subgroups of states (for example, major powers), those groups were chosen for reasons of data availability and under the argument that status would matter for only "central" powers. See Wallace 1971, 24.

70. Lupu and Traag 2012, 1023. Community detection is a topic of considerable interest to network scientists and has been used more recently in political science as well, for instance in Lupu and Voeten 2012, to identify communities in the network formed by citations to domestic and international case law by the European Court of Human Rights, Lupu and Traag 2012, to detect "trading communities" and Macon, Mucha, and Porter 2012, to detect "voting communities" within the UN General Assembly.

71. Leskovec, Lang, and Mahoney 2010, 1.

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Modularity thus measures the quality of a proposed network-partitioning scheme by comparing the fraction of all network edges (diplomatic connections, in this case) that fall entirely within each proposed community to what would be expected in a network with the same number of nodes (states) but edges assigned at random (with the same total number of degrees for each node). If a particular division gives no more within-community edges than would be expected by random chance, then modularity (Q) is 0. Values greater than 0 indicate "better than random" groupings and relatively higher modularity values suggest more efficient network partitions.[72]

Choosing one's method of community detection often involves comparing Q values (in this sense, they function similarly to log likelihoods) and combining that with substantive knowledge about the data.[73] I use the Fast Greedy (FG) algorithm, developed by Clauset and Newman, and widely used throughout network science.[74] Weights are an optional feature of such algorithms, and if not assigned, imply that all connections are equal. Here, I weight the edges by the type of diplomatic link, from 1 to 4, ranging from "interest section" to "ambassador."[75] The FG algorithm works by assigning each node to its own community and then iteratively pairing these communities in a search for the "greatest increase (or smallest decrease)" in modularity.[76] This process forms larger communities with each iteration. Once all communities have been merged into one super-community, the algorithm selects the partition that produced the highest modularity.

To see how this works, consider a snapshot of the international system in 1817, depicted in Table 2.[77] The table is sorted by column (f), the total number of diplomats received by each state in the system. It is worth remembering that nearly all past works have discarded all other information except this total. Columns (b–e) break down the total number of diplomats by type, arranged on a scale from least ("other," which includes personnel assigned to a country's "interest section" hosted by another embassy) to most important ("ambassador"). A country's status rank was determined in the past simply by counting the total number of diplomats received from all other states. Note the potential limitations of such an approach: (1) all countries are equal—representation from smaller states "counts" as much as

72. Newman 2004.

73. Louvain, another popular method, is used by Lupu and Traag 2012, and functions similarly to FG in that it uses heuristics to maximize modularity. Its exact process is, however, slightly different, and described in Blondel et al. 2008. Figure 2 in online appendix B compares FG and the Louvain algorithm (another popular method) in their weighted and unweighted versions. As is evident, Louvain provides no obvious benefit over FG, and weighted versions typically perform worse in the earlier, sparse networks of the early nineteenth century, but better later on in the larger networks of the twentieth century.

74. See Clauset, Newman, and Moore 2004; and Newman 2004. In particular, the built-in fastgreedy.community() function in the iGraph package for R. Csárdi and Nepusz 2006.

75. For a related example, see Macon, Mucha, and Porter 2012, who weight edges between countries in the United Nations by the number of voting agreements in place between them.

76. Newman 2004, 2.

77. Some countries (for example, Germany and Italy) did not exist in their current form yet in 1817 but are labeled with their modern state names as per COW convention.

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TABLE 2. *Detecting status communities (a snapshot of 1817)*

	Number of diplomats						*PageRank*			
(a) State	*(b) Other*	*(c) Chargé d'affaires*	*(d) Minister*	*(e) Ambassador*	*(f) Total*	*(g) Rank*	*(h) Overall*	*(i) Community*	*(j) Region*	*(k) Detected community*
FRN	1	1	7	4	13	1	2	1	Europe	A
UKG	0	0	9	3	12	2	5	2	Europe	A
BAV	4	0	8	0	12	2	1	1	Europe	B
AUH	1	3	5	3	12	2	6	2	Europe	C
SIC	0	1	9	1	11	5	12	5	Europe	A
RUS	0	0	9	2	11	5	10	3	Europe	A
NTH	1	0	9	1	11	5	11	4	Europe	A
GMY	0	1	9	0	10	8	15	5	Europe	B
SAX	3	1	6	0	10	8	3	2	Europe	B
SPN	1	0	5	3	9	10	14	6	Europe	A
TUR	0	2	4	3	9	10	17	7	Middle East	A
SWZ	1	1	7	0	9	10	16	5	Europe	C
DEN	0	0	8	0	8	13	18	8	Europe	A
PAP	1	0	5	2	8	13	9	4	Europe	C
TUS	2	0	6	0	8	13	7	3	Europe	C
BAD	2	1	5	0	8	13	4	1	Europe	C
USA	0	0	7	0	7	17	20	9	North America	A
ITA	0	0	6	1	7	17	21	6	Europe	C
SWD	0	0	7	0	7	17	19	6	Europe	B
HSG	2	0	4	0	6	20	8	3	Europe	B
HSE	1	0	4	0	5	21	13	4	Europe	B
WRT	0	0	5	0	5	21	22	7	Europe	B
POR	0	0	0	0	0	23	23	10	Europe	A

