

# No Fair! Distinguishing Between the Pursuit of Status and Equity in International Relations

BRIAN RATHBUN AND NINA SRINIVASAN RATHBUN

University of Southern California, USA

AND

CALEB POMEROY 

University of Southern California, USA; The Ohio State University, USA

Status-seeking behavior, the pursuit of a higher position on an international social hierarchy as perceived and defined by members of a community, has received considerable attention in recent years. Yet, much of what this recent literature calls status-seeking is difficult to distinguish from something else: the pursuit of fairness. We disentangle status-seeking from fairness-seeking by identifying where a pure status-seeking and a fairness-seeking argument diverge—in the degree to which state actors demand exclusive rights and privileges. Survey experiments of the Russian public concerning the country's membership in the G8 as well as a case study of Germany's behavior in the first Moroccan crisis provide strong support for our “biased fairness” account. Derived from the behavioral economics and psychology literature, it maintains that leaders demand entitlements that match their status and find any such denial as less fair than an equivalent discrepancy for other countries. However, once assured of what they deserve, they do not demonstrate any tendency to exclude others, the hallmark of the status motivation. Convergent evidence at multiple levels of analysis, country contexts, and widely different time periods gives strong indications that fairness concerns are driving much of what is attributed to status-seeking.

El comportamiento que busca estatus, esa búsqueda por una posición más alta en una jerarquía social internacional como lo perciben y definen los miembros de una comunidad, ha recibido una considerable atención en los últimos años. Sin embargo, mucho de lo que esta literatura reciente denomina “búsqueda de estatus” es difícil de distinguir de algo más: la búsqueda de justicia. Separamos los conceptos de “búsqueda de estatus” y “búsqueda de justicia” al identificar dónde diverge el argumento centrado únicamente en la búsqueda de estatus y aquel centrado únicamente en la búsqueda de justicia: el punto en el cual los agentes estatales exigen derechos y privilegios exclusivos. Las encuestas del público ruso acerca de la membresía del país en el G8, así como un caso de estudio del comportamiento de Alemania en la primera crisis marroquí, ofrecen un fuerte respaldo a nuestra definición de “justicia parcial.” Derivada de la literatura de psicología y economía conductual, sostiene que los líderes exigen derechos que coinciden con su estatus y consideran que toda negación de ellos es menos justa que una discrepancia equivalente para otros países. No obstante, cuando se les garantiza lo que merecen, no demuestran ninguna tendencia hacia la exclusión de otros, lo que es el sello distintivo de la motivación por estatus. La evidencia convergente a varios niveles de análisis, contextos a nivel país y épocas muy distintas dan una fuerte indicación de que los temas relacionados con la justicia impulsan mucho de lo que se atribuye a la búsqueda de estatus.

Le comportement de quête de statut, la poursuite d'une position plus élevée dans une hiérarchie sociale internationale, telle qu'elle est perçue et définie par les membres d'une communauté, a bénéficié d'une attention considérable ces dernières années. Pourtant, la plupart de ce que cette littérature récente qualifie de quête de statut est difficile à distinguer de quelque chose d'autre: la poursuite de l'équité. Nous démêlons la quête de statut de la quête d'équité en identifiant les cas où l'argument de la pure quête de statut diverge de celui de la pure quête d'équité. Ces cas reposent sur la mesure dans laquelle les acteurs étatiques demandent des droits et privilèges exclusifs. Des expériences d'enquête auprès du public russe concernant l'adhésion de leur pays au G8, ainsi qu'une étude de cas du comportement de l'Allemagne lors de la première crise marocaine, offrent un solide soutien à notre compte-rendu de « l'équité biaisée ». Ce compte-rendu puise dans la littérature sur l'économie et la psychologie comportementales et maintient que les dirigeants demandent des droits correspondant à leur statut et qu'ils considèrent qu'un refus est moins juste lorsqu'il les concerne que lorsqu'un écart équivalent existe pour d'autres pays. Cependant, dès qu'ils sont assurés d'obtenir ce qu'ils méritent, ces dirigeants ne font preuve d'aucune tendance à exclure les autres, et cela constitue la principale caractéristique de la quête de statut. Des preuves convergentes à plusieurs niveaux d'analyse, dans des contextes nationaux et sur des périodes très différentes, indiquent clairement que les préoccupations d'équité motivent la majeure partie de ce qui est attribué à la quête de statut.

## Introduction

Status-seeking behavior, the pursuit of a higher position on an international social hierarchy as perceived and defined by members of a community, has received considerable attention in recent years (Renshon 2017; Ward 2017; Murray 2018; Larson and Shevchenko 2019; Barnhart 2020). Yet, much of what this recent literature calls status-seeking is difficult to distinguish from something else: the pursuit of fairness. This is particularly true of a series of arguments about how states behave when they do not receive the respect,

---

Brian Rathbun is Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Southern California. He is the author most recently of *Reasoning of State*, which won the 2021 best book award from the American Political Science Association's Foreign Policy section.

Nina Srinivasan Rathbun is Professor (Teaching) of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Southern California. She is the author of articles in *International Organization*, *PS*, and *Nonproliferation Review*.

Caleb Pomeroy is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at The Ohio State University and a US-Asia Grand Strategy Predoctoral Fellow at the University of Southern California. His research focuses on the psychology of international security.

treatment, and spoils they feel they deserve, so-called status immobility arguments. Indeed, one proponent of such a model argues that a “belief in status immobility is equivalent to a belief that the rules are hopelessly unfair” (Ward 2017, 50).

Yet, fairness and status seem strikingly different. Status-seeking is rarely considered principled but instead connotes pettiness and superficiality. Rich men in sports cars are not held up as moral models, at least by most of us. Fairness has a moral connotation that status does not. Indeed, in a recent review essay on status in international relations, “unfair” or “unjust” is mentioned just once (MacDonald and Parent 2021). In this article, we aim to disentangle status-seeking from fairness-seeking by identifying where a pure status-seeking versus fairness-seeking argument diverge: the degree to which state actors demand exclusive rights and privileges. Pure status-seekers have a desire not just for a higher rank in a social hierarchy but a position that is exclusive. Status is diminished by the degree to which others share their position on the social hierarchy. Fairness-seekers—or, more precisely, equity-seekers—simply want their rank to reflect their achievements but are content for others to share that rank. They have a desire for earned status, what is called “appraisal respect.” We find that a fairness-driven pursuit of rank—without insistence on exclusivity—offers a better characterization of what we see in the international system.

Our conception of fairness-seeking is based on the behavioral literature in psychology and economics, which maintains that our conceptions of what is right and just are partially (but not entirely) subjective and self-serving. Individuals are more likely to see and respond to injustices done to the self than an equivalent injustice done to others. Nevertheless, individuals, having secured an outcome that they perceive as fair, prefer an outcome in which others also receive a fair share than one in which others do not. In other words, fairness is more inclusive than pure status-seeking. A fairness-seeking actor is not hostile to others sharing in the spoils provided that the actor is treated fairly. She simply wants to get hers. If she does not, she cries “no fair!”

We examine our argument through a detailed case study of Germany’s behavior in the first Moroccan crisis (Anderson 1930; Mercer 2010) as well as two survey experiments of the Russian public concerning G8 membership. Wilhelmine Germany and contemporary Russia are often considered exemplars of status-seeking and thus provide crucial tests for the status literature’s status quo.

Our case study of Germany, which makes use of a wider documentary basis than existing work, reveals that the country’s behavior was driven less by status than interests and fairness, with the latter serving as both a genuinely held belief and an instrument for pursuing the former. Previous accounts gloss over the interests at stake in the Moroccan crisis to make the case that status-seeking can overcome and even obstruct the pursuit of more tangible interests. A more nuanced consideration of the case shows that Germany felt unfairly treated by France as the latter came to terms with other European powers to gain a freer hand in Morocco. Germany turned down offers by France to negotiate a separate deal that would have been the most status-enhancing and instead demanded the convocation of an inclusive international conference. German leaders reasoned that by justifiably positioning the country as the defender of third-party rights writ large, not just for Germany, it could more effectively isolate France and deny it the foreign policy coup of rounding its North African empire. In the end, however, Germany became a prisoner of its own rhetoric. Germany turned down offers by France to negotiate a separate deal that would have been the most status-enhancing.

Our survey experimental designs allow us to distinguish between fairness-seeking and pure status-seeking as well as between a self-serving, biased definition of fairness and a more objective, neutral one. Our experiments demonstrate that Russians are indeed dissatisfied with being excluded from the G8, but they feel this exclusion as an injustice rather than a status slight. Provided that Russia is included in the institution, the Russian public actually prefers an outcome with many other members, rather than an exclusive club in which Russia is one of the few cardholders. Russians base their decision on who to include, including Russia itself, partially on deservingness, which we experimentally manipulate.

Together, convergent evidence at multiple levels of analysis, country contexts, and widely different time periods gives strong indication that fairness concerns are driving much (although surely not all) of what is typically attributed to status-seeking in IR. This has major implications for how to manage what is seen as Russian revisionism or China’s peaceful rise, since status-seeking is a harder thirst to quench. Accommodating others’ fairness concerns (and, indeed, even seeing their concerns as such) requires us, as we discuss in the conclusion, to put aside our own naturally biased understanding of what is just and right.

