

# Major Power Status (In)Consistency and Political Relevance in International Relations Research

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# Political Relevance as Case Selection Criterion

- Roughly 400 published articles since Weede's (1976) introduction of the concept (Jstor search)
- Theoretically tied to the opportunity-willingness framework
  - Dyads vary in their opportunity and willingness to engage in behavior of interest ---mostly conflict
- Various conceptual and operational definitions exist
- Most definitions based on two dimensions
  - Contiguity
  - Major power status

# Political Relevance as Case Selection Criterion

- Concerns with bias resulting from exclusion of conflicts
- Attempts to expand the definition by changing capabilities and distance (sometimes alliances) (e.g., Bennett 2006; Quackenbush 2006)
- Attempts to model explicitly political relevance (e.g., Braumoeller and Carson 2011)
- Major power status ---COW designation--- remains an invariant, key component in all studies

# Status Inconsistency and Political Relevance

- Major power status not just a dichotomous concept
- Major power status not a simple reflection of capabilities
  - Singer (1988) recognized possible mismatch between status and capabilities
- Status inconsistency dates as far back as Galtung (1964)
- Renewed interest, often in connection to social identity theory
  - E.g., Larson and Shevchenko (2003, 2010), Wohlforth (2009), Volgy et al. (2011)

# Status Inconsistency and Political Relevance

- Based on Levy's (1983) definition, status is multidimensional
- Major power states have
  - Extensive foreign policy interests
  - Ability to project power in the pursuit of such interests
  - Recognition by other states
- Major power states can be
  - Status consistent: capabilities and behavior match recognition
  - Status inconsistent overachievers: amount of recognition exceeds capabilities and behavior
  - Status inconsistent underachievers: capabilities and behavior exceed the amount of recognition

# Status Inconsistency and Political Relevance

- Opportunity and willingness vary across dyads also as a function of status (in)consistency
- Politically relevant dyads may differ as a result
- Politically relevant dyads containing status consistent major powers can be more conflict prone than dyads containing status inconsistent major powers
- Politically relevant dyads containing underachieving, status inconsistent major powers can be more conflict prone than dyads containing overachieving major powers
- The effects of conflict predictors may vary across politically dyads as a function of status

# Measuring Major Power Status

- We measure major power status as a function of 3 dimensions
  - Unusual military and economic capabilities to pursue a broad foreign policy agenda
  - Unusual foreign policy activity in the pursuit of said agenda
  - Recognition by other members of the international community
- In Volgy et al. (2011) we capture these 3 dimensions by looking at
  - Volume and reach (projection) of military and economic power, using COW disaggregated capabilities, GDP and trade
  - Volume of conflictual and cooperative cumulative foreign policy behavior using WEIS, COPDAB and IDEA event data
  - Diplomatic exchanges and state visits data
  - “Unusual” is defined as being one standard deviation above the mean for each of these measures for a given time period

# Measuring Major Power Status

- Status consistent major powers score “unusually” high in all 3 dimensions
- Status inconsistent major powers meet the bar in capabilities and behavior but not recognition (underachievers), or viceversa (overachievers)
- For the 1950-2005 period, our Status Attribution Measure (SAM) produces the following classification



# Measuring Major Power Status

Table 1: Comparing Status Designations, Aggregated at Five Year Intervals, 1951-2010.

	USA		USSR/Russia		UK		France		Germany		Japan		PRC	
	SAM	COW	SAM	COW	SAM	COW	SAM	COW	SAM	COW	SAM	COW	SAM	COW
1951-55	SC	Yes	SIU	Yes	No	Yes	SIU	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
1956-60	SC	Yes	SIU	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
1961-65	SC	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIU	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
1966-70	SC	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIO	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
1971-75	SC	Yes	SIU	Yes	No	Yes	SIO	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
1976-80	SC	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIO	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
1981-85	SC	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIO	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
1986-90	SC	Yes	SIO	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIO	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
1991-95	SC	Yes	SIO	Yes	SIU	Yes	SC	Yes	No	Yes	SIO	Yes	SIO	Yes
1996-00	SC	Yes	SIO	Yes	SC	Yes	SC	Yes	SIU	Yes	SC	Yes	SIO	Yes
2001-05	SC	Yes	SIO	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIU	Yes	No	Yes	SIU	Yes	SIO	Yes

# Exploring Differences Across Politically Relevant Dyads

- We expect differences in willingness and opportunity for conflict between status consistent and inconsistent dyads
- We look at MID onset, war, MID joining, and foreign interventions