Notes: Row shading indicates detected status community. States are sorted by rank (total number of diplomats received). AUH = Austria-Hungary; BAD = Baden; BAV = Bavaria; DEN = Denmark; FRN = France; GMY = Germany; HSE = Hesse Electoral; HSG = Hesse Grand Ducal; ITA = Italy; NTH = Netherlands; PAP = Papal States; POR = Portugal; RUS = Russia; SAX = Saxony; SIC = Sicily; SPN = Spain; SWD = Sweden; SWZ = Switzerland; TUR = Turkey; TUS = Tuscany; UKG = United Kingdom; USA = United States; WRT = Wuerttemburg.

representation from more powerful states; (2) all diplomats are equal—we ignore the different levels of diplomatic representation by collapsing it in to a binary form; and (3) there is only one hierarchy, composed of all states, whether in the Middle East, North America, or Europe.

The first issue can be properly accounted for using PageRank measures of network centrality in which the importance of the sending state is sensibly taken into account. This innovation is depicted in column (h), where rankings are based on PageRank scores, not simply raw counts of the number of diplomats hosted by each nation. Already, we can see that the overall picture changes from the traditional methods, such that some countries ranked high in (g)—Germany, for example—rank much lower in (h). These adjustments result from some states hosting a large number of diplomats from relatively unimportant countries; Germany's numbers are inflated by a large representation from other Germanic states.

Even once this adjustment is made, however, the second two issues remain. Here, we can see the advantages of community detection. Column (k) lists each state's detected status community: A, B, or C. These communities cut across regional geographic boundaries, demonstrating the potential advantage of formalized community detection over other approaches. One can see a clear cluster of powerful states in Community A (for example, United Kingdom, Russia, France, and the United States), a cluster of Germanic states in Community B (for example, Hesse Grand Ducal, Hesse Electoral, Wuerttemburg, Saxony, Germany, and Bavaria) and Italian regions in Community C (for example, Tuscany, Papal States, and Italy). The structure of the status communities of 1817 are easily visualized in Figure 1. The algorithm also does well on face validity in other periods, for example, by accurately recovering US-Soviet dynamics during the Cold War.[78]

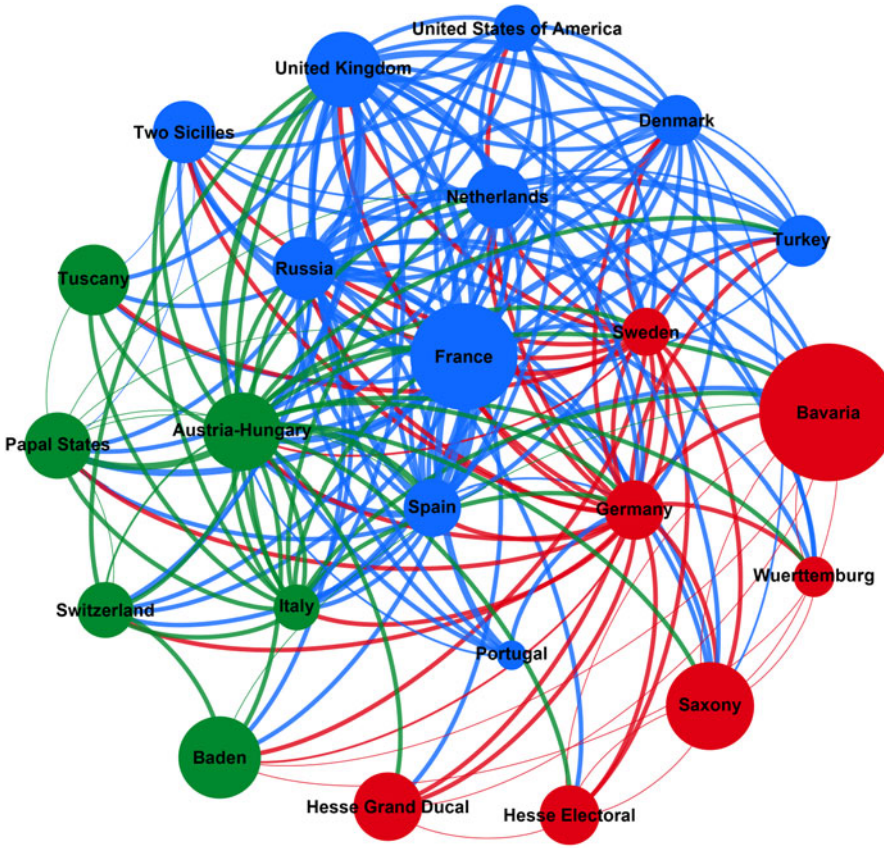
Now that we have detected the relevant status communities, we can create status ranks within the relevant status community for each state, depicted in column (i). For these to represent an improvement over the overall rankings in column (h), we must ask: Is the leadership of Wuerttemburg in 1817 likely to care more about its status in the hierarchy of all states (in which it ranks twenty-second) or in its status community composed of other states that are similar in size, power, culture, and language (where it ranks seventh)? Intuitively, the latter grouping seems more plausible, though confirmation must wait until we can more formally test the relevance of the different potential status communities.

