Institute of Psychology
Polish Academy of Sciences

Graduate School for Social Research
Institute of Psychology
Polish Academy of Sciences

Culturally Sensitive Psychology of Social Hierarchy: Self- and Other-Orientation of Powerholders Across Cultures

[Kulturowo wrażliwa psychologia hierarchii społecznej: orientacja na siebie i na innych u osób sprawujących władzę w ujęciu międzykulturowym]

Mgr Arkadiusz Wąsiel

Doctoral thesis under the supervision of
Dr hab. Kuba Kryś, prof. IP PAN

Warsaw, 2026

Funding information

The thesis was supported by the National Centre grant OPUS (2020/37/B/HS6/0314) entitled: “Bridging psychology with societal development science: Fifty countries research into folk theories of societal development”, SONATA (2020/38/E/HS6/00357) entitled: “Ideal types of well-being - over fifty countries research into culturally sensitive "National Accounts of Well-Being”, Norway Grants via National Science Centre grant GRIEG (2019/34/H/HS6/00597) entitled “Bridging psychology with societal development science: Fifty countries research into the relation between "folk theories of societal development" and "ideal types of wellbeing"” awarded to dr hab. Kuba Kryś, prof. IP PAN. The author was supported by the GSSR International Mobility award (GIMA) funded by the NAWA STER (BPI/STE/2021/1/00030/U/00001).

Acknowledgment

The Ph.D. journey was one of the happiest and most meaningful chapters of my life. During that time I moved three times, visited thirteen countries on research trips, and met so many smart, interesting people. I have learnt a lot, including how little I actually know. Looking back, I am filled with fondness and appreciation.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Kuba Kryś. There are so many qualities of his that I admire that it is difficult to put them into words. I thank him for his guidance, responsiveness and patience. I thank him for his kindness and openness to new ideas. Academic work can be overwhelming, but it felt rewarding knowing he had my back. I have learnt a great deal from him, both as a scholar and as a person.

I want to thank my friends from the Macropsychology Lab — Ewa, June, Maciek and Mateusz. For the fun and the hard work, for the silly jokes and the serious discussions. Without you this work would have been much harder and no fun at all.

I am grateful to Prof. Yuri Miyamoto and the members of the Cultural Psychology Laboratory at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, who welcomed a "crazy guy from Poland" with so much warmth and generosity. I deeply appreciate the time we spent together.

I would like to thank all my co-authors and members of the Live Better Project, whose collaboration made this research possible. Each time I sent out a first draft, I received numerous comments, reflections and edits from all over the world. It was a pleasure to wake up and find the work moved forward in another timezone.

I thank my parents for believing in me and for encouraging me to follow my own interests, wherever they led. I always knew I could count on their support, and that I could always go back to my hometown to catch my breath.

A special thank you goes to my beloved wife, Maria, for her continuous support. She was the one who listened to my frustrations and the one who shared my joy. I like to joke that without her this dissertation would have been completed sooner. But then again, it would not have been worth it.

Thank you all.

Table of Contents

Abstract 5

Streszczenie 7

General Introduction 9

- Social Hierarchy as a Multidimensional Phenomenon 10
- Self- or Other-Oriented Powerholders as Key Actors of Social Hierarchy 11
- Culture and the Meanings of Social Hierarchy 12

The Present Investigation 14

- Publication 1 14
  - Presentation of the Studies and Results 15
  - Summary and Discussion 16
- Publication 2 17
  - Presentation of the Study and Results 17
  - Summary and Discussion 19
- Publication 3 19
  - Presentation of the Studies and Results 20
  - Summary and Discussion 21

General Discussion 22

- Powerholder Perceptions Across Three Facets of Hierarchy 22
- The Role of Culture and Governance Quality 23
- Limitations and Future Directions 23
- Conclusion 25

References 26

Appendices 32

- Publication 1 32
- Publication 2 47
- Publication 3 76

Abstract

Psychological research on power, status, and hierarchy has been developed largely within WEIRD samples, and its conclusions, including the assumption that socioeconomic development tends to reduce the cultural relevance of hierarchy, may not always generalize. The view that progress entails the diminishing of hierarchy does not easily account for trajectories such as the Confucian Asian one, in which steep hierarchies and high developmental outcomes coexist. Social hierarchy, moreover, is rarely a single dimension: power (control over resources and outcomes), social status (respect and prominence), and socioeconomic position (access to resources) are related but not interchangeable, and the extent to which standing on one transfers to the others is itself shaped by culture. At the heart of these hierarchies are institutional powerholders, such as managers, teachers, judges, and officials, through whom hierarchy is most directly enacted in everyday life. This dissertation investigates how authorities are perceived across cultures: whether they are seen as self-oriented (using their position as an opportunity for personal gain) or other-oriented (taking responsibility for those they oversee). The dissertation is based on three first-authored publications.

The first publication tests the relationship between powerholder construals against preferences for societal development in the United States, Poland, and Hong Kong ($n_{\text{participants}}$=1,281). Perceiving powerholders as self-oriented was tied to stronger endorsement of egalitarian aims, such as gender equality, education, human rights, and reduction of poverty, while perceiving them as other-oriented was tied to traditional aims, such as religion, military power, or respect for authority. The results suggest that the responsible exercise of power may help legitimize existing hierarchies and ease pressure for egalitarian change.

The second publication investigates the link between being perceived as powerful and high in social status (N_{samples}=77 from $N_{\text{countries}}$=70 covering $n_{\text{participants}}$=18,096). The link between perceived power and social status was positive on average but absent in WEIRD and Post-Soviet regions, and stronger in Confucian Asia, Latin America/Caribbean, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Other-orientation amplified the link; self-orientation attenuated it. At the cultural level, the relationship was stronger in cultures characterized by Harmony cultural model of selfhood, high Embeddedness, and high Cultural Tightness. The results suggest that the conceptual separation of power and status may be more specific to WEIRD and Post-Soviet regions than universal.

The third publication investigates whether socioeconomic position shapes how powerholders are perceived, with governance quality as a moderator. Across two studies, one

on the 70-culture dataset and one a conceptual replication on an independent dataset of cultures ($N_{samples}$=83 from $N_{countries}$=62 covering $n_{participants}$ = 17,200), higher subjective SES was associated with perceiving powerholders as less self-oriented and more other-oriented. However, skepticism toward powerholders was widespread across the socioeconomic spectrum. Corruption Perception Index emerged as the robust moderator. In low-corruption contexts, the negative link between SES and perception of powerholders as self-oriented was the strongest. The results suggest that positive perceptions of powerholders may be both a privilege of socioeconomic position and of living in a well-governed society.

Taken together, the three publications suggest that powerholder perceptions are systematically tied to (1) views about social hierarchy, (2) preferences for societal change, and (3) one's socioeconomic position, and that (4) the strength and shape of these ties depend on cultural context. Hierarchies that appear similar can carry different meanings in different societies, and the figure of the powerholder — a responsible guardian in one society, an opportunist in another — becomes an indicator of cultural and economic foundations of hierarchy in a given society.

Key words: *social hierarchy, culture, powerholders, self-orientation, other-orientation*

Streszczenie

Dotychczasowe badania psychologiczne nad władzą, statusem i hierarchią społeczną były prowadzone głównie na próbach z krajów zachodnich, a ich wnioski, w tym założenie, że rozwój ekonomiczny zmniejsza znaczenie hierarchii, nie zawsze mogą być generalizowane na inne kręgi kulturowe. Pogląd, zgodnie z którym postęp wiąże się z osłabieniem hierarchii, nie wyjaśnia trajektorii takich jak obserwowana w Azji Konfucjańskiej, gdzie ścisłe hierarchie współistnieją z wysokimi wskaźnikami rozwoju społecznego i gospodarczego. Co więcej, hierarchia społeczna nie ma charakteru jednowymiarowego: władza (kontrola nad zasobami i ludźmi), status społeczny (szacunek i prestiż) oraz status socjoekonomiczny (dostęp do zasobów) są ze sobą powiązane, ale nie są tożsame, a stopień, w jakim pozycja jednostki w jednym z tych obszarów przekłada się na pozostałe, jest kształtowany przez kulturę. W centrum tych hierarchii znajdują się osoby sprawujące władzę w różnych instytucjach (takie jak osoby pełniące role menadżerskie, sędziowskie, nauczycielskie czy policyjne), za pośrednictwem których hierarchia jest bezpośrednio realizowana w życiu codziennym. Niniejsza rozprawa bada, jak w różnych kulturach ludzie postrzegają osoby sprawujące władzę: czy są postrzegane jako zorientowane na siebie (wykorzystujące swoją pozycję jako okazję do osiągnięcia osobistych korzyści) czy zorientowane na innych (biorące odpowiedzialność za tych, nad którymi sprawują władzę). Rozprawa opiera się na trzech pierwszo-autorskich publikacjach.

Pierwsza publikacja bada relację między spostrzeganiem osób sprawujących władzę a preferencjami dotyczącymi rozwoju społecznego w Polsce, Stanach Zjednoczonych i Hongkongu (n=1 281). Postrzeganie osób sprawujących władzę jako zorientowanych na siebie wiązało się z silniejszym poparciem dla celów egalitarnych, takich jak równość płci, edukacja, prawa człowieka czy redukcja ubóstwa, natomiast postrzeganie ich jako zorientowanych na innych wiązało się z poparciem dla celów tradycyjnych, takich jak religia, siła militarna czy szacunek dla autorytetów. Wyniki sugerują, że odpowiedzialne sprawowanie władzy może być związane z legitymizowaniem istniejących hierarchii i osłabianiem presji społecznej na egalitarne zmiany.

Druga publikacja bada związek między postrzeganiem osób sprawujących władzę jako wpływowych a spostrzeganiem ich jako mających wysoki status społeczny ($N_{\text{próby}}$=77 z N_{kraje}=70, n=18 096). Związek między spostrzeganą władzą a statusem społecznym był dodatni dla całej próby łącznie, ale nieobecny w krajach zachodnich i postsowieckich, a silniejszy w Azji Konfucjańskiej, Ameryce Łacińskiej, na Karaibach oraz w Afryce

Subsaharyjskiej. Postrzegana orientacja na innych wzmacniała ten związek; orientacja na siebie go osłabiała. Na poziomie kulturowym relacja ta była silniejsza w kulturach charakteryzujących się harmonijnym modelem „ja" (*self-expression vs. harmony cultural model of selfhood*), wysokim zakorzenieniem (*embeddedness*) i wysoką ciasnością kulturową (*cultural tightness*). Wyniki sugerują, że konceptualne rozdzielenie władzy oraz statusu może być specyficzne dla zachodnich oraz postsowieckich regionów zamiast być uniwersalne kulturowo.

Trzecia publikacja bada, jak pozycja społeczno-ekonomiczna kształtuje sposób, w jaki spostrzegane są osoby sprawujące władzę, wykorzystując jakość rządzenia jako moderator. W dwóch badaniach, jednym opartym na zbiorze danych z 70 kultur z poprzedniej publikacji oraz drugim stanowiącym konceptualną replikację na niezależnym zbiorze danych ($N_{\text{próby}}$ = 80 z N_{kraje}=160, n=17 200), wyższy status socjoekonomiczny wiązał się z postrzeganiem osób sprawujących władzę jako mniej zorientowanych na siebie i bardziej zorientowanych na innych. Sceptycyzm wobec osób sprawujących władzę był jednak powszechny w całym przekroju socjoekonomicznym. Indeks Percepcji Korupcji (*Corruption Perception Index*) był moderatorem tej relacji. W społeczeństwach o niskim poziomie korupcji ujemny związek między statusem socjoekonomicznym a spostrzeganiem osób sprawujących władzę jako zorientowanych na siebie był najsilniejszy. Wyniki sugerują, że pozytywne spostrzeganie władzy może być zarówno przywilejem pozycji socjoekonomicznej, jak i przywilejem życia w dobrze zarządzanym społeczeństwie.

Wspólnie trzy publikacje sugerują, że spostrzeganie osób sprawujących władzę jest systematycznie powiązane (1) z poglądami na temat hierarchii społecznej, (2) z preferencjami dotyczącymi zmian społecznych oraz (3) z pozycją socjoekonomiczną, (4) a siła tych powiązań zależy od kontekstu kulturowego. Pozornie podobne hierarchie mogą mieć różne znaczenia w różnych społeczeństwach, a osoby sprawujące władzę – w jednym społeczeństwie postrzegane jako odpowiedzialne, w innym postrzegane jako oportunistyczne – okazują się wskaźnikiem kulturowych i ekonomicznych fundamentów hierarchii w danym społeczeństwie.

Słowa kluczowe: *hierarchia społeczna, kultura, osoby sprawujące władzę, orientacja na siebie, orientacja na innych*

General Introduction

The term "roundtable" carries a specific meaning among members of Western cultures. According to the Arthurian tradition, the King commanded its creation to thwart fights between his barons over hierarchy and status. The table has no head, which emphasizes that anyone who sits at it is considered equal. A similar table carries reversed symbolism on the other side of the globe, in Shandong, a Chinese province. While the table remains round, each seat is designated for a person with a specific place in the social hierarchy (Bell & Pei, 2022). However, high social power that grants a prominent place at the table comes with the financial responsibility of paying for — and the social responsibility of caring for — the other guests. In the West, the round shape signals equality; in Shandong, it illustrates a web of obligations that accompanies social hierarchy.

What this contrast reveals goes beyond table manners. Social hierarchy is not simply a question of who sits where, or whether a society is equal or unequal — it is also a question of what power means to those who hold it, and to those who are subject to it (Tsai & Markus, 2003; Torelli & Shavitt, 2020; Gobel & Miyamoto, 2024). The stakes are far from abstract. In Japan, higher subjective social rank is associated with poorer health outcomes — the reverse of what is found in the United States (Park et al., 2024). American managers sleep better and report less stress than their subordinates; Japanese managers tend to sleep less and stress more (Miyamoto, 2024). The same rung on the ladder can feel like a privilege of opportunity or a burden of responsibility, depending on where in the world that ladder stands.

Yet psychology has been slow to grasp this variability, limited by two biases. The first is cultural. Most theories of power, status, and social class have been built within WEIRD societies (Henrich, 2020; Krys et al., 2024) — and these societies happen to hold a particularly uneasy view of ranking human beings. The result is a literature rich in studies of inequality, but sparse on its sibling phenomenon: hierarchy itself, with all the meanings and obligations that different cultures attach to it (Bell & Pei, 2022). The second bias concerns whose perspective the field has privileged. Psychological research has gravitated toward the powerful — how they construe their own authority (Sassenberg et al., 2014; Fousiani & Wisse, 2022; Scholl et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024), how they wield it (Maner & Mead, 2010; Kraus & Torrez, 2020), how it transforms them (Galinsky et al., 2008; Lammers et al., 2010; Inesi et al., 2012; Foulk et al., 2020) — while paying comparatively less attention to those on the receiving end, e.g., people lower in power, status, or wealth (Schaerer et al., 2018).

This dissertation considers both biases at once. First, it revisits an assumption often found in Western theorizing: that social hierarchy carries a relatively stable psychological

meaning, and that socioeconomic development tends to diminish its cultural relevance (see Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004). Second, it shifts the analytic focus toward how ordinary people across the world perceive those who hold position-based power over them. This perspective is valuable for understanding the differences in how hierarchy is legitimized, resisted, and experienced across cultures.

The central axis of this investigation is the question of how people perceive those who hold position-based power in their societies — whether as agents pursuing private gain, or as figures bound by obligation and responsibility to others. The investigation is organized around the following research questions:

1. How are perceptions of powerholders related to preferences for social change?
2. How do these perceptions structure the relationship between power and status?
3. How is one's place in the socioeconomic hierarchy related to views of powerholders?

This dissertation addresses these questions based on three cross-cultural studies spanning dozens of cultures and tens of thousands of participants. It employs a multi-level framework, with individual perceptions at its core, and the cultural values and practices, economic development, and political governance as contextual layers shaping how those perceptions form.

Social Hierarchy as a Multidimensional Phenomenon

All complex societies involve social hierarchy, even those committed to egalitarian values (Bruun et al., 2011; Selling & Svallfors, 2019). While outright discrimination based on innate worth has largely been delegitimized, societies still allow for unequal relations between individuals, especially in workplaces and institutions (Hofstede, 2001). At the same time, social hierarchies are not static arrangements (Redhead & Power, 2022) — they vary by context and by the basis on which people are ranked. The multidimensionality of social hierarchy traces back to Max Weber's model of social stratification (Weber, 1978), which posits parallel, intertwined hierarchies of power (the capacity to impose one's will onto others), status (the prominence and respect a person receives), and social class (access to both tangible and intangible resources, such as financial wealth or education). These three hierarchies are related, but they are not interchangeable. A person standing high on one may stand considerably lower on another — and the extent to which a position on one ladder transfers to a position on the others is itself culturally mandated. One may consider two CEOs in the same industry: Furukawa Shuntaro, the CEO of Nintendo, earns roughly 25–30 times

more than an average employee of his Japanese company. Andrew Wilson, the CEO of the American company Electronic Arts, earns around 260 times more than his average employee. By the metric of income stratification, the American firm is far more hierarchical. Yet Nintendo employees address Furukawa using honorific language and bow to him in person, while Electronic Arts employees refer to their CEO simply as *Andrew*. Which company is more hierarchical? The answer depends on which dimension one chooses to highlight. Socioeconomic status seems the most tangible, power can be wielded unilaterally, and status is inherently subjective and lies in the eyes of those who grant it (Blader & Chen, 2014; Van Vugt et al., 2008). This is consequential, because people lower in a hierarchy respond differently to those above them depending on which dimension is involved (Fousiani & van Prooijen, 2022). Treating social hierarchy as a phenomenon composed of related but distinct dimensions is therefore essential for understanding how it organizes human functioning. The general aim of this dissertation is to approach social hierarchy from multiple angles at once, and examine how its dimensions relate to one another depending on the cultural environment in which they operate.

Self- or Other-Oriented Powerholders as Key Actors of Social Hierarchy

Social hierarchy rests on real differences between individuals, but those differences are context-specific: a person typically occupies a high or low position within given domains of life (Anderson et al., 2012). Teachers and professors hold authority over students, managers over employees, and judges and police officers within the judiciary system, though outside those roles, they may not be considered authorities. Nevertheless, institutional powerholders are the agents through whom social hierarchy is most directly enacted in everyday life. Political powerholders fall outside this scope, as perceptions of them are often entangled with partisan stances, events of the moment, and country-specific political discourse (Taber & Lodge, 2006; Von Sikorski, 2018), which limit cross-cultural comparability.

The theoretical approach to powerholders is integrated from several concepts related to how power is understood. The first one, power construals (Sassenberg et al., 2014; Scholl et al., 2018; Scholl et al., 2023) describe the subjective appraisals of one's power as either an *opportunity* to pursue goals or a *responsibility* to care for others (Sassenberg et al., 2014). These construals have tangible consequences for behavior and cognitive processes: construing power as responsibility reduces self-interest and risk taking and increases openness to advice from others (De Wit et al., 2017), and increases trust and respect toward people lower in hierarchy (Fousiani & Wisse, 2022). The second one is the concept of *individualized* versus

socialized power (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010), which describe the drive to use power either for self-centered goals like gaining status and influence or the drive to use power for prosocial goals and helping others (Torelli & Shavitt, 2020). The effects of these concepts are culture-dependent — for example, wellbeing is improved by wielding socialized power in Korea, but individualized power in the United States (Park & Suh, 2018). Additionally, in some people with vertical-individualistic orientations (see Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), individualized power increases stereotypical processing (Torelli & Shavitt, 2011). The third one consists of lay theories of power (ten Brinke & Keltner, 2022), which describe a *coercive* theory, which holds that power is gained and maintained through manipulation, force, and strategic deception, and a *collaborative* theory, which holds that power is granted to those who serve the common good. Belmi and Laurin (2016) found that lower-class individuals report less desire for power, in part because they held a more coercive lay theory of power. Hull et al. (2022) showed that coercive lay theorists avoid power because they view it as inherently negative, whereas collaborative lay theorists avoid it out of responsibility aversion.

While each of the aforementioned frameworks approaches power from a different perspective, they seem to capture a similar underlying idea — that power may be perceived as either self-oriented (a means of exploiting opportunities to advance personal goals, gain status, and exert influence) or other-oriented (a means of fulfilling responsibilities to care for others and serve the common good). The present work draws on this shared distinction to study how institutional powerholders are perceived along this self- versus other-oriented dimension, and how those perceptions vary across cultural contexts.

Culture and the Meanings of Social Hierarchy

The degree to which differences in power between individuals are accepted and expected is one of the fundamental dimensions of culture (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 2008). In hierarchical societies, unequal interactions are embedded in everyday life, e.g., in the obligatory use of honorifics when addressing elders or supervisors in Japan and Korea (Brown, 2011; Yoon, 2004), or in the choice between "high" and "low" language depending on the person's social position in Indonesia (Boski, 2022). These patterns are transmitted through socialization in families and schools. For example, in countries such as China and Malaysia, children learn to defer to teachers and senior kin as a matter of moral expectation (Hofstede, 1986). On the other hand, egalitarian cultures occupy the second end of the spectrum: they tend to fight inequality when possible and endorse social interactions based on equality: in Sweden and the Netherlands, informal address and direct, unembellished speech are the default across age and rank (Fremer, 2023; Nickerson & Bargiela-Chiappini, 1996),

and Finnish schools institutionalize student participation in decisions (Johnson, 2007) that in other cultures are usually reserved for adults.

At the national level, indicators of prevalence of social hierarchy — most prominently Power Distance (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004) — correlate negatively with economic development (Tang & Koveos, 2008), income equality (Hofstede, 2001), and subjective well-being (Ye et al., 2015), and positively with autocratic leadership (Van de Vliert, 2006), tolerance and prevalence of corruption (Husted, 1999), and human rights violations (Cohen et al., 1996). Taken together, the literature presents a rather negative view of steep hierarchies, leading some scholars to argue that social hierarchy is largely a residue of material scarcity, and tends to lose importance when societies get wealthier (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004). This argument is challenged, however, by the case of Confucian Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan), which modernized and developed economically while remaining more hierarchical than Western cultures (Sugihara, 2004; Bomhoff & Gu, 2012). This suggests that the steepness of social hierarchies in a society is only part of the picture shaped by the culturally specific meanings attached to the hierarchies of power, status, and social class.

Cultural psychologists developed frameworks to describe the culturally divergent meanings of social hierarchy. Tsai (2006) contrasts two cultural models of interpersonal relationships: an *equality model*, rooted in European and American individualism and psychological independence, which associates hierarchy with the abuse of power and injustice, and a *propriety model*, rooted in Confucian traditions, which treats hierarchy as a natural feature of relationships and links it to role fulfillment, benevolence, and respect. In the propriety model, knowing one's place in the hierarchical network constitutes mature personhood, and authority is supported through family norms. Insights from studies on socioeconomic status show its culturally shaped effects — while in most of the world higher socioeconomic status correlates with self-orientation, in Confucian Asia it also correlates with other-orientation (Miyamoto et al., 2018). Finally, Gobel and Miyamoto (2024) proposed the social hierarchy model, in which rank-related processes operate at three interrelated levels — collective, interpersonal, and individual — and differ systematically between Western and Confucian contexts. In Western contexts, rank is conferred on the basis of competence, high-ranking individuals express emotions openly and interact with subordinates through authenticity, and are characterized by agency, self-orientation, and analytic cognition. In Confucian contexts, rank is conferred on the basis of competence and warmth, high-ranking individuals exhibit emotional restraint and dominance toward subordinates, and combine agency and self-orientation with other-orientation and holistic cognition. The central task of

high rank is the affirmation of individual freedom in Western contexts and the fulfillment of mutual obligations in Confucian contexts.

However, the proposed models are yet to receive robust cross-cultural support. Additionally, while cross-cultural researchers aim to increase the generalizability of psychology, they tend to focus disproportionately on the comparisons between Western and Confucian societies (Krys et al., 2024). Arguably the theoretical foundations of this investigation are also impacted by this problem. It is crucial, therefore, to involve other underrepresented cultural regions in the research on social hierarchy.