**Table 2.** Frequency of Conflict in Major Power (Nondirected) Relevant Dyads by Various Classifications of Status, 1950-2001\*

	COW	SAM	Status Consistent	Status Inconsistent	Inconsistent Overachiever	Inconsistent Underachiever
Disputes	481 (31.75%)	371 (24.48%)	176 (11.61%)	210 (13.86%)	83 (5.48%)	127 (8.38%)
Wars	159 (38.68%)	59 (14.35%)	36 (8.75%)	29 (7.05%)	3 (0.73%)	26 (6.32%)
Joining	571 (50.80%)	464 (41.28%)	327 (29.09%)	179 (15.92%)	41 (3.64%)	138 (12.27%)
Interventions	250 (35.48%)	194 (26.76%)	118 (16.27%)	95 (13.10%)	28 (3.86%)	67 (9.24%)

# Exploring Differences Across Politically Relevant Dyads

- We further explore whether definitions of political relevance based on variations in (major power) status affect the prediction of basic models of conflict
- We include capability ratio, alliance ties, and shared democracy
- Again, we consider MID onset, war, MID joining, and foreign intervention

**Table 3.** Conventionally Expected Effect of Baseline Conflict Variables on Conflict Onset, Conflict Joining, and Foreign Intervention.

	War	MID	MID Joining	Intervention
Cap. Ratio	+	+	+	+
Alliance	-	-	+	-
Joint Democracy	-	-	+	-

# Exploring Differences Across Politically Relevant Dyads

**Table 2.** MID Onset in Politically Relevant Dyads Based on Various Classifications of Status, 1950-2001: Logit Estimates

	COW	SAM	Status Consistent	Status Inconsistent	Inconsistent Overachiever	Inconsistent Underachiever
Cap. Ratio	2.329 (.26)***	1.992 (.26)***	1.154 (.27)***	1.927 (.27)***	1.259 (.29)***	1.643 (.27)***
Alliance	-.204 (.19)	-.367 (.18)*	-.687 (.17)***	-.300 (.20)	-.377 (.20)	-.427 (.19)*
Democracy	-1.185 (.20)***	-1.170 (.21)***	-1.233 (.22)***	-1.109 (.22)***	-.982 (.23)***	-1.013 (.23)***
Intercept	-3.920 (.10)***	-3.593 (.11)***	-2.849 (.12)***	-3.671 (.12)***	-3.196 (.14)***	-3.397 (.12)***
N	38633	28938	17544	25495	15857	20540
Log Likelihood	-4475.07	-4040.38	-3411.49	-3556.13	-2871.01	-3364.11

# Exploring Differences Across Politically Relevant Dyads

**Table 3.** War Onset in Politically Relevant Dyads Based on Various Classifications of Status, 1950-2001: Logit Estimates

	COW	SAM	Status Consistent	Status Inconsistent	Inconsistent Overachiever	Inconsistent Underachiever
Cap. Ratio	2.045 (.51)***	2.314 (.55)***	1.467 (.63)*	2.315 (.64)***	1.752 (.79)*	2.007 (.66)**
Alliance	-1.448 (.38)***	-1.402 (.41)***	-1.585 (.40)***	-1.140 (.44)**	-1.171 (.47)**	-1.232 (.43)**
Democracy	-2.652 (.75)***	-2.260 (.75)**	-2.182 (.75)**	-2.039 (.75)**	-1.800 (.76)*	-1.876 (.75)*
Intercept	-5.157 (.20)***	-5.371 (.25)***	-4.716 (.31)***	-5.574 (.28)***	-5.207 (.38)***	-5.303 (.28)***
N	38633	28938	17544	25495	15857	20540
Log Likelihood	-1323.81	-898.43	-744.52	-743.94	-581.08	-713.57

# Exploring Differences Across Politically Relevant Dyads

**Table 4.** Joining Ongoing Disputes in Politically Relevant Dyads Based on Various Classifications of Status, 1950-2001: Logit Estimates