Construction of Variables

The main predictor variable is a measure of the status deficit for a given state in a given year. The inputs to this measure are the status rank (described earlier) and the

78. See Figure 1 in online appendix A.

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Notes: Edge (tie) colors represent the community of the sending state, and edge widths (thickness) represent the weight of the tie (based on the level of diplomatic representation, from 1 to 4). Node size is a function of PageRank status (bigger nodes are more important).

FIGURE 1. *Status Communities of 1817*

rank on material capabilities, based on a country's Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) score. It is constructed by subtracting the rank on status from the rank on material capabilities, which are then standardized by year. This standardization process aids in interpreting the results, while allowing for fluctuating patterns in the relationship between status and power—the "exchange rate" between status and power—over time. The result is then multiplied by −1 so that positive (negative) numbers indicate greater (lesser) status deficits. Because both components of the status deficit measure (status and power) are likely to be affected by military disputes, all analyses described here lag this measure by one year, so that the relationship examined is status deficit in year $t - 1$ and conflict

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in year *t*.[79] The main outcome variables are binary measures indicating whether or not a state initiated a war (MID level 5) or a militarized interstate dispute (MID).

I used the EUGene software program to generate a directed-dyad data set of MIDs, both wars and nonwars, from 1816 to 2005.[80] Only originators involved on day 1 of a conflict could be coded as an initiator (this is the most restrictive coding). Control variables used in various models include: SHARE OF DYADIC CAPABILITIES, CINC, DISTANCE, CONTIGUITY, ONGOING MID, POLITY, PEACE YEARS, JOINT DEMOCRACY, MAJOR POWER, SYSCON (concentration of power in the international system), and ALLIANCE TYPE.[81]

Theoretical Expectations

First, we must establish that violent interstate conflicts—public, dramatic, and salient—will serve as "status-altering events." We should thus expect to see evidence that conflict initiation—and particularly victory in conflict—provides status boosts to the victor/initiator. The "null" here is that conflict would have no effect on status rankings, or perhaps depress status rankings as other states withdraw diplomats in protest of the initiator's belligerence. However, for conflict to be "status enhancing," states must reveal capabilities (military or otherwise) in conflict that provide new information on where they should stand in a given hierarchy. This is not necessarily accomplished by victory—since one could defeat a weak foe and reveal nothing new about capabilities—but by exceeding the expectations of observers. This suggests that we take additional care in our research design.

Second, we should expect to see evidence that dissatisfied states should initiate at a greater rate than "satisfied" states. Building on decades of evidence in cognate fields,

79. However, results do not depend on lagging the IV, and lagging it 2 or 3 (or 0) years instead of 1 produces similar results as well. For a more systematic analysis of the effects of different lags on the results, see online appendix D.

80. See Bennett and Stam 2000; and Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996. The first COW/MID data sets were not dyadic in nature, and so any analysis of dyadic data prior to that must rely on a conversion scheme to convert pre-1993 data into directed-dyad form. In this data, pre-1993 data are generated from the Maoz 2005 Dyadic MID data, which has a stricter set of criteria for generating pre-1993 dyads (both options use the same data for post-1993 dyads). The Maoz dyadic data fix a number of problems present in the alternative option, which include but are not limited to (1) states listed as on opposing sides of a dispute (for example, Japan and Bulgaria in World War I) that never used or even threatened force against one another; (2) incorrect outcomes (for example, Poland listed as winner of Germany-Poland World War II dyad); and (3) inaccurate levels of hostility (for example, the United States and Hungary were on opposing sides of World War II and both sides individually reached the highest level of hostility, but never fought each other, which should be reflected in the data). For more detail, see Maoz 2005.

81. Polity scores used are POLITY2 variables from the 2010 version of the Polity IV data set. Jaggers and Gurr 1995. Military capabilities data are taken from Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972. A state's share of dyadic capabilities is defined as $\frac{CINC_i}{CINC_i + CINC_j}$. Contiguity was calculated as "direct contiguity" (Level 1: contiguous on land). Distance is measured as "capital to capital" distance. Data on alliance commitments were taken from the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) Project, Leeds et al. 2002. Peace years were adjusted for pre-1816 disputes using Werner 2000.

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the theory also posits that more "local" or fine-grained reference groups are likely to be more salient to states, and in turn have larger consequences for conflict behavior. To that end, we should see evidence that status deficits within the detected communities predict conflict over and above status concerns within either the regional or global hierarchy. Finally, if conflict is, in fact, status-enhancing when states exceed observers' expectation, we should see evidence that dissatisfied states target the states that suit those purposes best. In particular, they should focus on targets that give them the best chance of prevailing (by targeting less powerful states) and gaining status (by targeting higher status states).[82]

These hypotheses can be summarized as follows:

H1: (Winning status): Exceeding expectations in conflict will increase the initiator's status rank.