The Present Investigation

Three first-authored publications form the empirical core of the thesis. The first develops the construct of powerholder construals — perceptions of authorities as self- or other-oriented — and tests its relation to preferences for social change in three culturally contrasting samples. The second study investigates 77 samples from 70 cultures, examining the link between power and social status, with powerholder construals and cultural values as moderators. The third study involves 160 samples from 80 cultures and asks whether one's position within the socioeconomic hierarchy shapes how the powerholders are perceived, with national governance quality as a moderator. Taken together, the three publications present powerholder perceptions as a culturally variable construct related to individual standing in the hierarchy, to perceptions about social status and judgments about societal change.

Publication 1. Wasiel, A., Yeung, V. W. L., & Krys, K. (2025). Responsible powerholders may preserve the status quo? A three cultures study into the relation between powerholder construals and societal development expectations. *BMC psychology*, *13*(1), 236. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02534-1

The first publication introduces the concept of *powerholder construals*, defined as perceptions of how people in positions of institutional power, such as managers, judges, officials, or teachers, exercise that power in one's society. Powerholders can be perceived as using their position to pursue private gains, referred to as the *opportunity* powerholder construal (perceived self-orientation), or as taking responsibility for the wellbeing of those below them, referred to as the *responsibility* powerholder construal (perceived other-orientation). These perceptions are examined in relation to societal development aims, which describe people's ideal trajectories of social change (Krys et al., 2022). *Social Modernization* aims center on improving quality of life and fostering egalitarian relations, and include gender equality, education, human rights, freedom, democracy, and the reduction of poverty.

Conventional aims center on preserving the existing social order and its hierarchical structure, and include traditional values, religion, respect for authority, military strength, and demographic growth.

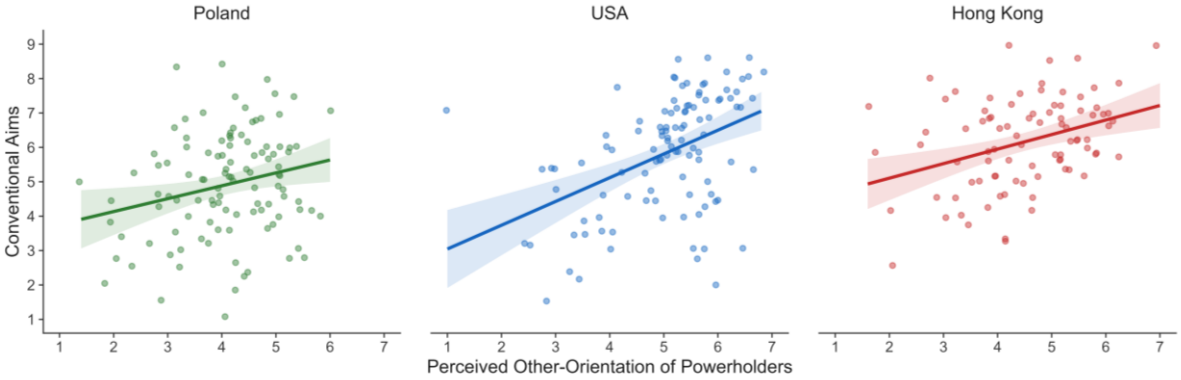
The publication critically examines the notion that economic development decreases the degree to which societies keep social hierarchies (see Bernstein, 1971; Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004) by proposing that such a process depends on the culturally shaped way power is exercised in a given society. From this premise, two competing theoretical lines are developed. The first holds that perceiving powerholders as opportunistic generates a sense of unjust resource distribution and undermines the legitimacy of the hierarchy, which in turn intensifies the desire for aims that flatten the social structure and improve living conditions for all (*Social Modernization*). Conversely, perceiving powerholders as responsible legitimizes existing hierarchies, reduces pressure for egalitarian change, and sustains a preference for *Conventional aims* that preserve the status quo. The proposed illustration of such an effect comes from Confucian Asia, which combines steep hierarchies with strong indicators of societal development. The second line, grounded in relative deprivation and populism research, hypothesizes the opposite. Perceiving powerholders as opportunistic generates unfavorable upward comparisons and fuels populist, reactionary responses oriented toward traditional values, religion, and military strength. Since research on perceptions of powerholder and societal development are scarce, it has been organized as exploratory research.

Presentation of the studies and results

Study 1 was a questionnaire-based correlational study conducted on online samples from three cultures selected for cultural and political contrast: the United States (n = 107), Poland (n = 109), and Hong Kong (n = 87). Participants rated a set of societal development aims and completed a ten-item scale measuring *opportunity* and *responsibility* powerholder construals. Multiple regression analyses, controlling for age, gender, and student status, were run separately for *Modernization* and *Conventional* aims. *Opportunity* powerholder construal predicted greater endorsement of *Social Modernization* aims in the USA and Hong Kong, though not significantly in Poland. Responsibility construal predicted stronger endorsement of Conventional aims in all three cultures. This result is presented in Figure 1. The direction of effects was consistent across cultural contexts.

Figure 1

The link between Perceived Other-Orientation of Powerholders and Endorsement of Conventional Aims in Poland, USA, and Hong Kong.



Study 2 replicated and extended Study 1 on a US sample representative by age, gender, and ethnicity (n = 978), recruited online. The same constructs were measured, alongside short-form scales of *Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (RWA; Duckitt et al., 2010), which describes submission to established authorities, aggression toward outgroups, and adherence to traditional norms, and *Social Dominance Orientation* (SDO; Ho et al., 2015), which captures the preference for group-based hierarchy and the dominance of some groups over others. *Opportunity* powerholder construal correlated positively with *Social Modernization* and negatively with RWA and SDO. Responsibility powerholder construal showed the reverse pattern.

Summary and discussion

Across two studies and four samples, the data offered consistent support for the first theoretical line. Perceiving powerholders as exploiting opportunities is tied to preferences for *Social Modernization*, while perceiving them as fulfilling responsibilities is related to preferences for *Conventional* aims. This pattern suggests that the responsible exercise of power may be connected to legitimizing existing hierarchies and reducing pressure for egalitarian change. Such a psychological mechanism is potentially relevant to the Confucian developmental trajectory, in which steep hierarchies and high developmental outcomes coexist. The findings suggest that the Western equation of progress with the reduction of hierarchy may not be the only viable model. Where powerholders are construed as responsible guardians, *Conventional* aims may retain legitimacy alongside material improvement.

Publication 2. Wasiel, A., Górski, M. R., Bond, M. H., Yeung, V. W. L., Akaliyski, P., Akello, G., ... & Krys, K. (2025). Examining the connection between position-based power and social status across 70 cultures. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *64*(2), https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12871

The second publication focuses on the relationship between two facets of social hierarchy, namely position-based power and social status. Power is defined as the ability to control resources and outcomes for others by virtue of one's institutional position, while status is defined as the prominence and respect a person receives from those around them. Contemporary approaches treat power and social status as two separate phenomena (see Blader & Chen, 2014), yet their connection has been studied mostly within Western and Confucian contexts and has yet to receive broad cultural focus. The publication addresses this gap by testing the power-status link across a wide range of cultural regions, and by examining its individual and cultural moderators. At the individual level, the perceived self-orientation (*opportunity* powerholder construal) and other-orientation (*responsibility* powerholder construal), drawn from the same theoretical framework as in the first publication, are proposed as moderators. The article hypothesizes that perceiving powerholders as other-oriented should strengthen the link between power and status, while perceiving them as self-oriented should weaken it. At the cultural level, four dimensions are considered as moderators. Power Distance (Hofstede, 2001) captures the cultural acceptance of unequal relations. The Self-Expression versus Harmony cultural model of selfhood (Vignoles et al., 2016) captures whether the culture rewards open expression regardless of possible conflicts, or instead prioritizes maintaining relational balance. Embeddedness (Schwartz, 2009) captures the degree to which the person is treated as part of a collective rather than an autonomous unit. Cultural Tightness (Gelfand et al., 2011) captures the strength of social norms and the tolerance for deviance. The publication hypothesizes that the link between power and status should be stronger in cultures that uphold the status quo through the acceptance of social hierarchy, harmony, embeddedness, and tight norms.

Presentation of the study and results

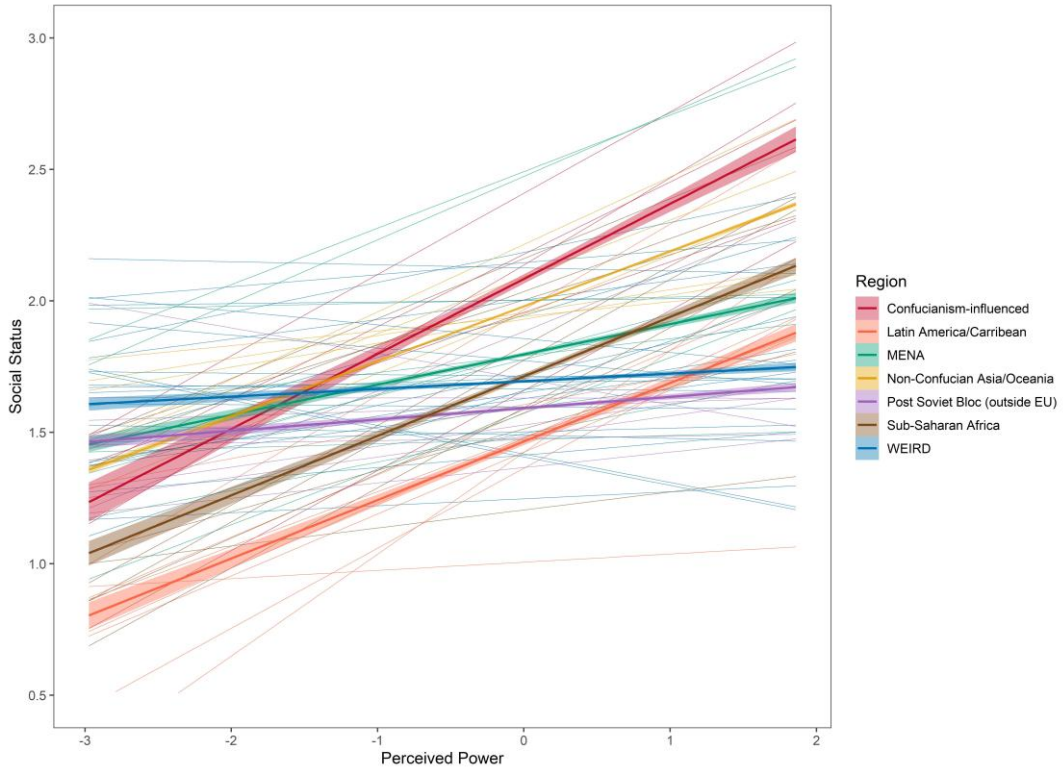
The study was a cross-cultural, questionnaire-based correlational investigation conducted on a cooperatively collected dataset of n = 18,096 participants from 70 cultures, spanning all major cultural regions. Perceived power, perceived social status, and the perceived self- and other-orientation of powerholders were measured with scales shortened for the purpose of large-scale cross-cultural distribution. Power Distance and Self-Expression

versus Harmony were measured within the study, while Embeddedness and Cultural Tightness were imported from external datasets. The data were analyzed using multilevel modeling, with individuals nested within cultures, and with stepwise inclusion of individual-level and culture-level predictors and cross-level interactions.

The results showed substantial cultural variability in the power-status link. The relationship was significantly positive on average, but the effect was absent in the WEIRD and Post-Soviet regions, and strongest in Confucian Asia, Latin America/Caribbean, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The results are presented on Figure 2. Both individual-level moderators behaved as predicted. Perceiving powerholders as other-oriented amplified the link between perceived power and status, while perceiving them as self-oriented attenuated it. Even at high levels of self-orientation, however, perceived power remained a positive predictor of status. At the cultural level, the link between power and status was stronger in cultures characterized by Harmony rather than Self-Expression, by high Embeddedness, and by high Cultural Tightness. Contrary to expectations, Power Distance showed a negative main effect on the social status of powerholders, and did not moderate significantly the power-status link.

Figure 2

The link between Perceived Power and Social Status across Cultures and Cultural Regions.



Note. The plot represents the simple slopes for cultures and cultural regions of the effect of perceived power on perceived social status of powerholders.

Summary and discussion

While most psychological theorizing on power, status, and hierarchy has been developed within Western samples (Henrich, 2020; Krys et al., 2024; Uskul et al., 2024), the findings suggest that the conceptual separation of power and status, foundational to much of that work (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Blader & Chen, 2014), is culturally specific rather than universal. In WEIRD and Post-Soviet cultures, perceived power did not significantly predict conferred status. In the rest of the world, the two were positively linked. For most cultures, perceiving someone as powerful and perceiving them as respected seem to be two aspects of the same evaluation rather than orthogonal judgments.

Perceptions of powerholders were robust moderators of the power-status link. Where powerholders are seen as acting in the interest of others, power and status converge; where they are seen as acting for themselves, this effect is weaker. These results can be explained by the functional theories of status conferral (see Berger et al., 1974), which posit that status is attained through exhibiting behaviors adaptive to the group. A powerful, yet other-oriented individual has both the inclination and ability to be a useful group member. At the cultural level, the link between power and social status was stronger in harmonious, embedded, and tight cultures, where shared norms sustain the existing social order and the withdrawal of respect is socially costly. Taken together, these findings present a culturally diverse relationship between different facets of social hierarchy.

Publication 3. Wasiel, A., Górski, M. R., Yeung, V. W. L., Sánchez-Rodríguez, A., Joshanloo, M., … & Krys, K. (2026) Are Positive Views of Authority a Privilege? Socioeconomic Status and Perceptions of Powerholders Across 80 Cultures. osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/nm9sb_v1

The third publication examines whether subjective socioeconomic status (SES) shapes how individuals perceive the motives of institutional powerholders, and whether national governance quality moderates this relationship. SES is operationalized as a composite of education, parental education, perceived household budget comfort, and subjective social rank. Perceptions of powerholders are conceptualized along the same self- versus other-orientation dimension used in the previous publications. The publication proposes that one's SES systematically shapes the lens through which powerholders are evaluated. Four theoretical frameworks are integrated to derive predictions. First, studies on System Justification (Jost & Banaji, 1994) show that those better situated within the existing system tend to view the system as more legitimate, which may translate to more other-oriented

perceptions of powerholders. Second, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) holds that higher-SES individuals may be socially closer to those in authority, may perceive them as ingroup members, and may therefore attribute more benevolent motives. Third, relative deprivation research (Runciman, 1966) holds that lower-SES individuals more often experience unfavorable upward comparisons with proximate powerholders, generating grievance and negative attributions toward authority. Finally, procedural justice research (Tyler, 2006) holds that lower-SES individuals consistently report less fair treatment by authorities, which over time may form stable expectations of powerholders as self-oriented. Together, these frameworks converge on the prediction that higher SES should be associated with viewing powerholders as less self-oriented and more other-oriented across cultures. At the cultural level, the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) and the Rule of Law Index (RLI) are proposed as governance moderators, capturing the prevalence of self-serving conduct and the strength of institutional accountability, respectively. The direction of moderation is theoretically ambiguous: stronger governance could shrink the differences between groups by making other-oriented attributions universally plausible. Alternatively, it could reinforce system justification among high-SES individuals without reducing relative deprivation for low-SES individuals, widening the differences in perceptions. The study aimed to resolve this ambiguity.

Presentation of the studies and results

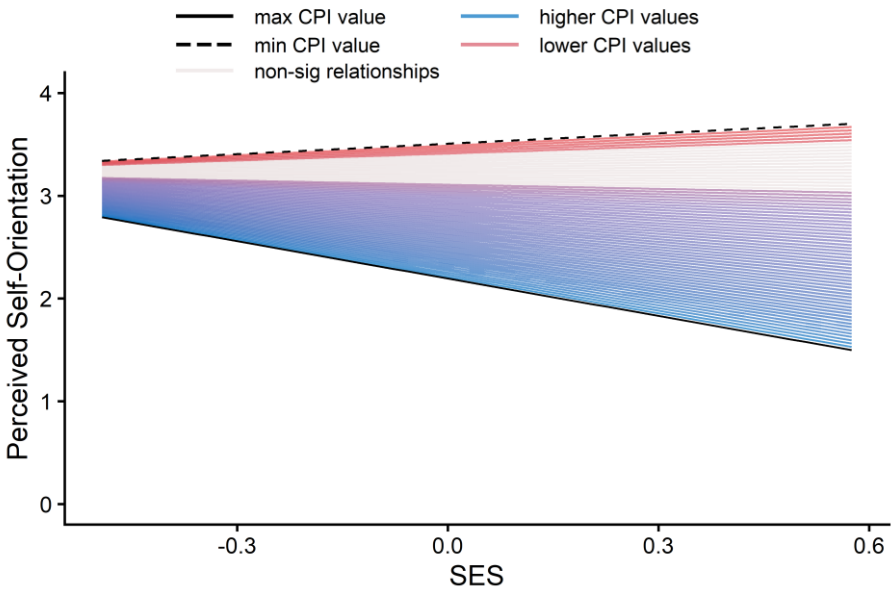
Study 1 was a large-scale cross-cultural analysis employing the same dataset as the second publication. SES was measured as a composite index, and the perceived self- and other-orientation of powerholders were measured with the three-item scales developed by Wasiel et al. (2025). CPI and RLI were averaged across 2022 to 2024 to match the data collection period. The national-level moderators were tested in separate models due to their high covariance.

Across model specifications, higher SES was consistently associated with perceiving powerholders as less self-oriented and more other-oriented. At the cultural level, lower corruption and stronger rule of law predicted more favorable perceptions of powerholders on average. CPI significantly moderated the SES effect on perceived self-orientation. The negative association between SES and self-orientation was the strongest in less corrupt societies. The result is presented in Figure 3. A parallel pattern was found for RLI. After controlling for age and gender, the moderation effect remained robust for self-orientation but became non-significant for other-orientation, providing only partial support for the moderation hypothesis.

Study 2 served as a conceptual replication on an independent dataset of 62 cultures collected between late 2024 and early 2026. SES was operationalized identically. Perceived powerholder orientation was measured with a single-item semantic differential ranging from purely self-oriented to purely other-oriented, adapted for ease of cross-cultural administration. CPI and RLI were drawn from the 2024 indices. The analytic strategy followed Study 1. Higher SES was again associated with perceiving powerholders as more other-oriented (versus self-oriented), and CPI again moderated this effect. In low-corruption contexts, the SES effect was the strongest. RLI did not show a main effect on powerholder perceptions in Study 2 and did not moderate the SES link, indicating that corruption is the more robust governance moderator across both studies. A harmonized re-analysis confirmed that the SES-by-CPI interaction was similar across the two studies

Figure 3

The link between Socioeconomic Status and Perception of Powerholders as Self-Oriented on Different Levels of Corruption Perception Index.



Note. Each line represents a simple slope at a given level of CPI based on a multilevel model with cross-level interaction of CPI and SES.

Summary and discussion

Across both studies, socioeconomic status was systematically related to how people perceive institutional powerholders. Higher-SES individuals consistently attributed less self-orientation and more other-orientation to authorities than lower-SES individuals. The effect was, however, modest in size, and overall skepticism toward powerholders was widespread

across the socioeconomic spectrum. Socioeconomic position seems to soften doubts about authority rather than eliminate them. Viewing powerholders as serving the common good appears to be both a privilege of socioeconomic position and a privilege of living in a well-governed society. At the same time, in low-corruption contexts, SES differences were most visible. When the system is more trustworthy, identifying with authorities is more plausible when those authorities are not openly self-oriented. At the same time, low corruption does not negate economic differences, meaning low-SES individuals still experience relative deprivation, which may translate to negative views about powerholders. Governance indicators were related to lower perception of self-orientation. People more easily stop seeing authorities as opportunistic than start seeing them as responsible, which suggests that signaling fairness alone may not be enough to build institutional trust and legitimacy in a society.

General Discussion

The central concept across all three publications is the perceived self- versus other-orientation of powerholders. The construct draws on power construals (Sassenberg et al., 2014), as well as cultural-psychological work suggesting that power carries different psychological meanings across societies (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010; Miyamoto et al., 2018; Gobel & Miyamoto, 2024). The Western literature has tended to frame power as opportunity for personal advancement, while Confucian-influenced literature has tended to frame it as responsibility and obligation toward those below (Tsai & Markus, 2006). The present work treats both framings as dimensions that can be measured in any cultural context. The theorizing is culturally specific, but the instrument is intentionally not. Rather than asking participants to endorse abstract values about how power should be exercised, the measure asks them to intersubjectively report how powerholders in their society behave, anchored in specific institutional roles such as managers, teachers, judges, and police officers. This grounding in everyday experience yielded a measure that allowed comparison across dozens of cultures sampled in the investigation.

Powerholder Perceptions Across Three Facets of Hierarchy

Each publication examines the interaction between perceptions of powerholders and a distinct facet of social hierarchy. Article 1 connects these perceptions to the kind of society people want to live in. People who perceive powerholders as self-oriented prefer development trajectories that flatten the hierarchy and improve living conditions for all. People who perceive powerholders as other-oriented prefer trajectories that preserve the existing social order. The way power is exercised, then, may be related to the psychological legitimacy of

hierarchy as such. Article 2 uses the perceived self- and other-orientation of powerholders to explain the link between power and social status. The Western literature treats these as conceptually distinct phenomena, and the data confirm that this distinctness holds in WEIRD and Post-Soviet contexts. However, the conceptual separation of power and status, often presented as universal, is itself culturally specific. In the rest of the world power and status are positively linked, and perceived other-orientation is a robust driver of that link. Where powerholders are seen as serving others, holding power and being respected covary. Where they are seen as serving themselves, the two come apart. Article 3 shows that perceptions of powerholders are themselves stratified by socioeconomic status. Higher-SES individuals view powerholders more favorably across cultures, and this gap is widest in well-governed societies and narrowest where corruption is pervasive. Class shapes how authority is perceived, and the institutional environment determines how visible class-based differences become.

The Role of Culture and Governance Quality

A consistent finding across the publications is that context matters, but not in the form of a single moderating dimension. Article 2 identified the harmonious cultural model of selfhood (Vignoles et al., 2016), Embeddedness (Schwartz, 2009) and Cultural Tightness (Gelfand et al., 2011) as cultural conditions that strengthen the link between power and status. Article 3 identified corruption as the most reliable indicator shaping the link between social class and perceptions of powerholders. What unites these findings is that context may not always change the direction of the basic relationships, but it changes their magnitude and, in some cases, whether they are detectable at all. The power-status link is positive on average but absent in WEIRD and Post-Soviet regions. The SES-perception link is positive on average but flat where corruption is high. Cross-cultural variation in the meanings of social hierarchy is therefore not best modeled as a moderation by a single cultural dimension. It is better modeled as a layered system in which individual perceptions, cultural values and practices, and institutional governance jointly shape the meanings of social hierarchy.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations apply across the three publications. First, the designs are correlational; therefore, the causal direction between perceptions of powerholders and the variables they are related to cannot be established with these data. The reverse direction is often plausible as well. For example, people who already prefer an egalitarian society may be predisposed to perceive powerholders as opportunistic or self-oriented, while those who endorse hierarchy may be predisposed to perceive them as responsible or other-oriented (e.g.,

due to confirmation bias — people who envision their ideal society as egalitarian may pay closer attention to instances of powerholder abuse, whereas those who envision their ideal society as traditional and hierarchical may pay more attention to instances of authority being exercised positively). Future studies should develop experimental designs to capture the direction of these relationships, for example, by priming participants to think of powerholders as self- or other-oriented and measuring shifts in preferences for egalitarianism or hierarchy.

The questionnaire type of data allows for feasible cross-cultural data collection, yet it presents limitations of mundane realism and applicability. Asking participants to rate statements about powerholders in their society may capture something different from how those perceptions operate in daily encounters with a specific manager, teacher, or official. Future studies could complement self-report with behavioral and more ecologically grounded measures, for example, by examining how perceptions of powerholders predict actual compliance with rules or engagement with public institutions. An interesting avenue would be the experience-sampling approach that tracks perceptions in response to specific interactions with authorities. This would also help bridge the gap between generalized attitudes and real-life experience.

