

International Status and National Pride

Steven Ward

sw986@cam.ac.uk

University of Cambridge

August 2023

13,328 words

Working paper – please do not cite without permission

Abstract: Does a state's relative status influence the attitudes and feelings of its citizens? This question is at the center of recent debates over the role of status in world politics, and its answer holds key implications for the future of research on whether and how international politics and domestic politics are related. However, no scholarship has directly or systematically assessed the influence of international status on public attitudes about the state. In this paper, I begin to correct this oversight by exploring the link between variation in a state's status in the international system and the strength of affective national identification (understood concretely as national pride). While prominent theoretical frameworks are built on the assumption that variation in international status should influence national pride, there are reasons to question this relationship, including recent critiques of the literature on status that suggest that public opinion is unlikely to respond strongly to changes in the state's position in the world. Using both cross-national and US-based observational data, as well as two original survey experiments, I show that there is indeed significant empirical support for the contention that international status drives variation in national pride.

Does a state's status influence the attitudes and feelings of its citizens? While work on status and prestige in world politics has developed into a rich and sophisticated research program over the past decades, theoretical claims have in some areas outpaced empirical investigation. One such area involves the domestic political significance of a state's position in the world. Some prominent recent scholarship on status in world politics relies on the claim that at least some domestic audiences care about the state's position in the world, and that attitudes toward the state itself, governing regimes, and other groups are influenced by changes in the state's status.¹ Other authors disagree: some contend that status itself is illusory or inconsequential; other suggest that while foreign policy may sometimes reflect concerns about the state's status, these concerns are primarily located at the level of leaders and elites who value status for reasons unrelated to domestic politics.²

There has, to date, been little sustained empirical attention to this question. Those who contend that changes in the state's status have implications for domestic politics and for relations between sub-state groups often ground their claims in findings from cognate fields – such as social psychology – where a body of theoretical and empirical research suggests that individuals care about the status of groups with which they identify.³ However, for a variety of reasons, these findings may not apply to

¹ Nicholas Sambanis, Stergios Skaperdas, and William Wohlforth, "Nation-Building through War," *American Political Science Review* vol. 109, no. 2 (2015); Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ward, "Decline and Disintegration: National Status Loss and Domestic Conflict in Post-Disaster Spain," *International Security* vol. 46, no. 4 (2022); Alex Yu-Ting Lin and Saori Katada, "Striving for Greatness: Status Aspirations, Rhetorical Entrapment, and Domestic Reforms," *Review of International Political Economy* vol. 29, no. 1 (2022); Joslyn Barnhart, *The Consequences of Humiliation: Anger and Status in World Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2020); Paul Beaumont, "Brexit, Retrotopia and the Perils of Post-Colonial Delusions," *Global Affairs* vol. 3, no. 4-5 (2017); Joshua Freedman, "Back of the Queue: Brexit, Status Loss, and the Politics of Backlash," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* vol. 22, no. 4 (2020).

² Jonathan Mercer, "The Illusion of International Prestige," *International Security* vol. 41, no. 4 (2017); Paul MacDonald and Joseph Parent, "The Status of Status in World Politics," *World Politics* vol. 73, no. 2 (2022); Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

³ See, for instance, Henri Tajfel, ed., *Differentiation between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1978); Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel, eds., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), pp. 33-47; Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (London: Routledge, 1988); Ann Bettencourt et al., "Status Differences and In-Group Bias: A Meta-

questions about the link between individual attitudes and changes in national status. Moreover, evidence from recent studies suggests that variation in national pride may not be responsive to variation in national status – a finding that would seriously undermine theoretical frameworks built on links between status and group identification dynamics.⁴

That this question – whether changes in national status influence public attitudes about the state – remains open is thus a significant weakness of the literature on status in world politics. Without an answer, other questions – such as whether and how status functions as an explanation for phenomena like interstate conflict or nuclear proliferation – cannot be fully answered. Still others – about, for instance, whether or not changes in status influence the dynamics of nation-building and intra-state conflict – will remain largely in the realm of conjecture.

In this paper, I take a step toward rectifying this gap in the literature on status in world politics by investigating the relationship between international status and national pride. I focus on national pride because of its substantive significance in helping to explain important political behaviors, and because of its role as a measure of national identification.⁵ This latter aspect is key, as a number of prominent theoretical frameworks are built in part on the claim that variation in the state's position in the world affects how individuals feel about the state as a social group.

Analytic Examination of the Effects of Status Stability, Status Legitimacy, and Group Permeability,” *Psychological Bulletin* vol. 127, no. 4 (2001).

⁴ Andreas Wimmer, “Power and Pride: National Identity and Ethnopolitical Inequality around the World,” *World Politics* vol. 69, no. 4 (2017).

⁵ See, among others, Gal Ariely, “Globalization and Global Identification: A Comparative Multilevel Analysis,” *National Identities* vol. 20, no. 2 (2018).

My analysis here draws on three different types of data. First, I explore the cross-national association between international status – measured using the standard indicator based on diplomatic exchange – and self-reported national pride based on data from a series of World Values Survey studies.

Second, I explore the association between expressions of national pride and perceptions of change in the United States' position in the world, drawing on data from the most recent version of the American National Election Studies survey. Finally, I use results from original survey experiments aimed at assessing the effect of variation in the United States' status on respondents' self-reported pride in being American.

Each of these three sources of data is imperfect. Among other issues, the cross-national analysis relies on a problematic measure of status; the ANES analysis cannot establish the causal direction of the relationship between pride and perceptions of change in national position; the experimental studies cannot establish that changes in self-reported national pride persist or have real-world consequences outside the setting of the survey questionnaire. However, taken together, these three sources of data and modes of analysis do much to compensate for each others' weaknesses – for instance, the cross-national analysis relies on a non-perceptual measure of status, while the ANES analysis uses a perceptual measure; the observational analyses facilitate the search for a real-world association between status and pride, while the experimental studies are designed to establish causality (albeit, in a fictional or at least hypothetical setting).

Strikingly, given the diversity of this data, findings are consistent in suggesting that international status *does* influence national pride. In the cross-national analysis, status rankings and recent improvements in status rankings both increase the probability that an individual expresses higher levels of national pride; in the ANES analysis, Americans who perceive that the United States'

position in the world has worsened recently are less likely to report feeling “proud” about “how things are going” in the United States; and in the experimental studies, manipulations that prompt respondents to imagine or reflect on scenarios in which the United States’ status in the world has declined reduce self-reported levels of pride in being American, compared to manipulations that prompt respondents to imagine or reflect on scenarios in which US status is static or improves. Taken together, these results offer a strong empirical warrant for the continued development of theories about how status matters in world politics that incorporate domestic political mechanisms and dynamics involving public opinion and changing levels of national identification. These results also point toward promising avenues for research that crosses subfield boundaries – highlighting potential linkages between work on status in international relations, on ethnic identification and conflict in comparative politics, and on affective polarization in American politics.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next (second) section provides a brief introduction to the debate over the role of domestic political mechanisms in theoretical frameworks about how (and whether) status matters in world politics. The third section justifies the focus on national pride as a dependent variable by explaining the relationship between status and national pride that is posited by prominent work on how status influences domestic politics. The fourth section describes three sources of data and research designs that I use to explore the relationship between status and national pride. The fifth, sixth, and seventh sections describe the results of the cross-national, ANES, and experimental analyses, respectively.

International Status and Domestic Politics

Over the past two decades, a large, rich literature has developed on status in world politics. Status refers to a state's position in an international hierarchy, and the core contention of researchers working on status is that concerns about position – separate from concerns about security or material power – motivate foreign policy and influence outcomes.⁶ The most prominent scholarship so far has focused on linking status or prestige-related dynamics to conflict between states – yet research has also established links between concerns about status and other phenomena, including non-conflictual behaviors (like investment in international athletic achievement), and even pro-social practices (like foreign aid provision and various forms of “restraint”).⁷

While this work is united in affirming the notion that states care about status, and that foreign policy is thus often inflected by concerns about position, disagreement remains about *why* this is the case. The most straightforward – and most prominent – line of argument is that states care about status because leaders do. In turn, leaders might value national status for one of two reasons. First, as Larson and Shevchenko suggest, leaders might identify strongly with the state and thus attend to its status for reasons related to social psychology and collective self-esteem.⁸ Second, as Renshon

⁶ For recent overviews of the concept and reviews of the literature on status in international relations, see Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, “Reputation and Status as Motives for War,” *Annual Reviews of Political Science* vol. 17 (2014); Deborah Larson, T.V. Paul, and William Wohlforth, “Status and World Order,” in Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); Elias Götz, “Status Matters in World Politics,” *International Studies Review* vol. 23, no. 1 (2021); MacDonald and Parent, “The Status of Status in World Politics.”

⁷ On conflict, see Renshon, *Fighting for Status*; Renshon, “Status Deficits and War,” *International Organization* vol. 70, no. 3 (2016); Barnhart, *The Consequences of Humiliation*; Barnhart, “The Consequences of Defeat: The Quest for Status and Morale in the Aftermath of War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* vol. 65, no. 1 (2021); Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*; Ward, “Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism in the Early 1930s,” *Security Studies* vol. 22, no. 4 (2013); on international athletic achievement, see J. Patrick Rhamey and Bryan Early, “Going for the Gold: Status-Seeking Behavior and Olympic Performance,” *International Area Studies Review* vol. 16, no. 3 (2013); on foreign aid provision, see Paul Bezerra, Jacob Cramer, Megan Hauser, Jennifer Miller, and Thomas Volgy, “Going for the Gold versus Distributing the Green: Foreign Policy Substitutability and Complementarity in Status Enhancement Strategies,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* vol. 11, no. 3 (2015); on restraint, see Jack Brake, “Prestige and the Restraint of Power in International Relations,” PhD Dissertation (University of Cambridge, 2022).

⁸ Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, “Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy,” *International Security* vol. 34, no. 4 (2010); Larson and Shevchenko, *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy* (Yale University Press, 2019).

suggests, leaders might value status because status yields material benefits for the state (in the form, for instance, of bargaining leverage and deference in interactions with other states).⁹

The second broad explanation for why states care about status is that national status has implications for domestic politics. This position has developed more recently, but could potentially open the door to significant theoretical and empirical advances in the study of status in world politics. The most prominent framework that integrates national status concerns and domestic politics builds on Sambanis and Shayo's adaptation of Social Identity Theory.¹⁰ Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth argue that a state's status influences the degree to which individuals identify with the common (national) in-group versus more exclusive sub-state groups (like ethnic groups). Thus, policies aimed at enhancing status may be understood as efforts to strengthen national identification.¹¹ Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth suggest that this dynamic helps explain Bismarck's orchestration of the series of wars that led to German unification, and Paci, Sambanis, and Wohlforth argue that Piedmont's achievement of international status played a similar role in the process leading elites to identify with an Italian national in-group during the 1850s.¹²

Other authors also suggest that domestic political dynamics are key to understanding how status matters in world politics. Ward, for instance, has argued that evidence of status "immobility" influences the foreign policies of rising powers in part because it strengthens the hands of those with hawkish preferences in domestic political contests.¹³ In more recent work, Ward argues that eroding

⁹ Renshon, *Fighting for Status*; Renshon, "Status Deficits and War."

¹⁰ Nicholas Sambanis and Moses Shayo, "Social Identification and Ethnic Conflict," *American Political Science Review* vol. 107, no. 2 (2013).

¹¹ Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth, "Nation-Building through War."

