

# Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach

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How do states achieve status? Although we rely on status to explain important phenomena in international politics—such as wars and the foreign policy of emerging powers—we still do not understand what status is or where it comes from. Previous research assumes that status is a function of state attributes such as wealth and military capability, but does not examine that assumption systematically. Following Weber, I argue that status is founded on social recognition: it concerns identification processes in which an actor is admitted into a club once they follow the rules of membership. Therefore, systematic social processes, which cannot be reduced to state attributes, influence status. Specifically, status is self-reinforcing and influenced by social closure—which implies that (i) a state’s existing relations influence its ability to achieve status, and (ii) states recognize similar states rather than states with the most attributes. To investigate the determinants of international status, I move beyond ranking states based on attributes to examine empirically how status emerges from state relations. Leveraging inferential network analysis, I examine state practices that express recognition—specifically, the network of embassies. The analysis indicates that self-reinforcing dynamics and social closure, rather than state attributes directly, drive status recognition.

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Status is a fundamental aspect of life in society, which influences interactions among actors and groups (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Fiske and Markus 2012; Veblen 2007; Weber 1978). When it comes to interaction among states, matters of status can be particularly relevant. Unlike domestic societies, which are ruled by a central government, in international politics there is no authority above states. This means that status is much more important in determining who gets what, when, and how. As Gilpin (1981, 31) puts it, status is the “everyday currency of international relations.” Achieving status allows states to achieve their goals on the cheap—without having to use force. And because today states do not go to war like they used to (Mueller, 2009), there is reason to think that status has become increasingly important in adjudicating state disputes.

Indeed, a review of international-relations scholarship across research traditions reveals that status is a critical element of international politics (Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth, 2014; Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, 2014). Previous work indicates that status is a fundamental state motivation, especially because of the inherent privileges—material, social, or psychological—that come with it (Gilpin 1981; Lebow 2008; Morgenthau 1948; Wolf 2011). Moreover, there is cumulative evidence that states take actions to change their status, which may involve military assertiveness, joining international organizations, or hosting the Olympics for example (Larson and Shevchenko 2003, 2010; Pu and Schweller 2014). In fact, actions taken to improve a state’s status may even compromise other important goals such as security (Barnhart 2016; Murray 2010). In addition, a growing body of research suggests that states that are dissatisfied with their status are more likely to engage in conflict (Lebow, 2010; Lindemann, 2011; Renshon, 2015, 2016; Schweller, 1999; Wohlforth, 2009).

Yet, though we rely on status to explain important phenomena in international politics—such as wars and the foreign policy of emerging powers—we still do not understand what status is or where it comes from. Conventional approaches typically define status as a state’s ranking on attributes, especially material attributes like wealth and military capability. In this view, status is a function of a state’s attributes: the richer or militarily stronger a state is, the more status it achieves. This approach contrasts with research on status in the social sciences more broadly, which considers status to be fundamentally social. The conventional approach in international-relations scholarship does not deny that status is social.<sup>1</sup> But because it emphasizes attributes, this approach contradicts the social nature of status in important ways. It mistakes social relations for actors’ attributes, leads to a material reductionism in the study of status, and separates status from state practices. As such, the concept of status does not differ enough from material capabilities to be useful analytically. Devoid of its distinctive feature, status has limited usefulness for theories of international relations.

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g., Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 373-76; Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, 13.

The assumption that status is a function of one's attributes makes intuitive sense, since it is consistent with how most of us experience status in our everyday lives. However, scholars of international relations have not examined this assumption systematically. Certain attributes are traditionally assumed to be relevant for status, but their relevance is rarely put to the test.<sup>2</sup> So how can we know if states value the same attributes researchers consider important—or if state attributes determine status to begin with? Rather than assumed a priori, the determinants of international status need to be considered as an analytical category that is separate from the experiences of observers and therefore subject to falsification.

There is reason to think that the translation of attributes into status is neither automatic nor exact. Take the example of North Korea. Even though nuclear weapons are usually considered one of the accoutrements of great power status, acquiring these weapons gives North Korea the status of a rogue state, rather than the status of a great power. North Korea may receive attention and even gain leverage in negotiations because of its weapons. But it does not get invited to sit at the main table and decide on the contours of the international order. The attention given to North Korea is more like the attention given to a low-status actor that misbehaves.<sup>3</sup> In addition, for emerging and established powers alike, there is a mismatch between a state's level of material resources and the recognition it receives from other states (see [Volgy et al., 2011](#), 14-15). So what explains that? What is international status, and where does it come from?

To address this puzzle, I adopt a relational approach in both theoretical and empirical terms. To begin, I propose a theory that focuses on state relations rather than state attributes. Following Weber's classical definition, I conceptualize status as an effective claim to social esteem in terms of privileges. I argue that status is founded on recognition: it concerns identification processes in which an actor is admitted into a club because they are considered to follow the rules of membership. This implies that systematic social processes—in particular, relational processes that cannot be reduced to state attributes—influence status.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, two relational processes affect status. First, status results from peer attribution rather than from actor attributes directly; that is, high-status states are those recognized as such by their peers. Therefore, status is self-reinforcing: the more a state is recognized, the more it is deemed worthy of recognition.

Second, status relations are characterized by social closure—the establishment of a boundary between the

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<sup>2</sup>[Miller et al. \(2015\)](#) is a rare exception. Other studies shown in [Table 1](#) use an inductive approach to recover status attributes, though the criteria used for induction are often unclear.

<sup>3</sup>See [Magee and Galinsky \(2008, 360-61\)](#) for a more detailed differentiation between status and attention.

<sup>4</sup>Previous work suggests the existence of relational patterns in status relations. For example, [Miller et al. \(2015, 786-87\)](#) acknowledge that status attribution is path-dependent and interdependent. However, relational patterns have not been the object of systematic investigation in previous studies of status in international-relations scholarship.

group and outsiders (Weber, 1978, 43-46). Social closure manifests itself in two ways. To begin, high-status states share dense relations among themselves and relatively sparse relations with outsiders. Therefore, a state's existing relations influence the state's ability to achieve status. Moreover, high-status groups differentiate themselves from the rest of society by adopting distinctive values and consuming distinctive goods. Therefore, states do not necessarily recognize the states with the most resources. Rather, they recognize states with similar values and resources. That is, the relevance of a given attribute for status recognition is socially defined: attributes matter because of their symbolic—rather than intrinsic—value.

To investigate the determinants of international status, I adopt a relational empirical strategy. Because status is founded on recognition, understanding where status comes from requires investigating why states are recognized. I thus move beyond ranking states based on attributes to examine how status emerges from states' recognition practices. To measure status recognition, I use diplomatic exchange data. But instead of using these data to measure status at the state level, as done in previous studies, I use a relational measure: the network of embassies. This allows me to integrate into the analysis important information about the structure of diplomatic relations that is discarded in previous studies. The goal of the empirical analysis is to investigate why states send embassies where they send them.<sup>5</sup> To do so, I use inferential network analysis—an approach that allows me to test the observable implications of my relational theory of status. I control for alternative explanations by taking into account states' levels of attributes, in line with traditional approaches.

I show that by focusing on state attributes we miss crucial aspects of international status. Compared to conventional explanations that see status as a function of attributes, the relational model performs much better in explaining the establishment of embassies. The results indicate that status recognition depends on a state's relations, and only indirectly on its attributes. States recognize similar states rather than the states with the most attributes. In addition, status is self-reinforcing: the more a state is recognized, the more it tends to receive recognition. Moreover, a state's existing relations affect the state's ability to achieve status: states are more likely to recognize states that recognize them in return, or that have diplomatic partners in common. Finally, although military capability does play a role in recognition, fundamental values such as democracy, human rights and economic liberalism are important drivers of recognition in the contemporary status order.

This article demonstrates the benefits of integrating a relational ontology (e.g., Goddard, 2009; McCourt, 2016) with a relational methodology (Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery, 2009, 584-85). Empha-

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<sup>5</sup>Two previous studies use diplomatic exchange data as a dependent variable (Kinne, 2014; Neumayer, 2008), though not with the purpose of investigating the determinants of international status.

sizing recognition in my conceptualization of status implies switching from a substantialist to a relational perspective—or taking as units of inquiry not self-subsistent or preformed entities, but rather unfolding, dynamic relations whose changing meaning affects the very identity of actors (Emirbayer, 1997, 282-91). In a relational perspective, relations come before states: status emerges from the way state relations are configured over time (Jackson and Nexon, 1999, 304-7), rather than from state characteristics. Similarly, social network analysis starts with the anticategorical imperative—the rejection of explanations based exclusively on the categorical attributes of actors (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994, 1414). Key to network theory is the notion that the structure matters; that is, the patterns of relationships among actors affect outcomes of interest (Borgatti et al., 2009, 893-94). In network analysis, the social structure emerges not only from the distribution of attributes among actors but also from the dynamics of interaction (Goodreau, Kitts, and Morris, 2009, 103).