The construct of powerholders was treated broadly across all three publications, which may obscure domain-specific variation in how judges, teachers, or managers are perceived. People likely hold somewhat different mental models of authority in different institutional domains. Future studies should disaggregate the category and test whether the patterns documented here hold across domains, or whether perceptions of, for instance, the police carry different psychological weight than perceptions of managers. For example, instead of asking about perceived power and its relation to social status in general, future studies could sample organizations from different cultural contexts and ask employees about specific managers, rating them on power and respect. This would provide more grounded evidence of the cultural differences in the link of these dimensions of hierarchy.

Some of the theoretical mechanisms proposed in the articles were not measured directly and remain to be tested. For example, the third article drew on system justification, social identity, relative deprivation, and procedural justice as parallel pathways linking SES to perceptions of authority. Future studies should include explicit indicators of these processes and test them as mediators. This would clarify which pathways carry the observed effects, whether they operate independently or in combination, and whether their relative weight varies systematically across cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

While the scope of the investigation involves all major cultural regions, the theorizing is mostly based on the comparison just between Western and Confucian culture, which is a common shortcoming of cross-cultural research (Krys et al., 2024). It is possible that other regions organize the perceptions of hierarchy around different dimensions. Additionally, the sources of egalitarianism may also be culturally specific. For example, the divergence between power and status in Western Europe may come from an emphasis on nonconformity and egalitarianism, rooted in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (see Henrich, 2020; Rio et al., 2022), while the same effect in Post-Soviet societies can be the effect of external historical oppression and challenging democratic transitions that lower trust and respect for authority figures, potentially leading to their perception as corrupt and exploitative (Cichocka & Jost, 2014; Cole & Cohn, 2016). Future studies could develop more culturally sensitive frameworks to understand attitudes toward social hierarchy.

Conclusion

What the three investigations collectively suggest, beyond any single finding, is that perceptions of powerholders may be a productive starting point for the psychology of social hierarchy. Power Distance, income inequality, and similar variables describe what shape the hierarchy takes. They are less informative about what hierarchy means to the people inside it, and the present data indicate that these meanings vary in ways that old indicators usually do not capture. The relationship between hierarchy and the desire to flatten it depends on how power is perceived, as shown in Article 1. The relationship between holding power and being respected depends on how powerholders are perceived, as shown in Article 2. Additionally, the relationship between one's social class and one's view of the powerholders depends on whether the surrounding institutions make favorable perceptions credible, as shown in Article 3. What it does suggest is that a psychology of hierarchy built primarily on how steep a hierarchy is, will continue to miss the variation that perceptions of powerholders help explain. Treating these perceptions as objects of cross-cultural psychological research opens an empirical pathway into questions about legitimacy, social change, and a culturally sensitive approach to social hierarchy that the field has yet to systematically develop.

References

Anderson, C., Kraus, M. W., Galinsky, A. D., & Keltner, D. (2012). The local-ladder effect: Social status and subjective well-being. *Psychological Science*, 23(7), 764-771.

Bell, D. A., & Pei, W. (2022). Just hierarchy: Why social hierarchies matter in China and the rest of the world. Princeton University Press

Belmi, P., & Laurin, K. (2016). Who wants to get to the top? Class and lay theories about power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *111*(4), 505.

Berger, J., Cohen, B. P., & Zelditch Jr, M. (1972). Status characteristics and social interaction. *American Sociological Review*, 241-255.

Bernstein, H. (1971). Modernization theory and the sociological study of development. *The Journal of Development Studies*, *7*(2), 141-160.

Blader, S. L., & Chen, Y. R. (2014). What's in a name? Status, power, and other forms of social hierarchy. In *The psychology of social status* (pp. 71-95). New York, NY: Springer New York.

Bomhoff, E. J., & Gu, M. M. L. (2012). East Asia remains different: A comment on the index of "self-expression values," by Inglehart and Welzel. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *43*(3), 373-383.

Boski, P. (2022). Kulturowe ramy zachowań społecznych [Social behavior in cultural framework-in Polish].

Brown, L. (2011). Korean honorifics and 'revealed','ignored'and 'suppressed'aspects of Korean culture and politeness. In *Politeness across cultures* (pp. 106-127). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Bruun, M. H., Jakobsen, G. S., & Krøijer, S. (2011). Introduction: The concern for sociality—Practicing equality and hierarchy in Denmark. *Social Analysis*, *55*(2), 1-19.

Cichocka, A., & Jost, J. T. (2014). Stripped of illusions? Exploring system justification processes in capitalist and post-communist societies. *International Journal of Psychology*, *49*(1), 6-29.

Cohen, D. (1996). Law, social policy, and violence: The impact of regional cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *70*(5), 961.

Cole, L. M., & Cohn, E. S. (2016). Institutional trust across cultures: Its definitions, conceptualizations, and antecedents across Eastern and Western European Nations. In *Interdisciplinary perspectives on trust: Towards theoretical and methodological integration* (pp. 157-176). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

De Wit, F. R., Scheepers, D., Ellemers, N., Sassenberg, K., & Scholl, A. (2017). Whether power holders construe their power as responsibility or opportunity influences their tendency to take advice from others. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *38*(7), 923-949.

Duckitt, J., Bizumic, B., Krauss, S. W., & Heled, E. (2010). A tripartite approach to right-wing authoritarianism: The authoritarianism-conservatism-traditionalism model. *Political Psychology*, *31*(5), 685-715.

Foulk, T. A., Chighizola, N., & Chen, G. (2020). Power corrupts (or does it?): An examination of the boundary conditions of the antisocial effects of experienced power. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *14*(4), e12524.

Fousiani, K., & van Prooijen, J. W. (2022). Motives for punishing powerful vs. prestigious offenders: The moderating role of group identity. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *61*(3), 729-747.

Fousiani, K., & Wisse, B. (2022). Effects of leaders' power construal on leader-member exchange: the moderating role of competitive climate at work. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *29*(3), 306-324.

Fremer, M. (2023). The informalisation of address practice in Swedish in a historical perspective. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, *24*(1), 179-197.

Galinsky, A. D., Magee, J. C., Gruenfeld, D. H., Whitson, J. A., & Liljenquist, K. A. (2008). Power reduces the press of the situation: implications for creativity, conformity, and dissonance. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *95*(6), 1450.

Gelfand, M. J., Raver, J. L., Nishii, L., Leslie, L. M., Lun, J., Lim, B. C., ... & Yamaguchi, S. (2011). Differences between tight and loose cultures: A 33-nation study. *science*, *332*(6033), 1100-1104.

Gobel, M. S., & Miyamoto, Y. (2024). Self-and other-orientation in high rank: A cultural psychological approach to social hierarchy. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *28*(1), 54-80.

Henrich, J. P. (2020). *The WEIRDest people in the world: how the West became psychologically peculiar and particularly prosperous.* First edition. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Ho, A. K., Sidanius, J., Kteily, N., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Pratto, F., Henkel, K. E., ... & Stewart, A. L. (2015). The nature of social dominance orientation: Theorizing and measuring preferences for intergroup inequality using the new SDO_7 scale. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *109*(6), 1003.

Hofstede, G. (1980). Culture and organizations. *International studies of management & organization*, *10*(4), 15-41.

Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural differences in teaching and learning. *International Journal of intercultural relations*, *10*(3), 301-320.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work related values* (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.

House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (Eds.). (2004). *Culture, leadership, and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies*. Sage publications.

Hull, K. E., Overbeck, J. R., Smillie, L. D., & Howe, P. D. (2022). The P-word: Power aversion and responsibility aversion as explanations for the avoidance of power. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *52*(3), 184-196.

Husted, B. W. (1999). Wealth, culture, and corruption. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *30*(2), 339-359.

Inesi, M. E., Gruenfeld, D. H., & Galinsky, A. D. (2012). How power corrupts relationships: Cynical attributions for others' generous acts. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *48*(4), 795-803.

Inglehart, R., & Oyserman, D. (2004). Individualism, autonomy, self-expression. *Comparing cultures: Dimensions of culture in a comparative perspective*, 74-96.

Johnson, P. (2007). Educational System and School Democracy in Finland. *Solidarity for National Movements for Educational Welfare*, 131.

Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (1994). The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness. *British journal of social psychology*, *33*(1), 1-27.

Kraus, M. W., & Torrez, B. (2020). A psychology of power that is embedded in societal structures. *Current opinion in psychology*, *33*, 86-90.

Krys, K., Capaldi, C. A., Uchida, Y., Cantarero, K., Torres, C., Işık, İ., ... & Zelenski, J. M. (2022). Preference for modernization is universal, but expected modernization trajectories are culturally diversified: A nine-country study of folk theories of societal development. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, *25*(4), 731-746.

Krys, K., de Almeida, I., Wasiel, A., & Vignoles, V. L. (2025). WEIRD–Confucian comparisons: Ongoing cultural biases in psychology's evidence base and some recommendations for improving global representation. *American Psychologist*, *80*(2), 247.

Lammers, J., Stapel, D. A., & Galinsky, A. D. (2010). Power increases hypocrisy: Moralizing in reasoning, immorality in behavior. *Psychological science*, *21*(5), 737-744.

Magee, J. C., & Galinsky, A. D. (2008). 8 social hierarchy: The self-reinforcing nature of power and status. *Academy of Management annals*, *2*(1), 351-398.

Maner, J. K., & Mead, N. L. (2010). The essential tension between leadership and power: when leaders sacrifice group goals for the sake of self-interest. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *99*(3), 482.

Miyamoto, Y., Yoo, J., Levine, C. S., Park, J., Boylan, J. M., Sims, T., ... & Ryff, C. D. (2018). Culture and social hierarchy: Self-and other-oriented correlates of socioeconomic status across cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *115*(3), 427.

Miyamoto, Y. (2024). Culture and Socioeconomic Status: Implications for Individuals and Society. *Seminar of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JPSP), Brighton, United Kingdom.*

Nickerson, C., & Bargiela-Chiappini, F. (1996). At the intersection between grammar and pragmatics: A contrastive study of personal pronouns and other forms of address in Dutch and Italian. *Language Sciences*, *18*(3-4), 743-764.

Park, J., & Suh, E. M. (2018). Does power boost happiness? The relative importance of personal versus social power in two cultures. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, *21*(3), 212-218.

Park, J., Kitayama, S., & Miyamoto, Y. (2024). When high subjective social status becomes a burden: A Japan–US comparison of biological health markers. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *50*(7), 1098-1112.

Redhead, D., & Power, E. A. (2022). Social hierarchies and social networks in humans. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, *377*(1845), 20200440.

Rio, K., Kapferer, B., & Bertelsen, B. E. (2022). An introduction to egalitarian thought and dynamics. *Social Analysis*, *66*(3), 1-21.

Runciman, W. G. (1966). *Relative deprivation and social justice: A study of attitudes to social inequality in twentieth-century England*. University of California Press.

Sassenberg, K., Ellemers, N., Scheepers, D., & Scholl, A. (2014). Power corrupts" revisited: The role of construal of power as opportunity or responsibility. *Power, politics, and paranoia: Why people are suspicious of their leaders*, 73-87.

Schaerer, M., du Plessis, C., Yap, A. J., & Thau, S. (2018). Low power individuals in social power research: A quantitative review, theoretical framework, and empirical test. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *149*, 73-96.

Scholl, A., & Winter, K. (2024). Responsibility as the door opener toward trust: How powerholders construe and express their power impacts others' willingness to trust them. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *54*(9), 536-551.

Scholl, A., de Wit, F., Ellemers, N., Fetterman, A. K., Sassenberg, K., & Scheepers, D. (2018). The burden of power: Construing power as responsibility (rather than as opportunity)

alters threat-challenge responses. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *44*(7), 1024-1038.

Scholl, A., Sassenberg, K., Ellemers, N., Scheepers, D., & De Wit, F. (2023). Construal of power: Review and summary of measures and manipulations.

Schwartz, S. (2008). The 7 Schwartz cultural value orientation scores for 80 countries. http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3313.3040

Schwartz, S. H. (2009). Causes of culture: National differences in cultural embeddedness. In G. Aikaterini & K. Mylonas (Eds.), *Quod Erat Demonstrandum: From Herodotus' ethnographic journeys to cross-cultural research: Proceedings from the 18th International Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology.*

Selling, N., & Svallfors, S. (2019). The lure of power: Career paths and considerations among policy professionals in Sweden. *Politics & Policy, 47*(5), 984-1012.

Sugihara, K. (2004). The East Asian path of economic development: a long-term perspective. In *The Resurgence of East Asia* (pp. 92-137). Routledge.

Taber, C. S., & Lodge, M. (2006). Motivated skepticism in the evaluation of political beliefs. *American Journal of Political Science*, *50*(3), 755-769.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (2004). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In *Political psychology* (pp. 276-293). Psychology Press.

Tang, L., & Koveos, P. E. (2008). A framework to update Hofstede's cultural value indices: economic dynamics and institutional stability. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *39*(6), 1045-1063.

Ten Brinke, L., & Keltner, D. (2022). Theories of power: Perceived strategies for gaining and maintaining power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *122*(1), 53.

Torelli, C. J., & Shavitt, S. (2010). Culture and concepts of power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *99*(4), 703.

Torelli, C. J., & Shavitt, S. (2011). The impact of power on information processing depends on cultural orientation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *47*(5), 959-967.

Torelli, C. J., Leslie, L. M., To, C., & Kim, S. (2020). Power and status across cultures. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *33*, 12-17.

Triandis, H. C., & Gelfand, M. J. (1998). Converging measurement of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *74*(1), 118.

Tsai, A. Y. (2006). *Equality or propriety: A cultural models approach to understanding social hierarchy*. Stanford University.

Tyler, T. R. (2006). Restorative justice and procedural justice: Dealing with rule breaking. *Journal of Social Issues*, *62*(2), 307-326.

Uskul, A. K., Thalmayer, A. G., Bernardo, A. B., González, R., Kende, A., Laher, S., ... & Cooper, M. L. (2024). Challenges and opportunities for psychological research in the majority world. *Collabra: Psychology*, *10*(1), 123703.

Van de Vliert, E. (2006). Autocratic leadership around the globe: do climate and wealth drive leadership culture?. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *37*(1), 42-59.

Van Vugt, M., Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2008). Leadership, followership, and evolution: some lessons from the past. *American Psychologist*, *63*(3), 182.

Vignoles, V. L., Owe, E., Becker, M., Smith, P. B., Easterbrook, M. J., Brown, R., ... & Bond, M. H. (2016). Beyond the 'east–west'dichotomy: Global variation in cultural models of selfhood. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *145*(8), 966.

Von Sikorski, C. (2018). Political scandals as a democratic challenge| the aftermath of political scandals: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Communication*, *12*, 25-25.

Wang, X., Liu, J., & Li, H. (2024). Power shapes power construal: the mediating role of entitlement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *15*, 1459405.

Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology* (Vol. 2). University of California press.

Ye, D., Ng, Y. K., & Lian, Y. (2015). Culture and happiness. *Social Indicators Research*, *123*(2), 519-547.

Yoon, K. J. (2004). Not just words: Korean social models and the use of honorifics. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *1*(2).

BMC Psychology

RESEARCH Open Access

Responsible powerholders may preserve the status quo? A three cultures study into the relation between powerholder construals and societal development expectations

Powerholders and societal development

Arkadiusz Wasiel[1*], Victoria Wai Lan Yeung[2,3] and Kuba Krys[1]

Abstract

Background Societal development has traditionally been characterized as a progression from a steep to a relatively flat social hierarchy. However, this model fails to account for the societal progress observed in Confucian Asia. Over the last dozen years, Confucian Asia has gone through remarkable societal progress while remaining highly hierarchical. In this paper, we aim to address this puzzle from a psychological perspective by examining how individuals' perception of powerholders (as opportunists vs. responsibility holders) in their society is related to their preferences for societal development.

Methods We conducted two correlational studies to investigate this relationship. In Study 1, participants from three cultural regions, namely Hong Kong ($n = 87$), Poland ($n = 109$), and the USA ($n = 107$), were examined, while Study 2 was conducted using a representative sample from the United States ($n = 978$).

Results Our data indicated that perceiving the powerholders as exploiting *opportunities* is positively connected to a greater endorsement of social modernization aims (such as the improvement of quality of life and egalitarianism), whereas perceiving the powerholders as fulfilling *responsibilities* is positively connected to a stronger preference for *conventional* development aims (including military, traditions, and religious values).

Conclusions The findings suggest that the negative perception of powerholders is tied to desires for modernization, whereas the positive perception of powerholders is related to the hierarchical status quo. Our results shed light on the recent Confucian pathway of societal development, which has allowed for the preservation of a steep societal hierarchy throughout modernization. Further culturally sensitive investigations are needed to explore the psychological foundations of societal development processes.

Keywords Culture, Hierarchy , Power, Responsibility, Social change, Societal development

*Correspondence:
Arkadiusz Wasiel
awasiel@sd.psych.pan.pl
[1]Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Jaracza 1, Warsaw 00-378, Poland
[2]Department of Psychology, Lingnan University, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong, China
[3]Wofoo Joseph Lee Consulting and Counselling Psychology Research Center, Lingnan University, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong, China

© The Author(s) 2025. **Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License, which permits any non-commercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this licence to share adapted material derived from this article or parts of it. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

Imbalances in power, and ensuing hierarchies, can be found in many life domains. At school, there are teachers and professors, at work managers, in governance politicians, policeman and judges. The power associated with a specific position is the ability to exert influence over others. Depending on the individual, situation, or cultural context, that power can be utilized for personal gain or for the betterment of others[1, 2]. Drawing inspiration from Kai Sassenberg et al. [3], we hypothesize that the distinction between selfishness and responsibility is reflected in lay people's perception of powerholders. If individuals in higher positions of hierarchy are perceived as self-centered, their power might be construed as the exploitation of *opportunities.* On the other hand, if they act responsibly and take care of their subordinates, their power might be construed as the fulfillment of their *responsibilities*. These perspectives are rarely studied [4] but potentially important for understanding social processes. In this paper, we investigate how lay perception of powerholders relates to people's preferences for societal development. Societal development leads to significant transformations in the macrosocial reality, akin to "tectonic shifts" (e.g., recessions causing "earthquakes" in social life; [5]). However, these shifts have received very little attention from the field of psychological science. In today's world, societies exhibit significant variations in their endorsed values and aspirations for a "good society". The perception of those in positions of power may serve as a crucial psychological factor contributing to these differences. Individuals occupying higher hierarchical positions can influence trust, social cohesion, compliance to norms, and the overall social order. Understanding these dynamics can provide valuable insights into desired societal trajectories, thus facilitating more informed policy-making and effective societal planning. We conducted a study across three different cultural regions, and replicated it within one culture using a nationally representative sample. We specifically examined the influence of powerholder construals (*opportunity* vs. *responsibility*; [3]) on the endorsement of either a "Social Modernization" or a "Conventional" shape of society [6]. Our goal is to contribute to the growing academic discussion on the psychological aspects of societal development [7, 8, 9, 10] and to foster a connection between psychology and the science of societal development, thereby building a bridge between the two fields.

Societal development: towards modernizing or conventional aims?

The concept of economic growth has dominated the contemporary debate on societal development [11]. However, economic indicators are merely a means to an end, rather than an ultimate goal of societal development processes. According to Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize winner in Economics, the ultimate goal of fostering economic growth is to improve people's lives. Through these lenses, it is crucial to determine how to enhance people's lives and explore the expectations of the general public regarding societal development. Addressing the latter question represents a developing area in social psychology [6, 12, 13, 14].

Lay people may have various visions of what societal development shall entail. The Folk Theory of Social Change [7] suggests that lay people view societal development as a shift from a traditional communal society characterized by close-knit communities, to a modern urban society that prioritizes market-based exchange relationships. Other research has classified lay beliefs about societal development as either utopian or dystopian, and as expansionist or contractionist [15]. Recently, Krys et al. [6] identified two broad aims that organize lay preferences for societal development: modernizing aims and conventional aims. This paper builds on this recent line of research. The Conventional aims of societal development revolve around upholding traditions, fostering religious practices, respecting authorities, stimulating demographic growth, and strengthening military forces [6]. On the other hand, the Social Modernization aims are those that focus on nurturing gender equality, providing good quality education, and safeguarding human rights. In a study conducted across nine countries with diverse cultural backgrounds, Krys et al. [6] found that people universally prioritize Social Modernization aims over Conventional aims. They found that the preference for Social Modernization aims over Conventional aims is significantly large (1.5 *SD* on average; in each single studied country above 1 *SD*). However, Krys et al. [6] also found variance in the strength of this preference, with some individuals preferred Social Modernization aims over Conventional aims by the size of several *SD*s, but across countries, approximately 3–10% of participants (depending on the country) preferred Conventional aims over Social Modernization aims. In the current paper, we attempt to provide an explanation for these diverse preferences. We seek to understand the factors connected to individual's inclination towards societal modernization or more conventional aims of societal development. Among the numerous potential explanatory variables associated with societal development preferences, we specifically focus on powerholder construals in this study.

Societal development and power construals in Confucian Asia

An initial observation inspiring us to pay special attention to powerholder construals is that: highly hierarchized Confucian[1] societies surprisingly exhibit high

[1] By "Confucian Asia" we address the cultures from the cultural sphere of influence of Confucianism, a philosophical and ethical system originating

societal development indicators. Previous empirical studies have repeatedly shown that the degree of hierarchization in a society, as measured by Power Distance, is *negatively* correlated with indicators of societal development [16, 17, 18]. In other words, the steeper the hierarchy in a society, the lower the various indicators of societal development, such as GDP per capita, HDI, and income equality. However, there have been exceptions to this pattern in recent decades, particularly in Confucian regions such as Japan, Hong Kong (HKSAR), Korea, Taiwan, mainland China, which have achieved high rankings in societal development *despite* their high levels of hierarchization [19, 20]. What could be the explanation for this "exception"? We hypothesize that the way power is construed in these regions, as a means to fulfill responsibility, may differ from that of other highly hierarchized societies where power is predominantly construed as an opportunity (e.g., Russia, Kazakhstan, Venezuela). This difference in powerholder construals may contribute to the preservation of hierarchical social structure alongside efficient societal development processes.

In every society, individuals occupying higher positions in the social hierarchy, commonly referred to as powerholders, possess significant influence over those lower in the hierarchy [21]. Meanwhile, individuals at the mid- and bottom-levels of the hierarchy tend to interpret power based on how it is exercised by powerholders [4]. If powerholders are perceived to utilizing their power solely for their own benefit and that of their in-group, the general public may perceive such power as exploiting *opportunity* for personal gain. Conversely, if the exercise of power is perceived as being oriented towards serving the greater good and acting in the best interests of the community as a whole, the general public may view power as a means of fulfilling *responsibility*. Such dynamic can manifest itself in various social context where power imbalances exist, such as between citizens and policy-makers, within private organizations, formal institutions, local communities (especially in communal-oriented cultures), or informal groups. To ensure generalizability and coverage across a wide range of social contexts, we use the term "powerholders" to refer to individuals in positions of authority such as managers, professors, policemen, judges, teachers and officials.

Currently, the field of psychological science lacks a comprehensive, large-scale quantification of powerholder construals across multiple cultures. However, there are indications that Confucian cultures may place a greater emphasis on power as responsibility fulfilment compared to other cultures. In Western cultures, power has traditionally been associated with self-enhancing goals [22, 23], whereas in East Asia, power is *also* linked to prosocial goals [24]. Miyamoto et al. [1] found that socioeconomic status is connected to self-orientation in the West, but also to other-orientation in Confucian Asia, indirectly supporting the notion that power in Confucian Asia is exercised more "responsibly". Similar patterns can be observed in the domain of work life, as power in "collectivistic" cultures is associated with stronger other-orientation compared to "individualistic" cultures [25]. It is worth noting that *responsibility* and *opportunity* are not mutually exclusive[1, 3], and powerholders can be perceived in both ways simultaneously.