¹² Ibid.; Simone Paci, Nicholas Sambanis, and William Wohlforth, "Status-Seeking and Nation-Building: The 'Piedmont Principle' Revisited," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 51, no. 1 (2020).

¹³ Ward, "Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism in the Early 1930s"; Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*.

status weakens the attractiveness of the state as a center for collective identification, and shows that this dynamic helps explain center-periphery conflict in Spain after the Spanish-American War.¹⁴ Beaumont has suggested that status concerns influenced British voting decisions during the Brexit referendum.¹⁵ Freedman contends similarly that the perception and invocation of national status loss contributed to a “backlash” movement among parts of the British public that culminated in the campaign to leave the European Union.¹⁶ Lin and Katada argue that claims about international status have played a key role in domestic rhetorical and political contests over economic reforms in China.¹⁷ Schulz and Thies demonstrate that international status cues influenced the politics of gender identity legislation in Chile.¹⁸ Some authors have also suggested that investments in space exploration and international athletic competition are often intended to bolster national status or prestige in order to consolidate domestic political support for a governing regime.¹⁹

This turn toward elucidating domestic political mechanisms portends a number of potentially significant consequences for the trajectory of research on status in world politics. First, it promises novel explanations for phenomena of perennial interest to IR scholarship – as Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth emphasize, their model offers a rational explanation for war that does not depend on

¹⁴ Ward, “Decline and Disintegration.”

¹⁵ Beaumont, “Brexit, Retrotopia, and the Perils of Post-Colonial Delusions.”

¹⁶ Freedman, “Back of the Queue.”

¹⁷ Lin and Katada, “Striving for Greatness.”

¹⁸ Carsten-Andreas Schulz and Cameron Thies, “Status Cues and Normative Change: How the Academy Awards Facilitated Chile’s Gender Identity Law,” *Review of International Studies* (2023).

¹⁹ On space exploration, see R. Lincoln Hines, “Heavenly Mandate: Public Opinion and China’s Space Activities,” *Space Policy* vol. 60 (2022); Sheehan, “Did You See That, Grandpa Mao? The Prestige and Propaganda Rationales of the Chinese Space Program,” *Space Policy* vol. 29, no. 2 (2013); on international athletic competition, see Dawn Brancati and William Wohlforth, “Why Authoritarians Love the Olympics,” *Foreign Affairs* (March 25, 2021); David Black and Janis van der Westhuizen, “The Allure of Global Games for ‘Semi-Peripheral’ Politics and Spaces: A Research Agenda,” *Third World Quarterly* vol. 25, no. 7 (2004); Janis van der Westhuizen and Kamilla Swart, “Bread or Circuses? The 2010 World Cup and South Africa’s Quest for Marketing Power,” *International Journal for the History of Sport* vol. 28, no. 1 (2011); Janis van der Westhuizen, “Status Signaling and the Risk of Domestic Opposition: Comparing South Africa and Brazil’s Hosting of the 2010 and 2014 World Cups,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* vol. 17, no. 3 (2021).

information asymmetries, commitment problems, or indivisible goods.²⁰ Second, domestic approaches imply different hypotheses about status-seeking than do approaches whose explanatory mechanisms are limited to the level of leaders or elites – for instance, accounts that center on domestic political factors might suggest that regime or leader insecurity incentivizes status-seeking, whereas unitary actor or elite-focused approaches would not.²¹ Third, domestic political models point toward a new focus on second-image reversed dynamics – in other words, on theorizing the ways in which a state’s international status influences its domestic politics. Fourth, a turn toward understanding the domestic politics of international status would necessitate investment in exploring empirical questions that analysts have thus far largely overlooked. For instance, fully modeling how changes in international status influence different kinds of domestic political contests might require investigating differences in how different groups understand status, or how highly they value it. Last, but not least, a turn toward integrating international status and domestic political dynamics promises potentially fruitful areas of intersection between international relations and other subfields within the broader discipline of political science. Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth’s work has already demonstrated one particularly promising link between the study of nation-building and ethnic conflict (topics traditionally of interest to scholars of comparative politics) and interstate war (firmly within the remit of international relations). Further developing these kinds of models could lead to new insights related to links between changes in international status, on one hand, and – for example – voting behavior or affective polarization, on the other.²²

²⁰ Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth, “Nation-Building through War,” pg. 283.

²¹ Domestic political accounts of status-seeking have an affinity with diversionary theories of war, in this respect. See, for instance, Tobias Theiler, “The Microfoundations of Diversionary Conflict,” *Security Studies* vol. 27, no. 2 (2018); Ahmer Tarar, “Diversionary Incentives and the Bargaining Approach to War,” *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 50, no. 1 (2006).

²² For recent work that has already pushed in some of these directions, see Diana Mutz, “Status Threat, Not Economic Hardship, Explains the 2016 Presidential Vote,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* vol. 115, no. 19 (2018); Cameron Ballard-Rosa, Amalie Jensen, and Kenneth Scheve, “Economic Decline, Social Identity, and Authoritarian Values in the United States,” *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 66, no. 1 (2022); Christopher Federico and Agnieszka Golec de Zavala, “Collective Narcissism and the 2016 US Presidential Vote,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* vol. 82, no. 1 (2018).

Questions remain, though, about whether this turn towards theorizing the domestic politics of international status is empirically warranted. Prominent recent critiques of the literature on status raise serious concerns. Mercer, for instance, has argued that status itself is illusory – that while foreign policy may sometimes be aimed at competing for prestige, this is best explained by the influence of misperceptions on the part of leaders. This critique has sweeping implications for the study of status in world politics, but more narrowly implies that investing in understanding the domestic political consequences of changes in international status is misguided. After all, if international status is merely a product of the *feelings* of leaders, and unrelated to changes in a state’s actual position (or in its treatment by other states), then it is difficult to see how status might influence domestic politics.²³ Another recent review article offers a more pointed critique of the domestic political turn in research on status. MacDonald and Parent write that while the “focus on domestic politics is compelling because it provides a plausible political account of how status concerns can shape the policy process...elements of the domestic political story are underspecified.”²⁴ Foremost among these weaknesses is that “it has not been demonstrated that domestic constituencies place much stock in status” – indeed, evidence from an analysis of national pride suggests that “public sentiments” are not “strongly tied to international triumphs or defeats.”²⁵

In an important sense, then, the debate over how analysts should model the influence of status in world politics – and thus over what kinds of theoretical models and explorations are worth pursuing, and which are not – comes down to an understudied empirical question: do domestic audiences care

²³ Mercer, “The Illusion of International Prestige.” Of course, Mercer’s critique *does* point toward the possibility that leaders might use status-inflected policies to “manipulat[e] a gullible public for domestic political gain” (pg. 168).

²⁴ MacDonald and Parent, “The Status of Status in World Politics,” pg. 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

about international status, or not? Recent work has begun to address this question – for instance, Powers and Renshon have demonstrated that, in the context of survey experiments, domestic audiences evaluate leaders in ways that reflect concerns about national status.²⁶ Yet much remains unknown. Is evidence that domestic audiences care about status limited to the controlled environment of a survey experiment, or do these patterns emerge in real-world data as well? Do people’s feelings about the *state* with which they identify (as opposed to an incumbent leader) change on the basis of that state’s position in the world? Or is international status mostly irrelevant to domestic audiences beyond elites and leaders?

National Pride, Affective Identification, and International Status

In this article, I explore this question by analyzing the relationship between international status and national pride. National pride is not necessarily the only conduit through which changes in status might influence domestic politics, but it is at the center of prominent theoretical frameworks that rely on or posit domestic political mechanisms linking status and outcomes of interest. These frameworks are rooted in insights from social psychology (especially Social Identity Theory, or SIT) that hypothesize a relationship between group status and group identification. SIT suggests that the strength of individual identification with a group depends on two factors – a cognitive element (which refers to an individual’s “knowledge of group membership”) and an affective element (which refers to “the emotional significance the individual attaches to that membership”).²⁷ In Shayo’s adaptation of SIT to the substantive area of political economy, he operationalizes these two

²⁶ Ryan Powers and Jonathan Renshon, “International Status Concerns and Domestic Support for Political Leaders,” *American Journal of Political Science* (2023).

²⁷ Michael Johnson, Frederick Morgeson, and David Hekman, “Cognitive and Affective Identification: Exploring the Links Between Different Forms of Social Identification and Personality with Work Attitudes and Behavior,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* vol. 33, no. 8 (2012), pg. 1143.

elements in terms of the “perceived distance” between an individual’s salient characteristics and a group’s ideal characteristics (which influences the cognitive side of identification), and the group’s status relative to other groups (which influences the affective element of identification).²⁸ To capture this affective element of national identification empirically, Shayo relies on survey questions asking respondents about the degree to which they are “proud” of their nationality.²⁹ In short, group status influences group attachment via the mechanism of affective identification, one of whose empirical referents is the expression of pride in group membership.

This understanding of the importance of affective identification is at the core of prominent research on the link between international status and domestic politics. For instance, Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth and Paci, Sambanis, and Wohlforth both develop models that hinge in part on the existence of a relationship between increases in the status of the state and increases in positive feelings related to identification with the state. Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth write that “victory in the ‘Great Patriotic War’ helped forge a Soviet identity despite almost incalculable material losses” as it increased “allegiance to the state and feelings of pride among Soviet citizens.”³⁰ Paci, Sambanis, and Wohlforth write that the strength of in-group identification depends on both “shared attributes” and “relative status comparisons” – individuals identify more strongly with a group the higher the group’s status, and, crucially, this is the case in part because high group status produces “intangible or psychological payoffs” stemming from “the self-esteem that comes with knowing that one’s group is high on the social hierarchy.”³¹ This dynamic plays a key role in Paci, Sambanis, and Wohlforth’s narrative of Italian unification, as Piedmont’s successful foreign policy

²⁸ Moses Shayo, “A Model of Social Identity with an Application to Political Economy: Nation, Class, and Redistribution,” *American Political Science Review* vol. 103, no. 2 (2009), pp. 150-151.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁰ Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth, “Nation-Building through War,” pg. 285.

³¹ Paci, Sambanis, and Wohlforth, “Status-Seeking and Nation-Building,” pp. 69-70.

increased pride in the Italian national identity among both elites and the masses.³² Ward also draws on the social psychological link between status and affective identification in theorizing the domestic political consequences of declining national status. He suggests that losing status reduces the “collective self-esteem” that flows from national identification.³³ This produces varying behavioral consequences depending on an individual or group’s position vis-à-vis the state, but in general contributes to hostility and conflict between groups within the declining state.³⁴

Policymakers also appear to believe there is a link between status and national pride, and through national pride to other important phenomena. During the Cold War, for instance, US policymakers applied this sort of analysis to themselves, to their friends, and to their adversaries. One of NASA’s justifications for continued funding of the American manned space program, for example, was that “manned space flight provides a basis for national pride and a medium for international competition and cooperation.”³⁵ During the 1950s, American analysts observed and worried about a link between the erosion of France’s status as a “great power,” domestic political problems, and the loss of “interest in extra-European affairs.”³⁶ US observers had made a similar analysis of the consequences of British decline, and in 1982 saw British national pride as a key element of the stakes in the Falklands War. In a memo for Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Assistant Secretary of State-Designate for European Affairs Richard Burt wrote that the “Thatcher government’s primary achievement has been to reverse the thirty-year trend of British withdrawal from global responsibilities. Failure in the Falklands will undo all that the Rhodesian settlement has done to

³² Ibid., pp. 85-88.