In both theoretical and methodological terms, this article brings the study of status in international-relations scholarship in line with the study of status in the social sciences more broadly.<sup>6</sup> The article contributes to the burgeoning literature on status in international-relations scholarship by showing that status is distinguishable from material capabilities both conceptually and empirically—and, as such, is a useful concept for international-relations theories. Taking the social nature of status seriously enables the concept to achieve its full potential in international-relations scholarship. Emphasizing the distinctive feature of the concept of status—its social nature—allows us to consider how status may affect not only international conflict, as done in previous studies, but also international cooperation. In addition, conceiving of status as a fundamentally social phenomenon allows us to rethink the connections between status and key concepts in international-relations theory such as hierarchy (Mattern and Zarakol, 2016).

### Existing Definitions of Status

Conventional approaches in international-relations scholarship define status as a state's ranking on attributes, especially material attributes like wealth and military capability. In this view, status is a function of a state's attributes: the more of the attribute(s) a state has, the more status it achieves. For example, Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014, 7) define status as “collective beliefs about a given state's ranking in valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout).” Table 1 shows the status attributes mentioned in the literature. Scholars of international relations

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<sup>6</sup>Sociologists have used network analysis for decades to investigate status in domestic societies (see Bottero, 2005, 8-10).

most commonly list as status attributes material resources—economic, military, or technological capabilities, and nuclear weapons. Some scholars also consider as status attributes fundamental values—such as political system or ideology, culture or civilization, and moral superiority.

**Table 1.** Status Attributes in the Literature

Nature of Attribute	Type of Attribute	Author
Material Resources	Economic capability	Gilpin (1981)
		Larson and Shevchenko (2003, 2010)
		Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014)
		Luard (1976)
		Neumann (2008, 2014)
		Schweller (1999)
	Military capability*	Gilpin (1981)
		Larson and Shevchenko (2003, 2010)
		Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014)
		Luard (1976)
		Neumann (2008, 2014)
		Schweller (1999)
Technological capability	Larson and Shevchenko (2003, 2010)	
	Luard (1976)	
	Schweller (1999)	
	Wohlforth (2009)	
Nuclear weapons	Art (1980)	
	O'Neill (2006)	
Fundamental Values	Political system or ideology	Larson and Shevchenko (2003, 2010)
		Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014)
		Luard (1976)
		Neumann (2008, 2014)
	Culture or civilization†	Larson and Shevchenko (2003, 2010)
		Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014)
Moral superiority		Luard (1976)
		Neumann (2014)
		Schweller (1999)

\*We can include in this category attributes such as territory (Luard, 1976; Schweller, 1999) and population (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, 2014; Luard, 1976; Schweller, 1999).

†We can include in this category attributes such as religion (Luard, 1976; Schweller, 1999) and education (Larson and Shevchenko, 2003, 2010).

Because it emphasizes state attributes, this approach contradicts the social nature of status in a number of

ways. First, it leads to generalized fetishism—the act of mistaking social relations for actors’ properties (Elster, 1976, 252). Defining status in terms of state attributes equates status with the consumption or possession of status symbols. However, status is not reducible to symbols for two reasons. To start, a symbol is an entity that stands for another entity, but should not be mistaken for it (Dittmar, 1992, 6; Goffman, 1951, 294-95). For instance, although a flag represents a country, no one would claim that it *is* the country. Moreover, attributes have no intrinsic symbolic value apart from social relations. A given attribute can only be relevant for status if actors share the belief that it symbolizes status (Dittmar, 1992, 6,79; Goffman, 1951, 294-95). Status symbols are thus part of a social, communicative process that involves not only self and object, but also the other; that is, they work as symbolic mediators between self and other (Dittmar, 1992, 9).

Second, this approach leads to material reductionism, as it tends to emphasize material resources as status attributes. For example, some scholars draw from Morgenthau (1948, 52,55) to define prestige more narrowly as a reputation for military power (Gilpin, 1981, 31; Wohlforth, 2009, 39). Status is thus reduced to a problem of incomplete information about military capability. But because status is not differentiated from military capability, it is unclear why we need the concept of status in the first place (Clunan, 2014, 274). In fact, it would be more precise in this case to use a term like “estimated military capability” rather than status, which is a social phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> The act of reducing status to material resources—or to state attributes more generally—strips away the very aspects that make the concept useful analytically.

Finally, this approach reifies the social structure, as the status order is seen as external to states. If status is a function of attributes, investing on attributes is the best way to improve one’s status. As such, status achievement becomes an autonomous act, and the social aspect of status recognition becomes epiphenomenal. For example, research on status inconsistency draws from Galtung (1964) to examine the disequilibrium between ascribed status—indelible dimensions known at one’s birth—and achieved status, or “delible” dimensions in which there is room for social mobility. Achieved status is usually measured in terms of material resources, while ascribed status is measured by the number of diplomatic representations a state receives (East, 1972; Midlarsky, 1975; Volgy et al., 2011; Wallace, 1971). That is, the number of representations is regarded as an indelible feature of a state’s status. However, diplomatic representations are relations among states; they are neither external to states nor carved in stone. The act of defining status in terms of state attributes separates status from state relations and reduces status to a state-level phenomenon.

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<sup>7</sup>One might argue that this definition has a social element because military capability is estimated collectively. However, this element is not substantively interesting but rather a nuisance—ideally, we would prefer estimates to be as accurate as possible. Moreover, this element is more cognitive than social per se.

## A Relational Ontology of Status

To conceptualize status, I use Weber's classical definition, which sociologists use extensively to investigate status in domestic societies (Bottero, 2005; Lamont, 2001; Scott, 1996). Weber defines status as "an effective claim to social esteem in terms of positive or negative privileges" (Weber, 1978, 305). This conceptualization avoids the problems discussed above because it emphasizes the fundamentally social nature of status in four key dimensions.<sup>8</sup> First, status involves "an effective claim:" an actor needs to be recognized by others to achieve a particular status (Murray, 2010; Ringmar, 2002; Wendt, 2003). The mere aspiration for a given status is not enough to achieve it; a successful claim requires recognition.<sup>9</sup> For example, a state may claim to be a great power, but great power status can only be achieved if other states—especially the great powers—consider that claim as legitimate (Levy, 1983, 17).<sup>10</sup>

Because status depends on recognition, it concerns identification processes in which an actor is admitted into a club once they are deemed to follow the rules of membership. The principal expression of status refers to the identification with the distinctive lifestyle—a set of behavior and practices (Weber 1978, 538)—expected from a group's members (Scott 1996, 31; Weber 1978, 305,932). Status is "to be considered a true bearer of some valued attributes that are distinguishing and place one in a socially constructed group" (Clunan, 2014, 279). For example, admission into international clubs such as the European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is conditioned on criteria such as democracy, human rights, and economic liberalism. Indeed, membership may be revoked when an actor's behavior violates the club's rules of membership. In 2014, the G7 suspended Russia from the group because it considered that Russia's annexation of Crimea contradicted the group's "shared beliefs and responsibilities."<sup>11</sup>

Second, status is founded on social esteem—a "social estimation of honor" that may be connected with any type of symbol (Weber, 1978, 932).<sup>12</sup> Weber's definition is agnostic about the types of attributes that should be

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<sup>8</sup>Some scholars of international relations draw boundaries among status and related terms such as prestige, honor, and respect (e.g., Lebow, 2008, 62-69; O'Neill, 2001, 152, 193-94; Wolf, 2011, 114-16). However, fine-grained distinctions among status and related terms cause conceptual confusion because they tend to be hard to comprehend and recall. Excessive differentiation compromises other desirable features in the concept—such as familiarity, parsimony, depth, and theoretical and field utility (Gerring, 1999). To avoid conceptual fragmentation, I do not differentiate among status and related terms. Instead, I conceive of status as a complex phenomenon with four deeply interrelated dimensions. Each dimension is a necessary condition of status (Goertz, 2006, 86-87).

<sup>9</sup>The intuition behind this argument appears in previous international-relations scholarship on status (e.g. Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, 2014, 10), though it has not been explored in depth.

<sup>10</sup>Recognition of great power status can be informal—expressed in terms of equal treatment or frequent political consultations—or formal, as in the institution of permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

<sup>11</sup>G7. "The Hague Declaration." 24 March 2014. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/24/hague-declaration>.