### Rethinking the Status Quo on Status

Recent literature has converged on a conception of status as perceptual, positional, and social (Renshon 2016, 520), based on intersubjective beliefs about a state’s relative position (Lebow 2010; Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014; Ward 2017). Status is perceptual in that it is based on socially constructed, rather than objective, criteria that change over time; positional in that it implies rank; and social in that it is conferred by others. Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014, 8) use the same three characteristics of status, simply using different words: “collective, subjective and relative.” The pursuit of status is conceptually different than the pursuit of power in that the former is valued in and of itself rather than instrumentally in what it allows a state to do.<sup>1</sup>

Countries that are not granted the status that they feel they deserve are particularly dangerous and are the subject of considerable recent attention (Greve and Levy 2018). Renshon (2016) offers a “status dissatisfaction” theory showing that states are inclined to use force when expectations about the status they are owed are inconsistent with the deference showed to them in the international system, operationalized for instance in the form of diplomatic missions. Ward (2017, 42) builds an argument about “status immobility,” what results when a country “deserves membership, but other states seem fundamentally unwilling to treat it as a full member of the club.” Barnhart (2020, 3) uncovers the destabilizing force of humiliation, “the emotional response to the perceived undeserved decline of one’s status in the eyes of others.” Humiliated states are inclined to initiate conflicts at much higher rates. Wolf (2011, 106) writes of “disrespect,” which “challenges an actor’s self-respect or self-esteem by denying her the degree of esteem or attention she feels entitled to.” It is usually experienced as an unacceptable mismatch between the social position one is assigned by others and the position one expects to deserve according to prevailing standards or norms. Barnhart (2020, 19) says the same, that “humiliation involves a strong sense of other-directed outrage at the party deemed responsible

<sup>1</sup>We are interested in the pursuit of status rather than whether status confers actual advantages (Mercer 2017) or the network of status recognition (Duque 2018).

for treating one unfairly.” We have also noted above that Ward (2017, 50) equates unfairness with status immobility.

Notice that in all of these conceptions of status, a key factor is at work: concern for fairness. There is a disjuncture between what a state is getting out and what it has put in. In other words, states are responding to a lack of equity, one of the main ways in which human beings define fairness (Adams 1965; Deutsch 1975; Anderson and Patterson 2008). Welch (1995, 19) calls this same phenomenon the “justice motive,” the “reaction to a perceived discrepancy between entitlements and benefits.” We do not want to split the pie evenly if it means that those who did not contribute to the cooking get to eat it.

In all of these recent “status” studies, states feel they “deserve” status. Deservingness implies that someone has a right to something, and to deny rights is unfair. Rights, particularly to deference and respect, are a large part of what status confers. Great power identity, the most important status in international relations, brings with it not only an expectation of being consulted on important international issues but also the ability to maintain a sphere of influence within at least their geographic area (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014; Ward 2017; Barnhart 2020). Just what great powers deserve and what confers status, these observers note, change over time as a process of shifting international norms (Duque 2018, 578). For example, great powers in the past thought of colonial territories as status markers.

Deservingness typically implies that someone has done something to earn something.<sup>2</sup> Achievement differentiates individuals and groups from one another—in other words, establishes a ranking—on the basis of their excellence. To deny these achievements and their just rewards is, therefore, unfair. The achievement itself is not necessarily moral—for instance, running fast. In international relations, the achievement that confers status has historically been the accumulation of material power and prosperity, which is not ethical in and of itself. Status is therefore different than honor, since honor is conferred based on adherence to a particular code of moral behavior (Dolan 2015). However, if achievements are socially appraised highly enough, accomplished individuals or states feel ethically entitled to certain treatment in light of it.

These status dissatisfaction accounts are, therefore, capturing the quest for fair treatment in light of state achievements, what Darwall (1977) calls the desire for “appraisal respect.” However, if “status-seeking” in international relations is the quest for fairness, why speak of status at all? Is there a way by which we might draw a line between them?

Distinguishing these motivations requires an understanding of the ways by which status-seeking and fairness-seeking might diverge. The key, we argue, is in another characteristic of status, often equated to rank and position, but conceptually and potentially empirically distinct: status’s exclusivity (Naylor 2018). Status’s draw is its exclusiveness, having a rank that others do not. Status is typically considered a “rival” good, zero-sum in nature. “If everyone has high status, then no one does ... Elite groups restrict membership to avoid diluting their status and privileges” (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, 19). To have status is to be part of a select few; the more that others have status, the less one has. “[S]ocial closure—the establishment of a boundary between the group and outsiders—shapes status relations” (Duque 2018, 578). Even within exclusive groups, there

is still room for more rarified rank. Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014, 7) write that in “international politics, status manifests itself in two distinct but related ways: as membership in a defined club of actors, and as relative standing within such a club.” They continue, “club membership does not end status politics, because within any grouping there is likely to be jockeying for position” (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, 9).

In contrast, while appraisal respect based on achievement necessarily creates a hierarchy, that rank can be more or less exclusive. Hierarchy only implies a lack of equality, that not all individuals are of the same rank. It tells us nothing about the distribution of individuals into various ranks. Hierarchy can be bottom-heavy, top-heavy, or something in between, whereas exclusivity implies a bottom-heavy system. To the extent that everyone does not share the same rank, the upper ranks are relatively exclusive when compared to the lower. However, this misses a lot of other possibilities. Pure status-seeking is the pursuit of exclusive rank.<sup>3</sup>

The desire for exclusivity distinguishes status-seeking from fairness-seeking, more so than the pursuit of rank. The search for appraisal respect does not imply exclusivity, only the deference and benefits that one has achieved, to which others are perfectly entitled. It uses status as a measure of fairness. Pure status-seekers want to be on the top rung of the ladder alone or with as few others as possible; fairness-seekers want to be on the rung they deserve and are perfectly happy with others being there too, provided they also deserve it.

Existing accounts present a conception of status that conflates status-seeking with fairness-seeking, evident in the unwitting oscillation between the two. In Larson and Shevchenko’s social identity theory-based model, by Ward’s (2017) estimate the most prominent theory of status in international relations, “Groups strive for positive distinctiveness—to be not only different but better” (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 68). This pursuit of esteem, however, could be consistent with both exclusive status-seeking and appraisal respect. Larson and Shevchenko describe one of the countries considered below, Russia, at times as having pure status-seeking objectives, without fairness or deservingness motivations. The country has “an obsession with international status and great power standing, as denoted by the word *derzhavnost*, referring to a preoccupation with great power status *regardless of whether Russia has the military and economic wherewithal*” (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 79). They attribute its intervention in Georgia to Putin’s feeling “that Russia’s status as a great power was threatened. Putin intervened in Georgia primarily to reassert Russia’s predominant interest in the area” (Larson and Shevchenko 2014, 274). Yet, in the same piece, they insert fairness into their conception of status-seeking. “Anger is elicited by perception of injustice or illegitimacy. The purpose of an offensive reaction is not merely to deter repeated humiliations in the future, but to restore power and status, to return the situation to a desired state of affairs” (Larson and Shevchenko 2014, 271).<sup>4</sup> This suggests the need not only for conceptual clarity but also for empirically testing precisely what is motivating

<sup>3</sup>In this way, we think the distinction made by MacDonald and Parent (2021) between status as rank and status as club membership breaks down since more-exclusive clubs imply greater rank.

<sup>4</sup>Other studies are also inconsistent. For instance, Renshon (2017) utilizes a definition of status-seeking that is inherently about fairness yet then argues that dominance-oriented individuals are the quintessential status-seekers. However, research shows that social dominance orientation is defined by its fundamental antipathy to moral considerations of any kind, associated as it is with the perception of an amoral, zero-sum world of dog-eat-dog competition in which might makes right (Duckitt et al 2002). Fairness is immaterial.

<sup>2</sup>However, it may not always be. Status based on ascriptive characteristics not in our control, such as race or gender, is not achievement-based (Naylor 2018). The privileged status of kings and queens, bestowed through the divine right of sovereigns, is not achievement-based, for instance.

behaviors and cases typically thought to be status-seeking in nature.

Here, it is useful to distinguish the pursuit of “appraisal respect” from two other possible pursuits. The first is “recognition respect,” the right to have one’s interests and welfare considered regardless of status or other characteristics (Darwall 1977). Appraisal respect establishes a hierarchy, whereas recognition respect is based on equality and equivalence (Lebow 2010). The latter is the theoretical basis, for instance, of liberal societies in which all are entitled to certain rights regardless of other traits. The desire for appraisal respect entails a desire to be set apart in a way, through rank and status, that recognition respect does not. Status becomes a way to assess fairness, whether one’s achievements are being socially recognized.

### **Crying Foul: Biased Fairness and International Relations**

Concerns about fairness—and its cousin, reciprocity—are thought to be so common as to be universal norms (Berg, Dickhaut, and McCabe 1995) and likely have biological origins in our evolved psychology. Behavioral economists have long been interested in fairness, finding it to be a powerful predictor of human behavior (Rabin 1998; Fehr and Fischbacher 2002). The now enormous literature on ultimatum games shows that across cultures and with varying stakes, individuals will consistently reject unequal distributions of material goods because they find them unfair, even when this leaves them worse off in absolute terms (Oosterbeek, Sloof, and Van De Kuilen 2004). International relations scholars are now beginning to come to terms with the role that fairness plays in interstate politics, research that we aim to connect with the status literature (Kertzer and Rathbun 2015; Gottfried and Trager 2016; Bechtel, Hainmueller, and Margalit 2017; Goddard 2018; Rathbun, Powers and Anders 2019).

Theorists of fairness typically distinguish between three conceptions of fairness: equality, equity, and need (Adams 1965; Deutsch 1975; Anderson and Patterson 2008). Fairness understood as equality is marked by balance, when all parties benefit equally or are treated equally in some collective endeavor, the former being substantive fairness and the latter procedural fairness (Hurd 2008). Equity, on the other hand, is fairness judged in terms of whether outputs reflect inputs. Are we fairly compensated given what we contributed to some collective process? Powers et al. (2021) show that equity is particularly relevant for public attitudes about burden sharing in defense for instance; others must pull their weight, or arrangements are unfair.

It is equity conceptions of fairness that are implicitly utilized in status dissatisfaction models. Fairness as need aims at rectifying imbalances by giving special treatment to a disadvantaged individual or group to bring it into line with others; it is the kind of fairness found, for instance, in appeals for foreign aid and not relevant for our purposes. All conceptions are used synonymously with justice.