³³ Ward, “Decline and Disintegration,” pg. 108.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Memorandum from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (Ash) to President Ford,” Washington, November 29, 1979, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976* volume E-3.

³⁶ Despatch from the Embassy in France to the Department of State No. 1363, Paris, January 17, 1956, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957* volume XXVII. See also National Intelligence Estimate on “The Outlook for France,” Washington, August 13, 1957, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957* volume XXVII.

revise UK national pride. It will leave us with no ally, save France, willing to share the risks and pay the price needed to protect global western interests.”³⁷ Status and pride were also linked in analyses of the Soviet Union. For instance, as part of a review of Soviet foreign policy in 1985, NSC and State Department officials prepared for President Ronald Reagan an analysis of “Russia’s Place in the World: The View from Moscow.” The paper noted that the “Russian people doubtless take satisfaction in their country’s superpower status, both because it bolsters their national pride and because they see it as insurance against another war on the own soil.” This was important because, while “the people are largely passive in regards to foreign policy formulation and play none of the direct role that publics do in democracies, their views are not unimportant to the leadership. To act contrary to deeply-held popular views risks damaging public morale, which is already quite low, and provides ammunition for potential rival factions in the party.”³⁸

National pride – as an empirical referent of affective national identification – thus figures prominently in theoretical frameworks aiming to understand the ways in which international status influence domestic political dynamics, and vice versa. Policymakers also appear to *believe* that status influences national pride (which in turn influences domestic political dynamics and potentially foreign policy), and that it is thus worth investing in and understanding. Yet, as MacDonald and Parent note, analysts have not established that changes in national status systematically influence national pride. Indeed, there are good reasons to doubt that they do. Research on public opinion in the United States, at least, suggests that the public is typically inattentive to foreign policy and

³⁷ Information Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State-Designate for European Affairs (Burt) to Secretary of State Haig, Washington, May 21, 1982, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988* volume XIII.

³⁸ Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (McFarlane) to President Reagan, Washington, August 8, 1985, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988* Volume V.

international politics.³⁹ And while some studies have shown that national pride can be influenced by events that might plausibly be interpreted as status-laden (such as results in or hosting of international athletic competitions), others point in the opposite direction.⁴⁰ The most significant such study is Wimmer's recent research on ethnic power relations and national pride. Wimmer explores the influence of a large number of country-level variables on expressions of national pride as measured through survey responses, and finds that historical war involvement and historical war outcomes are unrelated to the prevalence of national pride.⁴¹ MacDonald and Parent point to these results as evidence that changes in status are unlikely to drive variation in public feelings of national pride.⁴²

Still, this does not settle the issue. After all, Wimmer's analysis was not intended to assess the relationship between status and national pride. Historical war outcomes may not be a particularly meaningful measure of status in the contemporary world. If, for instance, the salience of historical events fades over time, or if the valence of a state's military history depends upon time or space-variant understandings of what kinds of achievements and characteristics are most significant, then it

³⁹ Matthew Baum and Philip Potter, "Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy in the Age of Social Media," *The Journal of Politics* vol. 81, no. 2 (2019).

⁴⁰ On international athletics and national pride, see Georgios Kavetsos, "National Pride: War Minus the Shooting," *Social Indicators Research* vol. 106, no. 1 (2012); K. Hallman, C. Breuer, and B. Kühnreich, "Happiness, Pride and Elite Sporting Success: What Population Segments Gain Most from National Athletic Achievements?" *Sport Management Review* vol. 16, no. 2 (2013); Henk Erik Meier and Michael Mutz, "Political Regimes and Sport-Related National Pride: A Cross-National Analysis," *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* vol. 10, no. 3 (2018); J. Haut, R. Prohl, and E. Emrich, "Nothing but Medals? Attitudes Towards the Importance of Olympic Success," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* vol. 51, no. 3 (2016); Christian von Scheve, Manuela Beyer, Sven Ismer, Marta Kozłowska, and Carmen Morawetz, "Emotional Entrainment, National Symbols, and Identification: A Naturalistic Study Around the Men's Football World Cup," *Current Sociology* vol. 62, no. 1 (2014); A. Elling, I. van Hilvoorde, and R. van den Dool, "Creating or Awakening National Pride Through Sporting Success: A Longitudinal Study on Macro Effects in the Netherlands," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* vol. 49, no. 2 (2014); I. van Hilvoorde, A. Elling, and R. Stokvis, "How to Influence National Pride? The Olympic Medal Index as a Unifying Narrative," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* vol. 45, no. 1 (2010); T. Dóczi, "Gold Fever(?): Sport and National Identity – the Hungarian Case," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* vol. 47, no. 2 (2012); Rasmus Storm and Georg Jakobsen, "National Pride, Sporting Success and Event Hosting: An Analysis of Intangible Effects Related to Major Athletic Tournaments," *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* vol. 12, no. 1 (2020).

⁴¹ Wimmer, "Power and Pride," pg. 627.

⁴² MacDonald and Parent, "The Status of Status in World Politics," pg. 18.

may not be surprising that war involvement and outcomes decades or even hundreds of years in the past are unrelated to measures of national pride in the present. Moreover, there remain strong theoretical reasons rooted in the social psychological literature to expect national status to influence national pride, along with suggestive evidence – from research in both international relations and other fields – that it might.

In the rest of this paper, I explore the empirical relationship between international status and national pride more thoroughly than has been done previously. I do so by using observational data appropriate to answering this particular question, and by supplementing this analysis with survey experiments designed to estimate the causal effect of manipulating international status on feelings of national pride.

Investigating the Relationship Between International Status and National Pride

Any effort to establish whether or not international status systematically influences national pride faces two key obstacles. First, there must be sources of data that contain valid measures of *both* national pride and international status (or perceptions thereof). Prior research has not been based on data containing both of these variables. For instance – as noted above – Wimmer’s analyses include controls for historical military behavior and outcomes, and MacDonald and Parent treat these as proxies for status. Yet measures of historical military behavior and outcomes do not actually capture a country’s current status – at best, they capture the residual effect of past events that may at some point have influenced its status. Along similar lines, work on the link between international athletic competition and national pride does not actually capture status, but rather one factor that has been

proposed by some authors as a possible driver of status.⁴³ To date, there has been no explicit effort to analyze the association, across countries and time, between status and national pride.

Second, any observational analysis establishing the existence of an association between status and national pride would be unable to say whether that association reflected a causal relationship or not. After all, high levels of national pride are theoretically and empirically associated with a variety of behaviors that should enhance state cohesion and strength.⁴⁴ As a result, if it is true that status and national pride are positively associated, this could reflect a causal relationship running in either direction – perhaps high status generates high levels of national pride, but perhaps high levels of national pride facilitate reforms and policies that allow states to achieve high status. An alternative approach would be to investigate the association, at the individual level, between *perceptions* of national status and expressions of national pride. Yet this analysis would face a similar sort of inferential problem: it could be that an individual’s level of affective identification with or attachment to the state influences her perceptions of its status. Thus, while this individual-level observational design solves one endogeneity problem, it introduces another.

An obvious solution to this latter problem is to adopt an experimental approach. While national status cannot feasibly or ethically be manipulated, individuals might be prompted to imagine or recall future or past scenarios in which their state’s status changed, and then asked to report

⁴³ Rhamey and Early, “Going for the Gold.”

⁴⁴ Wimmer, “Power and Pride, pg. 608; Pelle Ahlerup and Gustav Hansson, “Nationalism and Government Effectiveness,” *Journal of Comparative Economics* vol. 39, no. 3 (2011); Salmal Qari, Kai Konrad, and Benny Geys, “Patriotism, Taxation and International Mobility,” *Public Choice* vol. 151, no. 3-4 (2012); Kai Konrad and Salmal Qari, “The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel? Patriotism and Tax Compliance,” *Economica* vol. 79, no. 315 (2012); Brad Humphreys, Bruce Johnson, Daniel Mason, and John Whitehead, “Estimating the Value of Medal Success in the Olympic Games,” *Journal of Sports Economics* vol. 19, no. 3 (2018); Alison Macintyre, Ho Fai Chan, Markus Schaffner, Benno Torgler, “National Pride and Tax Compliance: A Laboratory Experiment Using a Physiological Marker,” Center for Research in Economics, Management and the Arts (CREMA) Working Paper No. 2021-07 (2021).

resultant feelings of national pride. This approach would allow for a reliable assessment of the causal effect of changes in the salience of national status loss or gain on self-reported national pride, but on its own it too is lacking – a survey experiment cannot establish that actual changes in national status and feelings of national pride are even associated outside the immediate setting of the online laboratory.

My approach in this paper is thus not to rely on any single research design or source of data, but rather to combine different data sources and research designs in ways that together address the problems that undermine each individually. In particular, I use three different types of data, and combine observational and experimental analysis to explore the link between variation in national status and national pride.

First, I examine the cross-national association between national status and national pride. To do so, I use hierarchical ordered logistic regression to model the drivers of a respondent's self-reported level of national pride (solicited through a series of World Values Survey studies). Predictor variables are located at both the individual level and at the country level. Importantly, to capture changes in national status, I use the standard measure from the quantitative literature on status in international relations: diplomatic exchange.⁴⁵ While there is no doubt that this is an imperfect proxy for status, there is also little doubt that it is the best measure available – and it remains widely-used among authors investigating both the drivers and consequences of changes in national status.⁴⁶ I evaluate the effect of both a state's *level* of status, as well as recent *changes* in its status, on the prevalence of

⁴⁵ Resat Bayer, "Diplomatic Exchange Data set, v2006.1," Online: <http://correlatesofwar.org>.

⁴⁶ See, among many others, Renshon, "Status Deficits and War"; Marina Duque, "Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach," *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 62, no. 3 (2018).

self-reported national pride from WVS surveys. This analysis constitutes the first effort to combine individual-level data on national pride with country-level data on diplomatic exchange to identify an association between the two. It is thus a more appropriate test than any prior study of the cross-national relationship between status and national pride.

However, the cross-national analysis still suffers from significant limitations. While diplomatic exchange is the standard measure of status in international relations, it is blunt and noisy. It is also unlikely that the public would be directly aware of the state's rank as measured via its position in diplomatic networks – at best, the indicator serves as a proxy for a multidimensional set of factors that (at least in theory) influences individual levels of national pride. Thus, I supplement the cross-national analysis with an analysis that relies not on an objective or concrete (but unavoidably flawed) measure of status, but rather on variation in individual-level perceptions of change in national status. This data comes from the most recent installment of the American National Election Studies survey (fielded during the 2020 US general election). The ANES includes a question asking respondents to indicate whether they believe that the United States' position in the world has improved, weakened, or stayed about the same over the past year. While this version of the ANES does not include a question asking individuals to rate levels of pride in being American (which would parallel the question asked in WVS surveys), it does include a question asking respondents to rate their level of pride in “how things are going” in the country. While an imperfect measure of national pride, this does allow for an analysis of whether there is an association at the individual level between perceptions of change in the United States' position (or status) in the world, and expressions of pride in the state's recent performance and conditions.