<sup>12</sup>Social esteem does not imply approval or friendship. That is, the conceptualization is agnostic about whether high-status actors are perceived as warm, considerate, or authentic by the other actors.

valued in a given society. Since the nature and value of symbols depend on inter-subjective understandings, symbols vary over time and across societies. Status attributes can be material—things that actors have—or ideational—norms that actors follow (Clunan 2014, 274; Miller et al. 2015). By supplying yardsticks for differentiating and ranking states, norms provide the raw material for estimating social honor and stressing the distinctiveness of a status club (Towns, 2012; Towns and Rumelili, Forthcoming). For example, members of the contemporary international society are expected to conform to a “standard of civilization” based on human rights, democracy, and capitalism (Buzan, 2014; Gong, 1984).

Importantly, material resources do not determine status, even though the two are often correlated in practice (Weber, 1978, 926). The status order is analytically distinct from class relations: whereas wealth is the currency in the latter, social honor is the currency in the former. High-status groups adamantly oppose claims to base social ranking exclusively on material resources, as the fulfillment of these claims would undermine the status order (Weber, 1978, 936). If material resources determined status, the status order would collapse into class relations, and the nouveau riche would be entitled to the same privileges as old money. In international politics, we can see the importance of non-material symbols in then Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick’s 2005 call for China to become a responsible stakeholder—a state that matches its economic growth with a commitment to the principles of capitalism, human rights, and democracy.<sup>13</sup>

Third, the status order is a social hierarchy: depending on a group’s level of social esteem, its members acquire “positive or negative privileges.” That is, the international status order is a hierarchy in the broad conception (Mattern and Zarakol, 2016, 629), as it refers to a system in which units are arranged into unequal relationships. To Weber, effective claims to status typically entail social closure—the establishment of a boundary between the group and outsiders (Weber, 1978, 43-46). Social closure has two manifestations. First, members of high-status groups share dense relations among themselves and relatively sparse relations with outsiders (Weber, 1978, 932). Second, high-status groups differentiate themselves from the rest of society by adopting distinctive values and consuming distinctive goods (Weber, 1978, 933). Based on its distinctiveness, the club justifies exclusive access to certain privileges (Scott 1996, 31-32; Weber 1978, 43-46,935).

In international politics, we can observe social closure in the creation of the UN and the institution of the nonproliferation regime. In both cases, the great power club legitimized exclusive access to resources like veto power and nuclear weapons. Great powers justified their privileges in terms of their status; that is, they

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<sup>13</sup>“Whither China? From Membership to Responsibility.” Remarks to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, New York City, September 21, 2005.

were entitled to privileges on account of being great powers. Although great powers' material capabilities may have initially contributed to the monopolization of resources, coercion alone cannot explain monopolization. Over time the distinction between great powers and other states has become a convention. As a result, great powers' exclusive access to privileges has relied less and less on coercion.

Besides the positive privileges enjoyed by high-status states, there are also negative privileges associated with low status (Adler-Nissen, 2014; Zarakol, 2011). For instance, there have been practices of semi-sovereignty since the institution of the Westphalian order (Donnelly, 2006). States recognized as "outlaw" states—deemed to violate international norms—have had their sovereignty restricted, as Iraq in the Gulf War. Moreover, states seen as less than states due to their perceived weakness, backwardness, or decay—such as Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq—have been subjected to forms of protection or guarantee. Recently, the Responsibility to Protect doctrine has legitimized intervention in states deemed unable to protect their nationals. As the examples indicate, states need to uphold a certain lifestyle in order to be recognized as sovereign and enjoy the corresponding privileges. For states to fail to meet these conditions, restrictions to sovereignty may be seen as legitimate and even necessary.

Finally, the status order is regulated by conventions—norms that determine the lifestyle corresponding to a given identity or the club's rules of membership (Weber, 1978, 34,307,319-24). Conventions are constituted actors' practices, and in turn constitute actors' positions in the status order. Therefore, the status order emerges from states' practices, rather than being external to them. From a theoretical standpoint, conventions are the most interesting feature of status. To Weber, the search for the ultimate status marker—the attribute that would lie at the root of status distinctions—is of little interest. Status markers vary across societies, are frequently chosen in an arbitrary fashion, and may become less relevant over time. What is puzzling, instead, is how conventions can perpetuate social divisions, even after the initial reasons for status distinctions are forgotten (Scott 1996, 32; Weber 1978, 387).

### **A Relational Theory of Status**

Having defined status, let us consider the other question: where does international status come from? In other words, how do states achieve status? Conventional explanations define status as a state's ranking on (material) attributes. In this view, the more status attributes a state has—for example, the richer or more militarily powerful it is—the more status it achieves. In contrast, I conceptualize status as an effective claim

to social esteem in terms of privileges. Therefore, I argue that status is founded on recognition: a successful claim to status requires recognition. This implies that systematic social processes, which cannot be reduced to state attributes, influence status. Specifically, two relational processes affect status.

First, status results from peer attribution. That is, high-status states are those recognized as such by their peers. This means that status is self-reinforcing: the more a state is recognized, the more it is deemed worthy of recognition.<sup>14</sup> High-status states not only have more influence on determining the criteria for social esteem (or defining status attributes), but also enjoy privileges that can be used to access more privileges. Therefore, status recognition is characterized by the dynamic of increasing returns that defines path dependence (Pier-son, 2000). For example, the inclusion of France in the P5 was largely based on France's previous status as a great power, rather than on its material capabilities in the aftermath of World War II (Heimann, 2015). The observable implication of this argument is that *high-status states should receive more recognition simply because of their position in the social structure, rather than because of the possession of status attributes*. In other words, this effect is purely structural: it emerges from the way status relations are configured (Jackson and Nexon, 1999, 304-7), rather than from state characteristics.

Second, status relations are characterized by social closure. As discussed above, effective claims to status typically entail the establishment of a boundary between the group and outsiders based on the group's distinctiveness. Social closure implies that, when we examine status relations, we should see the formation of tightly knit groups of states bound together by common values and resources. That is, social closure has two observable implications. First, connectedness or sharing relational ties, especially with high-status actors, brings status. Having connections with club members increases the odds of being admitted into a club. High-status states share dense relations among themselves and relatively sparse relations with outsiders. Identification with a status group imposes restrictions on social intercourse, as relations become dense within the group and relatively sparse with outsiders (Weber, 1978, 932). This means that *a state's existing relations should influence the state's ability to achieve status*. Again, this is a purely structural effect, which emerges from the structure of state relations rather than from state attributes.

Social closure has a second observable implication: similarity in terms of both fundamental values and material resources fosters status recognition. High-status groups differentiate themselves from the rest of

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<sup>14</sup>The intuition behind this argument appears in previous international-relations scholarship on status, though it has not been explored in depth. For example, Singer and Small (1966, 238) note that an actor's status originates from a shifting consensus in the community regarding the actor's qualities, which makes status "perceptual in the collective sense." Similarly, the self-reinforcing nature of recognition is evident when status is described in terms of second-order beliefs (beliefs about beliefs) and higher-order beliefs (common beliefs) about a state's quality (Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014, 374; O'Neill 2001, 193).

society by adopting distinctive values and consuming distinctive goods that symbolize the group's unique lifestyle. This means that similar states share denser relations. Therefore, states do not necessarily recognize the states that have the most resources, as conventional explanations argue. Rather, *states should recognize states that have similar values and resources as them*. While this observable implication involves state attributes, it does so in the context of state relations. The relevance of a given attribute for status recognition is socially defined: attributes matter not because of their intrinsic value, but rather because of their symbolic value or socially-ascribed meaning.

In sum, I argue that existing explanations of status are incomplete. To understand where status comes from, we need to examine recognition dynamics rather than focusing solely on state attributes. Status concerns identification processes in which a state is admitted into a club because it is considered to follow the club's rules of membership. Following a club's rules of membership—having certain attributes—does not automatically grant club membership. Recognition by other states is a necessary condition for club admission. To be sure, attributes do play a role in the status order, though an indirect one. Because status is hard to ascertain, attributes help identify the status of actors; that is, club members examine a state's attributes to figure out if the state fits the club's lifestyle (Goffman, 1951, 294-95).<sup>15</sup> But although attributes still play a role in my theory of status, the focus shifts from attributes to relations. That is, I adopt a relational rather than a substantialist perspective (Emirbayer, 1997; Jackson and Nexon, 1999).

### **A Relational Empirical Strategy**

Because status is founded on recognition, investigating the foundations of status requires understanding why states are recognized rather than simply what they possess. That is, the focus of the empirical analysis also needs to switch from state attributes to state relations. The goal of the empirical analysis is to identify the determinants of international status, rather than to come up with a new ranking of status. To achieve that goal, I adopt a relational empirical strategy. The first question the empirical strategy must address is: how do we measure status relations? An intuitive approach would be to measure how states perceive each other's status. However, status perceptions are not directly observable. It would be impractical to get state leaders to sincerely fill out a survey about the status of every other state in the world. But most importantly, status is not merely perceptual; it is about state practices.