Furthermore, the teachings of Confucianism, which emphasize concepts of duty, cooperation, and harmony [26], may further reinforce the notion of power as "having the responsibility to serve others" [27]. On the other hand, construing power as "having the opportunity to benefit oneself" may stem from historical frontier environmental pressures that fostered independent self-construals [28] or, in more contemporary contexts, from neoliberal ideology [29].

In Confucian Asia, the coexistence of high social hierarchies and strong indicators of societal development can be partly attributed to the concept of responsible power, which aligns with a "propriety model" of social hierarchy [30]. Unlike other regions of the world, power in Confucian Asia is often perceived as a responsibility rather than solely an opportunity for personal gain, and individuals in positions of power are expected to display benevolence [24]. People holding high positions are also perceived as more warm and moral [31]. The notion of responsible power contributes to the overall benefit of society and may help explain the higher rankings of Confucian Asia in terms of societal development measures. At the same time, responsible power can also contribute to the maintenance of social hierarchies in Confucian Asia. When power is construed and exercised as a responsibility, there is less pressure to flatten the social hierarchy. If powerholders fulfill their responsibilities effectively, individuals at lower levels of the hierarchy may respect and support them, allowing them to retain their positions. In such cases, there may be less urgency to advocate for rapid social change, and a greater reluctance to abandon conventional approaches. How can this reasoning be extrapolated to people's preferences regarding the aims of societal development? In societies where individuals perceive powerholders as responsible, there tends to be a stronger inclination to maintain the *status quo*, leading to a relatively greater endorsement of Conventional aims. In contrast, in cultures where powerholders are perceived as opportunistic and self-serving, the general public may

from the teachings of Confucius in ancient China. In these cultures, Confucian values and traditions have profoundly shaped societal norms, political structures, and educational systems. Confucian principles emphasize filial piety, social harmony, respect for authority, and the pursuit of moral cultivation. The Confucian cultures include for example mainland China and Hong Kong.

feel compelled to intensify the push for Social Modernization in order to overcome unjust rulers, potentially leading to a flattening of the social structure. In summary, this reasoning can be summarized as follows: "the negative perception of powerholders intensifies the desire for Modernization aims, whereas the positive perception of the powerholders fosters a tendency to preserve the status quo and endorse Conventional aims.

However, there is another line of reasoning that suggests the opposite.

Relative deprivation provokes urge for conventional solutions

When powerholders are perceived as abusive, i.e., when power is seen as being exploited for personal gain or *opportunities*, the general public may feel a sense of relative deprivation. This feelings arises from unfavorable comparison with those in power, which can contribute to the rise of populism [32]. For instance, Bos et al. [33] has documented that anti-elitist rhetoric contributes to the growth of populist tendencies. Populism often aligns closely with right-wing ideology and traditionalism [34]. Populist movement typically frame powerholders as corrupt and self-serving, advocating for stronger military forces, the restoration of traditional values (viz. "Making America Great Again"), and the promotion of religious values. This pattern has been observed in various cultural contexts, including the United States, the Middle East during the Islamic Iranian Revolution, Jair Bolsonaro's presidency in Brazil, the Law and Order Party in Poland, and other reactionary movements.

Therefore, one could argue that perceiving powerholders as self-interested and opportunistic may lead to a greater endorsement of Conventional aims for societal development. These Conventional aims are typically associated with conservative ideologies [35, 36]. On the other hand, the promotion of Social Modernization, such as advancement of gender equality, poverty eradication, and the protection of human rights, is commonly linked to social and liberal worldviews that prioritize enlightened and responsible powerholders elected through democratic procedures. Taken together, one could state that "the negative perception of powerholders necessitates conventional solutions, while the positive perception of the powerholders paves the way for modernization and progressive change".

Bridging psychology with societal development science

Modernization theorists [37] posit that steep social hierarchies are a traditional aspect of society that tends to become more egalitarian as a society becomes wealthier. The Human Development Syndrome theory [38] proposes that economic development weakens certain culture syndromes, such as traditional hierarchies, while strengthening others, such as freedom and political participation. Cross-cultural research in political science and psychology provides empirical support for these theories. For instance, the Power Distance (PD) [39] has been shown to negatively predicts GDP per capita, income inequality [39], perception of control over life [40], social progress [41], and satisfaction with life and work [42]. For many years, societal development scientists have concluded that a steep hierarchy cannot be associated with economic development [43]. They predicted that Confucian Asia, with economic development, would become more egalitarian and follow the Western model of modernization. However, despite economic and social development over several decades, Confucian Asia remains relatively hierarchical compared to the Western world. This presents an opportunity to bridge psychology with societal development science and allow psychology to propose a potential explanation for why development has not led to significant change in the social hierarchy of Confucian Asia. Figure 1 illustrates how the present psychological study can be situated within the broader research in societal development science.

The present study

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between powerholder construals (viewed as opportunity vs. responsibility) and lay preferences towards societal development (Social Modernization aims vs. Conventional aims). We conducted two studies to examine this relationship. In Study 1, we collected and analyzed data on powerholder construals and societal development preferences from cultures located on three continents: North America (USA), Europe (Poland), and Asia (Hong Kong, China). In Study 2, we replicated the findings from Study 1 using a representative sample from the United States. Psychological research on societal development processes is an important and emerging field within psychology, yet it remains relatively understudied. Therefore, while specific predictions could not be formulated in advance, it is essential to explore this topic in the hope that this study will lay the groundwork for further research in the field.

Study 1

Method

Sampled countries

We aim to compare samples from a Western culture with low Power Distance [18] to a Confucian region with relatively higher Power Distance. Data were collected in the United States and Hong Kong, China. To test the robustness of our findings beyond the Western-Confucian comparison, we included a culture with a Power Distance index similar to Hong Kong, China, but with cultural

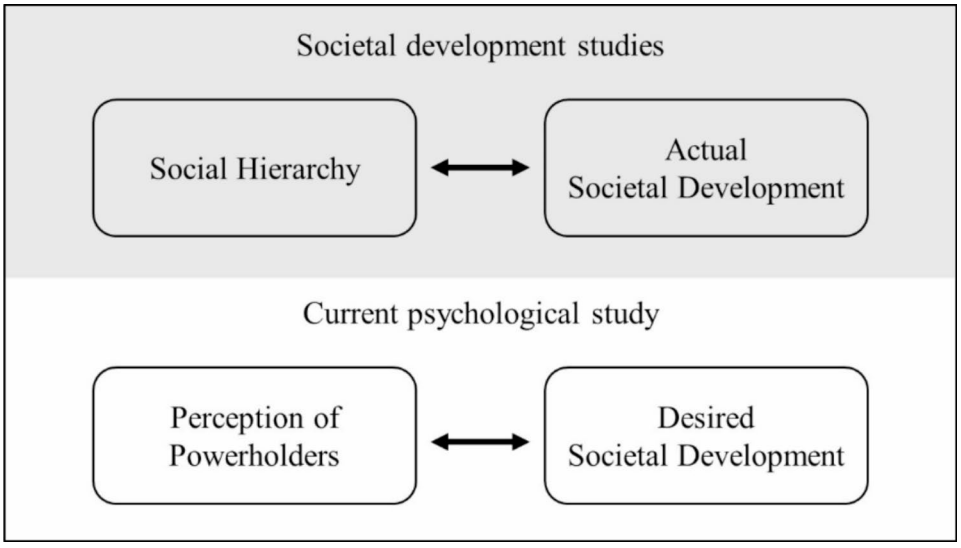


Fig. 1 Conceptual description of past research and present study

Table 1 Characteristics of the samples and demographic composition

	Regions	*N*	Mean Age (SD)	Gender	% of students
Study 1	USA	107	38.68 (13.83)	39.0% F / 61.0% M	13.1%
	Poland	109	23.81 (6.20)	54.1% F / 44.0% M / 1.8% NB/o	65.1%
	Hong Kong	87	22.97 (5.82)	73.6% F / 20.7% M / 5.7% nd	86.2%
Study 2	USA	978	45.79 (15.79)	49.9% F / 48.2% M / 1.7% NB/o / 0.2% nd	*na*

Note. Gender composition was labeled accordingly: M – male, F – female, NB/o – non-binary/other, nd– not disclosed

aspirations towards the Western world, namely Poland. The inclusion of Poland is further supported by its historical resistance to authority during the 80's, which had a strong religious component. Additionally, Poland has recently experienced the governance of an anti-establishment political movement that came to power by highlighting the corruptness and elitism of the previous government. By including these three cultures, we are able to examine both lines of reasoning: "negative perception of powerholders intensifies the desire for modernization, whereas positive perception of powerholders fosters a tendency to preserve the status quo" versus "negative perception of powerholders requires conventional solutions, whereas positive perception of powerholders paves the way for modernization". Such comparative approach allows us to explore the relation between powerholder perceptions and societal development preferences across different cultural contexts.

Participants

A total of 303 participants were recruited online to complete the Qualtrics questionnaire. Participants from the United States ($n = 107$) were recruited via Amazon mTurk, while participants from Hong Kong ($n = 87$) were recruited via NGO platform and completed the online survey as part of their service hours. Participants from Poland ($n = 109$) were recruited through Prolific. The gender composition, mean age, and percentage of the student sample are presented in the upper part of Table 1.

Procedure and measures

Participants were informed that the study aimed to learn their opinions on individuals who hold positions of power in their respective countries, such as policemen, judges, local government officials, clerks, teachers and managers. In addition, their views on the hierarchy and development of a good society were also sought. The full list of scales used can be found in the supplementary online material (SOM). The questionnaire was administered in English for the American and Hong Kongese samples, while data collection in Poland was conducted in Polish.

Measure of societal development preferences Preferences for aims of societal development were measured by the revised set of aims from Krys et al. [6]. The full list of aims can be found in SOM. Participants were instructed to rate the extent to which each aim describes "a good society" on a 9-point Likert-type scale with five labeled points: 1 (*does not describe a good society at all*); 3 (*describes a good society a little*); 5 (*describes a good society moderately*); 7 (*describes a good society very well*); 9 (*describes a good society exactly*). The aims were divided into two categories: Social Modernization aims and Con-

ventional aims. Social Modernization aims encompassed gender equality, freedom, democracy, human rights, health, education, and poverty reduction, reflecting aspirations for an improved quality of life and a more egalitarian culture. Conventional aims represented societal goals with a hierarchical nature, such as a strong military, religion, respecting authorities, traditional values, and demographic growth. The mean score of the aims within each category was computed. The scale obtained excellent internal reliability for Social Modernization aims, Cronbach's $\alpha_{US} = 0.91$,$\alpha_{Poland} = 0.90$,$\alpha_{Hong\ Kong} = 0.94$, and acceptable to good reliability for Conventional aims, Cronbach's $\alpha_{US} = 0.84$,$\alpha_{Poland} = 0.78$,$\alpha_{Hong\ Kong} = 0.71$.

Powerholder construals These constructs were measured using a scale consisting of ten statements, with half of the statements pertained to *responsibility* powerholder construal and the other half related to *opportunity* powerholder construal. For instance, an example item for *opportunity* powerholder construal is "In [country name], people in power (e.g., policemen, judges, local government officials, teachers, clerks, managers, etc.) use power to increase their wealth". In contrast, an example item for *responsibility* powerholder construal is "In [country name] people in power (e.g., policemen, judges, local government officials, teachers, clerks, managers, etc.) take responsibility for the well-being of others". Participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert type scale, with the following labels: 1 (*strongly disagree*); 2 (*disagree*); 3 (*somewhat disagree*); 4 (*neither agree nor disagree*); 5 (*somewhat agree*); 6 (*agree*); 7 (*strongly agree*). Mean scores were used to compute the scores for *opportunity* powerholder construal and *responsibility* powerholder construal. The scale obtained acceptable internal reliability for *opportunity* powerholder construal, Cronbach's $\alpha_{US} = 0.74$, $\alpha_{Poland} = 0.73$, $\alpha_{Hong\ Kong} = 0.74$. For *responsibility* powerholder construal, the scale showed fair to good reliability, Cronbach's $\alpha_{US} = 0.85$, $\alpha_{Poland} = 0.68$,$\alpha_{Hong\ Kong} = 0.82$.

Those two construals were correlated negatively in each of sampled regions (r_{US}=-0.41, p <.001; $r_{HongKong}$=-0.26, p =.033; r_{Poland}=-0.48, p <.001). The complete set of items, as well as the results of the confirmatory factor analysis, are available in Table S1 in the SOM.

Attention checks To ensure the reliability of our data, we included eight attention checks at various points in the study. Participants were instructed to choose a specific number from the rating scale provided in each attention check. An example item is: "In this question, please select 7 (strongly agree)". In cases where participants failed one or more attention check, their data were excluded from the analysis (the number of excluded participants: n_{Poland}=31, n_{US}=33, $n_{HongKong=}$71). This exclusion was done to maintain the integrity and accuracy of our results.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Consistent to Krys et al's [6] study, we found that Social Modernization aims were consistently preferred over Conventional aims across all of our study samples, regardless of participants' cultural background. With regard to powerholder construals, our participants, on average, showed a stronger perception that powerholders exploit *opportunities* than fulfill their *responsibilities*[2] (refer to Table 2 for details).

Regression of societal development aims on powerholder construals

A series of multiple regression analyses with powerholder construal (opportunity vs. responsibility) as an

Table 2 Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha and dependent T-Test for perceiving powerholders as exploiting opportunities vs. fulfilling responsibilities, and preferences for social modernization vs. conventional aims

Dependent variable	USA				Poland				Hong Kong			
	M_1(SD)	M_2 (SD)	t(df)	d	M_1 (SD)	M_2 (SD)	t(df)	d	M_1 (SD)	M_2 (SD)	t(df)	d
Powerholder construal Opportunity(1) vs. Responsibility(2)	5.43(0.81)	5.04(1.08)	2.68(106)	0.26***	5.73(0.78)	4.08(0.96)	16.38(108)	1.19***	5.05(0.94)	4.48(1.12)	3.34(86)	0.36**
Development preferences Social Modernization(1) vs. Conventional aims(2)	7.20(1.19)	5.84(1.68)	6.76(106)	0.65***	7.72(0.10)	4.91(1.52)	17.08(108)	1.57***	7.65(1.27)	6.15(1.31)	10.74(86)	1.15***

[2] Our Hongkong data did not support our initial theory that power in Confucian Asia is primarily perceived in terms of responsibility rather than opportunity. We acknowledge that the sample size for the Hong Kong data were small (only 87 participants) and not representative, as it was obtained through convenient sampling via social media. Moreover, given the cultural diversity of Hong Kong, which is influenced by both Confucian and Western cultures, we recognize that our Hong Kong sample may not have been the most representative of Confucian culture. This realization is a post-hoc, and we have taken it into account in our analysis and interpretation of the results.

independent variables and developmental aims (separately Social Modernization aims vs. Conventional aims) as a dependent variables were conducted. In each regression model, we controlled for age, gender and student status. Results revealed that opportunity powerholder construals were related to a higher endorsement of Social Modernization aims in the USA and Hong Kong (see upper section of Table 3). On the other hand, responsibility powerholder construals were tied to a stronger preference for Conventional aims in all studied cultures (see bottom section of Table 3). Importantly, the directions of the effects were consistent across the three cultural contexts studied (USA, Poland, and Hong Kong).

Discussion of findings from study 1

Results of Study 1 provide initial support for a theoretical framework inspired by the economic and social successes of Confucian Asian societies. Specifically, our framework posits that "the negative perception of powerholders intensifies the desire for modernization (Social Modernization aims), while the positive perception of powerholders fosters a tendency to preserve the status quo (Conventional aims)". If powerholders act in a self-oriented manner by exploiting the *opportunities* created by their power, it may necessitate egalitarian social change to "thwart" any unwanted imbalance. Selfish powerholders may induce a sense of unjust resource distribution, which in turn underscores the need to enhance living conditions for all members of society. In contrast, powerholders who prioritize the common good and fulfill their *responsibilities* well may contribute to the legitimization of hierarchies in general. In such cases, Conventional aims become more important for the general population. Our study generally supports this pattern, although we did not find a significant effect of opportunity powerholder construal on the preference for Social Modernization in Poland. Despite the lack of substantial disparities in how powerholder construals are connected to developmental aims across cultures, in contexts where power is traditionally equated with responsibility, it is likely that powerholders are generally perceived more positively. This positive perception can lead to a broader acceptance of Conventional aims. However, further research with additional robust samples is necessary to assess if such extrapolation is appropriate and to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between powerholder construals and developmental aims. Additionally, our data was correlational in nature, and therefore we can't assume the directionality. For example, the endorsement of certain developmental expectations may stem from some individual differences, that can bias the perception of powerholders. People who generally endorse egalitarianism more may be inclined to see powerholders as opportunistic. Conversely, people who accept and endorse hierarchy, could be inclined to perceive powerholders as responsible. Further experimental data is needed to establish causal relationship between powerholder construals and societal development expectations.

Study 2

The aim of Study 2 was twofold: to replicate the findings using a representative sample, and to investigate several constructs associated with political attitudes, namely Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) [44] and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) [45]. We conducted the study on a representative sample from the United States as a part of a larger research project examining preferred pathways of societal development [46].

Method

Participants

A total of 978 participants were recruited through Prolific. Representative sampling was employed, aligning with the US census data in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender. It is worth noting that all participants were required to complete the questionnaire while physically located within the United States. For a detailed breakdown of the sample composition, please refer to the bottom section of Table 1.

Measures

Measure of societal development preferences We adapted a refined set of instructions from Study 1 and modified it to ask participants to the extent to which certain goals should be prioritized within their society. Participants were asked to rate their responses on a 11-point Likert-type scale. The scale points were labeled as follows: 0 (*not at all a priority*); 1–3 (*low priority*); 4–6 (*moderate priority);* 7–9 (*high priority*) and 10 (*highest priority*).The complete set of items is available in the SOM.

Powerholder construals To mitigate the possibility of a ceiling effect, we utilize the scale employed in Study 1, making slight changes in the phrasing. In order to address feasibility constraints, we removed one item from each of the *opportunity* powerholder construal and *responsibility* powerholder construal scales. Further details on the rationale behind the removal of these items can be found in Table S2 in the SOM. Both subscales displayed excellent reliability, Cronbach's $\alpha_{Opportunity} = 0.90$, $\alpha_{Poland} = 0.92$.

Right-wing authoritarianism We employed a modified version of the VSA scale [47]. We removed two items from the scale due to their phrasing not being applicable for the intended cross-cultural replication. Instead, we included two items from the original ACT scale [14]. We obtained a

Table 3 Regression coefficients for powerholder construals predicting preference for social modernization and conventional aims

DV: Social Modernization		**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	***p***	R^2	***p***
USA	Opportunity	0.37	0.13	0.27	2.84	0.005	0.16	0.004
	Responsibility	0.07	0.10	0.07	0.76	0.451		
	Age	−0.01	0.01	−0.17	-1.79	0.077		
	Gender: Female - Male	0.11	0.21	0.09	0.50	0.618		
	Student Yes – No	−0.59	0.31	0.53	-1.88	0.062		
Poland	Opportunity	0.19	0.12	0.16	1.57	0.119	0.16	0.007
	Responsibility	0.07	0.09	0.07	0.74	0.461		
	Age	0.05	0.02	0.01	0.45	0.657		
	Gender: Female - Male	0.56	0.18	0.59	3.10	0.002		
	Student Yes – No	0.42	0.21	0.45	2.06	0.042		
Hong Kong	Opportunity	0.50	0.14	0.37	3.47	< 0.001	0.19	0.005
	Responsibility	0.14	0.12	0.12	1.09	0.277		
	Age	−0.00	0.03	−0.02	−0.15	0.883		
	Gender: Female - Male	−0.82	0.33	−0.64	-2.45	0.017		
	Student Yes - No	0.53	0.44	0.42	1.20	0.233		
three sub-samples combined	**Opportunity**	**0.35**	**0.07**	**0.27**	**4.70**	**< 0.001**	0.12	< 0.001
	Responsibility	0.06	0.06	0.07	1.10	0.273		
	Age	−0.02	0.01	−0.18	-2.93	0.004		
	Gender: Female - Male	0.11	0.13	0.10	0.85	0.395		
	Student Yes - No	0.17	0.14	0.15	1.19	0.237		
DV: Conventional aims								
USA	Opportunity	0.21	0.18	0.10	1.44	0.245	0.29	< 0.001
	Responsibility	0.81	0.14	0.52	5.93	< 0.001		
	Age	−0.04	0.01	−0.29	-3.36	0.001		
	Gender: Female - Male	0.00	0.29	0.00	0.01	0.987		
	Student Yes – No	−0.05	0.43	−0.03	−0.11	0.911		
Poland	Opportunity	0.09	20	0.05	0.48	0.632	0.10	0.057
	Responsibility	0.39	0.19	0.25	2.53	0.013		
	Age	0.04	0.03	0.16	1.51	0.135		
	Gender: Female - Male	0.47	0.29	0.31	1.60	0.114		
	Student Yes – No	0.07	0.33	0.04	0.19	0.846		
Hong Kong	Opportunity	0.13	0.15	0.10	0.90	0.369	0.16	0.018
	Responsibility	0.42	0.13	0.36	3.27	0.002		
	Age	−0.02	0.03	−0.11	−0.89	0.379		
	Gender: Female - Male	0.14	0.35	0.11	0.42	0.673		
	Student Yes – No	−0.59	0.46	−0.45	-1.29	0.202		

Table 3 (continued)

DV: Social Modernization		B	SE	β	t	*p*	R^2	*p*
three sub-samples combined	Opportunity	−0.01	0.10	−0.00	−0.08	0.933	0.17	< 0.001
	Responsibility	**0.59**	**0.08**	**0.42**	**7.23**	**< 0.001**		
	Age	−0.02	0.01	−0.15	-2.45	0.015		
	Gender: Female - Male	0.01	0.17	0.01	0.05	0.962		
	Student Yes - No	0.53	0.44	0.42	1.20	0.233		

Table 4 Zero-Order correlation between preference of societal development, powerholder construals, RWA and SDO

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Social Modernization					
2. Conventional aims	−0.02				
3. Opportunity	0.16***	−0.15***			
4. Responsibility	−0.04	0.36***	−0.61***		
5. RWA	−0.27***	0.69***	−0.18***	0.30***	
6. SDO	−0.56***	0.39***	−0.21***	0.20***	0.49***

Note. ***$p < .001$, RWA = Right-Wing Authoritarianism, SDO = Social Dominance Orientation

good internal reliability, Cronbach's α = 0.85. The full scale is presented in Table S3 in the SOM

Social dominance orientation To accommodate length constraints, we selected one item from each of the four sub-dimensions of the SDO_7 scale [45]. The reliability of the adapted scale was found to be good, with a Cronbach's α = 0.86. Selected items are presented in Table S3 in the SOM.

Attention checks Throughout the entire duration of the study, each participant encountered five attention checks, which required them to choose a particular answer based on the given instructions (please see [46]). Participants who failed any of these questions had their data excluded from all subsequent analyses ($n = 44$).

Results and discussion

Preferences for pathways of societal development

In Study 2, we successfully replicated the pattern of results observed in Study 1 regarding preferences for Social Modernization and Conventional aims. Consistent with the findings from Study 1, we conducted a dependent *t*-test, and found that Social Modernization aims were rated as a high priority for the US ($M = 7.61$, $SD = 1.44$), while Conventional aims were considered to be of moderate priority ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 2.43$), $t(977) = 33.5$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.07$.

Perception of powerholders

Consistent with the findings from our Study 1, we observed a similar pattern of results in the nationally representative sample. Powerholders were perceived as more opportunistic ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.17$) compared to being responsible ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.48$), $t(977) = 28.3$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.90$.

Zero-order correlation

We conducted a correlation analysis to investigate the relationships between the measured variables. The coefficients are presented in Table 4. The results revealed that perceiving powerholders as exploiting *opportunities* was negatively related to RWA and SDO, whereas perceiving powerholders as fulfilling *responsibilities* was positively correlated with these attitudes. Furthermore, the endorsement of Social Modernization positively correlated with *opportunity* powerholder construal, and negatively with RWA and SDO. Conversely, Conventional aims showed a positive correlation with the construal of powerholders as *responsible* and a negative correlation with the construal of powerholders as *opportunistic*. Conventional aims also exhibited positive correlations with RWA and SDO.