Of course, this research design is also limited. Even assuming that the dependent variable is a valid measure of national pride, evidence of an association between pride and perceptions of recent change in national status would not necessarily be evidence that variation in national pride is *driven by* changes in national status. After all, prior research has established that perceptions of conditions are influenced by attitudes, beliefs, and other kinds of commitments in ways that suggest that high levels of affective identification with a state could contribute to optimistic evaluations of its status.⁴⁷ Thus, while the individual-level analysis can (and does) adjust for potential confounding variables like party identification and presidential approval, it cannot establish the causal direction of any observed relationship between perceptions of status and national pride.

I address this issue by supplementing the observational analyses with two experimental studies. In each study, I manipulate the salience of different kinds of changes in the United States' status, and then ask respondents to report how proud those changes make them feel about being American. The two experimental studies vary in the way that they make change in status salient. In the first, I ask respondents to imagine futures in which the United States' position in the world has improved, declined, or stayed about the same relative to China. In the second, I ask respondents to recall a historical episode in which the United States' status in the world changed in a positive or negative manner.

Taken together, these three distinct empirical designs compensate for each individual approach's weaknesses and allow for a comprehensive exploration of the question of whether a state's status

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Evans and Robert Anderson, "The Political Conditioning of Economic Perceptions," *The Journal of Politics* vol. 68, no. 1 (2006); Geoffrey Evans and Mark Pickup, "Reversing the Causal Arrow: The Political Conditioning of Economic Perceptions in the 2000-2004 U.S. Presidential Election Cycle," *The Journal of Politics* vol. 72, no. 4 (2010); David Brady, John Ferejohn, Brett Parker, "Cognitive Political Economy: A Growing Partisan Divide in Economic Perceptions," *American Politics Research* vol. 50, no. 1 (2022).

influences national pride. Diplomatic exchange is a deeply flawed measure of status, but the ANES data contains a direct measure of individual perceptions of change in the United States' status; neither observational study can answer questions about the causal direction of an association between status and national pride, but the experiments can at least provide evidence about whether or not a causal relationship is plausible. At the same time, neither experimental design can say much about whether status influences national pride beyond the specific context of an online survey. But because the cross-national and ANES analyses are based on real-world data, it is possible to assess whether or not any causal effects identified in an experimental setting might plausibly be reflected in empirical patterns outside of it.

The rest of this section describes results from these three empirical investigations. I begin by showing that status – measured using the diplomatic exchange indicator – is associated with national pride as measured by the WVS surveys. I then show that *perceptions* of recent changes in the United States' status are associated with self-reported pride in the United States' recent performance and conditions, even controlling for factors like approval of Donald Trump, party identification, level of education, and ideological position. Finally, I show that asking Americans to contemplate losing status in the international system – whether by specifically prompting them to imagine decline vis-à-vis China, or by asking them to imagine changes in the United States' position in the world in a more open-ended way – results in lower levels of self-reported national pride, compared to asking them to contemplate either gaining or maintaining status.

Status and National Pride Around the World

To analyze the cross-national association between status and national pride, I rely on data from a series of World Values Survey studies that include questions asking respondents to assess the degree to which they are proud to be a member of their state-based national group (for instance, German for citizens of Germany; Austrian for citizens of Austria). Responses are ordinal, ranging from “very proud” to “not proud at all,” with two intermediate categories.⁴⁸ This measure has commonly appeared as the dependent variable in prior work on cross-national variation in national pride and identification.⁴⁹

Primary measures of status and change in status are derived from the diplomatic exchange indicator, which records the number, type, and source of diplomatic representatives stationed in a country’s capital. The analyses below use Renshon’s reformulation of this indicator, which accounts for the status of the sender, and transforms the adjusted number of diplomats hosted into a status rank (where the country with the largest adjusted number of representatives hosted is ranked first, the second largest second, etc.).⁵⁰ I also transform current diplomatic status rank into a measure of change in status over the most recent five-year period preceding the observation year by subtracting the state’s rank in the year before each WVS survey was put into the field from its rank six years prior to the WVS survey date. The theoretical link between status and national pride outlined earlier implies the following hypotheses about the relationship between these variables:

⁴⁸ R. Inglehart, C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin, and B. Puranen (eds.), *World Values Survey: All Rounds – Country-Pooled Datafile version 3.0*. (Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria: JD Systems Institute and WVSA Secretariat). For information on the specific surveys included in the data analyzed below, see the supplementary materials.

⁴⁹ Among many others, see Wimmer, “Power and Pride”; Ariely, “Globalization and Global Identification”; Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl, Jonathan Eastwood, and Peter Grajzl, “The Longevity of National Identity and National Pride: Evidence from Wider Europe,” *Research and Politics* vol. 3, no. 2 (2016).

⁵⁰ Renshon, *Fighting for Status*; Renshon, “Status Deficits and War.”

H1) A state's current diplomatic rank should be negatively associated with the probability that a respondent chooses a more positive evaluation of national pride.

H2) Recent improvement in a state's diplomatic rank should be positively associated with the probability that a respondent chooses a more positive evaluation of national pride.

In the analysis below, I account for variables that 1) prior work has suggested may be related to variation in national pride, and 2) could plausibly confound any relationship between national status and national pride. Some of these are country-level characteristics. One key set of variables includes factors that prior work has used to model status attribution, and that could plausibly also influence national pride. Within this category, I control for material capabilities (measured via a log-transformed version of the Correlates of War Composite Index of National Capabilities), GDP per capita, regime type, and regional dummy variables.⁵¹ Material power or wealth could, for instance, both boost a state's diplomatic rank, and at the same time facilitate investment in national symbols and education – thus accounting for any positive association between national pride and diplomatic rank. Another important set of country-level control variables comes from prior work on the composition and history of relations between groups within a state. For instance, Wimmer has shown that countries that exclude large portions of the population from political representation tend to have lower levels of national pride; and Dimitrova-Grajzl, Eastwood, and Grajzl have shown that national identity groups with longer histories tend to induce higher levels of pride among

⁵¹ These variables are drawn from the model of status attribution found in Renshon, *Fighting for Status* and Renshon, "Status Deficits and War." For a justification of log-transforming the CINC variable, see Ward, "Status from Fighting? Reassessing the Relationship Between Conflict Involvement and Diplomatic Rank," *International Interactions* vol. 46, no. 2 (2020).

identifiers.⁵² Either of these factors could plausibly also be associated with status or diplomatic rank – for instance, if exclusive or repressive regimes tend to be punished diplomatically, or if states tend to gain status and diplomatic representatives over time. In the analysis below, I control for the size of the population excluded from political representation, the degree of ethnic fractionalization within the state, and the number of years since the first recorded presence of a nationalist organization within a future nation-state’s territory.⁵³ The analysis below also accounts for a set of individual-level characteristics that prior work has suggested may be associated with variation in national pride. These include gender, marital status, age, a measure of ideological orientation, a variable capturing whether the respondent believes politics is important, a variable capturing religiosity, and a measure of the respondent’s social class.⁵⁴

Because the dependent variable is ordinal, and because the predictors are nested into different levels of aggregation, I use a mixed effects ordered logit model to estimate the association between status and national pride. In particular, I estimate a two-level model, where respondents (individuals) are nested within countries.⁵⁵

Results (reported in Table 1) suggest that status – at least, as measured by the diplomatic exchange indicator – is associated with variation in national pride. The coefficient on current diplomatic rank

⁵² Wimmer, “Power and Pride”; Dimitrova-Grajzl, Eastwood, and Grajzl, “The Longevity of National Identity and National Pride.”

⁵³ The measure of the longevity of national identity comes from Andreas Wimmer and Yuval Feinstein, “The Rise of the Nation-State Across the World, 1816 to 2001,” *American Sociological Review* vol. 75, no. 5 (2010).

⁵⁴ This is the entire range of individual variables included in the analysis in Wimmer, “Power and Pride,” with the addition of the ideological orientation variable.

⁵⁵ Hierarchical models are commonly employed to analyze this sort of cross-national survey data – for two recent examples, see Wimmer, “Power and Pride,” and Ariely, “Globalization and Global Identification.” Estimating a three-level hierarchical model (where individuals are nested within country-years, which are nested within countries) instead of two does not materially change results, likely because the data set only includes a handful of countries with more than one survey-year (and in no case more than two).

is negative and statistically significant, meaning that as rank numerically increases (and thus as status decreases) across countries, individuals become less likely to express high levels of national pride. At the same time, the coefficient on recent diplomatic rank *change* is positive and statistically significant, meaning that within states whose status has recently improved, individuals are more likely to express high levels of national pride.

Table 1: Hierarchical ordered logit analysis of status and national pride

DV: National pride (3 = “very proud”; 0 = “not proud at all”)	
Independent variables	Coef. (SE)
<u>COUNTRY-LEVEL</u>	
Current status rank	-0.0242*** (0.00751)
Five-year status change	0.0127*** (0.00117)
CINC (log)	-0.611*** (0.205)
Regime type (Polity)	-0.0115 (0.0147)
Size of excluded population	-1.421*** (0.342)
Ethnic fractionalization	0.0841 (0.525)
Longevity of nat. org.	0.00410 (0.00460)
GDP	-1.85e-05 (1.23e-05)
<u>INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL</u>	
Education completed (ref. cat. = less than elementary)	
Elementary	0.0721 (0.0878)
Secondary	-0.166

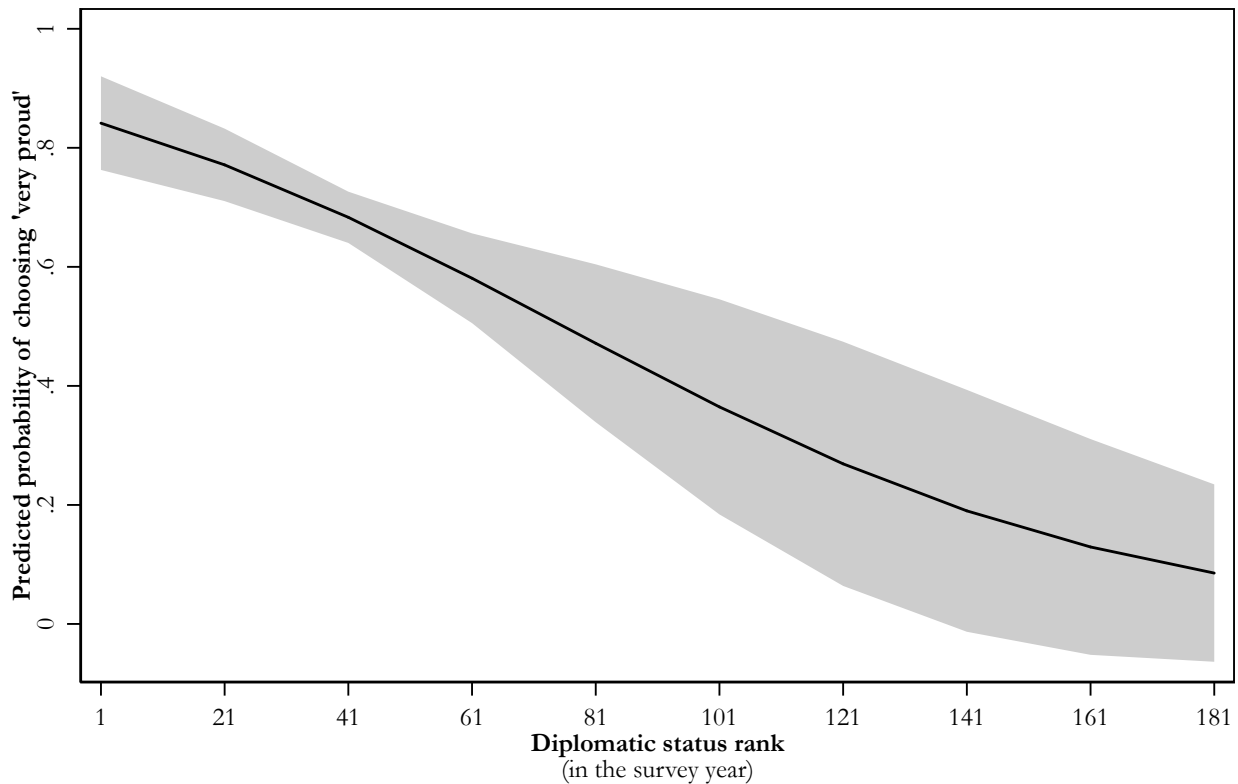
	(0.101)
Tertiary	-0.388***
	(0.113)
Male	0.104***
	(0.0269)
Married	0.0916**
	(0.0461)
Age	0.00780***
	(0.00178)
Pol. ideology (left to right)	0.0652***
	(0.0155)
Importance of politics (low to high)	0.0642*
	(0.0383)
Importance of religion (low to high)	0.288***
	(0.0414)
Social class (low to high)	0.0521***
	(0.0177)

No. of observations	61,242
No. of countries	47

Note: model includes dummy variables for region, but coefficients are not displayed

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

As these coefficients cannot be directly interpreted, Figure 1 depicts the predicted probability of the most positive value of the national pride scale across the range of the diplomatic rank indicator. For the state at the top of the status hierarchy, the probability that a respondent reports being “very proud” of his or her national identity is around .84. This decreases by around 7 percentage points for a state ranked 20th, and to less than .5 for a state near the middle of the pack.