If fairness, whether conceived in terms of equity or equality, is entirely impartial, then individuals will be as disappointed with outcomes or processes that are unfair to others as those that are unfair to themselves. What is good for the goose is good for the gander. We call this an “objective fairness” argument and do not expect that it applies widely in international relations since it does not apply widely in social life.

However, it might also be that what we find most fair is that which most benefits us. If so, fairness would serve as a post hoc rationalization of interest and offer little in terms

of explanation. We might call this the “endogeneity of fairness” argument. Such a phenomenon could be either instrumental or consistency-seeking in nature. In the former case, individuals would care little about ethics; in the latter, they would feel the need to justify to themselves and others their greater share. Some research in social psychology suggests such a process (DeScioli et al. 2014).

Our expectations about the fairness we might see in international relations are instead drawn from behavioral economics. Inequity aversion models distinguish between two types of inequality (Fehr and Fischbacher 2002). Individuals exhibit strong aversion to “disadvantageous inequality,” outcomes that leave them relatively behind. However, they are not more supportive of “advantageous inequality,” outcomes that leave them ahead, than equality. In experiments that manipulate the gains from allocative games, Loewenstein, Thompson, and Bazerman (1989) find highest support for an equal outcome, which is also judged the fairest. However, peoples’ distaste for outcomes that leave them relatively worse off is much stronger than their distaste for outcomes that leave them relatively better off. If individuals applied the rule of fairness impartially, this would not be the case. When we proclaim “no fair!,” we are generally doing this on our own behalf.

This is a biased conception of fairness—one that is subjective and particularly sensitive to injustices done to oneself but not so biased as to simply judge fairness after the fact based on whether one came out ahead (Babcock et al. 1995). In this conception, individuals are self-involved but not purely self-interested. They are not blind to fairness but near-sighted. In this vein, Gottfried and Trager (2016) find that American respondents prefer an equal distribution of territory in a hypothetical dispute with Russia but express less dissatisfaction with an outcome tilted to the United States’ advantage rather an outcome tilted to Russian advantage. Brutger and Rathbun (2020) show the same for trade.

Inequity aversion models are actually inappropriately named. They are based on the equality sense of fairness, which makes sense in that they are typically tested in games among peers in which there is no real input on the part of equal participants into the process and thereby no way to judge what one deserves by virtue of their contributions. Ultimatum games are conducted with someone else’s money. Where this is not true, participants typically interpret fairness in a manner that serves their interests (DeScioli et al. 2014). Given that international relations occur between unequal states who feel deserving of outcomes that reflect their accomplishments, we expect that equity will matter more and we adjust behavioral economic models accordingly. We expect leaders and publics to desire outcomes and treatment (substantive and procedural fairness, respectively) that take into account their accomplishments and contributions, what we have called “appraisal respect.” And, being biased, leaders and publics will fixate more on their own inequity than those suffering a similar injustice.

The key difference from pure status-seeking actors is that equity-seeking actors will not begrudge others the same rank that they have so long as the self is justly compensated. In the terms of aversion models, fairness-seekers will oppose disadvantageous inequity but will not demand or seek the advantageous inequity that would make their rank more rarified. In contrast, pure status-seeking involves making the club as exclusive as possible.

Nevertheless, we also expect that leaders’ or the public’s ability to judge objectively what their country deserves is

likely to be impaired as long as they are falling relatively behind. Leaders and publics likely anchor their expectations in subjective ways that allow them to make greater equity claims than their objective position would allow. For instance, states that have fallen from the ranks of great power status are unlikely, for a time, to update their expectations about their entitlements. France and Great Britain, for example, continue to claim a privileged position, such as membership in the United Nations Security Council, which objective criteria may no longer justify. Of course, this might indeed be status-seeking, particularly if these states are loathe to dilute the exclusiveness of a club that it has become harder to justify they deserve to belong in. In any case, our focus in this article is on those states trying to improve rather than defend their status positions. It might well be that the story is different for the latter.

### The “Collectivity Principle”: Germany, Fairness, and the First Moroccan Crisis

Wilhelmine Germany is considered the status-seeker par excellence. Renshon’s (2017) main empirical chapter is a study of Germany before World War I, and Murray (2015) also makes the argument that Germany was motivated by the pursuit of respect and status. If we find that fairness, however asymmetrically defined, better captures German behavior, we have strong reasons to doubt the power of pure status-seeking, captured by a desire first and foremost for exclusivity. The Moroccan issue implicated a particularly important status marker of the time, the acquisition of colonial territories: “These special rights and duties have historically included being able to exclusively determine their own affairs as well as playing a leading role in determining the direction and shape of international affairs, but beyond this, they have varied over time as constitutive norms that define this identity have changed. At the turn of the twentieth century, when Germany made its bid to join the ranks of the great powers, this leadership role included direct control over and exploitation of much of the world through colonial empires” (Murray 2015, 134).

Murray (2015, 132–33) claims, “By 1890 Germany was the strongest power on the European continent; however, its power beyond Europe was insignificant ... One part of German strategy to achieve world-power status involved instigating a series of crises over the independent status of Morocco.” Renshon concurs, noting the importance of exclusivity, “A common theme throughout this time period is Germany’s tendency to instigate crises (or use them once they appear) in order to bargain over status. And because of the positional nature of status, Germany could not gain more unless it came at the expense of those above it in the hierarchy that it cared most about: the *small,~exclusive~club* of major European powers ... [T]here is abundant evidence that Germany’s pattern of crisis provocation is linked closely to its desire to gain international standing” (Renshon 2017, 198, *emph. added*). Their conclusions about status are largely driven by discounting the stakes of the crisis. By dealing with issues of “little value” (Murray 2015, 132–33), they feel able to conclude that the “true value at stake” was “international status” (Renshon 2017, 198).

The first Moroccan crisis began when the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, traveled personally to Tangier on March 31, 1905, where he stressed Germany’s commitment to the independence of the Sultan of Morocco and the continued openness of the Sherifan empire to “peaceful competition of all nations without monopoly or exclusion,” by which the

emperor meant the maintenance of the open door to economic trade (GP XIX, no. 6589).<sup>5</sup> The Madrid Treaty of 1880 guaranteed that all countries would have the most favored nation status in regard to trade with Morocco. These principles had been called into question by the conclusion of the Franco–British agreement in 1904, a settlement of outstanding difference between the historic rivals that signaled a fundamental realignment of great power politics. As part of that deal, Britain recognized France’s special interests in Morocco and France did the same for the British in Egypt, amounting to an exchange of spheres of influence. In the wake of what became known as the Entente Cordiale, France pressured the Sultan for reforms of his empire that threatened to make it into a French protectorate, as it had done recently in Tunis. Reports from Morocco indicated that in doing so, the French representative claimed to speak for all Europeans. The French foreign policy strategy was directed by Théophile Delcassé, who the Germans believed aimed at their diplomatic and military isolation and the creation of an eventual Anglo–Franco alliance. So as to resist Delcassé’s designs, high-ranking German officials convinced a reluctant Kaiser to add a stop to his Mediterranean pleasure tour in Tangier as a symbolic act of defiance.

What exactly did Germany expect to accomplish with this provocation? What were its ultimate aims? The Germans were concerned about their future economic interests in Morocco, particularly contracts on major projects such as the construction of railroads that they believed would inevitably favor France were it to control the security and bureaucracy of the country, treaty provisions notwithstanding (GP XX, no. 202). They also wanted to separate Britain from France and prevent a consolidation of the Entente Cordiale into an alliance. German motives were defensive in another way as well, preventing further French influence over Morocco. The empire was one of the few remaining territories in Africa that had not been colonized by the European powers, and its absorption by France would complete its domination of North Africa. There was also the prospect of obtaining a share of Morocco for Germany itself; a port along the Atlantic coast would bolster its global economic and military reach, a policy known as *Weltpolitik*. The stakes were not nearly as trivial as often maintained.

Nevertheless, more than interests were at stake. Murray (2015, 138) claims that “allowing the French intrusion into Morocco to go unchallenged would be tantamount to relinquishing its status as a great power.” Renshon (2017, 200–201) argues that the first Moroccan crisis “had a significant status component ... Its main goal was to force other powers to take account of Germany ... [S]tatus and prestige were the causes of the crisis from the beginning.” Germany certainly felt anger at being excluded from deliberations of Morocco, both as a function of the Entente Cordiale and in French efforts to pursue internal Sherifan reforms without consulting the empire. Rich (1965, 700) concludes that at least for von Holstein, the primary purpose was to make Britain and France realize that they could not make far-reaching colonial settlements without German consent. “We don’t want to achieve anything in particular. Our action was intended to demonstrate that things can’t be done without us” (Rich 1965, 709). The Chancellor wrote the Kaiser, “It is not in Germany’s interests to support the gradual incorporation of Morocco into France ... Apart from the fact that the systematic exclusion of all non-French merchants and enterprises from Morocco according to the model used

<sup>5</sup> *Die große Politik der europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914*. 1927. (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte). Hereafter GP.

in Tunis would signify an important economic loss for Germany, it is also an underappreciation of our power position if M. Delcassé has not considered it worth the effort to negotiate with Germany over his Moroccan plans. M. Delcassé has completely ignored us in this affair" (GP XX, NO., no. 6565). "Germany would be astonished," Von Bülow stressed, "if a third party made decisions affecting its interests without asking us ... The material worth of the threatened interests is secondary to considerations of these other type" (GP XX, no. 6637).

*Kein Sonderabkommen: Germany's Pursuit of an International Conference*

German leaders were angered at their exclusion from Moroccan affairs. However, was their desire really to be part of an elite club with as few members as possible, as it would have been were their behavior purely status-driven? Or did they merely object to being excluded from their rightfully deserved place, one they would share with others? As we have noted above, distinguishing between these motivations is extremely difficult. The key is whether or not Germany was making exclusive claims to treatment that it would not afford to others that shared its rank or even those who did not. A purely status-driven Germany would want to receive better treatment than as many others as possible.