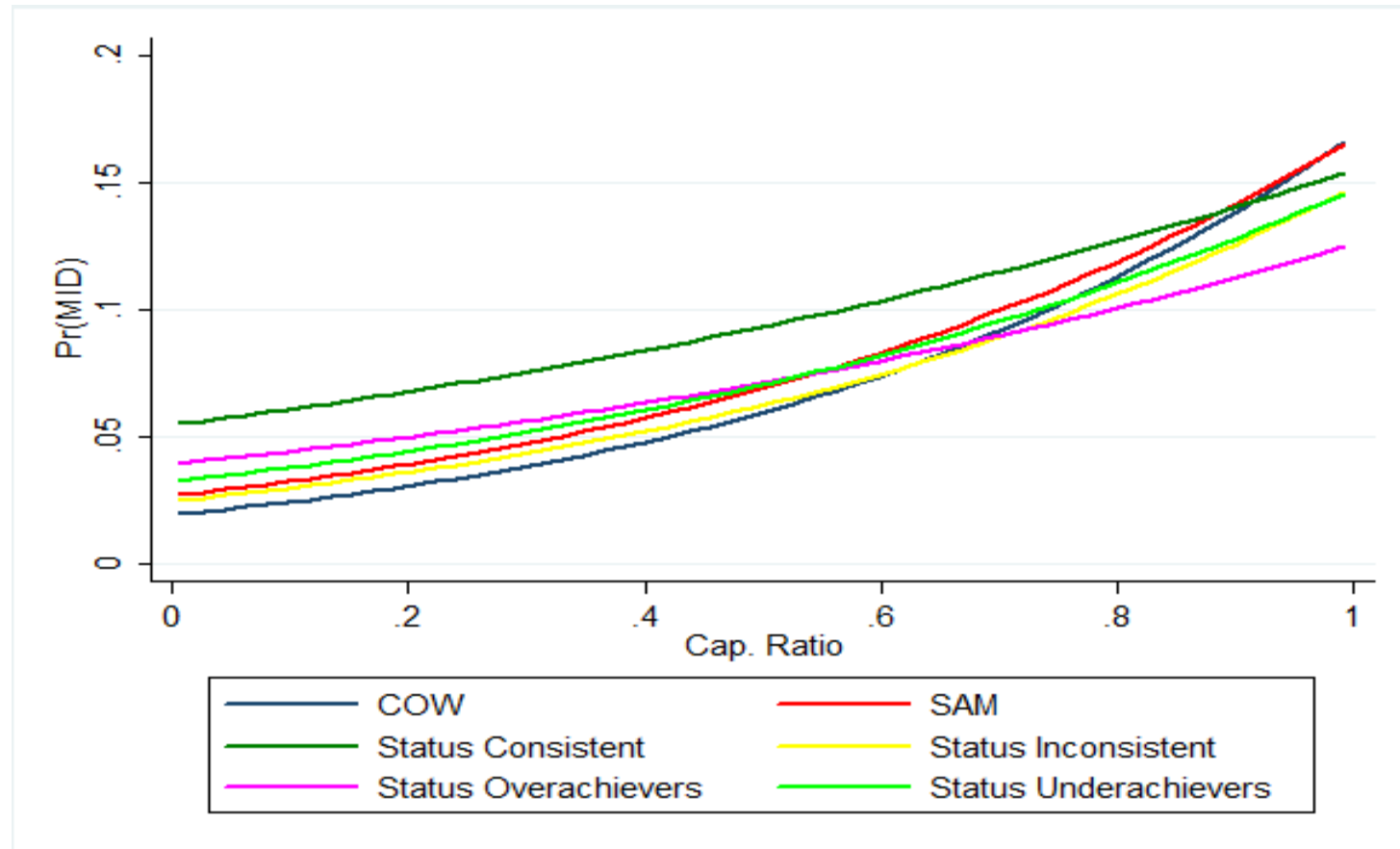
	COW	SAM	Status Consistent	Status Inconsistent	Inconsistent Overachiever	Inconsistent Underachiever
Cap. Ratio	1.001 (.43)*	.682 (.47)	.246 (.50)	1.092 (.28)***	1.121 (.33)***	.887 (.30)**
Alliance	.226 (.22)	.145 (.23)	-.115 (.23)	-.112 (.21)	-.284 (.25)	-.144 (.21)
Democracy	.219 (.19)	.220 (.21)	.344 (.22)	-.605 (.25)*	-1.241 (.38)***	-.508 (.25)*
Intercept	-4.414 (.08)***	-4.207 (.09)***	-3.825 (.12)***	-4.589 (.11)***	-4.697 (.16)***	-4.461 (.13)***
N	38633	28938	17544	25495	15857	20540
Log Likelihood	-3108.06	-2623.52	-1951.62	-1594.73	-888.82	1400.69