Note: Graph depicts predicted probability that a respondent will select 'very proud' as the response to a World Values Survey question asking about the respondent's degree of national pride. Other variables from the model reported in Table 1 held at means. Shaded area shows 95% confidence interval.

Figure 1: International status rank and national pride in WVS data

While this effect size is modest, it is not necessarily substantively unimportant. For one thing, the diplomatic exchange indicator is a blunt, noisy, and slow-moving measure of status. Moreover, prior research has shown that survey-based measures of national pride tend themselves to be stable over time, but that they may temporarily change more dramatically over the short-run in response to salient events.⁵⁶ Given these features of the data, the existence of a cross-national association between diplomatic exchange and national pride – robust to the inclusion of a range of potential country and individual-level confounders – is remarkable. It is unlikely that this result represents an

⁵⁶ Michael Mutz, “Patrioten für drei Wochen. Nationale Identifikation und die Fußball-Europameisterschaft 2012 [Patriots for Three Weeks. National Identification and the European Football Championship 2012],” *Berliner Journal für Soziologie [Berlin Journal of Sociology]* vol. 22, no. 4 (2012); Freya Gassman, Jan Haut, and Eike Emrich, “The Effect of the 2014 and 2018 FIFA World Cup Tournaments on German National Pride. A Natural Experiment,” *Applied Economics Letters* vol. 27, no. 19 (2020).

upper limit for the magnitude of any relationship between status and national pride – rather, it may represent the muted residue of a link that would appear stronger with different data.

Perceptions of Change in Status and National Pride in the United States

To analyze the association between individual perceptions of change in international status and national pride, I use data from the 2020 release of the American National Election Studies.⁵⁷ The 2020 ANES contains two variables that make this analysis possible. First, in most surveys conducted since 1958, the ANES has asked respondents to assess the change in the United States’ position in the world over the past year – did the United States’ position grow stronger, grow weaker, or stay about the same?⁵⁸ Importantly, variation across time suggests that this question does at least partially tap into broadly sensible attitudes about the United States’ changing fortunes in the world. For instance, as Figure 2 shows, there are visible spikes in the proportion of Americans choosing the “weaker” response in 1968 (the height of the Vietnam War), in the late 1980s (mirroring a concern about relative decline also reflected, for instance, in the popularity of Paul Kennedy’s *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*), and in 2008 (likely reflecting pessimism related to the global financial crisis, but also ongoing military quagmires in Iraq and Afghanistan, and potentially the rise of China).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ American National Election Studies, *ANES 2020 Time Series Study Full Release* [dataset and documentation]. July 19, 2021 version. www.electionstudies.org.

⁵⁸ This data can be found using the ANES Cumulative Data File. American National Election Studies, *ANES Time Series Cumulative Data File* [dataset and documentation]. September 16, 2022 version. www.electionstudies.org.

⁵⁹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (Random House, 1987); for a discussion of the influence of Kennedy’s book during the late 1980s, see Kenneth Zagacki, “The Rhetoric of American Decline: Paul Kennedy, Conservatives, and the Solvency Debate,” *Western Journal of Communication* vol. 56, no. 4 (1992); for more thorough analyses of cycles of declinism in the United States, see Samuel Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 67, no. 2 (1988), and Josef Joffe, *The Myth of America’s Decline: Politics, Economics, and a Half Century of False Prophecies* (W.W. Norton, 2014).

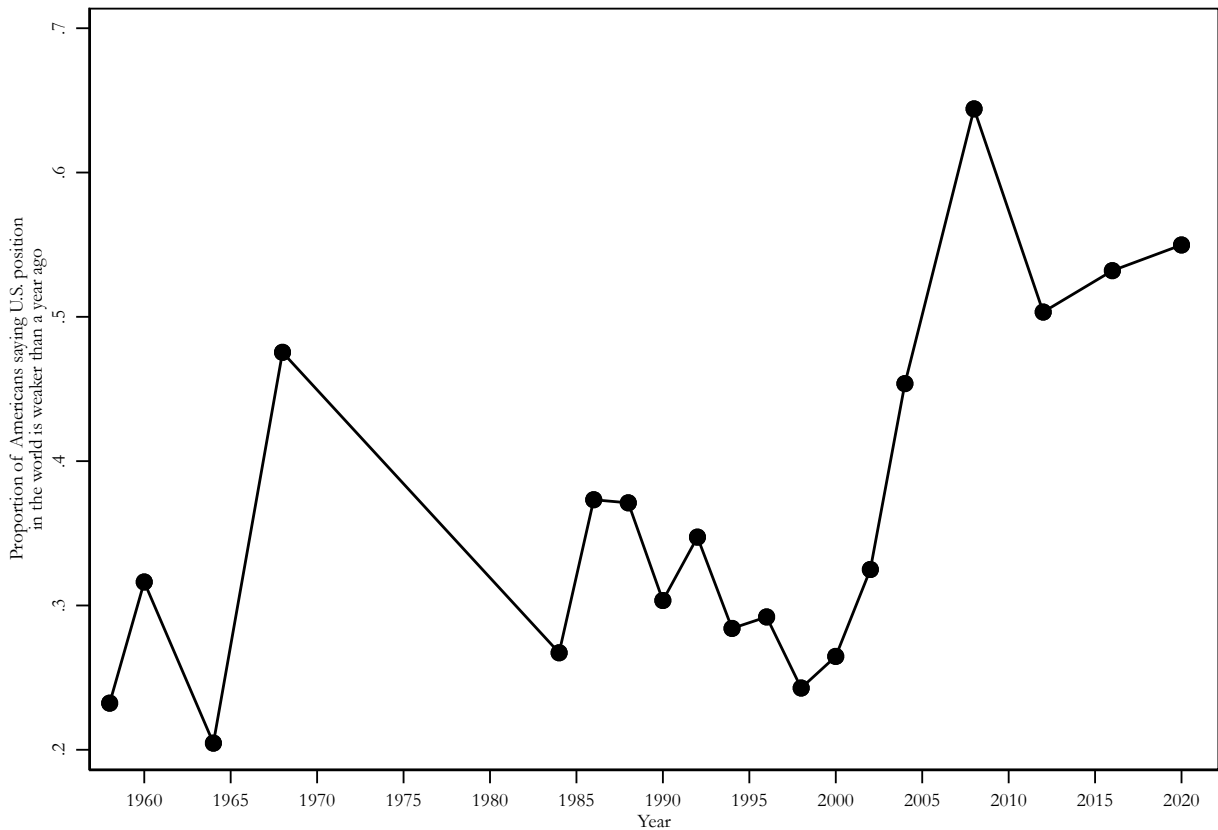


Figure 2: Perceptions of relative national decline among Americans, 1958-2020

Of course, responses to this question also very likely reflect *other* kinds of concerns, less clearly related to assessments of the United States' international status. For instance – as Figure 3 shows – just as partisan identities influence assessments of the performance of the US economy, they also influence assessments of the United States' position in the world. Individuals are more likely to report an improvement in the United States' international position when a co-partisan holds the White House, and more likely to report decline when the other party does. This has implications for model specification, but also broadly suggests caution in interpreting the results of this analysis.

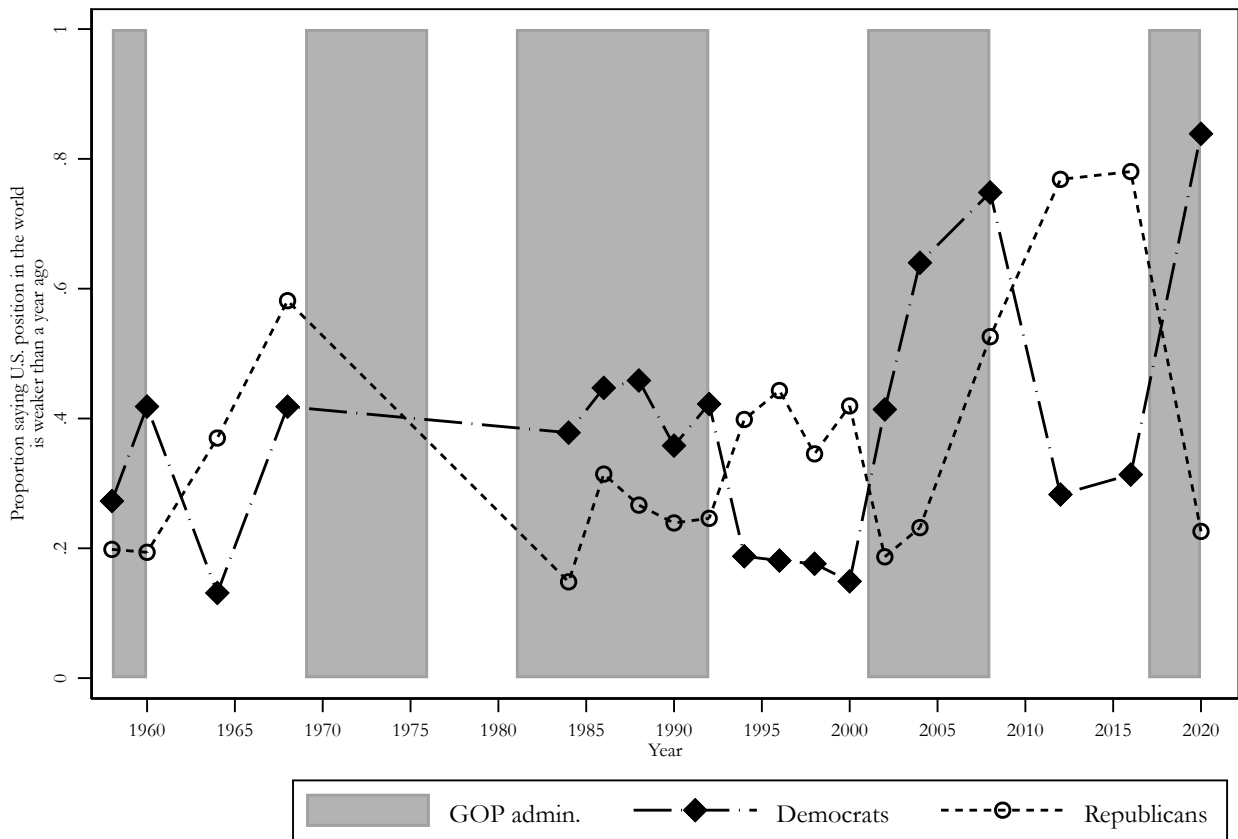


Figure 3: Perceptions of relative national decline among Americans (by party ID), 1958-2020