H2: (Status deficits and war): Status deficits will be associated with an increased probability of war and MID initiation.

H3: (Status is local): Status deficits within detected communities will be better predictors of conflict behavior than deficits within regional or global hierarchies.

H4: (The targets of status aggression): Dissatisfied states will pick fights that are most likely to provide the status benefits they seek (namely, against states they believe they can defeat).

Fighting for Status

Can Conflict Provide Status Benefits?

There is some anecdotal evidence that leaders believe that conflict initiation and victory will bring greater status.[83] Leaders' perceptions are key since the theory relies on their mental models of how status is gained. However, there is little empirical evidence to corroborate this relationship between conflict and increased status.

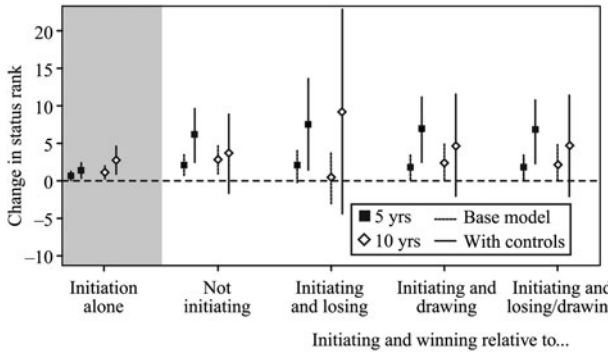
As a preliminary exercise, and to supplement the intuitions and anecdotal data of previous scholars, I analyzed the effect of conflict initiation and victory on status. Unlike other analyses, this relies on a country-year data set of conflict initiation in which country *i* is coded "1" if they initiated a MID in year *t* or "0" if they did not (multiple MIDs in a given year by the same country are still coded as a "1").[84]

82. This latter part is addressed in greater detail in Renshon 2015a.

83. Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 383–84. See also Renshon 2015a.

84. While this research design has important advantages, it does present two complications. First, it prevents us estimating an effect of a particular type of conflict on victory, since 13 percent of the data include

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Notes: Y-axis represents change in international status rank over either five or ten years after conflict. On the left, in gray, are estimates for initiation of an MID—independent of outcome—relative to not initiating.

FIGURE 2. *Status benefits of conflict initiation and victory*

To examine this, I regressed change in status rank on a series of independent variables relating to conflict victory.[85] Figure 2 plots the results of the analysis.[86] Models are shown in their bivariate and "full" versions, and dependent variables include changes in status rank over both five- and ten-year periods after the initiation of conflict.

In fact, we do find support for H1: initiating and winning conflicts provides a boost to status over both five- and ten-year periods following the conflict initiation, relative to the following:

1. Not initiating at all
2. Initiating and losing
3. Initiating and drawing
4. Initiating and losing/drawing

For example, initiating and winning vaults the initiator state six rankings over states that did not initiate at all, and seven ranks over states that initiated but fought to a stalemate.

observations where a country initiated more than one MID in a given year. The second issue is related: a state could initiate two MIDs in a year, win one of them, and suffer defeat in another. How to count this? For those countries with more than one MID in a given year, I selected the MID(s) with the highest level of hostilities. In cases where this did not result in a unique MID per country-year, I randomly selected one of the remaining MIDs for inclusion in the sample. The consequence is greater uncertainty surrounding our outcome variable.

85. Because states sometimes switch communities, and the algorithm provides arbitrary "names" for each community in each year, one cannot follow the progress of a state within given community. This means that we cannot examine status rank within a given community.

86. Full results appear in Table 3 in online appendix F.

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However, the theoretical expectations in H1 relate specifically to exceeding expectations of observers in combat, not necessarily winning. Fighting a superior opponent to a stalemate might generate as much status benefits as defeating an inferior opponent. Moreover, even victory itself is subjective.[87] Many factors—including material changes, achieving goals of war, expectation of participants and observers, and satisfaction with the settlement terms—affect perception of victory and defeat. We might expect COW's codings to line up with those subjective understandings over a large sample, but the relatively small numbers for any analysis of these outcomes (for example, there are only 105 states in the data that initiated and then lost a MID) combined with measurement error (particularly in the cases where a state both won and lost in the same year) suggests that we should not rely too heavily on codings of victory and defeat.

To provide a broader perspective, Figure 2 plots (in the left-hand gray panel) results for initiation alone (compared with not initiating). While the substantive effects are smaller, there is considerably less uncertainty. This fits with the explanation: while "victory" and "defeat" are variable and subjective terms, and multiple MIDs present difficult problems for this design, conflict initiation is (compared to these concepts at least) clear and unambiguous. Thus, I find that, on average, conflict initiation by itself—regardless of the outcome—provides a status boost to initiator states of 1.4 ranks over five years and 2.7 ranks over ten years.