Regression of societal development aims on powerholder construals

We tested two separate hierarchical multiple regression models, one for the endorsement for Social Modernization, and one for Conventional Aims. The details are presented in Table 5. In the first step of each regression model, we included powerholder construals while controlling for age, gender (dummy coded) and subjective socioeconomic status. In the second step, we introduced political attitudes measured by RWA and SDO. Overall, we observed a similar pattern of results to Study 1. However, after including RWA and SDO in the analysis, the preference for Social Modernization was connected similarly to perceiving powerholders as exploiting

Table 5 Hierarchical multiple regression models predicting social modernization and conventional aims in the US

DV: Social Modernization		B	SE	β	t	*p*	R^2	*p*
Model 1	Opportunity	0.27	0.05	0.22	5.58	< 0.001	0.06	< 0.001
	Responsibility	0.11	0.03	0.11	2.68	0.007		
	Age	0.00	0.00	0.05	1.67	0.096		
	Gender: Female – Male Non/binary – Male	0.35	0.09	0.24	3.85	< 0.001		
		1.00	0.37	0.69	2.68	0.008		
		Subjective SES	−0.06	0.03	−0.08	-2.44	0.015	
Model 2	Opportunity	0.17	0.04	0.14	4.19	< 0.001	0.34	< 0.001
	Responsibility	0.14	0.03	0.15	4.17	< 0.001		
	Age	0.01	0.00	0.06	2.20	0.028		
	Gender: Female – Male Non/binary – Male	0.16	0.08	0.11	2.09	0.037		
		0.36	0.31	0.25	1.15	0.251		
	Subjective SES	−0.01	0.02	−0.01	−0.27	0.790		
	RWA	−0.03	0.03	−0.03	−0.90	0.366		
	SDO	−0.53	0.03	−0.54	-17.33	< 0.001		
DV: Conventional aims								
Model 1	Opportunity	0.24	0.08	0.11	3.08	0.002	0.18	< 0.001
	Responsibility	0.59	0.06	0.36	9.34	< 0.001		
	Age	0.03	0.00	0.17	5.48	< 0.001		
	Gender: Female – Male Non/binary – Male	−0.42	0.14	−0.17	-2.92	0.004		
		-1.97	0.59	−0.81	-3.35	< 0.001		
	SES	0.07	0.04	0.05	1.78	0.075		
Model 2	Opportunity	0.23	0.06	0.11	3.84	< 0.001	0.52	< 0.001
	Responsibility	0.34	0.05	0.20	6.76	< 0.001		
	Age	0.01	0.00	0.06	2.20	0.028		
	Gender: Female – Male Non/binary – Male	0.16	0.08	0.09	3.69	< 0.001		
		0.36	0.31	0.25	1.15	0.251		
	Subjective SES	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.62	0.534		
	RWA	1.02	0.05	0.59	21.62	< 0.001		
	SDO	0.09	0.04	0.06	2.13	0.034		

Note. SES = Socioeconomic status, RWA = Right-Wing Authoritarianism, SDO = Social Dominance Orientation

opportunities and fulfilling *responsibilities.* On the other hand, the more people perceived powerholders as fulfilling *responsibilities*, the stronger their preference for Conventional aims. Powerholder construals were significantly related to the societal development preferences after the inclusion of RWA and SDO in each model. Interestingly, Social Modernization was negatively connected to SDO but not to RWA. In contrast, Conventional aims were positively connected to RWA, and the effect of SDO was notably weaker.

General discussion

The key finding of our study highlights the relationship between the perception of powerholders and the *desired* trajectories of societal development. Our research, which spanned across the United States, Poland, and Hong Kong, as well as the replication conducted in the United States, consistently demonstrate that perceiving powerholders as exploiting *opportunities* is connected with a preference for Social Modernization aims. Conversely, the perception of powerholders as fulfilling *responsibilities* is associated with an endorsement of Conventional aims. These findings provide the initial support to the notion that "the negative perception of powerholders intensifies the desire for modernization, whereas the positive perception of powerholders fosters a tendency to preserve the status quo".

Power and the two concepts of a "good society"

In all examined samples, powerholders were consistently perceived as being more self-serving rather than benefitting others. This finding supports the previous research on power dynamics in Western cultures [1, 48]. When powerholders use their influence solely to exploit *opportunities* for personal gain, the concept of a "good society" is more closely associated with Social Modernization.

Social Modernization encompasses developmental goals that aim to improve people's quality of life (e.g., health, education, reduction of poverty). When powerholders are perceived as "selfish", it suggests that they prioritize their own interests over the welfare and well-being of the general public.

Social Modernization, as a concept, compasses the goal of establishing a more egalitarian society that upholds principles like gender equality, freedom, democracy, and human rights. However, powerholders who prioritize their personal interests over these egalitarian principles can generate distrust [49], and undermine the necessary respect required to legitimize power imbalances. In the pursuit of achieving a "good society", individuals may experience a need to remove undesired powerholders, dismantle social hierarchies, and limit the exercise of power wherever feasible. This pattern of thinking can be viewed as a psychological facet of Inglehart's Human Development Syndrome [38], which describes the Western trajectory of development accompanied by changes towards egalitarianism.

However, an alternative notion of a "good society" may exist. When powerholders are perceived as fulfilling their *responsibilities*, there is a stronger endorsement of Conventional aims. This category encompasses the preservation of traditions, maintaining a robust military force, upholding religious values, and fostering demographic growth. If the social norm regarding the exercise of power is to benefit others, there may be stronger support for preserving hierarchies. In this interpretation, a "good society" permits certain members to utilize their power and influence to care for those at the lower rungs of the social hierarchy. For such a society to function effectively, it is essential for individuals to respect the established social order. Areas of societal functioning that exhibit hierarchical structures, such as military and religious organizations, may receive prioritization for this reason. Moreover, traditional values, that often emphasize obedience to authority figures are reinforced. As a result, power becomes imbued with prosocial meaning and evokes more positive associations. This description of the developmental scenario does not necessarily preclude the *actual* improvement in living conditions or economic growth. Rather, it suggests that the responsible exercise of power may, to some extent, suppress egalitarian tendencies, enabling traditional hierarchies to persist during the process of modernization. Although our data do not directly demonstrate this, it highlights a relatively understudied pathway that may currently be unfolding in Confucian Asia.

The relationship between power inequalities and societal wealth, as measured by GDP, has been found to be negative [18]. While Western societies are known for their wealth and egalitarianism, it is important for developmental professionals to exercise caution before assuming that adopting Western values is the definitive path towards achieving a "good society". In certain regions, the process of disempowering existing powerholders may be necessary to empower oppressed individuals and enable them to realize their full potential. However, this universalistic perspective should be approached with caution, as hierarchy itself is not inherently negative [50], and there exist cultural variations in the characteristics of social hierarchies [51]. The key issue is whether powerholders fulfil their responsibilities that come with entrusted power. Our study showed that being perceived as a responsible leader can maintain social structure.

In Study 2, we found that both powerholder construals and preferences for societal development aims are closely connected to political attitudes, as measured by Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation in the United States. Specifically, SDO was found to have a negative impact on the endorsement of Social Modernization. This suggests that individuals who have a preference for group-based hierarchy are more likely to be resistant to challenging the status quo and advocating for social changes that foster equality and the improve overall living conditions. On the other hand, RWA was found to be associated with the endorsement of Conventional aims. RWA encompasses attachment to traditional values, authoritarian aggression, and submission. This indicates that individuals who prefer maintaining the status quo are more likely to endorse developmental goals that preserve the hierarchical aspects of society.

Interestingly, when we included RWA and SDO, we found that *responsibility* powerholder construal was positively associated with Social Modernization, similar to the effect observed with *opportunity* powerholder construal. This suggests the presence of possible suppression effect [52]. By considering the impact of RWA and SDO, we are able to better understand the relationship between powerholder construals and preferences for societal development. However, it is important to note that by including RWA and SDO, we may not fully capture the variance associated with *responsibility* powerholder construal. This could potentially omit aspects related to benevolence or social non-cynicism, which are correlated with preferences for egalitarianism and the improvement of quality of life. These factors may play a role in shaping individuals' view on societal development beyond the influence of political attitudes and preference for hierarchy.

At present, additional analysis is needed to validate our assertions, especially regarding causality. It is possible that people who endorse certain ideas about societal development may perceive powerholders differently. For example, people who strive for egalitarianism and

welfare (Social Modernization) may judge powerholders unfavorably due to lesser adherence to authority, which might have resulted in higher scores for opportunity powerholder construals. On the other hand, people who endorse hierarchical societal structure (Conventional aims) may be inclined to perceive powerholders more positively, resulting in higher scores for responsibility powerholder construal. To fully establish the correct line of causal reasoning, future experimental data is required.

It is important to acknowledge that there exist diverse avenues for development that merit examination while adopting a culturally sensitive perspective [8]. Recognizing it as a multi-dimensional phenomenon can furnish us with a more comprehensive understanding guidance, particularly when confronted with periods characterized by conflicting values, ideologies, and subjective visions of the futures.

Future directions

Future research should investigate the practical implications of the values and behaviors exhibited by those in positions of power on the actual levels of societal development, using cross-national data. Additionally, it is important to develop a theoretical framework that elucidates the cultural underpinnings of power and its perception. It is plausible that powerholders demonstrate greater responsibility, and are perceived as such, in cultures fostering psychological interdependence. On the other hand, cultural contexts that promote psychological independence may nudge powerholders towards acting in a self-oriented manner.

Justifications of power inequalities can shape the models of hierarchies and play an important role in attaining the desired societal development. Power can stem from various sources, such as age, affiliation, cultural or religious values, extending beyond powerholder construals. Inequalities may be rationalized through beliefs in meritocracy, which could potentially create a more dynamic structure aligned with neoliberal development. The impact of these justifications on actual and desired societal development can vary significantly.

Study limitations

Our study has some limitations. Firstly, the correlational design utilized in our research does not allow us to establish causality. Future studies could employ experimental designs to examine cause-and-effect relationship by priming participants to perceive powerholders as either exploiting *opportunities* or fulfilling *responsibilities*. Our aim was to capture general powerholder construals, and we employed a broad category, including various types of powerholders. It is possible that construals of powerholders in different social domains or power levels may yield different results. Secondly, it is important to exercise caution when generalizing our findings due to the composition of our samples, which primarily consisted of students in cases of Poland and Hong Kong. We did not gather additional demographic information, such as social class (which was not assessed in Study 1), income, or religion. These variables could have been important to control and should be included in future studies. In Hong Kong, we administered the questionnaire in English, which may have primed participants with Western mindset, potentially concealing possible cultural differences. Such effect could be investigated by administering the questionnaire both in English and Cantonese. Moreover, the lack of scale invariance for societal development aims necessitates additional caution when making comparisons between countries. However, the presence of universal patterns in our findings suggest cultural similarities. Thirdly, our samples were drawn from relatively wealthy regions, so generalizing our results to less affluent regions should be done with caution. Ideally, future studies should investigate regions representing various "cultural zones" and stages of economic development. Fourthly, it is important to note that our findings are exploratory in nature and should be interpreted as such. Lastly, societal development is an emerging field in psychology, and the preferences and conceptions regarding how societies could and should develop are relatively novel topics for psychological inquiry. We hope our findings will contribute to the development of new studies that can refine and enhance theories of societal development, including the framework presented in this study.

Concluding remarks

Social hierarchies vary across cultures [53], shaping the power dynamics between powerholders and their subordinates. This dynamic has traditionally been regarded as negative and undesirable in Western societies. As a result, the progression towards a "good society" has been assumed to necessitate the relative dissolution of power structures. This perspective is reflected in influential developmental theories such as modernization and Human Development Syndrome. However, these theories predominantly represent a Western perspective on development. If the relationship between powerholders and population adopts a more guardian-like nature, emphasizing the responsibilities and obligations accompanying power, the path towards a "good society" may differ significantly from European or American models. Although our study indicates that, at an individual level, the association between the perception of powerholders and aspirations for a "good society" remains consistent across the studied cultures, in specific cultural regions like Confucian Asia, the notion of responsible powerholder embedded in social norms and practices may lead individuals to perceive powerholders as more responsible

on average. This could account for the unique amalgamation of high social hierarchies and robust societal development observed in the region. However, to substantiate this claim, further data collection is essential, particularly among cultures that have experienced less cultural overlap with the West than Hong Kong, ideally seeking appropriate samples from such communities.

By conceptualizing power as a responsibility rather than a means for personal gain, individuals in positions of authority can actively contribute to the betterment of society while upholding traditional social structures. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct culturally sensitive investigations in social hierarchies and societal development. The current study enhances our compression of how ordinary perceptions of power can shape preferences for social transformation. These findings hold potential implications for empowering powerholders to foster a sense of responsibility, as well as for social change movements to harness perceptions of exploitation to mobilize support for transformative initiatives. Ultimately, this research has the capacity to inform strategies aimed at establishing more just and equitable societies.

Abbreviations

RWA	Right Wing Authoritarianism
SDO	Social Dominance Orientation
PD	Power Distance
Subjective SES	Subjective Socioeconomic status

Supplementary information

The online version contains supplementary material available at https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02534-1.

Supplementary Material 1

Acknowledgements
The authors thank Mr. Eric Kenson Yau from the Department of Psychology, Lingan University, Hong Kong, for his help.

Author contributions
AW: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization, Project administration; VY: Conceptualization, Validation, Investigation, Resources, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision; KK: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

Funding
The study was supported by the Norway Grants 2014–2021 operated by the National Science Centre (Poland) under Project Contracts No 2019/34/H/HS6/00597 (GRIEG) and 2020/37/B/HS6/03142 (OPUS).

Data availability
The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available in the OSF repository, https://osf.io/wq72s/?view_only=2387d2d49265427db606e4f6837cce1d.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate
The research adhered to the principles of the Helsinki Declaration and obtained approval from the Committee for Ethics in Scientific Research of the Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences and was exempted from additional approval by the Sub-Committee on Research Ethics and Safety of the Research Committee at Lingnan university in Hong Kong. Data collection for U.S. samples was conducted online via online platforms, namely mTurk and Prolific. In line with Secretary's Advisory Committee on Human Research Protections (SACHRP) recommendations concerning internet research [54], which state that IRBs assumes the jurisdiction of the researcher instead of participants, we conducted the study in the U.S. based on the ethical approval from the lead author's institution.

Consent for publication
Not applicable.

Competing interests
Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research.

Received: 20 November 2023 / Accepted: 24 February 2025
Published online: 12 March 2025

References

1. Miyamoto, Y., Yoo, J., Levine, C. S., Park, J., Boylan, J. M., Sims, T.,… & Ryff, C. D. Culture and social hierarchy: Self-and other-oriented correlates of socioeconomic status across cultures. Journal of personality and social psych. 2018;115(3):427. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000133
2. Torelli, C. J., & Shavitt, S. Culture and concepts of power. Journal of personality and social psych. 2010;99(4):703–723. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019973
3. Sassenberg, K., Ellemers, N., & Scheepers, D. The attraction of social power: The influence of construing power as opportunity versus responsibility. Journal of Experimental Social Psych. 2012;48(2):550–555. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.11.008
4. Ten Brinke, L., & Keltner, D. Theories of power: Perceived strategies for gaining and maintaining power. Journal of Personality and Social Psych. 2022;122(1);53–72. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000345
5. Otker-Robe, I., & Podpiera, A. M. The social impact of financial crises: evidence from the global financial crisis. World bank policy research working paper. 2013;6703. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2354754
6. Krys, K., Capaldi, C. A., Uchida, Y., Cantarero, K., Torres, C., Işık, İ.,… & Zelenski, J. M. Preference for modernization is universal, but expected modernization trajectories are culturally diversified: A nine-country study of folk theories of societal development. Asian Journal of Social Psych. 2022;25(4):731–746. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12533
7. Kashima, Y., Bain, P., Haslam, N., Peters, K., Laham, S., Whelan, J.,… & Fernando, J. Folk theory of social change. Asian Journal of Social Psych. 2009;12(4):227–246. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-839X.2009.01288.x
8. Krys, K., Capaldi, C. A., Lun, V. M., Vauclair, C. M., Bond, M. H., Dominguez-Espinosa, A., & Uchida, Y. Psychologizing indexes of societal progress: Accounting for cultural diversity in preferred developmental pathways. Culture & Psych. 2020;26(3):303–319. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X19868146
9. Berry, J. W. Ecology, culture, and behavior: role in societal development. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psych. 2023;54(2):215–231. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221221105494
10. Badaan, V., & Choucair, F. Toward Culturally Sensitive Development Paradigms: New Shifts, Limitations, and the Role of (Cross-) Cultural Psychology. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psych. 2023;54(2):232–248. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221211073671
11. Stiglitz, J., Sen, A., & Fitoussi, J. P. The measurement of economic performance and social progress revisited: reflections and overview. Sciences Po. 2009;33. https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-01069384
12. Bain, P. G., Hornsey, M. J., Bongiorno, R., Kashima, Y., & Crimston, D. Collective futures: How projections about the future of society are related to actions and attitudes supporting social change. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. 2013;39:523–539. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213478200
13. Kashima, Y., Shi, J., Tsuchiya, K., Kashima, E. S., Cheng, S. Y., Chao, M. M., & Shin, S. H. Globalization and folk theory of social change: How globalization relates

to societal perceptions about the past and future. Journal of Social Issues. 2011;67(4);696–715. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2011.01723.x
14. Klackl, J., Ochoa, D. P., Du, H., Jonas, E., Kashima, E. S., Ah Gang, G. C., & Kashima, Y. A WEIRD Theory? On the prevalence of Western folk theory of social change in the West and Asia. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psych. 2023;54(2):249–268. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221221104960
15. Bain, P. G., Kroonenberg, P. M., & Kashima, Y. Cultural beliefs about societal change: A three-mode principal component analysis in China, Australia, and Japan. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psych. 2015;46(5);635–651. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115578005
16. Basabe, N., & Ros, M. Cultural dimensions and social behavior correlates: Individualism-Collectivism and Power Distance. International Review of Social Psych.2005;18(1):189–225.
17. Rinne, T., Steel, G. D., & Fairweather, J. Hofstede and Shane revisited: The role of power distance and individualism in national-level innovation success. Cross-cultural research. 2012;46(2):91–108. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397111423898
18. Hofstede, G. Culture's consequences: International differences in work related values (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE. 2001.
19. Bomhoff, E. J., & Gu, M. M. L. East Asia remains different: A comment on the index of "self-expression values," by Inglehart and Welzel. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psych. 2012;43(3):373–383. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022111435096
20. Sugihara, K. The East Asian path of economic development: a long-term perspective. In. The Resurgence of East Asia. Routledge. 2004;92–137.
21. Slothuus, R., & Bisgaard, M. How political parties shape public opinion in the real world. American Journal of Political Sci. 2021;65(4):896–911. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12550
22. Galinsky, A. D., Gruenfeld, D. H., & Magee, J. C. From power to action. Journal of personality and social psych. 2003;85(3):453. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.3.453
23. Scholl, A., Ellemers, N., Scheepers, D., & Sassenberg, K. Construal of power as opportunity or responsibility. Advances in Experimental Social Psych. 2022;57–107. https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.aesp.2021.11.001
24. Gardner, W. L., & Seeley, E. A. Confucius, "Jen" and the benevolent use of power: The interdependent self as a psychological contract preventing exploitation. In. The use and abuse of power. Psychology Press. 2015;263–280. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315783055
25. Choi, E., Gobel, M. S., & Uchida, Y. Entrusted or achieved: Construing power as socially dependent explains the greater other orientation of powerholders in collectivistic cultures. preprint. 2022. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/bjh4u
26. Ang, J. B., Madsen, J. B., & Wang, W. Rice farming, culture and democracy. European Economic Review. 2021;136:103778. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroecorev.2021.103778
27. Fu, P., Wu, R., Yang, Y., & Ye, J. Chinese culture and leadership. In J. S., Chhokar, F. C., Brodbeck, & R. J., House (Eds.). Culture and leadership across the world: The GLOBE book of in-depth studies of 25 societies. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Asso. 2008;877–907. DOI:https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203936665
28. Kitayama, S., Ishii, K., Imada, T., Takemura, K., & Ramaswamy, J. Voluntary settlement and the spirit of independence: Evidence from Japan's northern frontier. Journal of personality and social psych. 2006;91(3);369. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.91.3.369
29. Nafstad, H. E., Blakar, R. M., Carlquist, E., Phelps, J. M., & Rand-Hendriksen, K. Ideology and power: The influence of current neo-liberalism in society. Journal of community & applied social psychology. 2007;17(4): 313–327. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.931
30. Tsai, A. Y. Equality or propriety: A cultural models approach to understanding social hierarchy. Stanford University. 2006.
31. Li, M., Yang, F., & Han, Y. More power, more warmth: The enhancing effect of power on the perceived warmth about high-power individuals under Chinese culture. Frontiers in Psych. 2022;13:874861. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.874861
32. Mols, F., & Jetten, J. Explaining the appeal of populist right-wing parties in times of economic prosperity. Political Psych. 2016;37(2):275–292. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12258
33. Bos, L., Schemer, C., Corbu, N., Hameleers, M., Andreadis, I., Schulz, A.,… & Fawzi, N. The effects of populism as a social identity frame on persuasion and mobilisation: Evidence from a 15-country experiment. European Journal of Political Res. 2020;59(1):3–24. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12334
34. Jylhä, K. M., & Hellmer, K. Right-wing populism and climate change denial: The roles of exclusionary and anti-egalitarian preferences, conservative ideology, and antiestablishment attitudes. Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy. 2020;20(1)315–335. https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12203
35. Crowson, H. M. Right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation: As mediators of worldview beliefs on attitudes related to the war on terror. Social Psych. 2009;40(2):93–103. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335.40.2.93
36. Haynes, J. Right-wing populism and religion in Europe and the USA. Religions. 2020;11(10):490. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11100490
37. Bernstein, H. Modernization theory and the sociological study of development. The Journal of Development Studies. 1971;7(2):141–160. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220387108421356
38. Inglehart, R., & Oyserman, D. Individualism, autonomy, self-expression: The human development syndrome. In. Comparing cultures. Brill. 2004;73–96. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047412977_008
39. Diener, E., Diener, M., & Diener, C. Factors predicting the subjective well-being of nations. Journal of Personality and Social Psych. 1995;69:851–864. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.5.851
40. Inglehart, R. Culture shift in advanced industrial society. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1991.
41. Sharma, P. Measuring personal cultural orientations: Scale development and validation. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sci. 2010;38(6):787–806. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-009-0184-7
42. Steel, P., Taras, V., Uggerslev, K., & Bosco, F. The happy culture: A theoretical, meta-analytic, and empirical review of the relationship between culture and wealth and subjective well-being. Personality and Social Psychology Review. 2018;22(2):128–169. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868317721372
43. Inglehart, R., & Welzel, C. How development leads to democracy: What we know about modernization. Foreign affairs. 2009;33–48. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20699492
44. Duckitt, J., Bizumic, B., Krauss, S. W., & Heled, E. A tripartite approach to right-wing authoritarianism: The authoritarianism-conservatism-traditionalism model. Political Psychology. 2010;31(5):685–715. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2010.00781.x
45. Ho, A. K., Sidanius, J., Kteily, N., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Pratto, F., Henkel, K. E.,… & Stewart, A. L. The nature of social dominance orientation: Theorizing and measuring preferences for intergroup inequality using the new SDO_7 scale. Journal of personality and social psych. 2015;109(6):1003. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000033
46. Roczniewska, M., Marszałek, M., Kaffka-Skierka, K., Kryś, K., & Gasiorowska, A. Maximizing economic prosperity, strengthening military, or developing social bonds? Study protocol for research on the relationship between regulatory focus and preferences for the direction of societal development. Plos one. 2022;17(9):e0274624. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0274624
47. Bizumic, B., & Duckitt, J. Investigating right wing authoritarianism with a very short authoritarianism scale. 2018. Avaliable at: https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/251661/1/01
48. Zhong, C. B., Magee, J. C., Maddux, W. W., & Galinsky, A. D. Power, culture, and action: Considerations in the expression and enactment of power in East Asian and Western societies. In. National culture and groups. Emerald Grp Pub Ltd. 2006;9:53–73. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1534-0856(06)09003-7
49. Willer, R., Youngreen, R., Troyer, L., & Lovaglia, M. J. How do the powerful attain status? The roots of legitimate power inequalities. Managerial and Decision Eco. 2012;33(5–6):355–367. https://doi.org/10.1002/mde.2554
50. Haynes, N., & Hickel, J. Introduction: Hierarchy, value, and the value of hierarchy. Social Analysis. 2016;60(4):1–20. https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2016.600401
51. Gobel MS, Miyamoto Y. Self- and other-orientation in high rank: a cultural psychological approach to social hierarchy. Pers Soc Psychol Rev 2024;28(1):54–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/10888683231172252
52. Martinez Gutierrez, N., & Cribbie, R. Incidence and interpretation of statistical suppression in psychological research. Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement. 2021;53(4):480. https://doi.org/10.1037/cbs0000267
53. Curhan, K. B., Levine, C. S., Markus, H. R., Kitayama, S., Park, J., Karasawa, M., et al. Ryff, C. D. Subjective and objective hierarchies and their relations to psychological well-being: A US/Japan comparison. Social Psychological and Personality Sci. 2014;5:855–864. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550614538461