# Exploring Differences Across Politically Relevant Dyads

**Table 5.** Foreign Intervention and Politically Relevant Dyads Based on Various Classifications of Status, 1950-2001: Logit Estimates

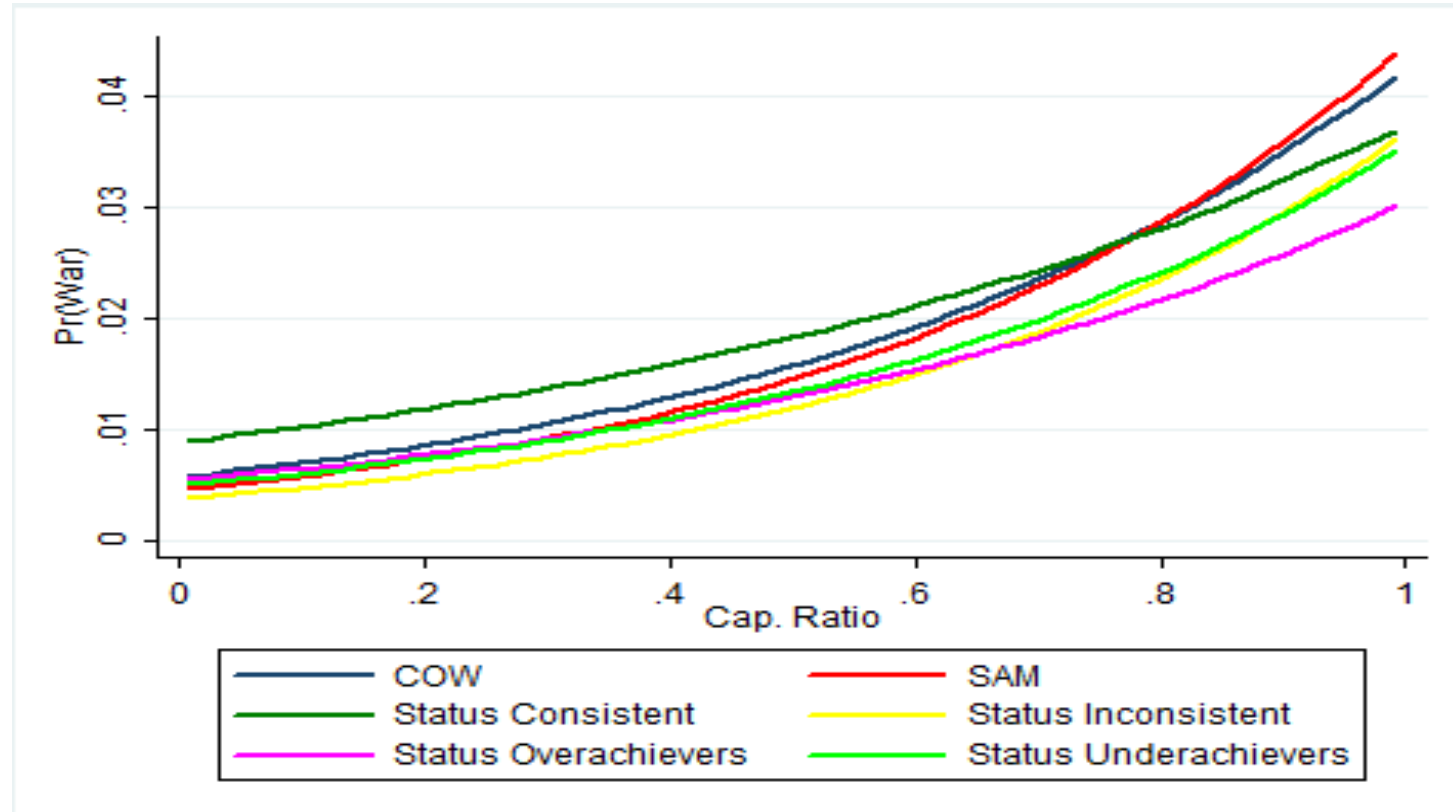
	COW	SAM	Status Consistent	Status Inconsistent	Inconsistent Overachiever	Inconsistent Underachiever
Cap. Ratio	1.286 (.28)***	1.054 (.28)***	.565 (.27)*	1.215 (.30)***	.822 (.32)**	1.046 (.29)***
Alliance	.615 (.17)***	.413 (.17)**	.040 (.17)	.408 (.19)*	.182 (.20)	.297 (.19)
Democracy	-1.303 (.21)***	-1.270 (.22)***	-1.271 (.23)***	-1.636 (.32)***	-1.661 (.37)***	-1.466 (.32)***
Intercept	-4.788 (.09)***	-4.503 (.10)***	-3.930 (.12)***	-4.588 (.11)***	-4.168 (.14)***	-4.393 (.12)***
N	38633	28938	17544	25495	15857	20540
Log Likelihood	-2225.51	-1995.52	-1629.55	-1715.92	-1375.25	-1599.80