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<sup>15</sup>We can think of this in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Separately, recognition or attributes are necessary but insufficient conditions for status. Together, recognition and attributes are jointly sufficient conditions for status.

Status emerges from practices such as granting recognition, attaching esteem to attributes, and assigning privileges to clubs. We should thus look at state practices to measure status relations (Pouliot, 2014, 192-200). Specifically, because status is founded on recognition, recognition practices should provide the best measure of status relations. Some studies use states' complaints about the way they are treated to measure the lack of recognition, whereas the lack of complaints would denote recognition (e.g., Wolf, 2011, 113-114). However, this approach conflates observed causes and effects, as it identifies recognition by proxy of the effects recognition is assumed to produce (Agné et al., 2013, 101). That is, recognition is measured *ex post*, based on the reaction of the (mis)recognized state. To be empirically meaningful, acts of recognition need instead to be specified *ex ante*, independently of their alleged effects (Agné et al., 2013, 101).

Moreover, since the status order involves all states, an ideal measure of status relations should cover all states. Some studies look only at great powers to identify status attributes (e.g., Heimann, 2015; Neumann, 2008; Volgy et al., 2011). However, it is unclear how the analysis of a specific group of states could be generalized to all states. Other potential measures of recognition also involve only a portion of states.<sup>16</sup> For example, measures such as membership in international clubs like the G7 provide information about the top of the status hierarchy, but neglect most states. Leadership positions in international governmental organizations have similar limitations. Most organizations do not cover all states to begin with; in addition, leadership positions are typically determined by criteria that are specific to the organization (Pouliot, 2016) or involve a geographic rotation principle. As such, it would be difficult to generalize from the findings.

The best existing measure of status relations that satisfies the criteria above is diplomatic representation—a recognition practice that involves all sovereign states.<sup>17</sup> Under international law, three acts of recognition by states create status distinctions, and could therefore be used to measure status relations: the recognition of a state, the establishment of diplomatic relations, and the establishment of diplomatic representation.<sup>18</sup> The three acts are distinct but share key features, most importantly their discretionary nature (Wouters, Duquet, and Meuwissen, 2013, 511).<sup>19</sup> Among the three acts, diplomatic representation is the best indicator of recog-

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<sup>16</sup>In this category we can include practices such as “choices of language and style in diplomatic communication; respect for national codes of conduct regarding for instance dressing at official visits; attention to national memorial days and monuments of international partners; invitations to international meetings and organizations” (Agné et al., 2013, 100-101).

<sup>17</sup>Other practices such as official visits and visa policies also satisfy the criteria, but comprehensive data on them are not available.

<sup>18</sup>Recognition is defined broadly in international law as the “acknowledgement of the existence of an entity or situation indicating that full consequences of that existence will be respected” (Peterson, 1997, 1). Both diplomatic relations and diplomatic representation are interpreted as acts of recognition in international legal jurisprudence and doctrine (Brown 1936; Kelsen 1941, 605).

<sup>19</sup>Each of these acts implies the previous one: diplomatic representation implies the existence of diplomatic relations, and diplomatic relations imply state recognition. However, each of these acts does not imply the next: it is possible to recognize a state without establishing diplomatic relations, and it is possible to have diplomatic relations without establishing diplomatic representation.

dition for the purposes of this article because it creates status distinctions among sovereign states. Since the other two acts typically create distinctions between states and non-state actors, neither is a good measure of status relations among states.

Unlike states' potential reactions to perceived (mis)recognition, acts of recognition under international law, such as diplomatic representation, are clearly specified and thus empirically stable (Agné et al., 2013, 101). Due to their official nature, these acts are also directly observable. Unlike other potential measures of recognition such as membership in international clubs, diplomatic representation involves all states, allowing us to map the status order in its entirety. To be sure, diplomatic representation provides an imperfect measure of status relations because factors external to status, such as geographical proximity, influence the establishment and maintenance of representations. But since we know what these factors are, it is possible to control for them statistically, as I discuss below.

Previous studies use diplomatic representations to measure status (East, 1972; Miller et al., 2015; Renshon, 2016; Singer and Small, 1966; Volgy et al., 2011; Wallace, 1971). I share with these studies a couple of assumptions. First, an embassy is only established if the receiving state is considered important across multiple dimensions (Brams 1966; East 1972, 305; Nierop 1994, Ch. 4; Singer and Small 1966, 241; Small and Singer 1973, 581-82; Wallace 1971, 26). Embassies are expensive—they imply financial and personnel costs (Vogeler, 1995, 324-27) that are significant not only to developing states but also to developed ones.<sup>20</sup> Because embassies are costly, states cannot establish an embassy in every other state in the world; rather, they have to prioritize. In fact, states periodically revise their embassy portfolios to reallocate resources from low to high priority areas.<sup>21</sup> By choosing to send an embassy to state  $j$ , state  $i$  reveals that it considers  $j$  more important than other states that do not host  $i$ 's embassies; in other words, it recognizes  $j$ .

Second, embassies have an important symbolic role, which may even take precedence over strategic interests or functional reasons (Kinne 2014, 2-3; MacRae 1989; Small and Singer 1973, 581-82). For example, during the last wave of decolonization, many states opened embassies in the newly independent states to express solidarity, rather than because a previous relationship existed (Malone, 2013, 124). Therefore, I share with previous studies the assumption that the number of embassies received by a state provides an aggregate measure of the state's status (East 1972, 305; Renshon 2016, 527; Singer and Small 1966, 238, 241; Wallace

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<sup>20</sup>Over the last decade, more than half of the developed states in the OECD have reduced their diplomatic footprint due to shrinking budgets. See Oliver, Alex. 2016. "The Irrelevant Diplomat." *Foreign Affairs*, March 14. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2016-03-14/irrelevant-diplomat>.

<sup>21</sup>Oliver, Alex. 2016. "The Irrelevant Diplomat." *Foreign Affairs*, March 14. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2016-03-14/irrelevant-diplomat>.

1971, 26). The more embassies a state receives, the more legitimacy it enjoys; legitimacy, in turn, increases a state's ability to enter into legal contracts and engage in financial or military transactions (Christopher 1994; Kinne 2014, 2-3; Singer and Small 1966, 239; Small and Singer 1973, 581-82). Not fortuitously, exchanging embassies is one of the first practices newly-established states engage in (Newnham, 2000). In sum, exchanging embassies is a recognition practice that signifies social esteem and implies privileges.

While I use the same data as previous studies, I also propose an innovation. Previous studies use diplomatic representation data at the state level: to measure a state's status, they count the number of representations received by the state.<sup>22</sup> By doing so, these studies throw away important information about the structure of status relations—for example, who sends an embassy to whom. Without this information, it is not possible to investigate relational patterns in status relations.<sup>23</sup> Given my relational theory of status, I am interested precisely in the information about the structure of relations that is discarded in previous studies. Instead of measuring status at the state level, I thus use a relational measure: the network of embassies.<sup>24</sup> My basic unit of analysis is the network of embassies rather than the state. This choice of unit allows me to investigate empirically the observable implications of my theory, which involve relational dynamics.

#### *Data: The Network of Embassies*

Using data from the Diplomatic Contacts Database,<sup>25</sup> I obtain a directed network in which the nodes are states, and state  $i$  sends a tie to state  $j$  when it establishes an embassy at state  $j$  headed by an ambassador or high commissioner.<sup>26</sup> I distinguish between embassies headed by an ambassador or high commissioner and other types of diplomatic representation because the former unambiguously signify recognition and imply costs.<sup>27</sup> Embassies headed by a *chargé d'affaires* indicate deteriorating relations (Berridge and James 2003, 36; Malone 2013, 123). Interest sections maintain communication in the absence of diplomatic relations (Berridge and James, 2003, 138). Consulates have a limited function (Berridge and James, 2003, 55). Side

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<sup>22</sup>The number of diplomatic representations a state hosts (East, 1972; Singer and Small, 1966; Volgy et al., 2011; Wallace, 1971), the proportion of embassies a state receives (Miller et al., 2015), or a state's centrality in the diplomatic network (Renshon, 2016) have been used as measures of the state's status.