54. Secretary's Advisory Committee on Human Research Protections. Considerations and Recommendations Concerning Internet Research and Human Subjects Research Regulations, with Revisions. 2013. https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/sites/default/files/ohrp/sachrp/mtgings/2013 March Mtg/internet_research.pdf

Publisher's note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Received: 3 June 2024 | Accepted: 7 February 2025

DOI: 10.1111/bjso.12871

ARTICLE

Examining the connection between position-based power and social status across 70 cultures

Arkadiusz Wasiel[1] | Maciej R. Górski[1,2] | Michael Harris Bond[3] | Victoria Wai Lan Yeung[4] | Plamen Akaliyski[5] | Grace Akello[6] | Joonha Park[7] | Mohsen Joshanloo[8] | Boris Sokolov[9] | M. Azhar Hussain[10,11] | Liman Man Wai Li[12] | Mateusz Olechowski[1] | Vivian L. Vignoles[13] | Farida Guemaz[14] | Mahmoud Boussena[14] | Md. Reza-A Rabby[15] | Ayu Okvitawanli[16] | Katarzyna Myślińska-Szarek[1,17] | Brian W. Haas[18] | Ángel Sánchez-Rodríguez[19] | Olha Vlasenko[20] | Vivian Miu-Chi Lun[4] | Nur Amali Aminnuddin[21] | İdil Işık[22] | Oumar Barry[23] | Márta Fülöp[24,25] | David Igbokwe[26] | Mladen Adamovic[27] | Ragna Benedikta Garðarsdóttir[28] | Natalia Soboleva[9] | Julien Teyssier[29] | Fumiko Kano Glückstad[30] | Adil Samekin[31] | Charity Akotia[32] | Marwan Al-Zoubi[33] | Laura Andrade[34] | Petra Anić[35] | Rasmata Bakyono-Nabaloum[36] | Arno Baltin[37] | Vlad Costin[13] | Patrick Denoux[29] | Alejandra Domínguez Espinosa[38] | Agustin Espinosa[39] | Vladimer Gamsakhurdia[40] | Magdalena Garvanova[41] | Alin Gavreliuc[42] | Biljana Gjoneska[43] | Eric Raymond Igou[44] | Naved Iqbal[45] | Nuha Iter[46] | Natalia Kascakova[47,48] | Elmina Kazimzade[49] | Maria Kluzowicz[1] | Agata Kocimska-Bortnowska[50] | Nicole Kronberger[51] | Mary Anne Lauri[52] | Hannah Lee[53] | Arina Malyonova[54] | Fridanna Maricchiolo[55] | Linda Mohammed[56] | Fatma Mokadem[14] | Magdalena Mosanya[1] | Oriana Mosca[57] | Elke Murdock[58] | Martin Nader[59] | Karolina Nowak[1] | Danielle Ochoa[60] | Zoran Pavlović[61] | Iva Poláčková Šolcová[62] | Ewelina Purc[63,64] |

For affiliations refer to page 23.

 © 2025 British Psychological Society.

Muhammad Rizwan[65] | Ana Maria Rocha[66] | Heyla Selim[67] | Rosita Sobhie[68] | Moritz Streng[69] | Chien-Ru Sun[70] | Morten Tønnessen[71] | Claudio Torres[34] | Kiều Thị Thanh Trà[72] | Vladimir Turjačanin[73] | Wijnand van Tilburg[74] | Christin-Melanie Vauclair[75] | Jorge Vergara-Morales[76] | Cai Xing[77] | Belkacem Yakhlef[78] | Jae-Won Yang[79] | Eric Kenson Yau[4] | June Chun Yeung[1] | John Zelenski[80] | Kuba Krys[1]

Correspondence
Arkadiusz Wasiel and Maciej R. Górski, Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Jaracza 1, Warsaw 00-378, Poland.
Email: awasiel@sd.psych.pan.pl and maciej.gorski@psych.uw.edu.pl

Funding information
University of Roma Department of Educational Studies Grant, Grant/Award Number: DSF 2017-2018; European Union-Next Generation EU (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, NPO: EXCELES, Czechia, Grant/Award Number: LX22NPO5101; HSE University Basic Research Program; Hungarian OTKA, Grant/Award Number: K-111789; Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, Grant/Award Number: 301298/2018-1; Norway Funds, Grant/Award Number: 2019/34/H/HS6/00597; Polish National Science Centre, Grant/Award Number: 2020/37/B/HS6/03142

Abstract
Even in the most egalitarian societies, hierarchies of power and status shape social life. However, power and received status are not synonymous—individuals in positions of power may or may not be accorded the respect corresponding to their role. Using a cooperatively collected dataset from 18,096 participants across 70 cultures, we investigate, through a survey-based correlational design, when perceived position-based power (operationalized as influence and control) of various powerholders is associated with their elevated social status (operationalized as perceived respect and instrumental social value). We document that the positive link between power and status characterizes most cultural regions, except for WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) and Post-Soviet regions. The strength of this association depends on individual and cultural factors. First, the perceived other-orientation of powerholders amplifies the positive link between perceived power and status. The perceived self-orientation of powerholders weakens this relationship. Second, among cultures characterized by low Self-Expression versus Harmony (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan), high Embeddedness (e.g., Senegal), and high Cultural Tightness (e.g., Malaysia), the association between power and status tends to be particularly strong. The results underline the importance of both individual perceptions and societal values in how position-based power relates to social status.

KEYWORDS
culture, other-orientation, power, self-orientation, social status

INTRODUCTION

Do you respect your current boss? Did you respect the previous one? What determines whether people holding power over us are respected or not? Human societies are organized within hierarchical structures. Even among the most egalitarian cultures, such as Scandinavian societies, some individuals

occupy higher positions in the hierarchy and wield more power than those lower in the hierarchy, consequently exerting a stronger impact on others (Bruun et al., 2011; Selling & Svallfors, 2019). However, does such position-based power also command respect?

The link of position-based power to social status is intriguing from a psychological perspective: while the power of powerholders is exercised on subordinates, social status is inherently subjective and voluntarily granted (Blader & Chen, 2014; Van Vugt et al., 2008). Psychology has examined the relationship between power and status almost exclusively within WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic; Henrich, 2020) and Confucian contexts (see Imada et al., 2023; Torelli et al., 2020). As a result, this relationship remains largely understudied in the remaining majority of world cultures (e.g., Post-Soviet cultures, Sub-Saharan African, Latin American, and Middle Eastern and North African cultures). Here, we address this gap by exploring how position-based power links to status across cultures, including both individual and cultural-level explanations. This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of hierarchy and may ultimately aid academics and practitioners in integrating knowledge of the consequences of power in a culturally sensitive way (Krys et al., 2023).

POWER AND STATUS

Our central aim is to examine the link between position-based power and social status. We define power as the ability to control resources and outcomes for other people (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), and status as the prominence and respect received by a person (Anderson et al., 2001; Blader & Chen, 2012). The relation between power and status is particularly intriguing because, unlike power, which can be wielded unilaterally, social status is inherently subjective and always lies in the eyes of beholders (Blader & Chen, 2014; Van Vugt et al., 2008). Consequently, while possibly somewhat related, hierarchies of power and status do not always overlap (Blader & Chen, 2014). For example, while an unpopular manager may still possess the authority to dismiss subordinates easily, an esteemed professor may wield less direct power over their students despite their high social status. These differences likely influence the behaviours of people lower in the hierarchy, leading them to vary their actions depending on whether they are dealing with powerful or respected individuals (Fousiani & van Prooijen, 2022).

Previous research has demonstrated the consequences of the discrepancy between the obtained power and status. Power without status has various negative outcomes, including interpersonal conflict (Anicich et al., 2016), demeaning tendencies of powerholders (Fast et al., 2012), unethical decision-making (Liu et al., 2020), corruption (Gu et al., 2020) and increased power struggles, opposition and anxious concerns among subordinates (Wang et al., 2021). However, much of this cited empirical research has been conducted using data from a single cultural context, overlooking the significant role of culture in shaping individual, interpersonal and collective processes surrounding position-based power and social status (see Gobel & Miyamoto, 2024). For example, To et al. (2020) demonstrated that the connection between perceiving someone as powerful and high in status is greater among individuals who endorse horizontal collectivism (cultural orientation that values equality and shared goals within the group) and vertical collectivism (emphasizing hierarchy and respect for authority within the group, see Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Li et al. (2017) provided another example, showing that the congruency between power and status for high-ranking managers correlates with Power Distance—the cultural endorsement of hierarchy (see House et al., 2002). Given that most psychological research has been limited to WEIRD (Western Europe, United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and Confucian (e.g., China, Japan, and Korea) samples (Krys et al., 2024), our aim here is to broaden the understanding of how position-based power predicts the conferment of social status across a more diverse range of cultures.

SELF- AND OTHER-ORIENTED USE OF POSITION-BASED POWER MAY SHAPE ITS RELATION TO SOCIAL STATUS

Powerholders may utilize their influence and control for personal gain or for the benefit of the group they oversee (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010). Such self- and other-oriented usage of power is likely relevant for the attained social status. Functional theories of status conferral (see Berger et al., 1972) indicate that being perceived as able to contribute to the group's overall success and proper functioning is the main source of a powerholder's social status.

The perceived usefulness of high-status individuals for the group has two components: competence (Ridgeway, 1987) and benevolence, which is an inclination to benefit the collective good (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Previous research has highlighted the importance of altruism, generosity, cooperativeness, helpfulness, ethicality and morality in attaining social status (Cheng et al., 2010; DesJardins et al., 2015). These other-oriented dispositions can become entangled with status in a positive feedback loop, as individuals high in social status may increase their generosity towards the group after achieving higher positions (Willer, 2009) and may be motivated to engage in further prosocial behaviours to maintain their status (Kafashan et al., 2014). Anthropological evidence indicates that the cultural phenomenon of status plays an important role in fostering group cooperation beyond coercive means (Henrich et al., 2015). For example, among the Kalahari, a hunter who successfully provides food often acts as an informal leader in hunting groups (Marshall, 1976). Similarly, chiefs of the Kwakiutl on Vancouver Island signal their status by hosting feasts, during which they donate items to other tribes (Piddocke, 1965). In general, position-based power is likely to strongly translate into social status if that power is exercised for the benefit of others. At the same time, a limitation of the psychological research discussed is the predominant focus on WEIRD or Confucian societies, which warrants the empirical investigation of the generalizability of these findings to other cultural regions.

Comparative multicultural investigations demonstrating that the other-orientation of powerholders builds status are scarce. Buss et al. (2020) compared 14 cultures from several cultural regions, for example WEIRD (e.g., US, Germany), Confucian (e.g., China, Japan), Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Zimbabwe, Eritrea) and Latin America (e.g., Brazil, Colombia) in terms of behaviours perceived as status-enhancing. Sacrificing for others, sharing resources, and social connectedness all positively impacted social status in every studied culture. Taking this result into account, it is crucial to move beyond specific behaviours and examine the underlying psychological processes driving this effect, such as generalized perceptions of certain individuals as other-oriented. Moreover, understanding the role of powerholders in these processes is essential, as influence and control should ideally come with heightened responsibilities towards others. The other-orientation of powerholders is a key factor in understanding social hierarchy (see Gobel & Miyamoto, 2024). Thus, the current study further replicates the relationship between other-orientation and social status attainment, with a particular focus on individuals whose other-orientation, or lack thereof, may carry significant societal implications.

Can self-orientation also serve as the basis of social status, or does it always undermine it? Although self- and other-orientations are not necessarily in opposition (see Miyamoto et al., 2018), from a group perspective, the perceived prioritization of one's own goals may be perceived as contradictory to generosity and cooperativeness. Thus, when power is perceived to be exercised in a self-oriented way, it may undermine a powerholder's social status.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF CULTURAL CONTEXT

Cultures vary in terms of the hierarchical structures they have adopted, thereby influencing the conferral of status to powerholders. The dynamics of hierarchies of power and status constitute the important differences between societies (Hofstede, 2001) and are a critical issue in discussing societal development and social change (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004; Krys et al., 2023). Below, we introduce four dimensions of cultural environments that may shape the link between position-based power and social status.

Power distance

Power Distance represents a fundamental cultural difference in desired (in)equalities in social life (Hofstede, 2001). Cultures high in Power Distance (e.g., Malaysia, China, and Russia) tend to accept disparities in power more readily. In contrast, cultures low in Power Distance (e.g., Norway, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands) advocate for egalitarian relations and are less accepting of differential treatment based on an individual's position within the social hierarchy.

Some empirical evidence suggests that Power Distance is an important dimension in position-based power and social status. For instance, in cultures with high Power Distance, top-ranking managers are less likely to be dismissed, which likely reflects a stronger acceptance of social hierarchy and the power-holder's status (Li et al., 2017). Additionally, in these cultures, there is a bigger congruency of power and social status among those in high-ranking positions. In high Power Distance cultures, such a connection is especially important – top managers are more likely to lose their position if their power does not align with their status. Such an effect is not present in egalitarian cultures (Li et al., 2017).

Self-expressive versus harmonious models of selfhood

The second important factor is the cultural emphasis on Self-Expression or Harmony (see Vignoles et al., 2016). In cultures that value self-expression (e.g., WEIRD or Latin American cultures), people tend to communicate openly, often disregarding potential conflicts. In such environments, the effect of position-based power on social status may be less stable due to a lack of cultural norms that maintain the status quo. Power itself may be seen as an unwanted infringement on others' capacity for self-expression, diminishing the social status accorded to powerholders. Redhead et al. (2019) found that in the United States, imposing power through dominant behaviours is ineffective in maintaining long-term status, as it often results in a loss of position. Therefore, the link between power and status may be weaker and more context-dependent in self-expressive cultures.

Conversely, members of harmonious cultures (e.g., those in the Middle East, North Africa, or Southeast Asia) tend to preserve social relationships and maintain balance within the group. Powerholders in such cultures have a responsibility to uphold harmony, often through administering punishment in cases of subordinate transgression. Ito et al. (2023) found that dominating leaders increase social assurance (i.e., the belief that engaging in selfish behaviours will not be tolerated) in Japan (a harmonious culture) but decrease social assurance in the United States (a self-expressive culture). In China, perceived power is positively related to perceived warmth (Li et al., 2022), which reflects the dominating yet caring nature of paternalistic leadership popular in Confucian Asia (Cheng et al., 2014). Although the cultures mentioned above differ in many aspects beyond Self-Expression versus Harmony, this initial evidence suggests the potential usefulness of dominating power in contexts that prioritize harmony, where powerful individuals may enjoy higher status compared to their counterparts from self-expressive cultures.

Embeddedness

Embeddedness (Schwartz, 2009) describes viewing people as parts of a broader social framework rather than autonomous entities. Within cultures that endorse Embeddedness (e.g., Egypt, Pakistan, and Ghana) the affiliation with the collective holds much significance, alongside striving towards shared goals, the preservation of the established order, social harmony, and adherence to traditional practices. People in embedded cultures value security, obedience, and wisdom. Such characteristics constitute a foundation for higher respect granted to powerful individuals, who may not rely solely on personal qualities for legitimization. Status may be granted in conjunction with a high position, since it is supported by the prevailing norms, obedience, and, in certain contexts, adherence to tradition. Those lower in the hierarchy would less likely withdraw respect from the powerholder to avoid violating

the cherished social order within a group. Conversely, powerholders from cultures that do not foster Embeddedness (e.g., Germany, Sweden and Denmark) would be deprived of such a foundation of status. Although powerful, they may need to rely on different strategies to maintain respect and prominence, making the relationship between power and social status weaker.

Cultural tightness

Cultural Tightness describes the strength of norms and low tolerance for deviant behaviours (Gelfand et al., 2011). In tight cultures (e.g., Pakistan, Malaysia and South Korea), people are supposed to abide by social norms, and there is strong moral outrage directed towards rule violators. For such cultures, power may come with an elevated social status, especially when supported by a formal role within institutions or organizations, as the social status of powerholders can be magnified by rules and regulations mandating appropriate behaviour for people lower in the hierarchy. Additionally, members of tight cultures expect strong, capable leadership (Aktas et al., 2016); therefore, persons with a high capacity for influence and control may be granted greater respect.

On the other hand, loose cultures (e.g., Brazil, US and Venezuela) exhibit weak norms and a higher tolerance for deviant behaviour. We suspect that in such cultural environments, the power of an individual is somewhat independent of their social status. Respect conferred to powerholders may depend less on formal titles and positions. People lower in the hierarchy may evaluate powerholders in line with their own personal values and opinions and rely less on social convention. Therefore, while power can still relate to social status, this relation may be weaker among loose cultures.

THE PRESENT STUDY

This study examines the individual and cultural factors that predict the attribution of social status to powerholders. To address these questions comprehensively, we present hypotheses at both the individual and cultural levels.

First, we investigate whether being perceived as powerful—defined as the ability to control resources and outcomes for others based on one's position—associates with elevated social status or respect. We propose that this relationship may depend on how powerholders are perceived to employ their control and influence: whether for self-oriented goals or for the benefit of others. Thus, we consider the self-orientation and other-orientation of powerholders as individual-level moderators of the power-status relationship.

Second, we hypothesize that the processes of conferring status upon powerholders vary across cultures. We initially examine two cultural characteristics: Power Distance (Hofstede, 2001) and the distinction between Self-Expressive versus Harmonious models of selfhood (Vignoles et al., 2016). Subsequently, we conduct exploratory analyses incorporating two additional cultural characteristics: Embeddedness (Schwartz, 2009) and Cultural Tightness (Gelfand et al., 2011).

While research on power and status is not scarce, it has predominantly focused on WEIRD and Confucian cultural circles. Our aim is to broaden the understanding of these phenomena by analysing how power and status intersect across 70 cultures from all major cultural regions. For an illustration of the conceptual framework, see Figure 1.

METHOD

The current study is part of a broader cross-cultural investigation that aims to explore the cultural factors associated with the endorsement of societal development goals, well-being, and perceptions of powerholders. Within the scope of the present paper, our focus centres on examining perceived power,

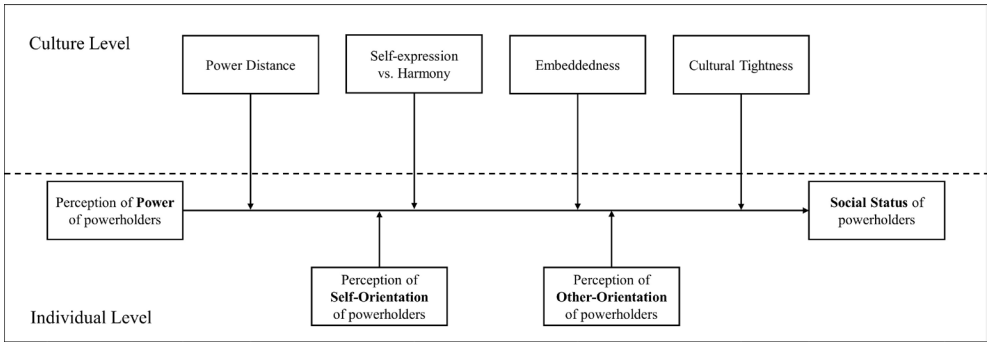


FIGURE 1 Conceptual framework of the study.

social status, and self- and other-orientation of powerholders, as well as cultural dimensions of Power Distance, Self-Expression versus Harmony, Embeddedness, and Cultural Tightness.

Participants and cultures

The data for this study were collected from a diverse range of 70 cultures. The required minimal sample in each culture was set at $n = 200$, but in several cultures, a smaller sample was collected. After excluding participants who failed more than 1 (out of 12) attention checks and those with any missing data for the variables of interest, the final sample size for analysis was $n = 18{,}096$. Further details regarding the breakdown of the samples can be found in Table 1.

The data were collected between late 2022 and early 2024. The last author has prepared all study materials, which were then applied by all other authors in their respective cultures. A template version of the questionnaire in English was prepared in Qualtrics and Google Forms for online administration, and in a separate document for paper-pencil administration. Collaborators across cultures were then instructed to translate the questionnaire using the back-translation method. Next, they administered the questionnaire to samples of their convenience. This involved university students, participants from research panels, snowball samples, convenience samples, and more, including 66 online samples, 7 paper-pencil samples, and 4 mixed samples. In all versions, informed consent was obtained from the participants. In some cultures, more than one sample was collected, specifically three in Algeria and two in Australia, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In such cases, collaborators worked together on the adaptation of the questionnaire but collected their data independently. In such cases, the samples were aggregated within a culture and treated as a single sample.

We grouped the cultures into seven cultural regions proposed by Krys et al. (2024). Regions for all studied cultures are listed in Table 1. We used the Under/Over-Representation Index (UORI; Krys et al., 2024) to assess how accurately different cultural regions are represented in the current study. This index compares the number of cultural samples from a given region in a study to the total number of cultures in that study (e.g., in our study, 34% of cultural samples originate in WEIRD cultures) and divides it by the proportion that the region occupies on the current geopolitical map (e.g., on the contemporary political map, WEIRD cultures constitute 19% of cultures). In essence, the UORI helps reveal sampling biases by showing whether certain cultural regions are overrepresented (UORI > 1.0) or underrepresented (UORI < 1.0) in data collection. To make robust claims about psychological findings, it is important to include cultural data from cultures of the majority world (Uskul et al., 2024). Overall, our sample improves representativeness in cross-cultural psychology studies. We achieved lower over-representation of WEIRD (UORI = 1.78) and Confucian (UORI = 1.99) cultural regions compared to average sampling bias in large-scale, cross-cultural research (2.69 and 2.41 respectively; see Krys et al., 2024). We also obtained a smaller under-representation of Sub-Saharan Africa (UORI = 0.60),

TABLE 1 Demographic information and descriptive statistics for the cultural dimensions.