Germany claimed it was merely due the same treatment that France had accorded other countries, even those significantly weaker such as Spain, with whom France had also come to terms regarding Morocco. French action was unfair. Von Bülow explained to a French envoy, "Germany could not allow France to keep it outside the Moroccan question. It considers that the French Government should have negotiated with it as with the other Powers, and it will pursue its policy in this sense so that the interests of Germany are respected" (GP XX, no. 368). In the immediate days following the conclusion of the Entente Cordiale, von Holstein complained, "For long we have clung to the belief that France would seek an understanding with the Powers interested. This however has not happened as far as Germany is concerned" (GP XX, no. 202). Germany was asking for similar treatment as other interested parties.

Most importantly, Germany framed its resistance to French moves not primarily as a snub to German status but rather as an affront to all parties with an interest in the maintenance of the open door in Morocco, which included not only the United States but also many smaller powers. Holstein wrote to his colleagues after the conclusion of the Anglo-French convention, "England is the gaining party in Egypt, and France in Morocco. England sought and obtained an understanding with the Powers who have legitimate interests in Egypt, whilst in acquiring Morocco France entirely ignored the justified interests of third parties, with the exception of Spain," and even then, only at the insistence of England. "It is undeniable that the losses which third Powers would suffer through the gradual absorption of Morocco by France would be immensely greater than any injury or loss caused by the new arrangements in Egypt ... France's evident scheme to absorb Morocco finishes the free competition of foreign countries and involves sensible injury to the interests of third Powers" (GP XX, no. 202). Von Bülow wrote the emperor that Germany "seeks no special advantages" but instead demands "equal commercial rights for all States to include not merely freedom of trade or even formal most-favored-nation treatment, but the 'open door' in the fullest sense" (GP XX, no. 6599). He explained to the German envoy to Tangier, "The security of

our position is that we do not demand any special advantages but only insist on the maintenance of the status quo, that is the equal treatment of all nations" (GP XX, no. 6582; also 6576).

The German government agreed to urge the Sultan to call for an international conference open to all the signatories of the Madrid Treaty, and therefore affected by French action, to jointly approve any alterations to the status quo. Germany was to stress that it was not looking for special prerogatives or concessions. Were this its goal, the chancellor explained, it would have insisted on participation in negotiations like the French had conducted with the Spanish (GP XX, no. 6613). The Germans stressed from the beginning that they would not consider such an "exclusive agreement" (*Sonderabkommen*). Holstein instructed the press to convey as the basic principle of German policy: "Moroccan matters are, to repeat, to be settled through a conference, by which the collective powers including the United States, jointly participate. The German government would not participate in any exclusive agreement over Moroccan matters in which the Moroccan government and the collective powers are not in the discussion" (GP XX, no. 6597). The Germans stressed to the British that the calling of a conference indicated "She had asked for no special advantages for herself, and any improvement that might take place in Morocco would be to the advantage not only of Germany, but of all the nations who had commercial interests there. As for the proposed Conference he regarded it as a piece of diplomatic etiquette that the Powers who had acquired certain rights in Morocco in virtue of the Madrid Convention should have their say as to the reforms which would benefit them all. This at all events was a proof that Germany was not pursuing a selfish policy, and that she did not wish for any territorial acquisition, although certain articles in the English press seemed calculated to force her to ask for a port" (BD III, no. 98).<sup>6</sup>

The German strategy was certainly instrumental in part. Holstein recognized that such a position, given the moral weight that came with its more disinterested quality, was superior to the one stressing how France had not consulted Germany, which he called a policy of "sensitivity and pouting" (GP XX, no. 6606), which made Germany look weak (GP XX, no. 6597). "To avoid the suspicion of pursuing, like France, a profit-seeking policy," Germany should "refer France to the collectivity of the treaty powers" (GP XX, no. 6597). Holstein noted in a memo that "our standpoint, that the [Madrid] treaty powers have a right to be heard is unassailable," to which the chancellor responded "correct" in the margins (GP XX, no. 6601; also 6597, 6611). He cautioned that "in addition to this main question, but only in addition, can be mentioned that Germany belongs to those great powers, whose dignity was injured when legally-recognized, justified interests were disposed of without agreement or even consultation" (GP XX, no. 6597). Holstein wanted to downplay status and play up equal treatment. Holstein believed that if the Germans "say that the absorption of Morocco by France injures us materially, that the injury is done without consulting us and wounds our dignity as a Great Power then it must be admitted that we are acting for Germany alone" (GP XX, no. 6521).

Importantly, however, Germany was consciously ruling out what would have been the most obvious redress for German concerns about exclusivity and status: a separate agreement with France in which it was compensated for French

<sup>6</sup> British Documents on the Origins of the War, Vol. III (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1928), no. 369 (hereafter BD III).

moves as other great powers had been, notably Britain. This would indicate exclusive status-seeking as well as offer tangible gains. The conference idea, by its very inclusive nature, could not offer such an outcome.

The French did precisely what the Germans expected; they tried to thwart the convocation of a conference that would impede on their Moroccan designs. The French premier Rouvier offered their rival a deal resolving any outstanding issues, including Morocco, directly comparing this to the recent accord with England (GP XX, no. 6642, 6623). Yet, German officials anticipated and stressed from the very beginning it would not negotiate such a buy-out and resisted every overture (GP XX, no. 6621). “We are not alone but rather one of the states of the Madrid convention,” Prince Radolin, German ambassador to Paris, told the French government. To do so would be hypocritical, the German envoy to Tangier told his English equivalent. “We cannot do what we are reproaching the French for; we must and want to remain honest in the matter ... What would the other signatory powers say if we negotiated with France behind their back?” (GP XX, no. 6642).

Any disingenuousness masked a pursuit of interests rather than exclusivity-seeking. As the Chancellor explained to his representatives abroad, their policy of promoting a conference “does not bind us forever ... In reality, we are confronted with the alternative either of relinquishing Morocco now to France without adequate compensation to Germany or of working for the extension of life of the Sherifan Empire in the expectation of a turn of events favorable to us. Thus, I perceive your important task to be in holding the future free for the profit of German interests” (GP XX, no. 6643). He wrote the German ambassador in the United States, “When the collectivity proves itself illusory and we are released, we are required to make exclusively German policy” (GP XX, no. 6667). The Chancellor’s goal for the conference, convened in Algeiras, Spain, in January 1906, was to block the creation of a French protectorate (GP XXI, no. 6914). Were the French to obtain the general mandate for organizing the police in the country’s coastal areas, it would establish a political predominance and effective occupation that would inevitably result in unequal treatment when it came to commercial interests and pave the way for an eventual absorption of the country (GP XXI, no. 6922). Holstein predicted, “If the conference is held it will, whatever the result, definitely not hand Morocco over to the French” (Von Holstein Papers IV, 882). One might attribute this to an effort to undermine French status and thereby boost their own, but German officials were under explicit instructions not to humiliate the French.

#### *The Algeiras Conference of 1906*

The French finally acquiesced to a conference in July 1905 after the Germans conceded in advance France’s overwhelming interest in securing the Moroccan border with Algeria. The two also agreed that the two main issues for conference consideration were the creation of a Moroccan state bank and the reform of the Moroccan police on the coastal areas to create more security for international trade interests.

The Germans settled on a strategy that portrayed them as the principled defender of collective interests, that is, as the voice of fairness in the crisis. Responsibility for the police might be (1) divided among the conference participants, with each receiving certain ports and hinterlands; (2) given exclusively to small powers; or (3) allocation of

mandates could be left to the Sultan. Germany looked to the United States for diplomatic help at the conference, believing that President Roosevelt’s commitment to the Open Door in other parts of the world would make him a natural ally in Algeiras. Von Bülow wanted proposals to come from friendly countries, rather than Germany itself, and suggested three alternatives to the Americans, the common denominator of which was the internationalization of the Moroccan police (GP XXI, no. 6922). German representatives told the Americans to choose the option they found best (GP XXI, no. 6956).

Internationalization had the advantage of precluding French predominance without appearing as if the Germans sought some sort of exclusive position for itself. The chancellor instructed his delegates to Morocco that “seeking special benefits of any kind in Morocco was not part of German foreign policy. On the contrary [German policy] accords with the most noble intentions, that the principle of the open door must be fully preserved for the economic development of Morocco” (GP XXI, no. 6922). The country was not looking for anything else, “otherwise we will be suspected of seeking special political advantages” (GP XXI, no. 6922). The country has no “ulterior motives” (*Hintergedanken*), it stressed; its interests were identical to all of the other parties to the conference (GP XXI, no. 6988). The Germans did stress that any such arrangement would be provisional, consistent with their pledge to keep the future open if circumstances changed.

The German strategy, however, had its own vulnerability. By claiming to speak for collective interests, it would find itself isolated at the conference if the participants tended to side with France. The Germans also identified avoiding blame for any breakdown as the highest priority (GP XXI, no. 6922) and “chief object” (GP XXI, no. 6900). If they lost the support of others “after all that has occurred, our situation would be almost ludicrous,” recognized the chancellor (GP XXI, no. 6900). In this way, an argument based on fairness disarmed Germany in a way that a status-driven argument based on exclusivity would not have. Yet, this is exactly what happened. Germany overestimated the force of its moral coercion. Grey noted in early February, as the negotiations lagged on, “it does not appear that proposals as to Bank or Police, which would be made or accepted by France are objected to on their merits by any Power except Germany” (BD III, no. 195) and tried to rhetorically coerce the ambassador to England, Metternich, with this logic (BD III, no. 285). In Russia, the German ambassador was told, “It is difficult to understand why [Germany] is so stubbornly committed at the conference to stand up for rights that all other powers are willing to give up in view of the practical solution that the French propose” (GP XXI, no. 7037). The Russian ambassador to Berlin “stated clearly ... in answer to [the German] contention [to be] acting in the interests of Europe, that he considered the powers of Europe the best judges of their own interests, and that Germany could not speak for them without their authority ... .[I]f the Representatives of the Powers at the Conference which met in deference to the wishes of Germany declared themselves satisfied with French proposals he did not believe it possible for Germany on her own motion to break up the Conference. If she did so, her aggressive policy would be plain to the whole world” (BD III, no. 274). The Germans even lost the confidence of the Americans (Anderson 1930, 360, 385, 388–89). Entirely isolated, the Germans eventually conceded to a shared organization of the Moroccan police by the French and Spanish with a Swiss inspector-general. This was a major diplomatic blow.