Status Deficits and War

The theory's centerpiece is the hypothesis that dissatisfied states will initiate conflicts at greater rates than satisfied states. Because the dependent variable is binary, the appropriate regression model is binomial logit. And because the vast majority of observations are zeroes (there are very few conflicts in the data set relative to the number of total observations), I use rare events logit to correct for the noted tendency of traditional logit models to underestimate low-probability events.[88] The reported results use robust (dyad-clustered) standard errors, though, encouragingly, analyses using normal standard errors generate virtually identical results.[89] The main results appear in the online appendix.[90] In all models—from bivariate regressions to those that include a variety of controls, as well as squared polynomials of the IV to

87. See Johnson 2006; and Mandel 2006.
88. King and Zeng 2001.
89. King and Roberts 2015.
90. See Table 2 in online appendix C. There is substantial disagreement on how one should utilize control variables in this sort of set-up. See, for example, Ray 2003. Solutions entail everything from using no control variables at all to a limit of some reasonable number (for example, the "rule of three"), to those more optimistic about the utility of control variables. See Clarke 2005; Achen 2002; and Oneal and Russett 2005, 445, respectively. I present all results as both bivariate models and fuller models that include a reasonable number of control variables, and show through coefficient plots the stability of the results when switching the control variables used in the models.

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account for nonlinear effects and a lagged dependent variable to address temporal dependence[91]—the coefficient for status deficits within the detected community is positive and statistically significant. This implies that more positive values for that measure—in effect, larger status deficits—are associated with an increased probability of war and MID initiation.

The results are robust to a wide variety of model specifications. For example, the results are not driven by underlying disputes that would cause both *j* to withdraw diplomats from *i* (inflating *i*'s STATUS DEFICIT) and *i* to initiate. To address this, I constructed a variable, DIPLOMATIC CHANGE, that takes on a 1 if *j* has withdrawn diplomats from *i* in year $t-1$ and a 0 otherwise. Including this covariate in models for MID and war initiation changes neither the size of the STATUS DEFICIT coefficient nor its statistical significance.

More broadly, we can visualize the results' robustness through a coefficient plot, here used to depict STATUS DEFICIT coefficients from a variety of model specifications, including different samples of states, different time periods, and different corrections for temporal dependence. As is evident in Figure 3, the STATUS DEFICIT coefficient is quite stable in the MID initiation models, remaining positive in all specifications, and highly statistically significant in all but two (where it is only marginally significant; results are highly similar—with more uncertainty—for war initiation models).

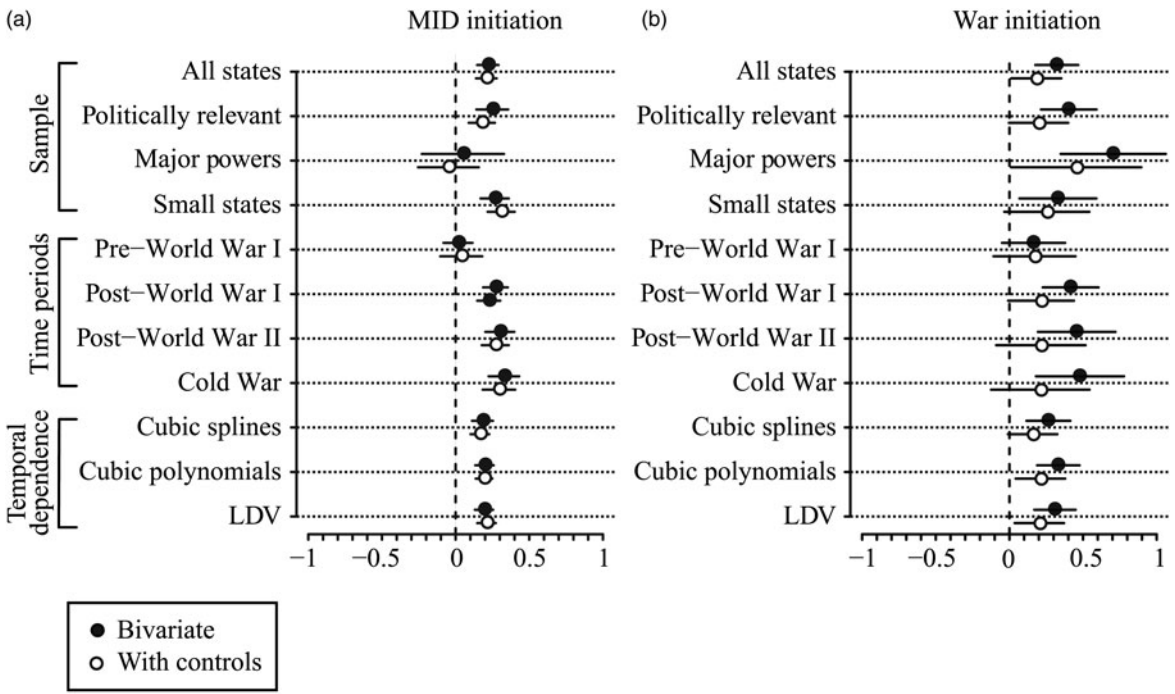
That the results are "stable," however, does not tell us much about the effects of status deficits in the real world. To assess this, Figure 4 plots first differences—the difference between pr(DV = 1) at two different levels of the IV—for (A) MID and (B) war initiation. They answer the question: What is the change in the probability of a state initiating a war if we hold every control variable at some constant (mean or median) level, but switch status deficits from one level to another?