The ANES does not include a question asking respondents how proud they are to be American. However, it does include a question that asks respondents to rate how proud they are of “how things are going” in the United States. While this is clearly not the same as the WVS measure of national pride, it still taps into the concept of affective national identification, as it asks the respondent to assess the degree to which they are proud of the performance of the national in-group.⁶⁰ The question is, in that sense, analogous to asking a New York Mets fan how proud they

⁶⁰ This is, in other words, a measure of “interdependent pride,” which Gordon, Masayuki, Makoto, and Bass note is “derived from the accomplishments of a group where membership is actual or perceived.” See Brian Gordon, Yoshida Masayuki, Nakazawa Makoto, and Jordan Bass, “The Role of Pride Feelings in the Team and Fan Community Identification Processes: An Empirical Examination in Professional Sport,” *Corporate Reputation Review* vol. 24, no. 2 (2021), pg. 77.

are of how things are going for the Mets – not exactly the same as asking how proud someone is to be a Mets fan, but plausibly closely related. Like the WVS national pride item, responses to this question are ordinal, ranging from “extremely” to “not at all,” with three intermediate categories.

The theoretical link between status and national pride developed earlier in this paper implies the following hypothesis about the relationship between these two individual-level variables:

H3) Individuals who report perceiving that the United States’ position in the world has declined (improved) should be less (more) likely to report more positive evaluations of pride in the United States’ current performance.

To analyze this association, I use ordered logistic regression, and control for a range of possible confounders. These include race, gender, educational attainment, age, and potentially important variables capturing political attitudes and identities. I control for party identification, as well as attitudes toward Donald Trump (the occupant of the White House at the time of the survey) in two ways – by using a dichotomous indicator of approval or disapproval, along with a thermometer-based measure. These latter variables are critical in order to account – as much as possible – for the likely influence of partisan identification and attitudes toward the current president on both perceptions of change in the United States’ position in the world and feelings of pride or shame in the country’s performance.⁶¹

⁶¹ One objection might be that perceptions of changes in the United States’ position are driven primarily by perceptions of socio-tropic economic conditions. I am agnostic about the *source* of perceptions of changes in the United States’ position in the world. It is very likely that these flow in part (at least for some people) from beliefs about economic conditions. Because this would not, in my view, contribute to an alternative explanation for the observed association between perceptions of change in position and reported national pride, I do not include socio-tropic economic views in the model reported above. However, I have included these (from a question asking whether the “national economy” is better or worse than a year ago, and a question asking whether unemployment has gotten better or worse in the last year) in alternative specifications, and the findings reported above remain unchanged.

Results (reported in Table 2) are consistent with the contention that perceptions of change in national status are linked to the experience of national pride. The coefficients on the change in position indicator are both positive and significant. Given the way that the pride measure is coded (higher values indicate more positive evaluations), and the fact that the reference category for the change in position variable is the “weaker” option, this suggests that individuals who perceive that the United States’ position in the world has remained the same are more likely to report positive evaluations of national pride than are individuals who perceive that the United States’ position in the world has weakened, and that individuals who perceive that the United States’ position in the world has strengthened are the most likely to report higher levels of pride.

Table 2: Ordered logit analysis of predictors of pride in United States’ performance

DV: How proud? (5 = “extremely”; 1 = “not at all”)	
Independent variable	Coef. (SE)
Change in position (ref. cat. = Weaker)	
No change	0.587*** (0.0830)
Stronger	0.730*** (0.104)
Party ID (ref. cat. = Democrat)	
Independent	-0.0561 (0.116)
Republican	0.0848 (0.116)
Race	

(ref. cat. = White)

Black	-0.350*** (0.117)
Hispanic	-0.000558 (0.133)
Other	0.194* (0.103)
Disapproves of Trump	-0.0829 (0.140)
Trump therm.	0.0268*** (0.00245)
College graduate	0.271*** (0.0806)
Male	0.103 (0.0643)
Age	0.00298 (0.00207)

Observations	7,526
--------------	-------

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

To make these results easier to interpret, Figure 4 displays predicted probabilities for each value of the dependent variable across the range of the change in status measure.⁶² As the figure demonstrates, individuals who perceive that the United States has lost status over the past year are substantially more likely than others to report the lowest level of pride – the effect size is greater than .1. Other differences are in the expected directions, but far more subtle in magnitude – suggesting that (perhaps because of the United States’ longstanding position at the top of the international hierarchy, or perhaps for other reasons) perceived decline may be especially significant in this particular context.

⁶² Continuous variables (age and Trump thermometer rating) are set to their means; categorical values are set to white, non-college educated, Male, Republican, and Trump approval.

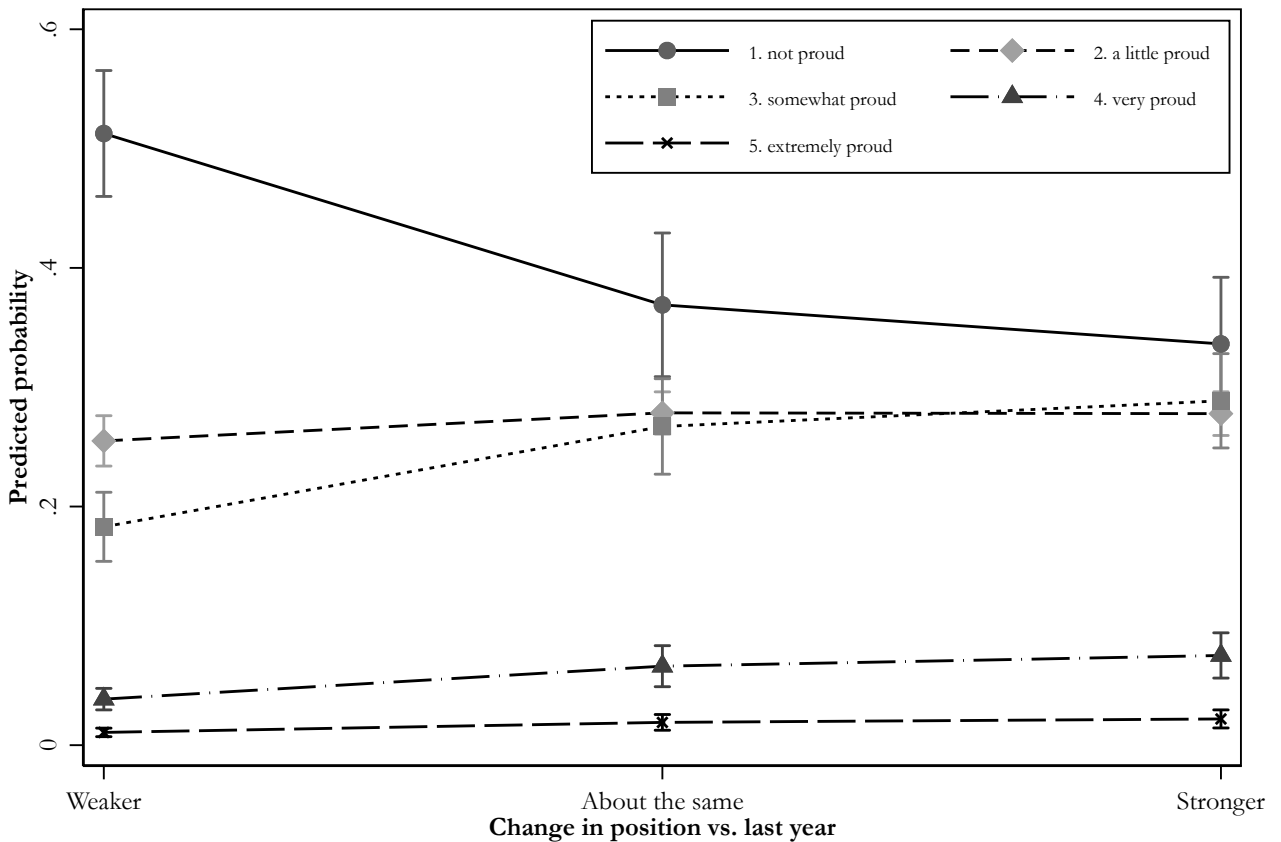


Figure 4: Perceptions of change in US position and reported national pride

Remarkably, these patterns remain reasonably consistent – especially with respect to the link between perceptions of decline and reduced national pride – even when results are estimated separately for respondents identifying with different political parties, and for respondents who approved and disapproved of Donald Trump. As Table 3 shows, in every case, respondents who perceived that the United States’ position in the world had declined in the past year were less likely to express pride in the United States’ performance than were respondents who perceived that the United States’ position in the world had remained the same or improved. This is true in comparisons among only Democrats, only Republicans, only respondents who approved of Donald Trump, and only respondents who disapproved of Donald Trump. In some cases, differences do not achieve statistical significance, but this is likely because some of these categories hold very few observations

– there are, for instance, only 107 Democrats and 124 Trump disapprovers in the sample who reported thinking that the United States’ position in the world had improved relative to a year ago.

Table 3: Perceptions of status change and national pride, by party ID and Trump approval

DV: How proud (5 = Extremely; 1 = Not at all)				
	Republicans	Democrats	Trump approvers	Trump disapprovers
	Coef. (SE)	Coef. (SE)	Coef. (SE)	Coef. (SE)
Change in position (ref. cat. = Weaker)				
No change	0.522*** (0.113)	0.747*** (0.169)	0.630*** (0.117)	0.626*** (0.111)
Stronger	0.796*** (0.130)	0.480 (0.357)	0.849*** (0.128)	0.575** (0.266)
Observations	3,139	3,569	3,068	4,458

Note: control variables from Table 2 included, but coefficients not displayed.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The relative robustness of the link between perceptions of change in international status and national pride to this sort of analysis suggests that the association is likely not entirely attributable to partisan cheerleading dynamics. However, two related problems remain unaddressed. First, as the discussion above highlighted, perceptions of change in the United States’ position in the world are not randomly assigned – there are so few Democrats and Trump disapprovers who reported believing the United States’ position in the world had improved over the past year precisely because party identification and political attitudes are important predictors of perceptions of change in national status. This raises questions about the reliability of estimates of the association between perceptions of change in international status and national pride net of party identification and political attitudes. Second, it is plausible that the association between perceptions of international

status and national pride is at least in part accounted for by the influence of the latter on the former, which makes it impossible to say with certainty that this association is evidence that variation in international status actually influences variation in national pride. To address these issues requires an experimental approach.