### Surveys of the Russian Public: Experimental Evidence

Our Moroccan case study gives us reason to believe that what is often taken for status-seeking is better understood as fairness-seeking of a particular sort, driven by appraisal respect and the demand for equity. Of course, case studies have weaknesses in terms of generalizability, causal identification, and measurement. Therefore, we supplement our historical analysis with two survey experiments conducted on samples of the Russian public. We do so for three reasons.

First, in addition to measurement precision, an experimental design allows us to rule out potential confounders and increase confidence in our argument. Second, we believe the status and fairness concerns of ordinary people are relevant. Scholars find that public opinion plays a constraining role even in semi-authoritarian regimes by providing crucial information to the elite selectorate in determining whether or not to continue supporting the incumbent, particularly in patronal presidential systems such as those that populate the post-Soviet space, including Russia (Hale 2005; Treisman 2011). The status immobility models with which we are engaging also see leaders as performing before an audience whose desires and aspirations both constrain and reflect elite behavior (Powers and Renshon, forthcoming). However, even if mass publics are entirely powerless, they can still provide insight into the motivations of elites. If only as passive observers regurgitating state propaganda, ordinary Russians are still a mirror of their government's aspirations, particularly considering Russia's highly state-controlled news media (Urnov 2014).

Finally, the Russian public is an ideal place to gauge status-seeking, because it is frequently maintained that Russian foreign policy behavior historically and in recent years, particularly under President Putin, is driven by status concerns. Forsberg (2014, 323) writes, "Status and honor have often been regarded as motivations for Russia either to go to war, or to cooperate with the Western partners and also explain why their relationships were difficult. Prominent scholars claim that the key problem in the mutual relationships is not about security, but rather about how Russia receives the status and respect from the West that she expects." Urnov (2014, 305) claims, "The expression 'greatpowerness' (velikoderzhavnost) denotes one of the most important components of Russian self-consciousness: a belief that Russia is or has to be a great power." Clunan (2014, 282) makes a more nuanced argument, maintaining that the importance of status was contested in post-Soviet domestic politics and eventually "settled on a statist national identity that focused on retaining Russia's historical status as a Western great power and hegemon in the former Soviet Union."

In early March 2020, we conducted two separate survey experiments on Russian samples recruited through the survey firm Anketolog and chosen to create samples similar to the general population in terms of age, gender, and region of residence. Our instrument was translated by a native speaker, piloted on a small sample for difficulties in comprehension, and also evaluated by another, non-native, Russian speaker.

Both surveys revolved around the question of Russian participation in the G8, from which Russia was uninvited in 2014 following the annexation of Crimea (returning it to the G7). Membership in exclusive institutions, such as the United Nations Security Council, are considered by theorists as modern-day status symbols and markers of "great powerness" (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014). Paul and Shankar (2014) argue that rising powers' status ambitions can be ac-

commodated through membership in "elite clubs," and the G8, in particular, appears as an important status marker for Russia in research on post-Cold War foreign policy (Larson and Shevchenko 2010; Forsberg 2014). Participating in the G8 can be considered an indication of appraisal respect and socially recognized rank. However, based on our theoretical argument, we have reason to believe that any dissatisfaction arising from exclusion from the G8 is fairness-based rather than status-based.

#### Study 1: G8 Vignettes

In our first survey experiment ( $N = 962$ ), respondents were introduced to the question of Russian involvement in the G8 and randomized into one of six conditions in a fully crossed  $2 \times 3$  factorial design. The first factor included two conditions: one emphasized Russia's deliberate exclusion and highlighted the status aspects of the G8 (its importance, exclusivity, and public face), whereas the second downplayed those status aspects and used the neutral language of not participating. If status-seeking concerns are driving attitudes, respondents primed with the first treatment should indicate greater dissatisfaction and do so as a function of self-expressed concern about Russian status rather than fairness. The prompts are as follows:

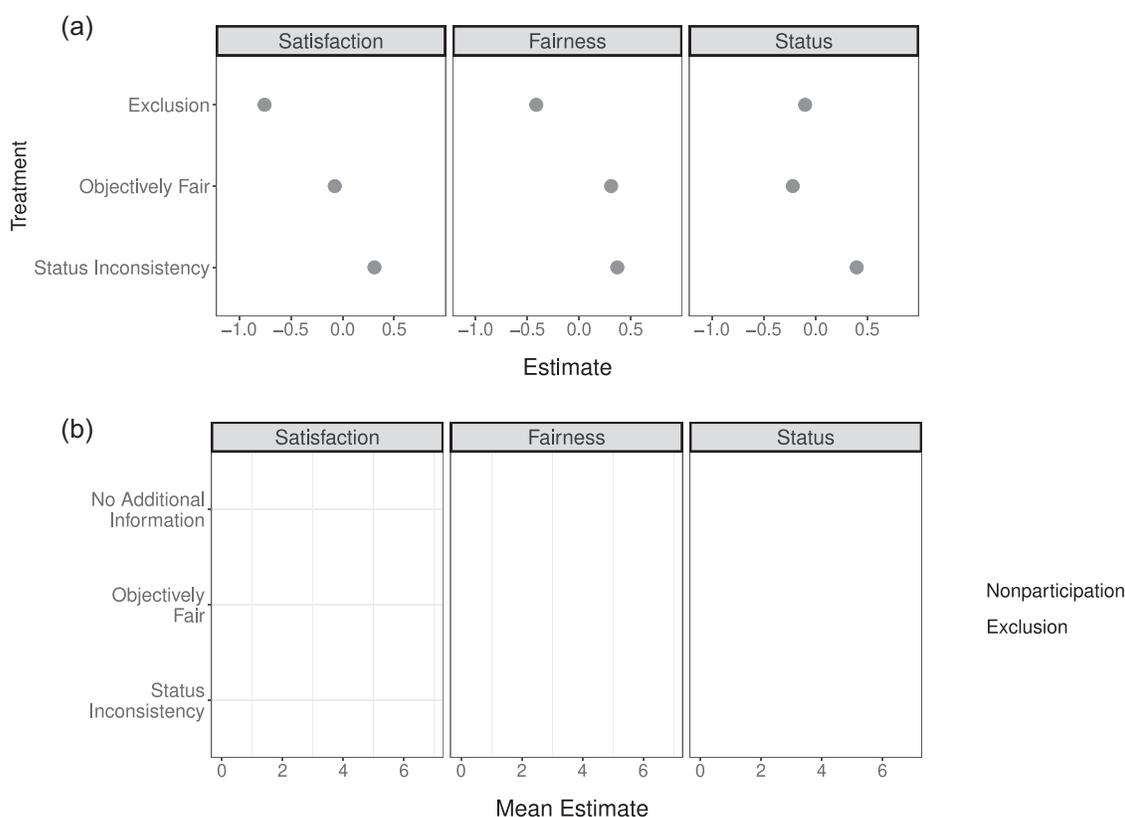
- Exclusion treatment: "Since 2014, Russia has not been allowed to participate in the G8, a prestigious and influential association of the world's leading powers (the United States, Britain, France, Japan, Germany, Italy and Canada), whose goal is to coordinate policy lines in accordance with the common interests of the member countries of the group. Meetings of the group attract wide media attention and demonstrate membership in an elite club of the world's leading countries."
- Nonparticipation treatment: "Since 2014, Russia has not participated in the G8, an association of countries (the United States, Britain, France, Japan, Germany, Italy, and Canada) whose goal is to agree on policy lines in accordance with the common interests of the member countries of the group. Russian authorities have stated that participation in this informal and purely deliberative group is of no particular importance to them."

Then, respondents were randomized into three additional groups: subjects received either no further information or one of two supplemental statements priming fairness in different ways. Of these two supplemental statements, one emphasized the objective fairness of Russia's nonparticipation or exclusion:

- Objectively fair treatment: "Although frustrating to many Russians, Russia's exit is objectively consistent with the country's actual influence in the world. Membership in the G8 is largely based on the size of the members' economies and Russia is not one of the world's eight largest economies by most measures. No country with a gross domestic product smaller than Russia is included in the organization."

If respondents care about fairness in an objective manner, this treatment should lead to greater satisfaction. Our biased fairness argument, however, expects that respondents will not respond to such a treatment. So long as Russia is not a part of the group, this will be perceived as unfair. This is disadvantageous inequity.

The second supplemental treatment instead stressed the lack of fairness of Russia's "exit" given its rank, which according to status inconsistency arguments should be more likely to invoke fairness concerns and greater dissatisfaction.



**Figure 1.** *G8 vignette experiment results.* In (a), ordinary least squares estimates of the effect of treatment on the DVs with 95 percent confidence intervals. The DVs (listed at the top of each panel) include levels of satisfaction with the state of affairs, fairness of the current G8 membership, and concerns about Russia's status in the world. The "Exclusion" estimate uses the nonparticipation assignment as the baseline. The "Objectively Fair" and "Status Inconsistency" estimates use the no additional information condition as the baseline, that is, no further text beyond the exclusion/nonparticipation manipulation. In (b), the mean estimates for each treatment condition with 95 percent confidence intervals, which provide a sense of the substantive effect sizes.

- Status inconsistency treatment: *"Russia's exit is not consistent with its real influence in the world as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council with a history as a great power and outstanding cultural achievements."*

To avoid mentioning Russia's expulsion from the G8 for those who received the nonparticipation treatment, in these additional treatments we utilize the neutral Russian term "exit" (Выход). In fact, there is no direct translation of the term "exclusion" in Russian. Online appendix A1.1 provides the Russian version of the prompts and appendix A1.2 describes the sample characteristics relative to the national population.