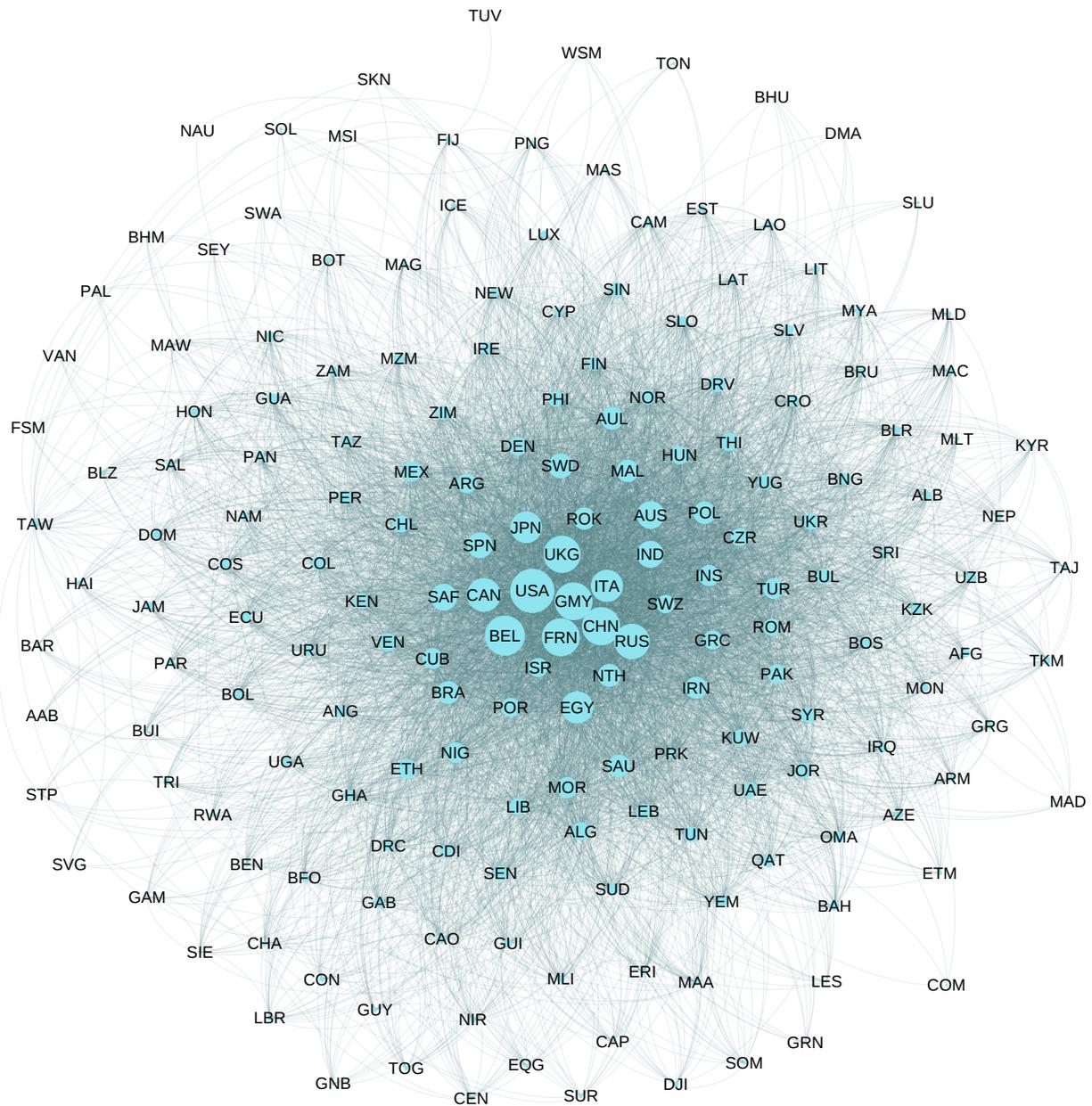
<sup>23</sup>This approach contrasts with the way diplomats see their own craft. Diplomats typically subscribe to a "folk relationalism," as they think in terms of processes and relations rather than substances or rigid notions such as the national interest (Adler-Nissen, 2015, 287-90).

<sup>24</sup>In social network analysis, a network is defined as the set of actors and the ties (or relationships) among them (Wasserman and Faust, 1994, 9).

<sup>25</sup>Rhamey, Patrick, Jacob Cramer, Kirssa Cline, Jennifer Miller, Megan Hauser, Paul Bezerra, Christina Sciabarra, Nicholas Thorne, and Thomas J. Volgy. The Diplomatic Contacts Data Base, Version 3.0. Tucson, AZ: School of Government and Public Policy, University of Arizona.

<sup>26</sup>Following network notation,  $i$  denotes the sending state and  $j$  denotes the receiving state.

<sup>27</sup>Ambassadors and high commissioners hold equal rank in diplomatic protocol (Malone, 2013, fn 2).

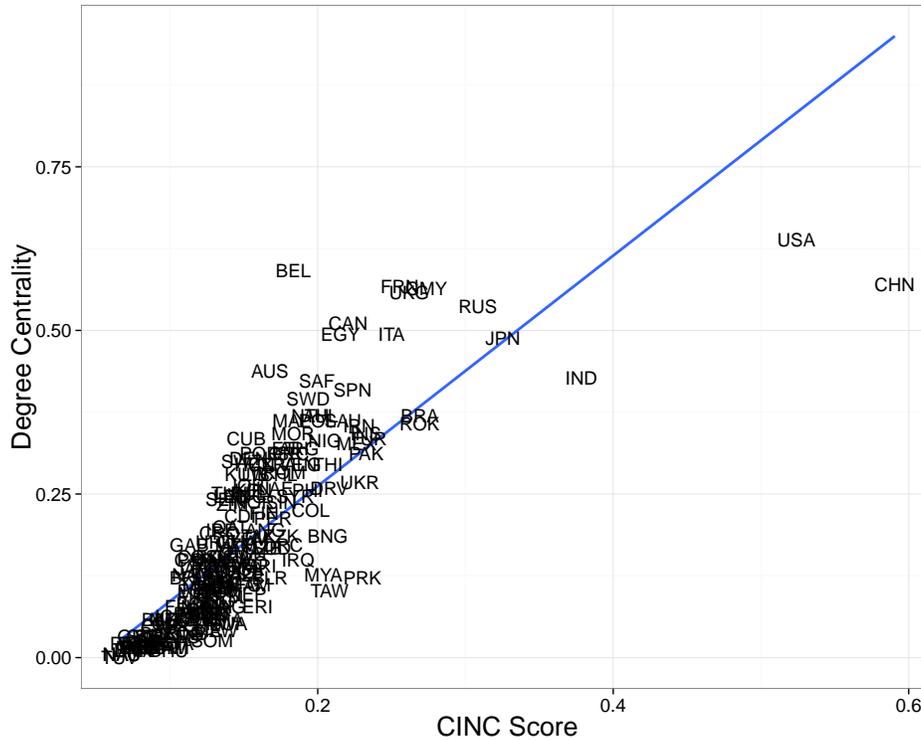


**Figure 1.** Diplomatic Network in 2005

accreditations are used to reduce costs (Berridge and James, 2003, 177) and result in only occasional interactions (Malone, 2013, 124).

Figure 1 shows the network in 2005, with nodes representing states and lines representing embassies.<sup>28</sup> Node size is proportional to in-degree,  $d$  (the number of embassies received). That is, larger nodes at the center host the most embassies. Some of the states located at the center—such as the United States ( $d = 166$ ),

<sup>28</sup>The original data cover the period from 1970 to 2010. See the online appendix for a more detailed description of the network.



**Figure 2.** Relationship between Material Capability and Degree Centrality (2005)

Germany ( $d = 141$ ), and the United Kingdom ( $d = 139$ )—are considered high-status states in the literature. But the figure also shows intriguing cases that cannot be explained in terms of state attributes. For instance, Brazil ( $d = 83$ ) and Cuba ( $d = 74$ ), despite having vastly different levels of material capabilities, receive almost the same number of embassies. Italy ( $d = 119$ ) has no longer been considered a major power for a while, but still has a central position in the network.

Figure 2 shows the relationship between material capability, measured by the CINC score (Singer, 1988), and the number of embassies received or a state's degree centrality. Although embassies and material capability are correlated, there is much variance in the number of embassies that cannot be explained in terms of material capability, especially as material capability increases. Above the line there are states such as Italy ( $d = 119$ ) and Egypt ( $d = 119$ ) that receive more embassies than their material capabilities would predict. Below the line, states such as North Korea ( $d = 24$ ) and Taiwan ( $d = 20$ ) receive fewer embassies than their capabilities would predict. So what explains the overall distribution of embassies? Why do states send embassies where they send them?