As is easily seen, larger status deficits are associated with an increased chance of both MID and war initiation. In fact, the substantive impact of status deficits is rather large, even compared with other variables commonly implicated in explaining conflict initiation: a state that is switched from "no status deficit" to "a status deficit one standard deviation from the mean" is roughly 35 percent more likely to initiate a war or an MID. This is clear support for our hypothesis (H2) that status deficits are associated with the initiation of violent interstate conflict.

91. Temporal dependence is a vexing statistical issue for IR scholars using time-series cross-sectional data. In IR, there have been three broad approaches to the problem: (1) including a lagged dependent variable (LDV; Beck and Katz, 2011; though see Achen 2000), (2) cubic splines (Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998), and (3) the related but simpler solution of including cubic polynomials of peace years (Carter and Signorino 2010). Typically, IR scholars pick a "fix," justify it with appeals to the statistical authorities, and proceed. However, this procedure is dysfunctional in the longer term, since in many cases, adopting the wrong "fix" can lead to significant inferential problems. See Wilson and Butler 2007. More forcefully, Dafoe 2015 demonstrated that the solution for temporal dependence is always dependent on strong assumptions about the data-generating process. The best "fix" is, thus, not at a fix at all, but rather to report estimates under a variety of model specifications, as I do here.

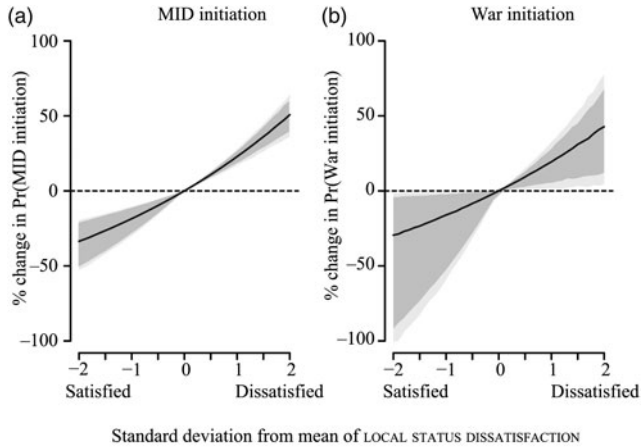
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Note: Plot of status deficit (community) coefficients—and 95 percent confidence intervals—under a variety of model specifications.

FIGURE 3. *MID and war initiation models: Status dissatisfaction coefficients*



Notes: Y-axis represents the percentage change in the probability of initiating either a (A) militarized dispute or (B) war. Estimates are first differences, switching only the level of status dissatisfaction while holding covariates at mean or median. Black lines represent estimates and dark and light gray-shaded regions are 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals, respectively. Results are estimates from Models 2 and 5 in Table 2 in online appendix C.

FIGURE 4. *Status deficits and war*

Status Is Local. IR scholars have yet to grapple with the "local" nature of status. Typically, previous works assumed that all states interacted primarily within a global hierarchy; and if a smaller grouping of states was analyzed (for example, just major powers), it was assumed that those were the only states for whom status concerns were likely to affect conflict behavior. Decades of research on status suggest that this view is incomplete, at best.

I classified two broad approaches to identifying reference groups for states in the international system, one deductive and one inductive. The deductive approach starts by positing attributes that might define a reference group (for example, geographic region) and proceeds from there. The inductive uses data to identify—here through "community detection"—reference groups through real-world interactions. H3 (status is local) states that status deficits within detected communities will be better predictors of conflict behavior than deficits within regional or global hierarchies. However, direct tests of this hypothesis are difficult because multicollinearity between ranks in different communities present inferential difficulties.

To combat this and separate out the effects of status deficits within local communities from those within the global system, I subset the data to examine the effects of status deficits (within detected communities and within the regional geographic hierarchy) for only those states who are satisfied within other, broader hierarchies. Table 3 displays the results of this analysis. Models 1 and 3 show that status deficits within detected communities significantly predict war even when those states are "satisfied" within the larger, global hierarchy. Models 2 and 4 show similar effects

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for regional status deficits; they are significant predictors of conflict even for those globally satisfied states. Models 5 and 6 extend this and show that even among states satisfied within their regional hierarchy (itself a "local" hierarchy of sorts), community status deficits are significant predictors of dispute and war initiation.

TABLE 3. *Status is local*

	Globally satisfied subsample							
	MID				War			
Model	*(1a)*	*(1b)*	*(2a)*	*(2b)*	*(3a)*	*(3b)*	*(4a)*	*(4b)*
COMMUNITY STATUS DISSATISFACTION	0.361** (0.0680)	0.382** (0.0647)			0.652** (0.244)	0.499* (0.235)		
REGIONAL STATUS DISSATISFACTION			0.522** (0.0525)	0.500** (0.0518)			0.489** (0.141)	0.189** (0.169)
Controls?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	654,027	577,458	654,027	577,458	673,597	577,458	673,597	577,458

	Regionally satisfied subsample			
	MID		*War*	
Model	*(5a)*	*(5b)*	*(6a)*	*(6b)*
COMMUNITY STATUS DISSATISFACTION	0.337** (0.0738)	0.352** (0.0748)	0.659** (0.204)	0.532* (0.235)
REGIONAL STATUS DISSATISFACTION				
Controls?	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	615,179	548,365	634,179	548,365

Notes: Standard errors in brackets. $p < 0.10$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}\ p < 0.01$

These results can also be seen in Figure 5. Even for states who are "satisfied" within the larger, global hierarchy, status deficits within their local community emerge as reliable predictors of conflict initiation. This is true even when we subset to states satisfied within their regional, geographic hierarchy (itself a type of "local" hierarchy). Thus, we find initial support for H3: even internationally, status is local.