International Status and National Pride: Evidence from Survey Experiments

While the observational data analyzed above is consistent – both cross-nationally and across individual Americans – with the contention that international status influences national pride, observational research designs are often unable to firmly establish the existence of a causal relationship between phenomena. This has led researchers interested in a variety of questions related to international relations to deploy experimental methods that establish causality by randomizing the assignment of the values of an independent variable and then observing resultant changes in the dependent variable. Researchers interested in public opinion have found survey experiments especially useful. These typically involve manipulations that randomly vary the salience or content of information provided to survey participants, and then estimate the effect of that variation on a survey response measuring a concept of interest. Survey experiments have been used productively to explore, for instance, the determinants of public support for military intervention and trade preferences.⁶³ Some research has also used survey experimental methods to explore hypotheses

⁶³ See, among many other examples, Diana Mutz and Eunji Kim, “The Impact of In-group Favoritism on Trade Preferences,” *International Organization* vol. 71, no. 4 (2017); Michael Tomz, “Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach,” *International Organization* vol. 61, no. 4 (2007); Tomz and Jessica Weeks, “Military Alliances and Public Support for War,” *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 65, no. 3 (2021).

related to the influence of status in international relations – though this has so far been restricted to questions about elite decisionmaking and the public’s foreign policy preferences.⁶⁴

To explore the causal effect of variation in international status on national pride, I use a survey experimental approach that manipulates the salience and content of information about the United States’ status in the world, and then assesses the influence of that variation on the degree to which respondents (who are all US citizens) express pride in the United States as an in-group.⁶⁵

Manipulating information about the United States’ status in the world is complicated by the fact that status is multi-faceted, socially constructed, and may be interpreted differently by different observers. I thus fielded two separate survey experiments, each built around a different manipulation. In the first survey (fielded in March, 2018) I manipulated information about hypothetical future changes in the relative position of the United States and China (based on “trends in military, economic, and technological power”).⁶⁶ There were three treatment conditions. In the first, I informed respondents that a group of non-partisan experts had concluded that the United States’ position in the world was likely to decline markedly relative to that of China. In the second, I informed respondents that the group of experts assessed that the United States’ current advantage over China would increase; in the third, I informed respondents that the group of experts assessed that the United States’ would maintain its position relative to China. Each respondent was provided with a chart depicting the anticipated change in the relative positions of the United States and China over time, and then asked to spend a few minutes writing about what the hypothetical future would be like, how it would affect their lives, and how they would feel about it. Following treatment,

⁶⁴ Renshon, “Losing Face and Sinking Costs: Experimental Evidence on the Judgment of Political and Military Leaders,” *International Organization* vol. 69, no. 3 (2015); Barnhart, *The Consequences of Humiliation*, chapter 3.

⁶⁵ Both of the survey experiments described below were granted IRB exemption under protocol number 1801007699.

⁶⁶ This survey yielded 993 valid responses, recruited using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk.

respondents were asked “How would the scenario that you read about in the previous section make you feel about being an American?”, and selected responses ranging from “very proud” to “not too proud at all,” with two intermediate options, as well as a fifth option for those who responded that their feelings would not be affected.

This is a straightforward manipulation that accords well with the widely-accepted notions that status is based on comparisons with relevant others, and that – in international relations – it derives at least in part from material power. The concreteness of the manipulation is also attractive, as this avoids potential confusion among respondents over the meaning of the term “status.” At the same time, though, status is not *identical* to material power, and it is conceivable that – at least for some respondents – this manipulation might not primarily correspond with the concept of status. Thus, in a second survey experiment (fielded in June, 2021), I used a different manipulation in which I asked respondents to think about a *historical* episode in which the United States’ status relative to other countries (which I also described as “prestige, position and/or social standing”) had either increased or decreased.⁶⁷ A third – control – condition asked respondents to think about a “normal, typical time in the past.”⁶⁸ All respondents were then asked to spend a few minutes writing about the events or time in question, and to describe it in as much detail as possible. This treatment, in other words, varied the salience of historical status loss and gain, rather than the content of information about a hypothetical future. Respondents were then asked to “think back to the past events that you wrote about earlier. How does thinking about those events or that time make you feel about the United States?” Respondents chose options ranging from “extremely proud” to “not proud at all,” with

⁶⁷ This survey yielded 2000 valid responses, recruited using Lucid.

⁶⁸ These treatment conditions were adapted from those used in the elite-focused survey experiments in Renshon, *Fighting for Status* (chapter 3), though applied explicitly to variation in international – rather than interpersonal – status.

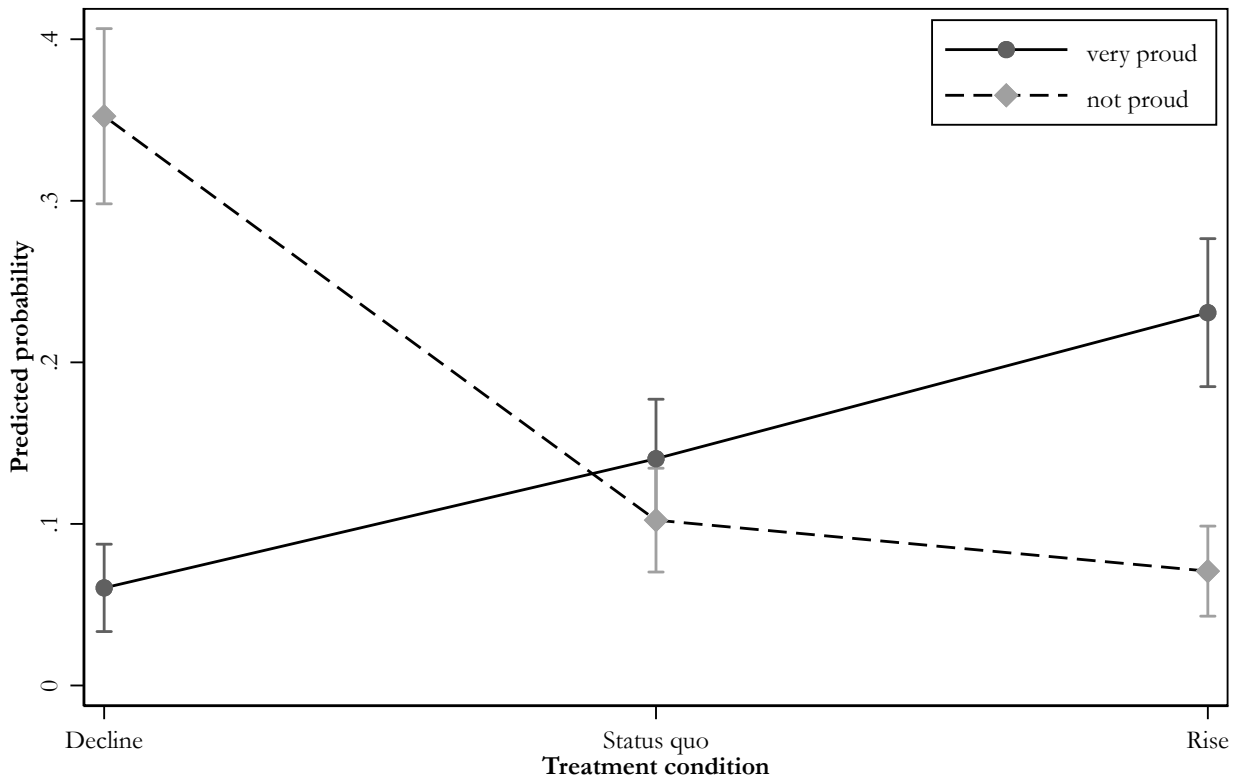
three intermediate categories, as well as an option indicating that “this does not affect my feelings of pride in the United States.”

The theoretical link between international status and national pride developed earlier suggests the following two hypotheses with respect to these experimental studies:

H4) Individuals prompted to imagine a future in which the United States’ position in the world declines (improves) vis-à-vis China will express lower (higher) levels of national pride than participants in other experimental conditions.

H5) Individuals prompted to reflect on an episode of historical international status loss (gain) will express lower (higher) levels of national pride than participants in other experimental conditions.

Results from both studies are broadly consistent with these hypotheses. Figure 5 shows the proportion of respondents choosing “very proud” and “not too proud at all” – the two extreme response options – across the three levels of the change in status treatment in the first survey experiment.



Note: Estimates come from a multinomial logit regression model, and report predicted probabilities of two responses ('very proud' and 'not proud') to a post-treatment question about how the future described would make respondents feel about being American.

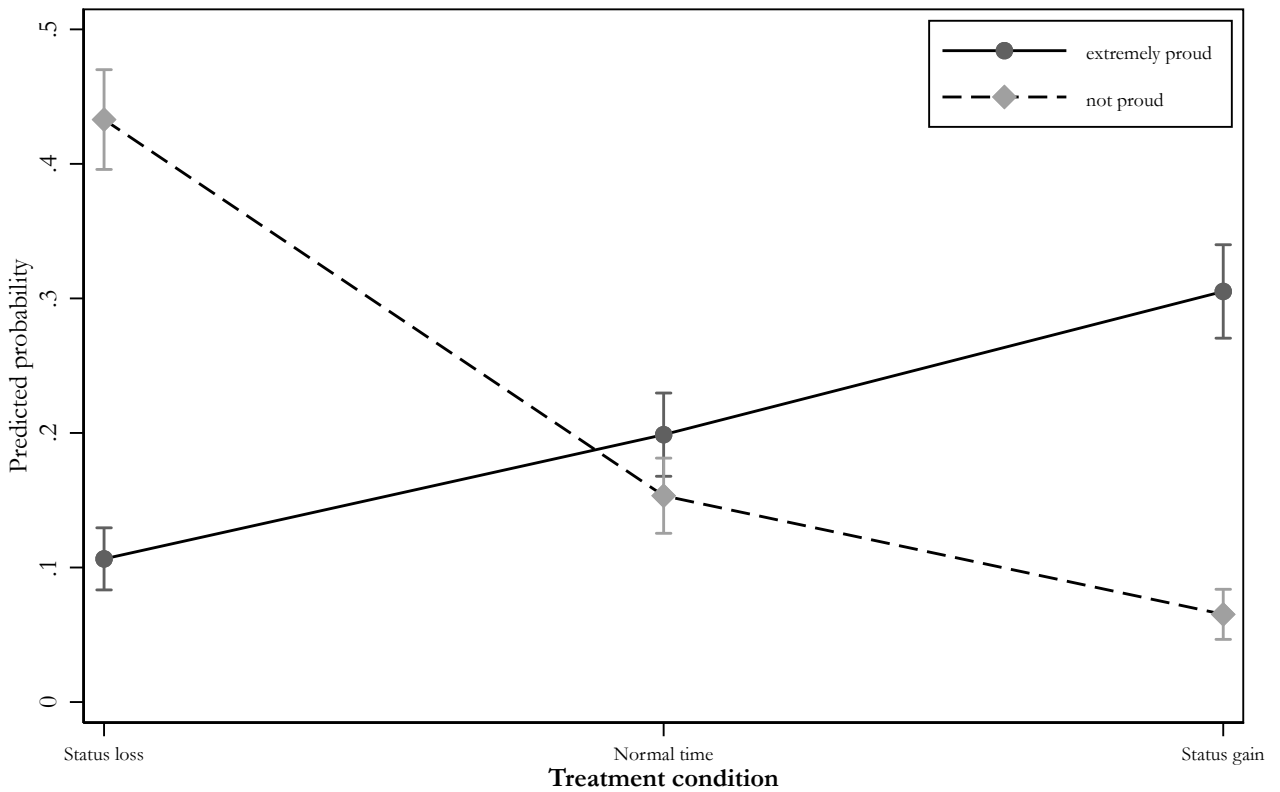
Figure 5: Effect of future US position change on reported national pride

Among respondents in the status quo condition, 14% reported that the hypothetical future scenario would make them feel very proud to be American, while 10% reported that it would make them feel not too proud at all. In the status increase condition, “very proud” increases by 9 points (to 23%), while not too proud falls very slightly (to 7%). In the status decline condition, differences are even starker – “very proud” falls to 6%, while “not too proud” increases to 35%. All of these differences across treatment conditions reach statistical significance at conventional levels, except for the difference between the status increase and status quo conditions with respect to the proportion reporting feeling not proud.⁶⁹ Across all three conditions, between a quarter and a third of

⁶⁹ This is based on a series of pairwise difference of proportion tests.

respondents indicated that the future change in the United States' position in the world would not affect national pride – a substantial minority, but still a minority.