Following randomization, subjects responded to three dependent variables gathered on ten-point scales: (1) their satisfaction "with this state of affairs," (2) whether the "current membership of the G8" is fair, and (3) their level of concern about Russia's status in the world, namely concern that "Russia does not rank in the eyes of the world as among a select group of great countries." The latter is meant to capture status-seeking concerns.

Figure 1(a) displays the effects of the treatments on the three dependent variables (DV), estimated via ordinary least-squares regression, and figure 1(b) plots the mean estimates for each condition, which provides a sense of the substantive effect sizes.<sup>7</sup> Only the exclusion treatment (relative to nonparticipation) significantly affects respondents'

attitudes. However, importantly, respondents experience exclusion as lacking in fairness; it does not generate status concerns. Being told that Russia has been exiled rather than simply not participating in the G8 has a negative effect on satisfaction and perceived fairness (coef =  $-0.75$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and coef =  $-0.41$ ,  $p = 0.029$ , respectively) but has no effect on Russian concerns about status. Exclusion is felt as an injustice rather than a slight to status. In other words, Russians care about not being included in this prestigious club, but that seems to be driven primarily by a sense of fairness. Indeed, pointing out status inconsistency, by priming Russia's rank, has no effect on either fairness or status perceptions, although it could be that reminding Russians of the country's past achievements lessens the blow, counteracting any sense of injustice. This buttresses our findings above. Publics, like leaders, expect their country to not be excluded yet experience such exclusion primarily as an injustice rather than a status slight.

Even if fairness matters to our respondents, however, they are not judging equity objectively, as indicated by the lack of any effect of the objective fairness treatment. As suggested by inequity aversion models of fairness, if one is falling relatively behind, outcomes are judged as unfair.

We should point out that our exclusion and nonparticipation treatments differ in more than one respect, making it impossible for us to precisely identify whether it is the organization's importance, prestige, or public salience that drives the effects as opposed to the way by which Russia is not involved. All of these aspects were varied because

<sup>7</sup> Online appendix A1.3 provides the full regression table and demonstrates that the results are robust to inclusion of control variables.

all should prime status. Yet, despite this, status judgments were not affected, only fairness judgments. Nevertheless, a cleaner research design would be necessary to determine the precise contribution of these different elements. What we can say is that involuntary exclusion from an important club with a strong public profile (our exclusivity treatment) does not generate concerns that Russia does not rank in the eyes of the world as one of a few select great powers (our dependent variable capturing pure status-seeking), but it does generate concerns about fairness.

Overall, however, Russian respondents do have status concerns, as indicated by the mean score on the status scale. These concerns are simply not affected by the exclusion or other treatments. However, as we have noted, what status entails might be more or less exclusive. Even within exclusive groups, there is still room for more rarified rank, as Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014, 7, 9) point out above. Our first experiment does not attend to that question, which we take up in a second experiment.

### Study 2: Design-a-GX

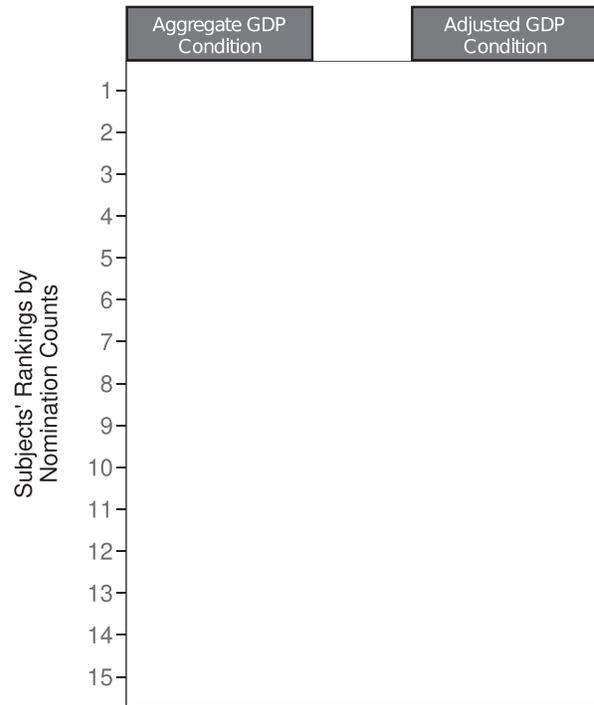
The above results provide evidence that Russian exclusion from the G8 generates concerns about fairness rather than status. However, inequity aversion arguments suggest that—provided Russia is included—respondents will not begrudge the inclusion of others. As argued above, this is the best way to distinguish pure status-seeking, which aims at maximum exclusivity, from fairness, even if the latter is myopic and asymmetrical. Our second survey experiment directly examines this phenomenon in a different sample of the Russian public in order to avoid the influence of previous participation ( $N=1,249$ ). All subjects again received information about Russian exclusion from the G8, specifying that the basis of membership was economic with an achievement-based equity frame:

- Since 2014, Russia has not been allowed to participate in the G8, a prestigious and influential association of the world's leading powers (the United States, Britain, France, Japan, Germany, Italy, and Canada), whose goal is to harmonize political lines in accordance with the common interests of the member countries of the group.

The group's meetings attract widespread media attention and demonstrate membership in an elite club of the world's leading countries. Membership in the group is mainly based on the size of the economies of the participating countries, but other leading countries with a large economy, such as China, are also not allowed to be part of the G8. In addition, there are various ways to measure economic activity.

Respondents were then asked to consider economic information about fifteen countries and to design their own group of this type, where subjects decide both the size of the group and the specific members.<sup>8</sup> However, subjects were randomly assigned one of two sets of economic data about these countries. In the first condition, subjects were assigned aggregate gross domestic product (GDP) figures, “a measure of the total value of economic activity in the country in a year calculated in US dollars, which is how international organizations generally calculate this number.” In the second condition, subjects were instead given cost-adjusted GDP figures, namely figures that take “into account the cost of living in each country so that, for instance, China's GDP is

<sup>8</sup>The country list is as follows: the United States, China, Japan, Germany, India, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Brazil, Canada, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Mexico, and Indonesia.



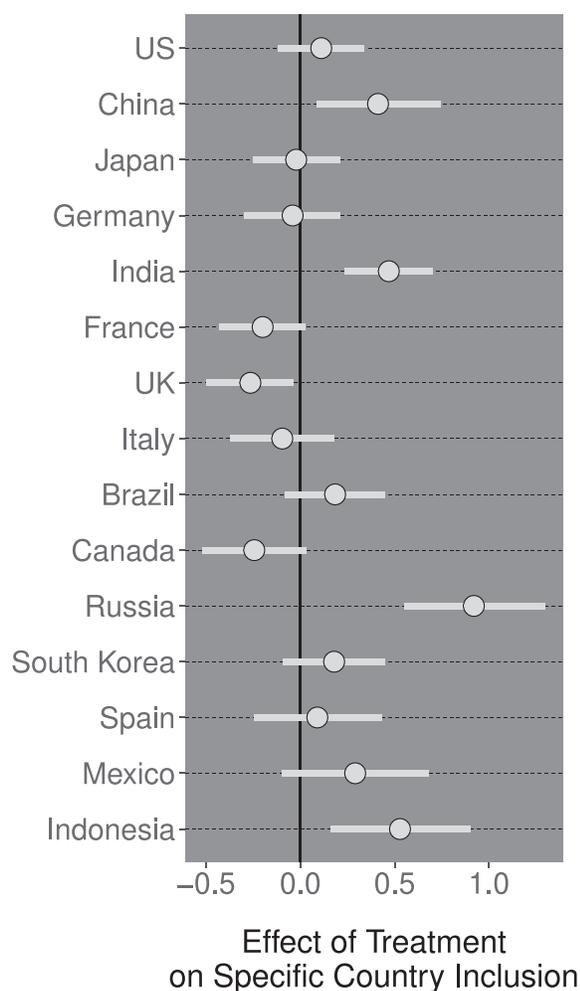
**Figure 2.** Design-a-GX results. Ranks of the total number of times a country is included in an organization according to condition (i.e., aggregate versus adjusted GDP). Countries in each condition are ranked by the total number of nominations received. Numbers in brackets indicate the objective rank of that country according to GDP type.

larger than the United States.” In both conditions, countries were listed from the largest to smallest economy by their assigned economic figures. Subjects were asked to drag icons with country names and flags into a box representing their institution, with a minimum of four countries included but as many as they wished. Online appendix A2.1 provides the translations for the prompts and appendix A2.2 describes the sample characteristics.

An objective fairness argument would expect that the likelihood of inclusion into the group of X will reflect the objective size of the economies, which vary across the two treatments. Russia will be much more likely to be included in the adjusted GDP condition than the aggregate GDP condition and considerably less likely to be included than the countries with larger economies in both treatments. A pure status motivation would be evident in preferences that Russia be included regardless of the treatment, with a preference for very few other countries so as to make the organization as exclusive as possible. Our biased fairness argument also expects that subjects will tend to include Russia in their organization but so too expects subjects to apply equity considerations to other countries, content to admit others into their organization based on economic size.

The results indicate support for both the biased and objective fairness arguments. Figure 2 ranks all countries by the number of times they were included in the group of X by treatment condition, with the objective ranking for each treatment in brackets next to the name of the nation.<sup>9</sup> While Russia ranks only eleventh in aggregate GDP and sixth in

<sup>9</sup>We note that Mexico and Indonesia are tied at 52 nominations in the aggregate GDP condition, and Spain and Indonesia are tied at 86 nominations in the adjusted GDP condition.



**Figure 3.** “Effect of treatment on country inclusion. Effect of the cost-adjusted GDP treatment on inclusion of specific countries, using the aggregate GDP condition as the baseline and estimated via logistic regression. Countries listed in order of aggregate GDP size.

adjusted GDP, it is the country most included in both treatments. As found in behavioral economics, evaluations of fairness are biased toward oneself.