# Exploring Differences Across Politically Relevant Dyads

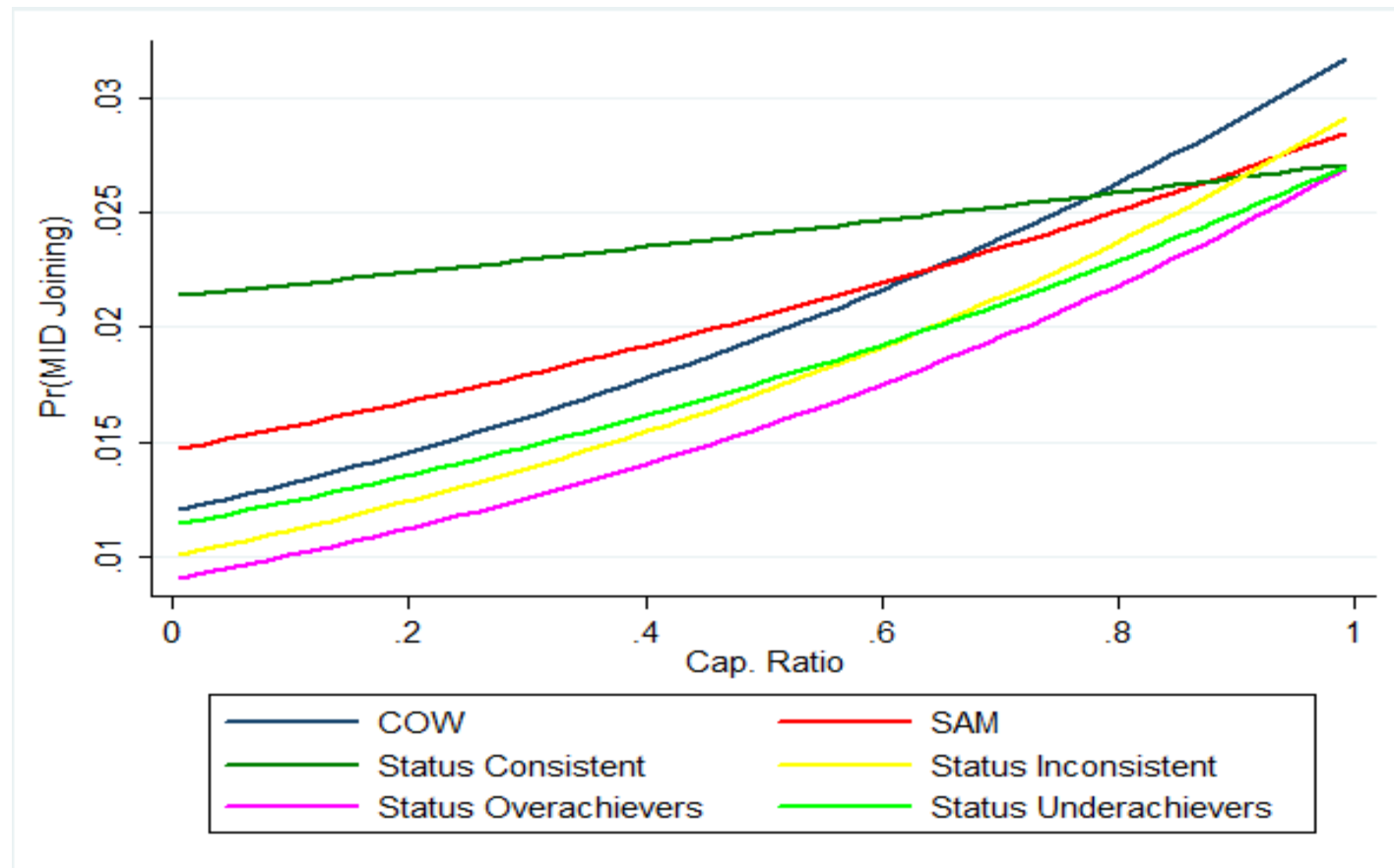




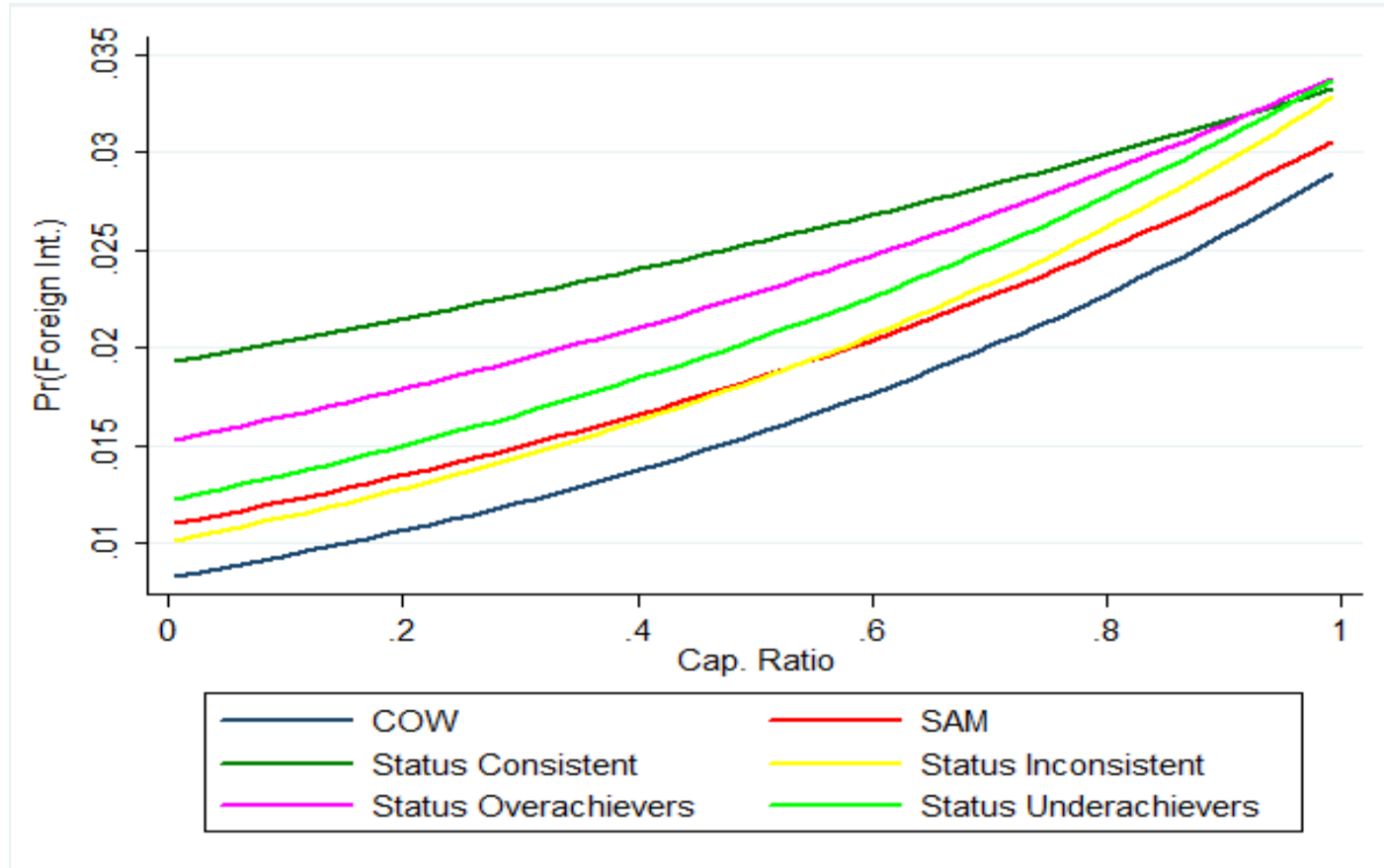
# Exploring Differences Across Politically Relevant Dyads



# Exploring Differences Across Politically Relevant Dyads



# Exploring Differences Across Politically Relevant Dyads



# Conclusions

- Status matters
- Operationally and conceptually it is more complex than usually assumed
- The effect of “standard” predictors of conflict varies as a function of status
- Scholars should develop more nuanced expectations about political relevance and about how conflict predictors are affected by it
- Encourage studies explaining the behavior of different types of major powers