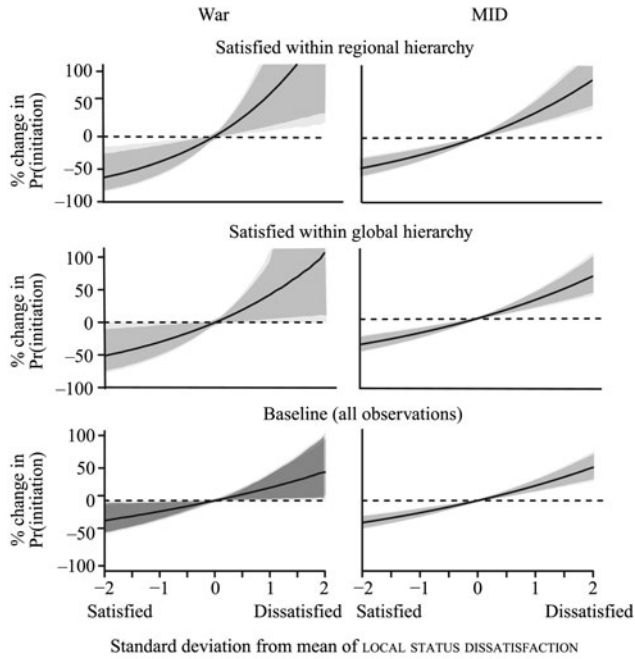
The Targets of Status Aggression

Finally, I turn to the characteristics of the targets of status aggression. More specifically, I test the hypothesis (H4) that dissatisfied states pick fights with different sorts of states than satisfied states. Because conflict as a strategy for gaining status should work only in cases where the dissatisfied state either wins or performs better than expected, we should see evidence that dissatisfied states pick winnable fights.

To conduct this analysis, I created a dummy variable, DISSATISFIED, equal to 1 when states' status deficit was above the mean in their community, and equal to 0 when it was equal to or below the mean. To assess whether a fight was "winnable," I

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constructed a measure, POWER DIFFERENTIAL that is the difference between *i* and *j*'s CINC score; positive values indicate that *i* had greater military capabilities than *j*, negative values mean the opposite.[92] Because conflict at time *t* is likely to affect the power differential between i and j in that same year, I lag POWER DIFFERENTIAL one year to better proxy beliefs about the likelihood of winning a conflict.



Notes: Y-axis represents the percentage change in the probability of initiating either a (A) militarized dispute or (B) war. Estimates are first differences, switching only the level of status dissatisfaction while holding covariates at mean or median. Black lines represent estimates and dark and light gray-shaded regions are 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals, respectively. Results are estimates from Models 2 and 5 in Table 2 in online appendix C.

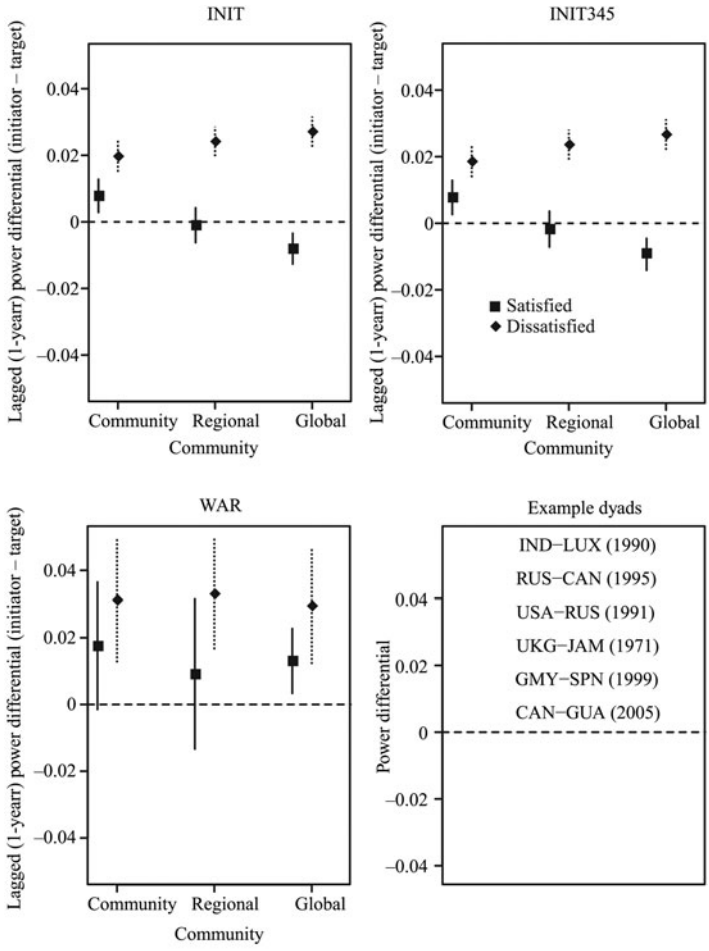
FIGURE 5. *Even internationally, status concerns are local*