Culture	Language of the questionnaire	*n*	Age (*SD*)	% Female	% Student	Cultural Tightness	Embeddedness	Self-Expression versus Harmony	Power Distance
Confucianism-influenced									
China	Chinese	235	26.51 (6.77)	49.79	60.00	7.90	3.74	1.90	2.00
Hong Kong	English	136	22.36 (3.20)	67.67	96.99	6.30	3.76	1.71	1.98
Japan	Japanese	133	21.72 (1.27)	73.64	100.00	8.60	3.49	1.73	2.08
South Korea	Korean	201	22.44 (2.12)	59.70	100.00	10.00	3.68	1.58	2.47
Taiwan	Chinese	204	27.36 (6.78)	74.02	55.39	—	3.82	1.53	2.11
Latin America/Caribbean									
Brazil	Portuguese	96	30.36 (9.66)	54.88%	93.90	3.50	3.62	1.92	2.28
Chile	Spanish	170	29.15 (9.88)	70.63%	95.80	—	3.64	2.29	2.41
Colombia	Spanish	252	29.30 (11.00)	48.41%	58.73	—	3.86	2.04	2.17
Ecuador	Spanish	246	28.22 (9.00)	46.67	46.19	—	—	1.97	2.31
Mexico	Spanish	154	34.17 (15.14)	74.19	50.40	7.20	3.90	2.22	2.41
Peru	Spanish	195	30.68 (13.98)	55.97	54.09	—	3.92	2.13	2.21
Suriname	Dutch	140	31.42 (11.54)	51.43	39.29	—	—	1.93	2.17
Trinidad and Tobago	English	179	28.34 (9.46)	70.86	99,34	—	—	1.98	2.31
Venezuela	Spanish	307	37.10 (12.04)	48.00	26,55	3.70	3.74	2.00	2.19
MENA (Middle East and North Africa)									
Algeria	Arabic	981	35.55 (12.61)	52.40%	46.38	—	—	2.12	2.07
Egypt	Arabic	70	28.04 (7.74)	36.76	45.59	—	4.45	1.89	2.44
Jordan	Arabic	242	34.33 (12.02)	65.15	40.50	—	4.20	2.05	2.26
Morocco	Arabic	150	29.35 (7.90)	36.00	30.67	—	—	1.91	2.23
Pakistan	English	50	30.78 (8.38)	56.00	50.00	12.30	4.31	1.88	2.29
Palestine	Arabic	187	40.52 (11.54)	61.29	31.88	—	4.09	1.96	2.32
Saudi Arabia	Arabic	131	26.15 (9.50)	64.12	70.23	—	—	1.75	2.36
Turkey	Turkish	1278	31.02 (11.85)	57.36	48,36	9.20	3.77	2.24	2.67
United Arab Emirates	English	97	21.96 (6.39)	82.47	94,85	—	—	1.80	2.21

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Culture	Language of the questionnaire	*n*	Age (*SD*)	% Female	% Student	Cultural Tightness	Embeddedness	Self-Expression versus Harmony	Power Distance
Non-Confucian Asia/Oceania									
Bangladesh	English	96	27.76 (6.43)	59.38%	80.21	—	—	1.75	2.28
India	English	87	23.83 (3.66)	70.11	94.25	11.00	3.97	1.96	2.47
Indonesia	Bahasa Indonesia	236	20.58 (2.75)	77.13	98.65	—	4.27	1.53	2.35
Malaysia	English	1903	29.13 (6.62)	69.75	31.78	11.80	4.35	1.60	2.50
Philippines	English, Filipino	238	26.31 (8.26)	59.72	74.54	—	4.03	1.82	2.74
Vietnam	Vietnamese	198	24.92 (6.70)	62.12	59,09	—	—	2.02	1.67
Post-Soviet (outside EU)									
Azerbaijan	Azerbaijani	173	25.44 (9.96)	17.52%	72.99	—	—	2.34	2.22
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian	356	30.80 (12.70)	76.12%	67.70	—	4.01	2.09	2.25
Georgia	Georgian	170	35.06 (15.17)	75.88	48.82	—	4.12	2.06	2.32
Kazakhstan	Russian	205	28.16 (11.64)	71.71	68.29	—	—	2.08	2.31
North Macedonia	Macedonian	97	32.51 (12.55)	69.07	50.52	—	3.91	1.89	2.35
Russia	Russian	414	23.20 (3.63)	60.39	98.07	—	3.81	2.12	2.20
Serbia	Serbian	193	24.11 (3.49)	69.43	100.00	—	3.57	2.15	2.59
Ukraine	Ukrainian	167	31.23 (11.99)	73.65	73,05	1.60	3.93	2.45	2.39
Sub-Saharan Africa									
Angola	Portuguese	83	24.62 (6.95)	56.63%	100.00	—	—	2.02	2.58
Burkina Faso	French	28	23.64 (1.99)	21.43%	96.43	—	—	1.63	2.29
Ghana	English	179	24.70 (3.51)	56.42	92.86	—	4.27	1.61	2.61
Kenya	English	177	28.75 (6.19)	43.50	30.51	—	—	2.04	2.25
Madagascar	French	244	29.30 (7.59)	50.00	35.92	—	—	1.89	2.51
Nigeria	English	279	24.48 (8.00)	66.40	75.10	—	4.41	1.74	2.75
Senegal	French	176	24.62 (4.82)	37.50	99.43	—	4.45	2.00	2.39
South Africa	English	475	31.70 (11.12)	49.68	41.19	—	4.03	1.93	2.11

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Culture	Language of the questionnaire	*n*	Age (*SD*)	% Female	% Student	Cultural Tightness	Embeddedness	Self-Expression versus Harmony	Power Distance
Uganda	English	123	29.13 (5.75)	52.94	41.18	—	4.23	1.84	2.21
WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic)									
Australia	English	631	52.21 (19.34)	50.53%	12.85	4.40	3.59	1.74	1.60
Austria	German	250	27.13 (8.87)	74.49%	93.83	6.80	3.11	1.80	2.51
Bulgaria	Bulgarian	204	33.27 (10.75)	49.02%	100.00	-	3.87	2.15	2.31
Canada	English	276	21.62 (3.35)	77.41%	100.00	-	3.31	1.80	1.98
Croatia	Croatian	203	36.05 (13.68)	84.73%	44.33	-	4.00	2.13	2.32
Czechia	Czech	285	34.51 (13.97)	76.80%	52.51	-	3.59	2.11	2.49
Denmark	Danish	86	26.02 (3.77)	60.78	92.16	-	3.19	1.88	0.87
Estonia	Estonian	238	37.33 (13.72)	72.65	69.96	2.60	3.81	1.97	2.14
France	French	164	36.38 (14.50)	79.27	74.39	6.30	3.20	2.21	2.52
Germany	German	305	29.06 (10.26)	59.34	82.78	7.00	3.10	1.89	2.25
Hungary	Hungarian	529	24.19 (6.56)	72.97	98.11	2.90	3.60	2.06	2.48
Iceland	Icelandic	372	29.41 (9.04)	69.43	98.12	6.40	-	1.83	0.89
Ireland	English	262	25.54 (7.60)	60.69	98.47	-	3.41	1.78	1.82
Italy	Italian	136	33.07 (12.86)	57.35	55.88	6.80	3.46	2.29	2.54
Luxembourg	German	162	39.04 (19.58)	70.92	50.35	-	-	1.99	2.22
Malta	English	66	42.11 (15.16)	69.70	22.73	-	-	2.09	2.31
Norway	Norwegian	79	38.27 (15.34)	61.02	50.85	9.50	3.45	1.86	1.00
Poland	Polish	227	28.81 (7.94)	49.34	43.61	6.00	3.86	2.05	2.44
Portugal	Portuguese	176	36.89 (15.85)	73.30	46.02	7.80	3.43	1.92	2.37
Romania	Romanian	225	26.22 (8.85)	62.67	79.56	-	3.78	2.03	2.54
Slovakia	Slovak	272	39.43 (13.08)	85.29	50.74	-	3.82	2.20	2.49
Spain	Spanish	261	25.63 (7.23)	68.85	86.54	5.40	3.31	2.11	2.10
United Kingdom	English	193	29.38 (12.35)	73.02	69,84	6.90	3.34	1.71	1.86
United States of America	English	363	30.92 (12.03)	66.18	64,16	5.10	3.67	1.96	2.19

which means that our study involved more Sub-Saharan cultures than the average for large-scale, cross-cultural research (UORI = 0.29; Krys et al., 2024). Additionally, the MENA (Middle-East and North Africa; UORI = 1.38) and Post-Soviet (non-EU former Soviet states; UORI = 1.59) regions were overrepresented, in contrast to their typical under-representation (UORIs = 0.85 and 0.80 respectively; Krys et al., 2024). However, the Latin American/Caribbean (UORI = 0.77) and Non-Confucian Asia/Oceania (UORI = 0.55) regions remained similarly underrepresented compared to other large-scale, cross-cultural studies (UORI = 0.86 and 0.57 respectively; Krys et al., 2024).

Individual-level measures

Perception of power

We used a perception of power scale developed specifically for this study. The scale aimed to measure the extent to which powerholders from various domains of social life (e.g., managers, teachers, judges, professors, policemen, etc.) were perceived to have control over people's everyday lives. In the study, we defined power as an outcome control (Dépret & Fiske, 1993; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and influence (Dahl, 1957). The initial phrasing was proposed by the lead author. However, all contributors were able to suggest alternative items and impact the final version of the scale. Participants were provided with the following instruction: "We would like to understand the role of people who are higher in the hierarchy in almost every society, for example managers, judges, professors, policemen or teachers. According to your own experience, to what extent do the following statements describe your society?" The scale consisted of three items: (1) "In [culture name], people higher in the hierarchy have more power than an average person"; (2) "In [culture name], people higher in the hierarchy have firm control over citizens' lives"; (3) "In [culture name], people higher in the hierarchy have a strong influence on citizens' lives". Participants were asked to rate each item on a five-point Likert-type scale, with the following response options: 0 (doesn't describe my society at all); 1 (describes my society a little); 2 (describes my society moderately); 3 (describes my society well); 4 (describes my society exactly). The outcome variable was computed as the mean score of the three items, representing participants' overall belief of power among certain powerholders in their society. The strategy of creating items was informed by the intersubjective approach (Chiu et al., 2010). The questions, therefore, probe beyond the personal experience of a certain individual to allow for more broad societal contextual beliefs and perceptions, which can in turn shape individual behaviours and interactions (Smith & Bond, 2019). The internal reliability for the whole sample was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$). Reliabilities for all cultures separately are presented in Table S2.

Social status

We created a social status scale specifically for this study. Social status is a heterogenous phenomenon and requires diligent recognition of the context where it is measured (see Xu et al., 2024). Although there are several instruments designed to capture social status, most of them refer to interpersonal aspects of social status (see Anderson et al., 2012; Bitterly et al., 2017). In this study, we focus instead on a generalized social status conferred to powerholders in a society. The scale aimed to assess social status based on components of general admiration (Fiske, 2010), trustworthiness and competence (Chen et al., 2012). The instruction provided to the participants was the same as in the perception of the power scale. The scale consisted of the following items: (1) "In [culture name], citizens admire those higher in hierarchy"; (2) "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy do their job well"; (3) "In [culture name], each citizen can rely on people higher in hierarchy". Participants were instructed to assess each item using the same 5-point Likert-type scale employed for the perception of power scale. The mean score of the three items was computed to indicate the overall social status attributed to powerholders in the respective culture. A higher mean score indicated a higher perceived social status of powerholders. The internal reliability for

the whole sample was not high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .54$). However, given the conceptual breadth of the scale and the limited number of items to ensure plausibility for cross-cultural administration, we propose that this is sufficient to proceed with further analyses. In support of this argument, we refer to research (Clark & Watson, 2016) that suggests Cronbach's α values may vary depending on the diversity of the constructs being measured. Furthermore, because the scale is short, a lower α value is not uncommon and does not necessarily indicate poor reliability (e.g., Sijtsma, 2009). Short scales are often more prone to lower alpha coefficients, and the trade-off between brevity and reliability is a recognized issue in scale development.

Perceived self-/other-orientation

We used the shortened version of the scale developed by Wasiel et al. (in press). The scale consisted of three items for both self- and other-orientation. The instruction and response scales provided to participants were the same as in the previous two scales. The items for self-orientation were: (1) "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy use power to increase their wealth"; (2) "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy are concerned primarily with their own interests"; (3) "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy use power to increase their own privileges". The items for other-orientation were: (1) "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy act in the interest of citizens"; (2) "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy take responsibility for well-being of citizens"; (3) "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy take responsibility for the good of their communities." Participants were instructed to assess each item using the same 5-point Likert-type scale employed for the perception of power scale. The mean score of the items was computed to indicate the overall perceived self-orientation and other-orientation of powerholders in the respective culture. A higher mean score for self-orientation indicated a perception of powerholders as being focused on their own interests, while a higher mean score for other-orientation indicated a perception of powerholders as acting in the best interest of citizens and their communities. The internal reliability for the whole sample was good for perceived self-orientation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$) and for perceived other-orientation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$).

Individual-level control variables

In the study, we also considered several individual-level control variables. These variables include gender, age, and subjective SES, which were measured using the McArthur Ladder (Adler et al., 2000).

Invariance of the individual-level measures across cultural regions

To examine whether the individual-level scales we used were invariant across the studied cultures, we conducted a series of multigroup confirmatory factor analyses (van de Schoot et al., 2012). First, we tested the characteristics of our scales among 70 cultures and found that they did not reach metric invariance based on the conventionally used threshold. Given the rarity of finding invariance across a large number of groups, we instead compared 7 cultural regions rather than 70 cultures (Welzel et al., 2023). We have established metric invariance at the regional level. Detailed information about invariance testing is available in the Data S1.

Cultural-level indexes measured in the study

Power Distance

We used four items to assess the prevalence of social hierarchy in each society. Two of the items were introduced first in our study: (1) "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy must be addressed

using formal titles"; (2) "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy can be addressed by their first (i.e., given) name" (reversed). Another two items were adapted from Kim and Zhang (2014) and slightly rephrased to ensure consistency with other items: (3) "In [culture name], citizens think that social hierarchy is important"; (4) "In [culture name] citizens think that social equality is important" (reversed). The instruction and response format were the same as in the previous scales. The mean score of the four items was computed to obtain the Power Distance score, representing the perceived level of social hierarchy in each society. According to the original concept (see Hofstede, 2001), Power Distance is considered a characteristic of societies rather than of individuals. Therefore, this study followed this theoretical framework and aggregated the Power Distance scores at the culture level rather than analysing them at the individual level. The items showed good reliability at the cultural level (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$).

Self-expression versus harmony cultural model of selfhood

We used the Culture and Identity Research Network Self-Construal Scale Version 3 (CIRN-SCS-3; Krys et al., 2021; Uskul et al., 2023; Yang, 2018) to capture the Self-Expression versus Harmony dimension to provide insights into individuals' tendencies towards expressing themselves or prioritizing harmonious relationships. For this study, four items were selected from CIRN-SCS-3, with two representing the self-expression pole and two representing the harmony pole. Participants were instructed as follows: "We would like to ask some questions about you. To what extent the below statements describe you?" Participants then responded to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from 0 (doesn't describe me at all), to 4 (describes me exactly). An example of an item is, "You prefer to express your thoughts and feelings openly, even if it may sometimes cause conflict."

The Self-Expression versus Harmony dimension can be employed as both an individual-level and societal-level measure. In this study, the focus was on using it as a measure of societal-level context. By examining individuals' responses and aggregating them at the societal level, the study aimed to understand the prevalence of Self-Expression or Harmony orientations within a given society. Items showed good reliability at the cultural level (Cronbach's $a = .77$).

Cultural-level indexes measured in other studies

Embeddedness

We retrieved the culture scores from Schwartz (2008). The score is based on the average values of schoolteachers among 80 cultures, specifically: respect for tradition, social order, forgiveness, obedience, politeness, being clean, national security, being devout, reciprocation of favours, being moderate, self-discipline, honouring elders, protecting one's public image and wisdom. Embeddedness values have been established using the multidimensional scaling method (see Schwartz, 2009).

Cultural tightness

We obtained the scores from Gelfand et al. (2011). The scores are available for 33 cultures. The index is based on questions regarding the strength of the norms and tolerance (or lack thereof) of deviant behaviour. A sample item is: "People in this country have a great deal of freedom in deciding how they want to behave in most situations."

Analysis strategy

Cross-cultural psychology often examines data that are hierarchically structured, with individuals nested within a cultural or national groups (Cheung et al., 2006). Multilevel modelling (MLM) allows for the examination of both individual-level and culture-level effects. To this aim, we first examined the regional variability of the relation between perceived power and status by fitting a random-slope multi-level model with a cross-level interaction. Here, the perceived social status of powerholders was predicted by perceived power, with the Level-1 effect moderated by a categorical Level-2 moderator that grouped the 70 countries into seven cultural regions.

Next, we tested the individual and cultural moderators of the relationship between perceived power and social status using an MLM approach, following the stepwise model-building procedure proposed by Aguinis et al. (2013). Individual-level predictors were centred clusterwise to properly estimate within-group effects, while culture-level predictors were grand-mean centred. We included the Perceived Self/Other orientations of powerholders as individual-level moderators, and Power Distance along with the Self-expressive versus Harmonious cultural model of selfhood as culture-level moderators.

As an additional analysis, we explored two other cultural moderators important for understanding the status attribution to powerholders: Embeddedness and Cultural Tightness. We did not measure the latter two constructs in this study; instead, we imported pre-existing scores, which is a common practice in cross-cultural psychology, for both Cultural Tightness (see Gelfand et al., 2021) and Embeddedness (see Davidov et al., 2014). The lack of a national score for a certain culture led to its exclusion from the analysis. To minimize the information loss, we therefore computed separate models for Embeddedness and Cultural Tightness.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlations

We computed zero-order correlations between the variables of interest at their respective levels (individual and cultural). Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations. At the individual level, for the whole sample, social status showed a positive correlation with the perception of power and perceived other-orientation of powerholders and a negative correlation with the perceived self-orientation of powerholders. Perception of power was positively correlated with perceived self-orientation and weakly negatively correlated with perceived other-orientation. Perceived self-orientation and other-orientation were negatively linked. At the culture level, Power Distance showed a positive correlation with Embeddedness. Self-Expression versus Harmony cultural model of selfhood was negatively correlated with Cultural Tightness.

Regional variability of the effect of perceived power on social status

As an initial analysis, we examined the regional variability of the effect of perceived power on social status, for which we found substantial cultural differences. The relation between perceived power and social status was significantly positive on average for the whole sample; however, we did not find such an effect in the WEIRD and Post-Soviet cultural regions. We found the strongest effect in Confucian Asia, $Estimate = 0.28$, $SE = 0.057$, $p < .001$, and a similar one in the Latin American/Caribbean cultural region, $Estimate = 0.23$, $SE = 0.040$, $p < .001$, as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa, $Estimate = 0.22$, $SE = 0.042$, $p < .001$. We found a smaller effect in Non-Confucian Asia/Oceania, $Estimate = 0.16$, $SE = 0.046$, $p = .002$, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), $Estimate = 0.13$, $SE = 0.040$, $p = .002$. In the Post-Soviet cultural region, the effect was non-significant,

TABLE 2 Means, standard deviations (*SD*) and correlations of the studied variables.

Variable	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3
Individual level					
1. Social status	1.75	0.79	—		
2. Perceived power	2.66	0.82	.13***	—	
3. Perceived self-orientation	2.94	0.98	−.24***	.48***	—
4. Perceived other-orientation	1.53	0.90	.58***	−.09***	−.46***
Culture level					
1. Power distance	2.21	0.37	—		
2. Self-Expression versus Harmony	1.94	0.20	.19	—	
3. Embeddedness	3.78	0.35	.40**	−.10	—
4. Cultural Tightness	6.66	2.84	.03	−.41*	.29

***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$.

Estimate = 0.05, *SE* = 0.042, $p = .278$, which was the same as in WEIRD cultures, *Estimate* = 0.03, *SE* = 0.025, $p = .238$. The slopes for each culture, as well as the average slopes within all major cultural regions, are shown in Figure 2.

Individual and cultural moderators of the effect of perceived power on social status

To test the individual and cultural aspects important for the perceived power and social status relationship, in the first step, we computed a null model (Step 1) to estimate the variance explained by culture (intra-class correlation, ICC). The results indicated that culture accounted for 14.8% of the variance of social status conferred to powerholders. Then, in Step 2, we included fixed effects at both the individual and culture levels. In Step 3, we allowed the slopes to vary between cultures. In Step 4, we introduced the individual-level interaction between the perceived power and perceived self- and other-orientation. Finally, in Step 5, we included the cross-level interaction between perceived power and our initial set of two cultural-level moderators: Power Distance and Self-Expressive versus Harmonious Culture. The parameter estimates of the models are presented in Table 3. The results with individual-level control variables of age, gender, and subjective SES are presented in Tables S5–S7. The social status of powerholders was positively predicted by respondents' age and negatively predicted by their subjective SES. The main results remained largely the same after the inclusion of these three control variables.

The results of the analysis revealed several findings. Higher perceived power was positively connected to an elevated social status in all of the models we tested. We also observed a negative main effect of the perceived self-orientation of powerholders on their social status, which means that powerholders perceived as guided by personal gain tend to be conferred lower social status. Conversely, we found a main positive effect of other-orientation on status: those who perceive powerholders to be primarily concerned about others' welfare perceive them as higher in social status. We also found significant interactions between perceived power and perceived self/other-orientations. Perceived power was related to social status at weaker levels when powerholders were perceived as more self-oriented. On the other hand, perceived power and social status were linked at stronger levels when powerholders were perceived as more other-oriented. For the Johnson–Neyman plot, see Figure 3.

There was a significant negative effect of Self-Expression versus Harmony on the social status of powerholders, suggesting that, in cultures that prioritize self-expressive behaviours, individuals tend to assign lower social status to powerholders compared to cultures that prioritize harmony. There

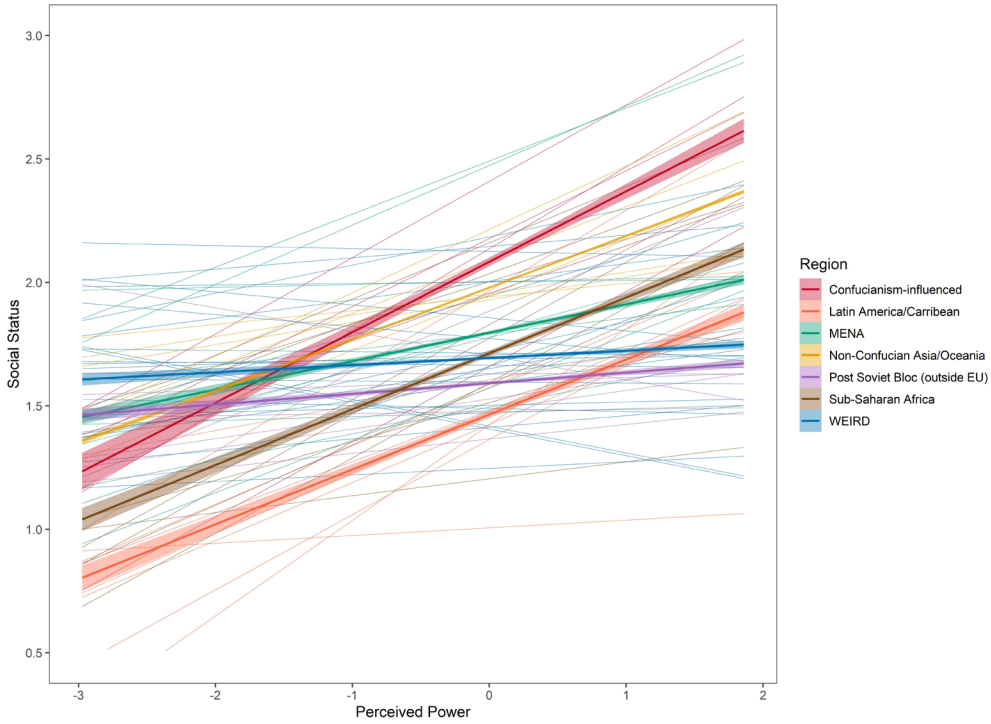


FIGURE 2 The link between perceived power and social status across cultures and cultural regions. The plot represents the simple slopes for cultures and cultural regions of the effect of perceived power on social status based on the multilevel model with a random intercept and random slopes.

was also a significant cross-level interaction between perceived power and Self-Expression versus Harmony on the social status of powerholders: in cultures that foster self-expressive behaviour and openness, the link between perceived power and social status is weaker than in cultures that tend to preserve harmony. The Johnson–Neyman plot is depicted in Figure 4. Contrary to our expectations, in model steps 3, 4 and 5, we found a significant negative main effect of Power Distance on the social status of powerholders. There was no significant cross-level interaction between perceived power and Power Distance.