Figure 6 shows the proportion of respondents choosing “extremely proud” and “not proud” (the two ends of the pride scale) across the three treatment conditions of the second survey experiment.



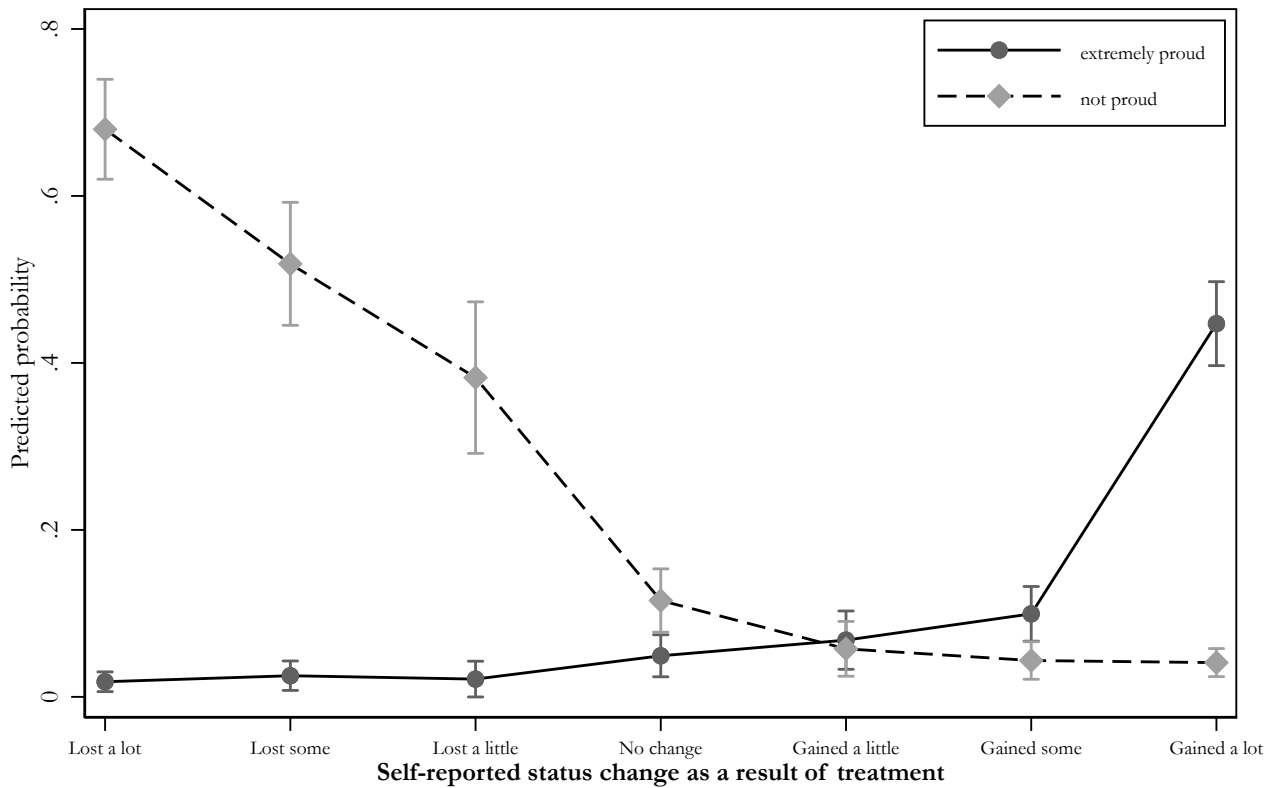
Note: Estimates come from a multinomial logit regression model, and report predicted probabilities of two responses ('extremely proud' and 'not proud') to a post-treatment question about how the treatment condition made respondents feel about the United States.

Figure 6: Effect of historical US status change on reported national pride

Among respondents in the status quo condition, 19.9% reported feeling “extremely proud” of the United States, while 15.3% reported feeling “not proud.” In the status gain condition, the proportion choosing “extremely proud” increases by 10 percentage points (to 30.5%), while “not proud” declines to 6.5%. In the status loss condition, by contrast, the proportion choosing

“extremely proud” declines to 10.6%, while the proportion choosing “not proud” increases to 43.3%. All of these differences across treatment conditions reach statistical significance at conventional levels. Across the three conditions, between 12% and 17% of respondents indicated that the exercise did not influence their feelings about the United States – even lower than in the first survey experiment. Results from the second study thus largely mirror those from the first – even down to the more dramatic differences between the control condition and the “status loss” condition, compared to the “status gain” condition. This is remarkable, given the differences between the experimental designs – especially with respect to the status change manipulations.

To further explore the relationship between the salience of historical status changes and variation in national pride, respondents in the historical status change experiment were asked – after treatment – to evaluate the *magnitude* of the status loss or gain that resulted from the event (or during the time) that they had reflected upon and written about during treatment. Response options ranged from “gained a lot” to “lost a lot,” with five intermediate categories. If variation in international status influences national pride, then one might expect an association between the magnitude of a status change and the likelihood of expressing positive or negative feelings about the national in-group. Of course, since the magnitude of the status changes made salient were not experimentally manipulated in this study, this analysis requires additional attention, and should be interpreted with caution. Nonetheless, the magnitude of status losses and gains is associated with variation in the pride indicator. Figure 7 displays predicted probabilities for the two extreme values of the pride variable, across the seven categories of the status change magnitude variable.



Note: Estimates come from a multinomial logit regression model, and report predicted probabilities of two responses ('extremely proud' and 'not proud') to a post-treatment question about how the treatment condition made respondents feel about the United States. Model includes a control for pre-treatment national pride.

Figure 7: Magnitude of self-reported US status change and national pride

Estimates come from a multinomial logit model that controls for a range of other demographic and dispositional characteristics that were measured prior to treatment – these include gender, race, age, educational attainment, political party identification, an indicator of the frequency with which respondents typically feel proud to be American, and a measure of “social dominance orientation” (which social psychologists suggest is defined by a heightened concern for group status).⁷⁰ As Figure 7 shows, the likelihood that a respondent reports feeling “not proud” of the United States increases along with the magnitude of status loss, while the likelihood of feeling “extremely” proud increases

⁷⁰ On social dominance orientation, see Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

along with the magnitude of status gain – though in this case the difference is much larger between the “gained some” and “gained a lot” categories than at any other point on the scale.

Taken together, the survey experimental evidence unambiguously supports the contention that information about variation in international status influences affective national identification (or national pride). This is true both prospectively – that is, when respondents imagine hypothetical future changes in status – and retrospectively – when respondents are asked to reflect on historical changes in status. The relationship is also consistent regardless of whether the *source* of the status change is specified concretely as an improvement or decline in terms of position relative to China or left for the respondent to interpret.

Significance, Implications, and Future Research

This article has demonstrated, using a wide range of different data sources and research designs, that there is substantial evidence to support the contention that variation in international status influences national pride. From one perspective, this is unsurprising: it is consistent with the insights drawn from social psychology and other fields that form the theoretical foundations of prominent recent work linking international status, domestic politics, and foreign policy.

At the same time, the relationship between international status and national pride has never before been systematically demonstrated, and the evidence presented here is at odds with recent work expressing or contributing to skepticism about the significance of international status for domestic politics. This skepticism is rooted in both particular theoretical commitments (for instance, to the primacy of elite security concerns for understanding foreign policy) and in evidence from related

research that appears to show that national pride is unresponsive to variation in international status. This paper establishes that the case for skepticism is overdrawn: when we use data more appropriate to directly examining the relationship between international status and national pride, the evidence clearly undermines the claim that these two variables are unrelated.

This finding has important implications for how analysts should think about the significance of a state's position in the world. One way to understand these is to think about national pride – or affective national identification – as a variable that might mediate between changes in a state's status and a range of other outcomes. Prior research has established that national pride is linked to a variety of other substantively important variables, like the willingness to materially support the state, and support for wealth redistribution.⁷¹ There are also theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that the strength of affective identification with a strong common in-group – like a state – might be inversely related to hostility between less inclusive in-groups – like ethnic groups or political parties.⁷² Indeed, Levendusky has demonstrated that priming American “national identity” reduces “affective polarization,” or hostility between Republicans and Democrats in the United States.⁷³

By extension, the findings reported in this paper imply that these phenomena might also be affected by variation in a state's position in the world. If, for instance, international status influences national pride, and if national pride influences the degree to which individuals resist materially supporting the state, then it is plausible that changes in a state's status could indirectly influence state strength via a

⁷¹ Qari, Konrad, and Geys, “Patriotism, Taxation, and International Mobility.”

⁷² On the “common in-group model,” see Samuel Gaertner, John Dovidio, Phyllis Anastasio, Betty Bachman, and Mary Rust, “The Common Ingroup Identity Model: Recategorization and the Reduction of Intergroup Bias,” *European Review of Social Psychology* vol. 4, no. 1 (1993).

⁷³ Matthew Levendusky, “Americans, Not Partisans: Can Priming American National Identity Reduce Affective Polarization?” *The Journal of Politics* vol. 80, no. 1 (2018).

mechanism running through changes in the strength of national identification. Similarly, it could be that relations between groups within the state might be influenced by changes in the state's status, again via a mechanism running through affective identification with the common (national) in-group. Future research – using a range of data sources and methods – should investigate these and other hypotheses about the domestic political consequences of changes in international status.

One reasonable objection to this claim that the quantitative and experimental results reported above warrant the development of an extensive research agenda focused on fully understanding the relationship between international status and domestic politics is that the *degree* to which national pride depends on international status remains unclear. The magnitude of the association between status and pride reported in the cross-national analysis is small; effect sizes appear larger in the ANES and experimental analyses, but these cannot be used to draw inferences about how *much* changes in international status matter for understanding variation in national pride.

At the same time, international status does not have to be, in general, the strongest source of variation in affective identification for this relationship to have substantive importance. It could be, for instance, that particular contexts – like, say, an unexpected military defeat – might trigger especially strong or significant consequences in ways that the studies described above were unable to evaluate. It could also be that certain kinds of groups might be especially sensitive to changes in the state's position in the world. If circumstances (such as the composition of a governing coalition) made these groups particularly influential, then understanding the kinds of dynamics at the heart of this paper would be critical. Future research should also aim to further explore these possibilities by, for example, investigating the consequences of different kinds of status changes, and by beginning

to probe demographic and other inter-individual-level differences in how people understand international status and react to international status losses and gains.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ To the extent that this has been done already, scholars have focused almost entirely on social dominance orientation, but other demographic and dispositional characteristics might matter as well.