Nevertheless, there is a large and significant effect of the treatment on Russian inclusion. Figure 3 displays logistic regression results for the effect of the adjusted GDP condition (holding the aggregate GDP condition as the baseline) on subjects’ inclusion of each country. Subjects in the adjusted GDP condition are approximately 2.51 times more likely to include Russia in their organization than subjects in the aggregate GDP condition [ $\exp(0.920) = 2.51$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ]. Said differently, 93 percent of subjects who are told that Russia has the sixth largest GDP in the world include it in the group of X of their choice, but this drops to 84 percent among those told that Russia ranks eleventh. This result, which is the largest effect of the treatment on any single country’s inclusion, suggests evidence of an *objective* fairness effect that exceeds even our theoretical expectations and is remarkable from a status point of view.

The treatments have an effect on the inclusion of other countries, as well. Figure 3 shows respondents are more likely to include countries as they move up the economic hierarchy, namely India ( $p < 0.001$ ), Indonesia ( $p < 0.01$ ), and China ( $p = 0.014$ ). Similarly, subjects are less likely to

include states as they move down the economic hierarchy (e.g., United Kingdom,  $p = 0.025$ ; Canada,  $p = 0.082$ ). Of course, beyond mere fairness considerations, geopolitical alignments and historical antagonisms matter as well, evidenced by the low ranking of the United States relative to GDP calculations of any kind. Nonetheless, consistent with inequity aversion models of fairness, Russians tend to include themselves and, once this is assured, bring in those more deserving.

Finally, in our first experiment, Russians reported non-trivial concerns about Russian status. Collapsing responses across experimental conditions to arrive at an observational measure, subjects in the first experiment reported a mean status concern of 5.99 (95 percent confidence interval [5.78, 6.20]) on a ten-point scale. However, our findings from the current experiment suggest that this result requires contextualization. Specifically, we asked respondents to report their satisfaction with the following three outcomes with respect to the G8, gathered on ten-point scales:

- Russia added back into the organization with no other new members (Russia alone).
- Russia added back into the organization as well as a number of powerful others like China but others should be excluded who are less powerful so the organization remains the same size of eight (small and fair).
- Russia added back into the organization as well as a number of powerful others like China so that the organization truly represents international influence but is larger than eight members (large and fair).

Figure 4(a) displays the descriptive responses to these questions. The outcome highest in exclusivity, “Russia alone” receives the lowest satisfaction scores. By far, respondents prefer the “large and fair” outcome, by almost three points on the ten-point scale. Even compared to the “small and fair” outcome, the most inclusive option scores almost two points higher on average. As we found in the sorting exercise above, so long as Russia plays a part, Russians do not insist on exclusivity. Respondents first ensure that Russia is included in the organization and then add in countries largely based on equity considerations, with larger economies more likely to be included.

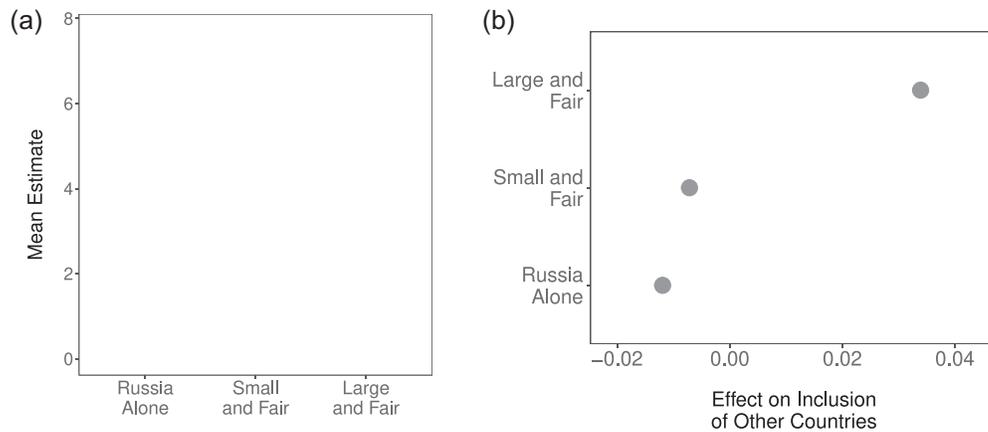
To add inferential precision, figure 4(b) plots Poisson estimates of the effect of these preferences on the number of countries included in each participant’s organization, controlling for treatment group and demographic factors.<sup>10</sup> Consistent with their beliefs, respondents more satisfied with “Russia alone” included fewer countries. Those more satisfied with “large and fair” outcomes included more countries in their organization.

Taken together, these two survey experiments buttress our case study of German foreign policy. The Russian public demonstrates little concern with exclusive status-seeking. Rather it seems fixated, as German elites were, on doing right by Russia without begrudging others.

### The Implications: Doing Justice in and to International Relations

We find that leaders and publics thought to be driven by status are instead concerned with equity. Both Wilhemine Germany and the Russian public indicate an interest in not being excluded from decision-making on important international issues. Yet, they experience this slight to noninclusion primarily as an injustice rather than a status slight. Both

<sup>10</sup>Online appendix A2.3 presents the full regression results.



**Figure 4.** Satisfaction with organizational arrangements. In (a), “Russia Alone” refers to the reinstatement of Russia to the G8 with no additional members. “Small and Fair” refers to reinstatement of Russia alongside other powerful countries and the exclusion of less-powerful countries to retain the size of eight members. “Large and Fair” refers to the reinstatement of Russia alongside other powerful countries such that the organization represents international influence, even if larger than eight members. In (b), subjects more satisfied with the addition of Russia alone included fewer countries in their own organization. Subjects who preferred larger and fairer criteria for inclusion included more countries in their organization. Estimates derived from a Poisson regression with the number of countries included by each subject as the DV.

demonstrate a status-seeking pursuit that is less exclusive than many prominent models of status implicitly or explicitly pursue. The desire for respect, prestige, and esteem does not seem to be nearly as zero-sum as we might expect it to be. The German foreign minister, Bernard von Bülow, said it best in a speech taken to be the ultimate expression of German status seeking but which actually clearly indicates the pursuit of fairness. In the context of a dispute over Germany’s interests in China, he declared, “We are happy to respect the interests of other powers in China, secure in the knowledge that our own interests will also receive the recognition they deserve. In short, we do not want to put anyone in our shadow, but we also demand our place in the sun.”<sup>11</sup>

This finding has fairly clear policy implications, particularly vis-à-vis those frequently regarded as seeking to revise the international order. Most notable are China and Russia, although there are others such as India and Brazil. It is important to note that for those who feel that the current state of world affairs is unjust and unfair, revisionist aims are likely. We too often assume that fairness concerns will work to dampen state egoism; in many cases, this is what moral considerations do. However, this will not be the case for those who are perceived as not having been treated fairly.

Indeed, Russian behavior in Crimea and Ukraine can be understood in this light. Through Western eyes, these actions seem like naked aggression to secure material interests and security or promote Russian status. As Toal (2017, 21) describes, “The dominant liberal storyline views geopolitics as an anachronistic practice used only by revisionist great powers to challenge the universal liberal norms that are the necessary foundation of world order,” something explicit in American objections to Russian action in its “near abroad.” In Russian eyes, however, their perceived revisionism is the natural reaction to a United States that has not treated it as an equal partner after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. In other words, it is only fair. Sushentsov and Wohlforth (2020) diagnose the cause of deterioration

in American–Russian relations as largely due to Russian perception that its cooperative moves in the 1990s and early 2000s were not reciprocated. The Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov explained in 2011, “Russia’s concerns ... were invariably ignored. Our arguments fell on deaf ears” (Sushentsov and Wohlforth 2020, 441). Another foreign minister, Lavrov, offered the same rationale, explaining poor relations as the “consequence of the policy that Western countries, primarily the United States and NATO allies, conducted after the end of the Cold War ... Instead of taking advantage of the unique historical chance and forming a truly pan-European structure of security and cooperation, the West opted for NATO expansion” (Sushentsov and Wohlforth 2020, 442). Nor is this merely a nationalist, Putinist perspective. Gorbachev says the same (Toal 2017, 27).

One cannot comprehend Russian behavior without recognizing how Russians perceive NATO and American policies and how hypocritical and, therefore, unjust the latter’s behavior appears to them. Political actors, no less than individuals, respond to perceived injustices through negative reciprocity. Rescinding cooperation is the fair response (Kertzer and Rathbun 2015). By Russian interpretation, the Crimean invasion was not an invasion but rather the return of historically Russian territory made necessary by (a likely incorrect) perception that Ukraine would imminently violate the 2010 Kharkiv Pact guaranteeing Russian basing rights on the Black Sea, a fear compounded by concerns that Ukraine would eventually be admitted into NATO (Galeotti 2016). One could of course make the same diagnosis about the drivers of China’s treatment of the Taiwan issue as well as its behavior in the South China Sea.

From a biased fairness perspective, it is not surprising that it is American realists who are most inclined to look at Russian–American relations through Russian eyes (Mearsheimer 2014). Realists pride themselves on their cold, passionless, and objective reading of international affairs (Rathbun 2018). When they do so, they see Russia doing what the United States does, despite the latter’s claims to be upholding international rule-of-law. “The political-realist counterstory holds that all great powers practice geopolitics and, furthermore, that all are sensitive to security challenges that are geographically proximate to their borders ... Russia

<sup>11</sup> *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstags*, 5th Session, Vol. 1, Berlin, 1898, p. 60.

acted because there were threats in its backyard, just as the United States has done in the past” (Toal 2017, 21).