Before delving into the analysis, let us consider some basic features of the network. First, embassies are unevenly distributed in the network: a few states receive many embassies, but most states receive only a few

embassies. While the number of embassies received ranges from 0 (Tuvalu) to 166 (United States), the median state receives only 27 embassies. Second, on average states send only one out of the five potential embassies they could send. This confirms the intuition that the establishment of embassies is costly—and therefore informative as an act of recognition. Finally, in a five-year interval, on average 12% of the existing embassies are closed and 23% new embassies are created. This shows that the network is not static and that there is variation over time to be explained.

### *A Relational Method*

The goal of the empirical analysis is to explain how the diplomatic network emerges. To model network formation, I use an exponential random graph model (ERGM). This model estimates the probability of observing the network we observe given all the possible networks that could have been observed. ERGM has a number of properties that fit very well with my purposes.

First, ERGM allows us to assess the possibility that a network emerges not only from actors' attributes or exogenous effects, but also from structural dynamics or endogenous effects—whereby the network structure itself influences the establishment of ties. I argue that the diplomatic network emerges as a result of not only state attributes but also relational dynamics. Because my argument involves relational dynamics, I have a substantive interest in endogenous effects. ERGM allows me to specify directly the type of endogenous effects that I expect to observe in the network.

Second, ERGM avoids the bias that is likely to result when we use conventional regression models to examine relational data (Cranmer, Desmarais, and Menninga 2012, 282-83; Cranmer and Desmarais 2016, 358-61). Because diplomatic ties influence one another, conventional regression models would likely yield biased estimates. ERGM avoids this problem because it does not assume that ties in the network are independent and identically distributed. ERGM treats the network as a single multivariate observation rather than as a collection of independent dyadic observations (Cranmer and Desmarais, 2011, 67-69).

Finally, since embassies tend to remain open once they are established, I use a temporal extension of ERGM—Temporal ERGM or TERGM (Desmarais and Cranmer, 2012)—that allows me account for the persistence of embassies over time. Specifically, I estimate a TERGM for a time series of networks from 1995 to 2005 at five-year intervals. Because of the availability of covariates, the main analysis uses data from 1995 to 2005. Robustness checks include data from 1970 to 2005 to ensure that the results from the main analysis are not specific to the 1995-2005 period.

### *Model Specification*

I expect the diplomatic network to emerge as a result of not only state attributes but also of endogenous effects, whereby the network structure influences the establishment of embassies. Specifically, there should be three endogenous effects in the diplomatic network. To begin, because status depends on peer attribution, I argue that it is self-reinforcing: the more a state is recognized, the more it is deemed worthy of recognition. Therefore, I expect to observe a popularity effect: the more embassies a state already hosts, the more likely it should be to receive additional embassies. To assess this effect, the *Popularity* term counts the number of distinct 2-instars in the network, where a 2-instar is defined as a node  $i$  and two incoming ties  $(j, i)$  and  $(k, i)$ . I expect to find a positive coefficient for the *Popularity* term, indicating that states are more likely to receive additional embassies the more embassies they already host.

Moreover, I argue that status is characterized by social closure. The first dimension of social closure has to do with the structure of relations: high-status actors share dense relations among themselves but sparse relations with outsiders. This means that a state's existing relations affect the state's tendency to receive recognition. I thus expect to observe two additional endogenous effects in the network. The first effect is reciprocity: states should reciprocate embassies. This effect captures the notion that status involves an effective claim. While reciprocal recognition is mutually gratifying, asymmetric recognition is inherently unstable because it tends to be costly and ultimately worthless (Wendt, 2003, 512-14). Indeed, a refusal to reciprocate an embassy denotes "a marked sense of material or moral superiority (or both) on the part of the receiving state," which compromises bilateral relations (Berridge and James, 2003, 82). To assess this effect, the *Reciprocity* term counts the number of dyads for which mutual ties exist. I expect to find a positive coefficient for the *Reciprocity* term, indicating that states are more likely to send embassies to states that send embassies in return.

The second endogenous effect associated with social closure is transitivity: states should be more likely to establish embassies where their diplomatic partners have embassies. That is, the more diplomatic partners any two states have in common, the more likely they should be to exchange embassies. This effect captures the notion that connectedness, especially with high-status actors, brings status. Although recognition is a discretionary act, states routinely coordinate acts of recognition to ensure legitimacy (Crawford 1996; Kelsen 1941; Kinne 2014, 5-6). Given their central position in status relations, high-status states are particularly influential in determining who gets recognized. For example, Western states with close ties to the United

States rarely recognize the State of Palestine, while states with ties to China rarely recognize Taiwan.<sup>29</sup> To assess this effect, the *Transitivity* term counts the number of closed triads—any set of ties  $(i, j)$  and  $(j, k)$  for which either  $(k, i)$  or  $(i, k)$  also exist. I expect to find a positive coefficient for the *Transitivity* term, indicating that states are more likely to exchange embassies the more diplomatic partners they have in common.

The second dimension of social closure has to do with actor (or exogenous) attributes. Status groups differentiate themselves by adopting distinctive values and consuming distinctive goods. Therefore, I expect states to recognize states with similar values and resources, rather than the states with the most resources as argued by traditional approaches. In terms of the diplomatic network, this means that states that are more similar should be more likely to exchange embassies; in other words, there should be homophily effects. To test this claim, I specify the status attributes considered in the literature as dyadic attributes—in terms of the absolute difference between the states in every dyad in the network. The more two states differ in terms of attributes such as military capability or democracy, the less likely they should be to exchange embassies. I thus expect to find negative coefficients for the homophily effects.

In contrast, conventional explanations expect status to be a function of attributes. For example, the more economic or military capabilities a state has, the more status it should achieve. In terms of the diplomatic network, this means that states with higher levels of attributes such as wealth or military capability should be more likely to receive embassies. To assess conventional explanations, I specify status attributes at the state level—in terms of how much each state has of that attribute.

I use the state attributes considered in the status literature, which include both material resources and fundamental values. Material resources include wealth, military capability, and nuclear weapons. Three variables are used to assess the effects of material resources: *GDP per capita* is the log-transformed real GDP per capita in 2005 US dollars (Gleditsch, 2002); *Military Spending* is the log-transformed military expenditure in current US dollars (Singer, 1988); and *Nuclear Weapons* indicates whether a state has nuclear weapons and an ongoing nuclear program (Singh and Way, 2004).

In terms of fundamental values, the status literature traditionally considers regime type as well as more abstract notions such as civilization and moral superiority (see Table 1). It is often argued that, besides democracy, the standard of civilization today includes capitalism and human rights (Buzan, 2014, Neumann, 2014, 111). Therefore, I estimate the effects of the three values on recognition: democracy, human rights, and economic liberalism. Specifically, I use three variables: the modified Polity IV score (Gleditsch and Ward, 1997)

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<sup>29</sup>BBC News. “Sweden to recognise Palestinian state.” October 3, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29479418>.

measures *Democracy*; the Political Terror Scale based on U.S. State Department reports measures *Human Rights*<sup>30</sup>; and the Index of Economic Freedom measures *Economic Freedom*.<sup>31</sup>

I control for other factors that may influence the establishment of embassies both at the dyadic and monadic levels (Kinne, 2014; Neumayer, 2008). *Alliance* records whether  $i$  and  $j$  share an alliance (Leeds et al., 2002), and *Trade* measures the log-transformed total trade between  $i$  and  $j$  in 2000 US dollars (Barbieri, Keshk, and Pollins, 2009). To control for geographical proximity, *Contiguity* measures whether  $i$  and  $j$  share a river, land, or maritime border (up to 24 nmi) (Stinnett et al., 2002); and *Same Region* measures whether  $i$  and  $j$  are in the same geographical sub-region.<sup>32</sup> Since states that host IGO headquarters tend to receive more embassies due to economies of scale for sending states, *IGO Headquarters<sub>j</sub>* records whether  $j$  hosts IGO headquarters.<sup>33</sup> Since richer states have more resources to send embassies abroad, *GDP per capita<sub>i</sub>* controls for the sending state's wealth (Gleditsch, 2002).<sup>34</sup>

I use a *Tie Stability* term to control for the persistence of embassies over time. This term acts like a lag of the dependent variable in a time series model, conditioning effects on the previous year. Because this term is included in the model, the effects observed are net of past network structure. Finally, I use a *Sociality* term to control for the possibility that states that already send many embassies are more likely to establish additional ones due to increasing returns to scale. Since the act of opening embassies has high fixed costs in bureaucratic terms, the marginal cost of opening an additional embassy should decrease as the overall number of embassies increases. To account for this, the *Sociality* term counts the number of distinct 2-outstars in the network, where a 2-outstar is a node  $i$  and two outgoing ties  $(i, j)$  and  $(i, k)$ .