Using simple t-tests, it is plain that the power differential between initiator and target is greater for dissatisfied states than satisfied states ($t(2450) = -3{:}37$, $p < .001$). In fact, this pattern persists in all the hierarchies examined—community, regional, and global—and for a variety of operationalizations of conflict initiation—all MIDs, violent MIDs, and wars.[93] As is evident in Figure 6, differences between satisfied

92. Of course, the more powerful state does not always win, but it is difficult to find a better *ex ante* proxy for whether a war was "winnable." See Arreguin-Toft 2001.

93. Models that involve wars are always in the predicted direction, but not always significant at conventional standards.

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Notes: Y-axis represents lagged (1-year) power differential between *i* and *j* (where *i* is always the initiator) in terms of CINC score. Plotted estimates represent the means for dissatisfied (diamonds) and satisfied (squares) initiators, with confidence intervals from two-tailed t tests. Dissatisfied states are those above the mean in community status deficits, and satisfied states are those equal to or lower than the mean status deficit. Plots represent different categories of initiation: INIT = initiation of any kind; INIT345 = initiation of violent disputes; WAR = initiation of wars. CAN = Canada; GMY = Germany; GUA = Guatemala; IND = India; JAM = Jamaica; LUX = Luxembourg; RUS = Russia; SPN = Spain; USA = United States; UKG = United Kingdom.

FIGURE 6. *Targets of status aggression*

and dissatisfied states targets are significant under all specifications for MIDs and violent MIDs. Moreover, the power differentials for the different groups are substantively significant, as illustrated by the third panel that plots example dyads along the same *y* axis.

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Conclusion

Despite a widespread consensus that status "matters," we lack a basic understanding of fundamental questions concerning status dynamics in world politics. How does status matter: What specific behaviors do status concerns trigger, and what strategies do states use to maximize (or salvage) their standing? When does status matter: Under what circumstances do concerns over relative position overshadow the myriad other concerns that leaders face? How are status comparisons made: how do leaders select the group of states with whom they are in competition and what attributes (for example, wealth, power) form the basis of these comparisons?

I argued for an emphasis on relative status concerns that vary over time and context. I then proposed that status deficits—a disjuncture between status an actor is accorded and what they believe themselves to deserve—are likely to trigger particularly sharp status concerns. Although many scholars have acknowledged that status is "local," the powerful implications of that maxim have been largely overlooked. To rectify this, I showed how we can use "community detection" methods borrowed from network analysis to infer status communities; clusters of states defined by the number and intensity of real-world diplomatic interactions.

Finally, because status is a perceptual construct, I demonstrated how we can use our understanding of how beliefs are updated to predict the types of events that states might use to update (and improve) the community's beliefs about their relative position. Conflict is thus not the result of unthinking aggression triggered by concerns over status, but a way of updating one's position in a status hierarchy.

It should (but may not) go without saying that many questions remain unresolved. For example, I operationalized "local" status communities as those inferred by a community detection algorithm. However, it is possible that some amount of dissatisfaction results not from a disjuncture between power and status, but from a lack of interactions with the community that one sees themselves as being part of. In these cases, community detection would fall short by placing a state in the "wrong" status community. Although this is an improvement over ignoring the issue entirely, my methods still provide only a coarse measure of "belonging." Religion, shared history, culture, and ideology are all likely to produce status hierarchies even more fine-grained than regional geography or detected communities. Moreover, states may see themselves as belonging to more than one community at any given time, with different domains or behavior triggering one community or another.

Another important element of status research concerns the strategies states use to acquire rank. I argued that violent international conflict was one plausible strategy for dissatisfied states. It seems extremely unlikely, however, that this is the only such strategy. Future work might uncover other effective strategies, with the larger goal in mind of accounting for how states choose between multiple possible actions designed to alter their place in a hierarchy.

Finally, future work should seek to better understand the dynamics that lead actors to coalesce around a commonly agreed-upon reference group. There is the additional

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question of whether the modern international system might provide new avenues for measuring international status. For example, because the ease of travel has made state visits more common over time, we might be able to use systematic data on these meetings to construct new status rankings or corroborate past measures.[94] Perhaps most importantly, any status research agenda must begin to focus on other methods of status-seeking apart from conflict. Given the costs of armed violence (both in the short term, but also including reputational consequences and the provocation of balancing coalitions), it seems likely that states might use multiple strategies to alter their status community's beliefs about where they "stand." Possibilities include economic growth, technological development, or behavior in international governmental organizations.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available at https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/Jrenshon.

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