Even though fairness-seeking is often revisionist in nature (and as the literature shows us can explode in violence), there are nevertheless likely to be very clear differences between those who seek status and those who seek equity. Given the exclusive and zero-sum nature of status-seeking, it is much harder for others to accommodate and ultimately much larger in scope. Therefore, properly parsing what in fact underlies Chinese and Russian motivations, while difficult, is nevertheless critical. To the extent that we attribute fairness motivations to status-seeking, we run the risk of overstating the threat to Western interests. Attributions of status-seeking to Russia and China on the part of Americans and others seem hard to disentangle from suspicions of hostile intentions. Calling someone a status-seeker is never a compliment. If fairness is good and Russia is bad, then Russia cannot be motivated by fairness or feel that their actions are just. We must understand that there is a third possibility between a demand for the status quo and a desire to undermine the entire Western-based order, one that calls for revisionism but not revolution. However, the reverse is also true. Falsely concluding that others merely want what is rightfully theirs could open the door to excessive concessions that are ultimately insufficient. Although difficult, the best path forward seems to be keenly aware of our own biased notions of what is fair, which color our characterization of others’ motivations.

We must also keep in mind that even if Russian and Chinese leaders are only seeking what is fair, their conception of what constitutes a just settlement will be highly biased. Just how far does this bias go? What are the bounds of objective reality? This is an unanswered question. Russia might feel rightly entitled to G8 membership, despite its lower GDP. Yet, Finland does not. The same question applies to those with status prerogatives that are hard to objectively justify, such as the permanent membership in the Security Council of Britain and France. Such expectations might reflect previous designations historically of great power status, anchored at the point in time when a country was at its height of power and influence. Yet, Turkey does not make claims of status dissatisfaction and unfairness. This strikes us as a crucial next question in the evolution of the literature on fairness and status.

### Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

### Acknowledgments

The authors thank the audience at the Center for International Studies workshop series for feedback. Alex Lin and Austin Carson also contributed substantially with their comments. The data underlying this article are available on the ISQ Dataverse, at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/isq>. Evgeniia Iakhnis provided invaluable help in drafting and fielding the survey of the Russian public.

### References

- ADAMS, J. STACY. 1965. “Inequity in Social Exchange.” In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 2, edited by Leonard Berkowitz, 267–99. Burlington: Elsevier Science & Technology.
- ANDERSON, EUGENE N. 1930. *The First Moroccan Crisis, 1904–1906*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- ANDERSON, WILLIAM D., AND MILES L. PATTERSON. 2008. “Effects of Social Value Orientations on Fairness Judgments.” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 148 (2): 223–46.
- BABCOCK, LINDA, GEORGE LOEWENSTEIN, SAMUEL ISSACHAROFF, AND COLIN CAMERER. 1995. “Biased Judgments of Fairness in Bargaining.” *The American Economic Review* 85 (5): 1337–43.
- BARNHART, JOSLYN. 2020. *The Consequences of Humiliation: Anger and Status in World Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- BECHTEL, MICHAEL M., JENS HAINMUELLER, AND YOTAM MARGALIT. 2017. “Policy Design and Domestic Support for International Bailouts.” *European Journal of Political Research* 56 (4): 864–86.
- BERG, JOYCE, JOHN DICKHAUT, AND KEVIN McCABE. 1995. “Trust, Reciprocity, and Social History.” *Games and Economic Behavior* 10 (1): 122–42.
- BRUTGER, RYAN, AND BRIAN C. RATHBUN. 2020. “Fair Share? Equality and Equity in American Attitudes toward Trade.” *International Organization* 75 (3): 880–900.
- CLUNAN, ANNE L. 2014. “Historical Aspirations and the Domestic Politics of Russia’s Pursuit of International Status.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47 (34): 281–90.
- DARWALL, STEPHEN L. 1977. “Two Kinds of Respect.” *Ethics* 88 (1): 36–49.
- DESCIOLI, PETER, MAXIM MASSENKOFF, ALEX SHAW, MICHAEL BANG PETERSEN, AND ROBERT KURZBAN. 2014. “Equity or Equality? Moral Judgments Follow the Money.” *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 281 (1797): 20142112.
- DEUTSCH, MORTON. 1975. “Equity, Equality, and Need: What Determines Which Value Will Be Used As the Basis of Distributive Justice?” *Journal of Social Issues* 31 (3): 137–49.
- DOLAN, THOMAS. 2015. “Demanding the Impossible: War, Bargaining, and Honor.” *Security Studies* 24 (3): 528–62.
- DUCKITT, JOHN, CLAIRE WAGNER, LOUIZE DU PLESSIS, AND INGRID BIRUM. 2002. “The Psychological Bases of Ideology and Prejudice: Testing a Dual Process Model.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83 (1): 75.
- DUQUE, MARINA G. 2018. “Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach.” *International Studies Quarterly* 62 (3): 577–92.
- FEHR, ERNST, AND URS FISCHBACHER. 2002. “Why Social Preferences Matter: The Impact of Non-Selfish Motives on Competition, Cooperation and Incentives.” *The Economic Journal* 112 (478): C1–C33.
- FORSBERG, TUOMAS. 2014. “Status Conflicts between Russia and the West: Perceptions and Emotional Biases.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47 (3–4): 323–31.
- GALEOTTI, MARK. 2016. “Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New is Russia’s ‘New Way of War?’” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27 (2): 282–301.
- GODDARD, STACIE E. 2018. *When Right Makes Might: Rising Powers and World Order*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- GOTTFRIED, MATTHEW S., AND ROBERT F. TRAGER. 2016. “A Preference for War: How Fairness and Rhetoric Influence Leadership Incentives in Crises.” *International Studies Quarterly* 60 (2): 243–57.
- GREVE, ANDREW Q., AND JACK S. LEVY. 2018. “Power Transitions, Status Dissatisfaction, and War: The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895.” *Security Studies* 27 (1): 148–78.
- HALE, HENRY E. 2005. “Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia.” *World Politics* 58 (1): 133–65.
- HURD, IAN. 2008. *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power in the United Nations Security Council*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- KERTZER, JOSHUA D., AND BRIAN C. RATHBUN. 2015. “Fair is Fair: Social Preferences and Reciprocity in International Politics.” *World Politics* 67 (4): 613–55.
- LARSON, DEBORAH W., AND ALEXEI SHEVCHENKO. 2010. “Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to US Primacy.” *International Security* 34 (4): 63–95.
- . 2014. “Russia Says No: Power, Status, and Emotions in Foreign Policy.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47 (3–4): 269–79.
- . 2019. *Quest for Status*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- LARSON, DEBORAH W., T.V. PAUL, AND WILLIAM C. WOHLFORTH, eds. 2014. “Status and World Order.” In *Status in World Politics*, 3–29. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- LEBOW, RICHARD N. 2010. *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- LOEWENSTEIN, GEORGE F., LEIGH THOMPSON, AND MAX H. BAZERMAN. 1989. “Social Utility and Decision-Making in Interpersonal Contexts.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57 (3): 426–41.
- MACDONALD, PAUL K., AND JOSEPH M. PARENT. 2021. “The Status of Status in World Politics.” *World Politics* 73 (2): 358–91.

- MEARSHEIMER, JOHN J. 2014. "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin." *Foreign Affairs* 93 (5): 77–89.
- MERCER, JONATHAN. 2010. *Reputation and International Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- . 2017. "The Illusion of International Prestige." *International Security* 41 (4): 133–68.
- MURRAY, MICHELLE. 2015. "Recognition, Disrespect and the Struggle for Morocco: Rethinking Imperial Germany's Security Dilemma." In *International Politics of Recognition*, edited by Thomas Lindemann and Erik Ringmar, 131–51. Oxford: Routledge.
- . 2018. *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- NAYLOR, TRISTEN. 2018. *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilised Nations to the G20*. Oxford: Routledge.
- OOSTERBEEK, HESSEL, RANDOLPH SLOOF, AND GIJS VAN DE KUILEN. 2004. "Cultural Differences in Ultimatum Game Experiments: Evidence from a Meta-Analysis." *Experimental Economics* 7 (2): 171–88.
- PAUL, T.V., AND MAHESH SHANKAR. 2014. "Status Accommodation through Institutional Means: India's Rise and the Global Order." *Status in World Politics* 176: 165–91.
- POWERS, KATHLEEN E., JOSHUA D. KERTZER, DEBORAH J. BROOKS, AND STEPHEN G. BROOKS. 2021. "What's Fair in International Politics? Equity, Equality, and Foreign Policy Attitudes." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66 (2): 217–45.
- POWERS, RYAN, AND JONATHAN RENSHON. forthcoming. "International Status Concerns and Domestic Support for Political Leaders." *American Journal of Political Science*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12689>.
- RABIN, MATTHEW. 1998. "Psychology and Economics." *Journal of Economic Literature* 36 (1): 11–46.
- RATHBUN, BRIAN C. 2018. "The Rarity of Realpolitik: What Bismarck's Rationality Reveals about International Politics." *International Security* 43 (1): 7–55.
- RATHBUN, BRIAN C., KATHLEEN E. POWERS, AND THERESE ANDERS. 2019. "Moral Hazard: German Public Opinion on the Greek Debt Crisis." *Political Psychology* 40 (3): 523–41.
- RENSHON, JONATHAN. 2016. "Status Deficits and War." *International Organization* 70 (3): 513–50.
- . 2017. *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- RICH, NORMAN. 1965. *Friedrich Von Holstein, Politics and Diplomacy in the Era of Bismarck and Wilhelm II*, vol. 2. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- SUSHENTSOV, ANDREY A., AND WILLIAM C. WOHLFORTH. 2020. "The Tragedy of US–Russian Relations: NATO Centrality and the Revisionists' Spiral." *International Politics* 57 (3): 427–50.
- TOAL, GERARD. 2017. *Near Abroad: Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- TREISMAN, DANIEL. 2011. "Presidential Popularity in a Hybrid Regime: Russia under Yeltsin and Putin." *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (3): 590–609.
- URNOV, MARK. 2014. "'Greatpowerness' As the Key Element of Russian Self-Consciousness under Erosion." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47 (3–4): 305–22.
- WARD, STEVEN. 2017. *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- WELCH, DAVID A. 1995. *Justice and the Genesis of War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WOLF, REINHARD. 2011. "Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition." *International Theory* 3 (1): 105–42.