To recap, Table 2 compares the empirical expectations from my relational model of status with expectations derived from the conventional approach. I use a TERGM to model the probability of tie formation in the diplomatic network over time as a function of both state attributes (exogenous effects) and network structure (endogenous effects). Specifically, I expect to observe three endogenous or structural effects in the network: popularity, reciprocity, and transitivity. The coefficient for each of these effects should be positive. Moreover, I expect to observe homophily effects in the network: the more similar any two states in terms

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<sup>30</sup>Gibney, Mark, Linda Cornett, Reed Wood, Peter Haschke, and Daniel Arnon. "The Political Terror Scale 1976-2015," accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.politicalterrorsscale.org>. To facilitate interpretation, I inverted the scale so that higher levels indicate a better human rights record.

<sup>31</sup>"The Index of Economic Freedom," accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.heritage.org/index/download>.

<sup>32</sup>"Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use," accessed February 20, 2015, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>.

<sup>33</sup>"The World Treaty Index," accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.worldtreatyindex.com/>.

<sup>34</sup>See the online appendix for a more detailed description of the data.

**Table 2.** Model Specification Summary

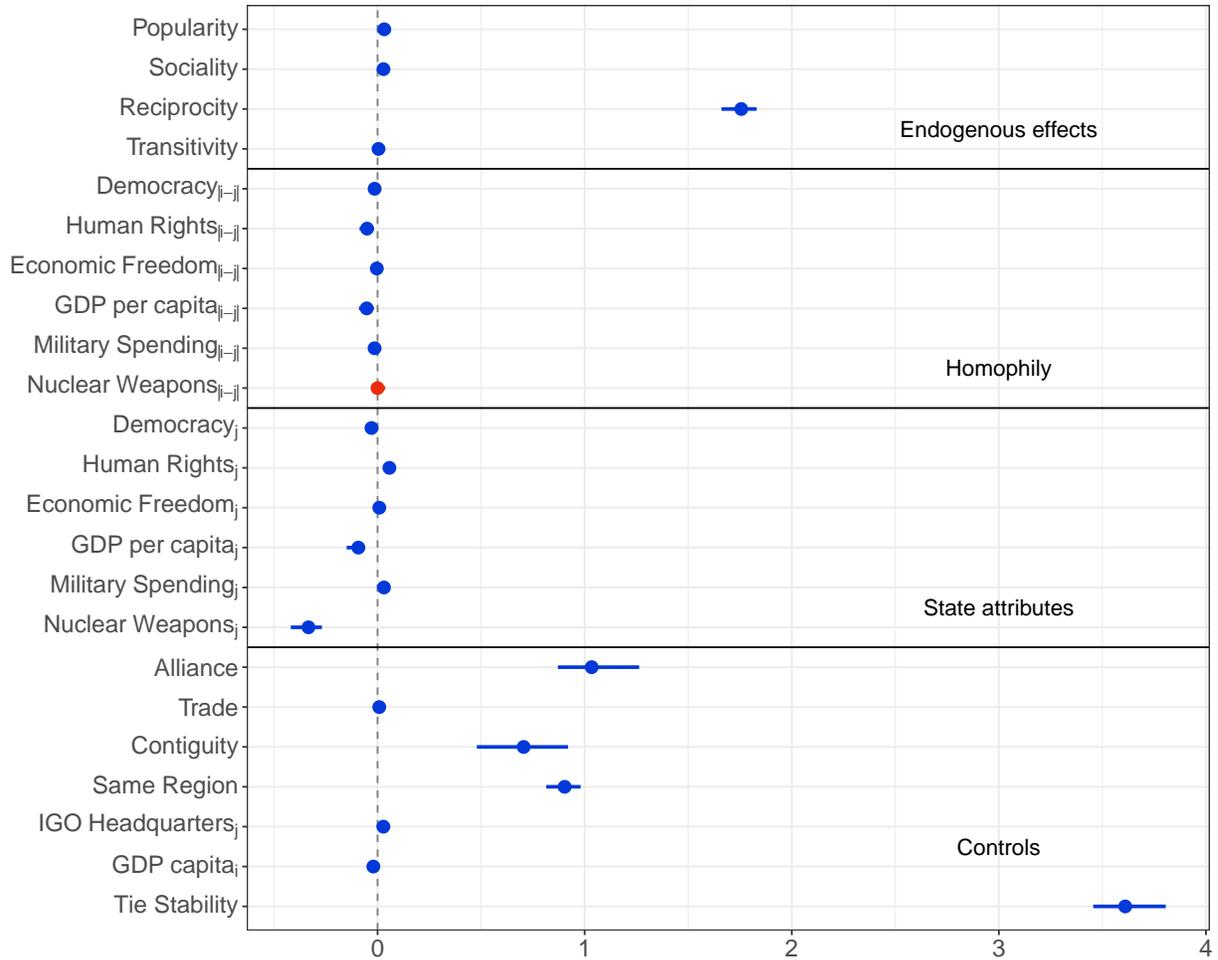
Approach	Effect Type	Variable	Expectation
Relational (relations → status)	Endogenous	Popularity Reciprocity Transitivity	+
	Homophily (dyadic)	Democracy Human rights Economic liberalism Wealth Military capability Nuclear weapons	
Conventional (attributes → status)	State attributes (monadic)	Democracy Human rights Economic liberalism Wealth Military capability Nuclear weapons	+

of their attributes—democracy, human rights, economic liberalism, wealth, military capability, and nuclear weapons—the more likely these states should be to exchange embassies. In other words, I expect to observe negative coefficients for the homophily effects. In contrast, the conventional approach expects status to be a function of state attributes: richer or more democratic should achieve more status. According to the conventional approach, state attributes should thus be positively correlated with the establishment of embassies.

## Results

Figure 3 presents the estimated parameters, which can be interpreted at the network or dyad levels (Cranmer and Desmarais, 2011, 71-73). At the network level, parameters can be used to estimate the effect that changes in specific network configurations—such as an increase in the number of reciprocal dyads or in the level of a state attribute—would have on the predicted probability of observing a given network. At the dyad level, parameters can be used to estimate the effect that changes in specific network configurations would have on the odds of observing a tie between  $i$  and  $j$ . The dyadic level of interpretation is more intuitive because it closely resembles how we interpret logistic regression estimates. I thus interpret the results at the dyad level, in terms of the odds of observing a tie between two states.

Because the variables have different scales, Figure 3 is not informative about the size of the effects, which I discuss below. First, let us consider the direction and statistical significance of the coefficients. Filled circles in Figure 3 denote statistically significant coefficient estimates, while empty circles denote insignificant



**Figure 3.** Temporal Exponential Random Graph Model of Diplomatic Ties for 1995-2005.

Notes:  $N_{1995} = 123$  and  $N_{2005} = 132$ . Bars denote 95% confidence intervals based on 1,000 bootstrap replications. Filled circles indicate statistically significant coefficient estimates, and empty circles indicate insignificant estimates. Following network notation,  $i$  denotes the sending state and  $j$  denotes the receiving state.

estimates. The variables are divided into categories that reflect either my relational model of status, based on endogenous effects and homophily, or conventional explanations based on state attributes.

Conventional explanations argue that states with more attributes achieve higher status: the richer or militarily stronger a state is for example, the more likely it should be to receive an embassy. Based on these explanations, we should expect to find positive coefficients for state attributes, indicating that status is a function of a state's material resources and fundamental values. However, state attributes have a mixed impact on the establishment of embassies: half of the coefficients are positive, but half are negative. Among material resources—traditionally emphasized as status attributes in the literature—only military capability has a positive effect. Against expectations from the literature that state attributes should bring recognition, attributes

only sometimes increase the odds of receiving an embassy.

I derive two expectations from my relational model of status involving endogenous effects. First, I argue that status is self-reinforcing: the more a state is recognized, the more it is deemed worthy of recognition. Therefore, I expect to find a positive coefficient for popularity. This is what we observe: states that host many embassies are more likely to receive additional embassies. Second, I argue that status relations are characterized by social closure—the formation of tightly-knit groups that have only sparse relations with outsiders. Therefore, I expect to find positive coefficients for reciprocity and transitivity. The analysis supports this expectation: states are more likely to send embassies to states that send embassies in return, and states are more likely to exchange embassies the more diplomatic partners they share. Together, these effects indicate that a state's existing relations affect its propensity to receive recognition.

I derive one expectation from my relational model of status involving state attributes. Social closure implies that status groups differentiate themselves from outsiders by adopting distinctive values and consuming distinctive goods. Therefore, I expect to observe homophily effects in the diplomatic network—that is, similar states should be more likely to recognize each other. If that is the case, the coefficients for the variables that measure the differences between states in terms of attributes should be negative. This is what we observe: two states are less likely to exchange embassies the bigger the difference between them in terms of democracy, human rights, economic liberalism, per capita GDP, and military spending. That is, the more similar two states are in terms of values or resources, the more likely they are to recognize each other. Homophily effects are observed for all state attributes except nuclear weapons. These results indicate that status is not just a matter of being rich or democratic. Rather, status is relational: states that share fundamental values and have similar levels of material resources are more likely to recognize each other.

Compared to conventional explanations that see status as a function of attributes, the relational model performs much better in explaining the establishment of embassies. As expected, relational dynamics influence tie formation in the diplomatic network. States recognize similar states rather than the states with the most attributes. Moreover, a state's existing relations affect the state's ability to achieve status. Traditional approaches that see status as a function of attributes cannot explain homophily or endogenous effects, despite the influence of these effects on the establishment of embassies. Importantly, the observed endogenous effects are purely structural dynamics that come from the structure of the network itself, rather than from state attributes. Since the analysis controls for factors such as geographical proximity and the wealth of the sending state, the endogenous effects cannot be attributed to these factors.

Finally, most of the controls have statistically significant effects in the expected direction. States that send many embassies are more likely to send additional embassies (sociality effect). States are more likely to exchange embassies if they share an alliance, trade more, share a border, or are in the same region. States that host IGO headquarters are more likely to receive embassies. Richer states are less likely to end embassies. The positive tie stability effect indicates that embassies tend to persist over time.

### *Size of the Effects*

The coefficients shown in Figure 3 are log odds ratios, which means that we can exponentiate the coefficients to obtain the odds ratios. In particular, to assess the size of the effects, one can compute the odds ratio associated with a one-standard deviation change around the mean for each variable. In terms of popularity, a one-standard deviation around the mean number of embassies received in 2000 increases the odds of receiving an additional embassy by a factor of 2.47. For example, Cuba, who hosts 51 embassies, is 2.47 times more likely to receive an additional embassy than Bolivia, who hosts 23 embassies. In terms of reciprocity, a tie is 5.75 times more likely to exist if it is mutual. That is, an embassy is almost six times more likely to exist if both states in a dyad exchange embassies. In terms of transitivity, a tie is 1.0046 times more likely if it closes one additional triangle in the network. For example, Hungary is 1.13 times more likely to send a tie to Libya, which would close 36 triangles, than to Chad, which would close 9 triangles. In sum, there are strong endogenous effects in the diplomatic network.

To assess the size of effects involving state attributes, Table 3 shows the effect that a typical change in each variable has on the odds that an embassy will be established. The table tells us two things that conventional approaches cannot explain. First, similarity in terms of material resources and fundamental values has a substantively significant impact on the establishment of embassies. While conventional approaches emphasize state attributes as a source of status, the importance of attributes is socially defined: similar states are more likely to recognize each other. Second, the effect of fundamental values on the establishment of embassies is substantively significant. For both homophily and monadic effects, fundamental values have a large (and mostly positive) impact on the odds of observing an embassy. Contrary to approaches that emphasize material resources as status attributes, fundamental values are at least as important for recognition.

**Table 3.** Change in Odds of Tie from Typical Change in Variable\*

Homophily effects	
Democracy	9%
Human rights	11%
Economic liberalism	4%
GDP/capita	6%
Military spending	2%
Nuclear weapons	-
State attributes	
Democracy	-18%
Human rights	12%
Economic liberalism	10%
GDP/capita	-11%
Military spending	7%
Nuclear weapons	-28%

\* One-standard deviation for continuous variables and the interquartile range for discrete ones.

### *Model Fit and Robustness Checks*

To assess model fit, I conduct goodness of fit tests (Figure A3) and degeneracy checks (Table A12), whose results are reported in the online appendix. Both diagnostics indicate that the model fits the data very well. To assess the robustness of the results, I employ a number of alternative model specifications shown in the online appendix. First, I estimate two models without endogenous effects—equivalent to logit models (Cranmer and Desmarais, 2011, 79)—including either only state attributes or both state and dyad attributes (Table A13). I also estimate models with alternative measures for wealth and military capability, such as GDP and population (Table A15). As I discuss in more detail below, the results are robust to model specification.

To account for possible high collinearity among the fundamental values variables, I estimate baseline models for each of the variables, including one of the variables but excluding the other two. These models have the added advantage of covering longer periods of time starting in 1970. Since the number of embassies in the world more than doubled between 1970 and 2005, the models capture longer-term dynamics, addressing the potential concern that factors that precede the period of estimation may affect the results from the main model. As shown in Table A14, the results are robust to these changes in specification. This indicates that potentially omitted longer-term dynamics do not drive the results and that the findings are not specific to the 1995-2005 period.

The comparison of results across specifications attests to the robustness of the main findings and indicates that results reflect the underlying data generating process. Regardless of specification, the coefficients for all endogenous effects are consistently significant and positive. Moreover, homophily effects for fundamental

values are robust, while homophily effects for material resources are somewhat sensitive to model specification. Across specifications, state attributes only sometimes increase the odds of receiving an embassy. Importantly, the negative effects for both wealth and nuclear weapons are robust to model specification. Regardless of specification, the possession of wealth or nuclear weapons consistently reduces the odds of receiving an embassy—which indicates that the results are not an artifact of model specification.

### **Conclusion**

This article offers three new findings about status in international politics. First, status results from systematic social processes that cannot be reduced to state attributes. Because status is founded on recognition, ranking states based on attributes provides a poor representation of the international status order. Overall, the results indicate that status recognition depends on a state's relations, and only indirectly on its attributes. The relevance of a given attribute for status recognition is socially defined: states recognize states that have similar values and resources, rather than the states with the most attributes. Moreover, states are more likely to recognize states that already enjoy recognition, that recognize them in return, or that have diplomatic partners in common. This might explain, for example, why Egypt has a more central position in the diplomatic network than its material capabilities would predict. Recognized by other states as a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement and a hub at the crossroads of the Middle East and North Africa, Egypt gets status from its relations with other states, rather than directly from its attributes.

Second, the international status order is characterized by social closure. That is, a state's existing relations affect the state's propensity to achieve status. Moreover, status is self-reinforcing: the more a state is recognized, the more it is deemed worthy of recognition. These relational dynamics have opposite implications for high- and low-status states. High-status states have considerable advantage in the status game—which originates from their position in status relations rather than from the possession of attributes per se. This might explain, for example, why Italy is able to maintain a central position in the diplomatic network even though it has not been a major power for a while. For emerging powers, on the other hand, the relational dynamics imply that moving up the status ladder is very difficult. States that lack close connections with a club's members are much less likely to gain admission into the club.

Finally, although traditional approaches emphasize material resources as status attributes, I find that fundamental values such as democracy and human rights are at least equally important for status. Status at-

tributes are not only material but also ideational. This suggests that the role of status in international politics could be broader and more complex than assumed by the literature, which associates status-seeking behavior with aggressive behavior. Because fundamental values such as democracy are relevant for status recognition, there may be a structure of incentives for states to adopt prevailing international norms. Status-seeking states may thus be more likely to engage in cooperation, rather than engaging in conflict. Therefore, this finding opens a new direction for research on status in international-relations scholarship.

Compared to conventional approaches based on state attributes, the relational approach advanced here has a number of advantages. First, it provides a more complete explanation of the foundations of international status. The relational ontology of status provides a unified model of status with multiple observable implications, involving not only state attributes but also relational dynamics. The empirical results demonstrate the analytical leverage provided by a relational model of status. Compared to conventional approaches based on state attributes, the relational model performs much better in explaining the formation of the diplomatic network. Importantly, conventional approaches based on state attributes cannot explain the main findings, which involve both endogenous effects and homophily. That is, a relational perspective reveals important patterns in status relations that a substantialist perspective cannot accommodate.

Moreover, the approach advanced here is consistently relational: it uses a relational empirical strategy in the service of a relational theory of status. Previous studies of status in international-relations scholarship allude to relational patterns but do not investigate these patterns systematically. Given its relational nature, the empirical strategy adopted here is able to assess higher-order patterns in status relations that are not observable when only dyads or the major powers are considered. As the analysis shows, these patterns are substantively significant, and therefore should not be neglected in studies of status. Furthermore, the empirical strategy tests hypotheses about the determinants of status rather than imposing on observations a set of status attributes chosen a priori. Because it does not rely on strict assumptions about status attributes or the international status ranking, the empirical strategy introduced here provides a flexible approach that can be used to investigate the determinants of international status during any historical period.

### **Supplemental Information**

The online appendix and replication materials are available at [www.marinagduque.com](http://www.marinagduque.com) and the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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