Power and status: Additional cultural moderators

The effect of Embeddedness is based on the data of $n = 14{,}398$ participants from 52 cultures. We computed a model including perceived power and self/other orientations, level-1 interactions, Embeddedness and its interaction with perceived power. Embeddedness had no main effect on the conferral of social status upon powerholders, $Estimate = -0.06$, $SE = 0.105$, $p = .571$. However, it significantly moderated the relation between the perceived power of powerholders and their social status, $Estimate = 0.08$, $SE = 0.038$, $p = .036$. For the full model breakdown, see Table S3. The effects of perceived power on social status depending on culture's Embeddedness are presented in the upper part of Figure 5. In cultures scoring high on Embeddedness, the relation between the perceived magnitude of power and social status was stronger than in cultures that do not foster Embeddedness.

In the case of Cultural Tightness, the scores were available for 26 cultures sampled in our study. Therefore, the model is based on data from $n = 8671$ participants. Similar to Embeddedness, Cultural Tightness exhibited no significant main effect on the social status of powerholders, $Estimate = 0.03$,

TABLE 3 MLM predicting social status of powerholders with Power Distance and Self-Expression as cultural moderators.

	Null model (step 1)		Random intercept and fixed slope (Step 2)		Random intercept and random slope (Step 3)		Level 1 interaction (step 4)		Cross-level interaction (step 5)	
	Estimate	***SE***	**Estimate**	***SE***	**Estimate**	***SE***	**Estimate**	***SE***	**Estimate**	***SE***
Fixed effects										
Individual-level										
Intercept	1.74***	0.038	1.74***	0.033	1.74***	0.033	1.75***	0.033	1.75***	0.033
Perceived Power (PP)			0.20***	0.007	0.19***	0.012	0.19***	0.012	0.20***	0.012
Self-orientation (SO)			−0.07***	0.006	−0.07***	0.012	−0.08***	0.012	−0.08***	0.012
Other-orientation (OO)			0.46***	0.006	0.45***	0.010	0.44***	0.010	0.44***	0.010
Culture-level										
Power Distance (PD)			−0.13	0.010	−0.18*	0.089	−0.18*	0.088	−0.18*	0.089
Self-Expression versus Harmony (SEH)			−0.70***	0.174	−0.68***	0.161	−0.66***	0.160	−0.67***	0.160
Level-1 interaction										
PP × SO							−0.03***	0.006	−0.03***	0.006
PP × OO							0.02***	0.006	0.02***	0.006
Cross-level interaction										
PP × PD									0.03	0.033
PP × SEH									−0.14**	0.059
Random effects										
Within-culture variance	0.55		0.37		0.36		0.36		0.36	
Intercept variance	0.10		0.08		0.075		0.075		0.075	
Slope variance (Perceived Power)					0.006		0.006		0.006	
Slope variance (Self-orientation)					0.007		0.006		0.006	
Slope variance (Other-orientation)					0.004		0.004		0.004	
Log Likelihood	−20,347		−16,733		−16,597		−16,566		−16,563	

Note: Estimator = Restricted Maximum Likelihood. Culture-level predictors are grand-mean centered. Individual-level predictors of interest are centered culture-wise.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$.

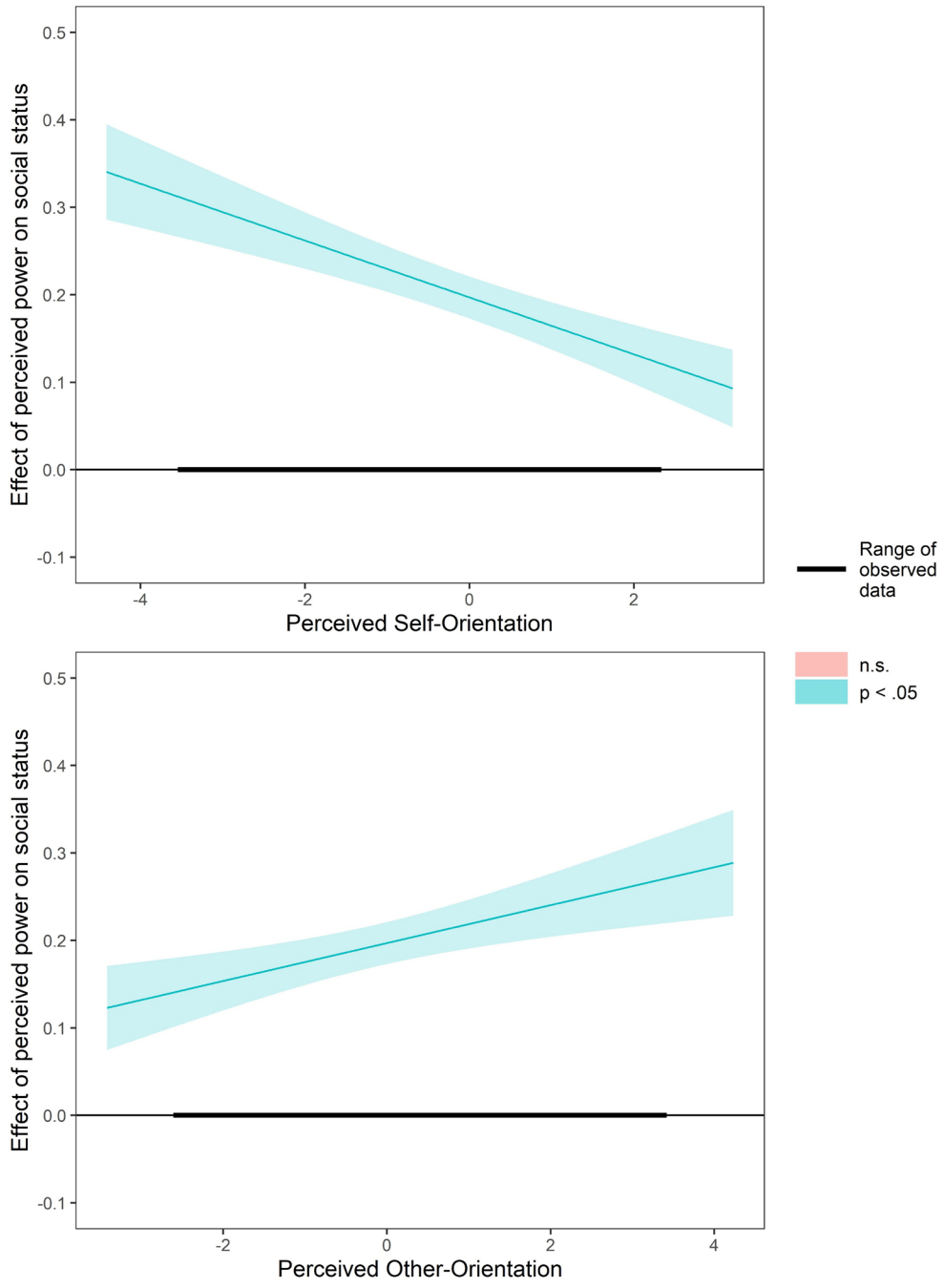


FIGURE 3 Johnson–Neyman plot for the effect of perceived power on social status on different levels of perceived self/other-orientation of powerholders.

SE = 0.017, *p* = .116. At the same time, it significantly moderated the effect of perceived power on social status, *Estimate* = 0.02, *SE* = 0.006, *p* = .015. The full model is presented in Table S4. For the visualization of the effects of perceived power on social status on different levels of Cultural Tightness, see the bottom part of Figure 5. Members of tight cultures associate power with a higher social status more than members of loose cultures.

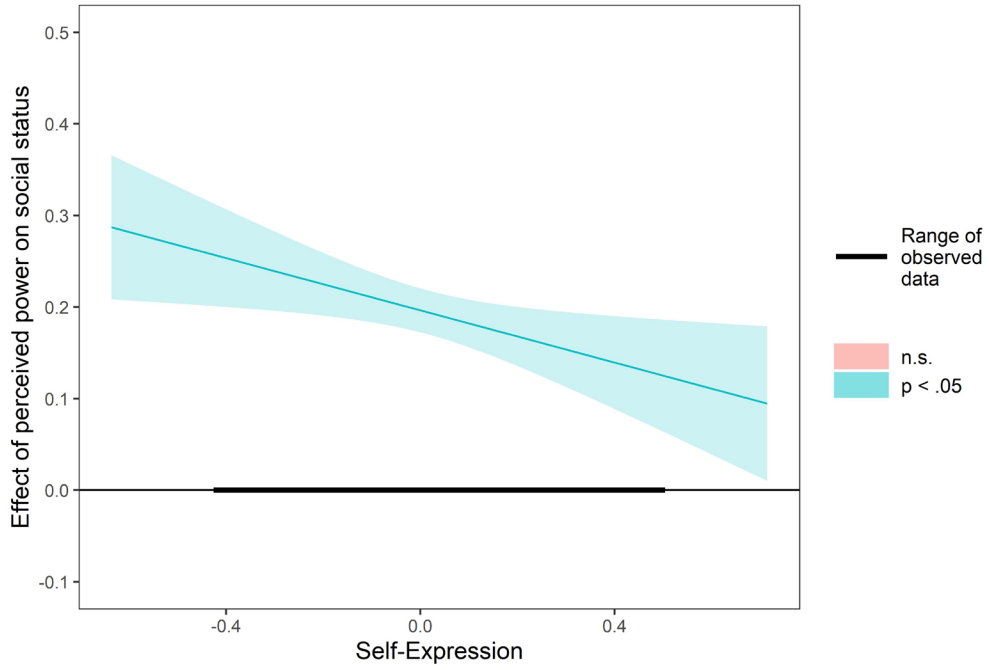


FIGURE 4 Johnson–Neyman plot for the effect of perceived power on social status on different levels of Self-Expression versus Harmony on the culture level.

DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to test the relationship between position-based power and social status among 70 cultures, and to understand the individual and cultural conditions that shape this relationship. These topics are essential to study because powerholders, by virtue of their positions, significantly impact formal institutions, private companies and informal groups, either leading them towards flourishing or contributing to their deterioration (Anderson & Brown, 2010; Maskor et al., 2023). Social status plays a vital role in indicating the positive outcomes arising from the exercise of power. Our study builds on and verifies previous research while also advancing current knowledge in the field.

Is being perceived as powerful universally connected to an elevated social status?

While power and status are viewed as distinct forms of social hierarchy, our study shows that this separation is characteristic of WEIRD and Post-Soviet cultures, most of which showed no significant link between perceived power and social status. In WEIRD cultures, low conformity (Henrich, 2020) may lead individuals to challenge authority, while in the Post-Soviet context, the legacy of centralized control and authoritarian governance may foster scepticism towards powerholders, viewing them as corrupt and unworthy of respect (Sandholtz & Taagepera, 2005). In other regions, we observed a generally positive connection between power and status. This means that in the majority of cultures, people who perceive powerholders as influential and having more control over others also believe they are more respected, competent and hold higher instrumental social value. In most cultural environments, power and status not only serve as self-reinforcing

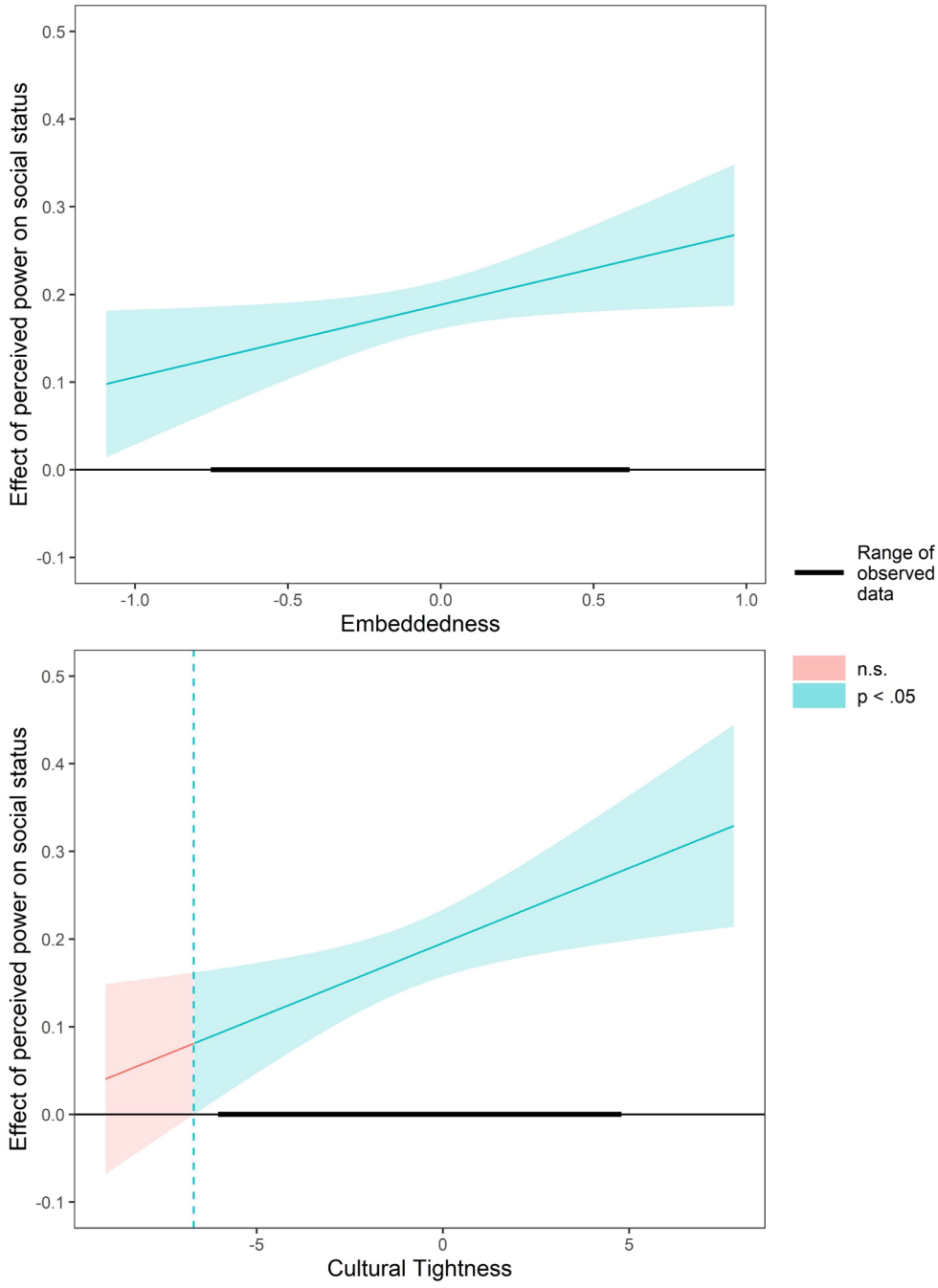


FIGURE 5 Johnson–Neyman plot for the effect of perceived power on social status on different levels of Embeddedness and Cultural Tightness on the culture level.

foundations of social hierarchy (see Magee & Galinsky, 2008) but can also mutually reinforce each other. However, the *extent* to which position-based power and social status are interconnected varies depending on individual and cultural factors.

Prosocial use of power is important for social status

First, the level of attributed status depends on the way power is perceived to be exercised. Here, we find support for theories of status conferral (see Berger et al., 1972). Being perceived as using power to benefit others is linked to a higher conferral of status, and this strengthens the connection between power and social status. High power, when paired with good intentions, can make an individual especially valuable to the group, and thus, highly respected.

The perception of powerholders as self-oriented lowers their status and weakens the relationship between power and social status. However, even for highly self-oriented powerholders, perceived power is still a positive predictor of social status. Our results suggest that the sheer possession of power can still confer social status.

Cultural emphasis on status quo matters

Culture shapes the relation between position-based power and social status. In self-expressive cultures, powerholders have a lower status on average. This effect may come from the scrutiny powerholders face in cultures where people are more likely to speak up against unsatisfactory conduct, thereby undermining authority and challenging the established status hierarchy. In such contexts, powerholders may also be seen as infringing on individual rights, leading to resentment. In contrast, in harmonious cultures, respect towards powerholders may be crucial for maintaining good relationships and avoiding conflict. Furthermore, being a powerholder in a harmonious culture may involve additional responsibilities to ensure social order and reassurance among subordinates (Ito et al., 2023). Engagement with subordinates by regulating their social life may make the position of a powerholder more salient, significant, and respected. In harmonious cultures, people are socialized to avoid open disagreement, stabilizing the powerholder's role and ensuring their social status.

Depending on the culture, powerholders may rely on certain societal foundations to ensure their social status. Cultural dimensions that promote social rigidity, like valuing order and strong norms (Embeddedness and Cultural Tightness), make power more likely to confer social status. Social conventions support formal positions, which can reduce challenges and dissent that may disrupt group order and threaten the status of powerholders. Conversely, in cultures without strong norms, with less emphasis on traditions, and a greater focus on self-expression, attaining social status through power becomes more challenging. Social status is less readily granted, as it lacks strong support from established conventions. As a result, powerholders may rely on personalized sources of status, such as charisma, a reputation based on past achievements, or the use of power for the benefit of others.

Contrary to expectations, we found that members of high Power Distance cultures tend to confer lower social status to powerholders compared to those in low Power Distance cultures. It is important to note that we measured Power Distance in our study using an intersubjective measure (see Chiu et al., 2010), assessing the degree to which people think their culture is either hierarchical or egalitarian. This perception may correlate with lower status conferred to powerholders due to factors like perceived corruption, misuse of power, or detachment from the needs of those lower in the hierarchy. All of these factors can be facilitated by the unequal distribution of power in society. Past research has demonstrated that Power Distance is linked to higher corruption (Park, 2003) and a greater number of human rights violations (Diener et al., 1995), which can undermine the social status of powerholders.

Limitations

Our study has several limitations. First, by assessing powerholders across various domains, we may have oversimplified our findings, as perceptions of power and self/other orientations may differ by context.

Future studies could explore specific domains of power to capture these nuances. Some of the cultural moderators we used were imported and constituted a data loss of excluded cultures. Thus, future replications should include those moderators within the same data collection. Another limitation of our study is the limited reliability of the perceived power and social status measures. The scales employed in the current research had regional metric invariance but did not reach culture-wise invariance. While establishing measurement invariance with a large number of groups is rarely obtainable, this is a limitation of the presented findings. In the case of social status, we conceptualized the construct broadly, which in conjunction with a few items produced limited reliability. Moreover, we did not validate our short scales before launching the 70-culture study. Future research should aim to replicate our findings using well-established and ideally longer measures. Furthermore, it is important to note that our study was correlational, which limits drawing causal conclusions. For example, previous literature suggests a reciprocal relationship between other orientation and social status (Kafashan et al., 2014; Lyle & Smith, 2014). To better understand these dynamics and establish causal relationships, further in-depth research is necessary. Future studies could investigate other foundations of social status across cultures, such as adherence to traditions, charisma, expert knowledge, ethical conduct, or economic success.

CONCLUSION

Hierarchies of power and status are prevalent across human societies, even in those that strive for greater egalitarianism. The current study contributes to the understanding of these phenomena by highlighting the link between perceived power and elevated social status across different cultures. Our findings indicate that not all powerholders are equally respected. To gain social status, it is important that power is wielded in a way that benefits the local community and demonstrates a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others. The self-interested use of power, on the other hand, is detrimental to attaining respect and admiration. Beyond universal processes, our study reveals cultural differences in how powerholders are perceived. People in self-expressive cultures tend to confer less status upon powerholders compared to people in harmonious cultures. Cultural characteristics that promote the status quo make power strongly linked to the higher social status of powerholders.

While position-based power and social status often overlap, individuals and cultures differ in how they navigate the dynamics of social hierarchy. Our most robust finding highlights the importance of perceived other-orientation in attaining high social status alongside power. Therefore, as hierarchies persist in the modern world, it is crucial to incentivize, encourage, and demand that powerholders prioritize the well-being of others, not only to benefit their own status but also for the flourishing of society as a whole.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Arkadiusz Wasiel: Conceptualization; investigation; writing – original draft; methodology; validation; visualization; writing – review & editing; formal analysis; project administration. **Maciej R. Górski:** Conceptualization; investigation; writing – original draft; methodology; validation; visualization; writing – review & editing; formal analysis; project administration; data curation. **Michael Harris Bond:** Conceptualization; investigation; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing; supervision; resources. **Victoria Wai Lan Yeung:** Conceptualization; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing; investigation; resources. **Plamen Akaliyski:** Writing – original draft; writing – review & editing; conceptualization; methodology. **Grace Akello:** Writing – original draft; writing – review & editing; conceptualization; investigation; resources. **Joonha Park:** Investigation; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing. **Mohsen Joshanloo:** Conceptualization; methodology; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing; investigation; resources. **Boris Sokolov:** Conceptualization; investigation; methodology; visualization; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing; resources. **M. Azhar Hussain:** Writing – original draft; writing – review & editing; conceptualization; investigation; resources. **Liman Man Wai Li:** Conceptualization; investigation; writing – original draft; writing – review &

editing; resources. **Mateusz Olechowski:** Conceptualization; investigation; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing; resources. **Vivian L. Vignoles:** Conceptualization; investigation; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing; resources. **Farida Guemaz:** Investigation; writing – original draft; resources. **Mahmoud Boussena:** Investigation; writing – original draft; resources. **Md. Reza-A Rabby:** Investigation; writing – original draft; resources. **Ayu Okvitawanli:** Resources; investigation. **Katarzyna Myślińska-Szarek:** Investigation; resources. **Brian W. Haas:** Investigation; resources. **Ángel Sánchez-Rodríguez:** Investigation; resources. **Olha Vlasenko:** Investigation; resources. **Vivian Miu-Chi Lun:** Investigation; resources. **Nur Amali Aminnuddin:** Investigation; resources. **İdil Işık:** Investigation; resources. **Oumar Barry:** Investigation; resources. **Márta Fülöp:** Investigation; resources. **David Igbokwe:** Investigation; resources. **Mladen Adamovic:** Investigation; resources. **Ragna Benedikta Garðarsdóttir:** Investigation; resources. **Natalia Soboleva:** Investigation; resources. **Julien Teyssier:** Investigation; resources. **Fumiko Kano Glückstad:** Investigation; resources. **Adil Samekin:** Investigation; resources. **Charity Akotia:** Investigation; resources. **Marwan Al-Zoubi:** Investigation; resources. **Laura Andrade:** Investigation; resources. **Petra Anić:** Investigation; resources. **Rasmata Bakyono-Nabaloum:** Investigation; resources. **Arno Baltin:** Investigation; resources. **Vlad Costin:** Investigation; resources. **Patrick Denoux:** Investigation; resources. **Alejandra Domínguez Espinosa:** Investigation; resources. **Agustin Espinosa:** Investigation; resources. **Vladimer Gamsakhurdia:** Investigation; resources. **Magdalena Garvanova:** Investigation; resources. **Alin Gavreliuc:** Investigation; resources. **Biljana Gjoneska:** Investigation; resources. **Eric Raymond Igou:** Investigation; resources. **Naved Iqbal:** Investigation; resources. **Nuha Iter:** Investigation; resources. **Natalia Kascakova:** Investigation; resources. **Elmina Kazimzade:** Investigation; resources. **Maria Kluzowicz:** Investigation; methodology; project administration. **Agata Kocimska-Bortnowska:** Investigation; resources. **Nicole Kronberger:** Resources; investigation. **Mary Anne Lauri:** Investigation; resources. **Hannah Lee:** Investigation; resources. **Arina Malyonova:** Investigation; resources. **Fridanna Maricchiolo:** Investigation; resources. **Linda Mohammed:** Investigation; resources. **Fatma Mokadem:** Investigation; resources. **Magdalena Mosanya:** Investigation; resources. **Oriana Mosca:** Investigation; resources. **Elke Murdock:** Investigation; resources. **Martin Nader:** Investigation; resources. **Karolina Nowak:** Investigation; project administration. **Danielle Ochoa:** Investigation; resources. **Zoran Pavlović:** Investigation; resources. **Iva Poláčková Šolcová:** Investigation; resources. **Ewelina Purc:** Investigation; writing – review & editing. **Muhammad Rizwan:** Investigation; resources. **Ana Maria Rocha:** Investigation; resources. **Heyla Selim:** Investigation, resources. **Rosita Sobhie**: Investigation, **Moritz Streng:** Investigation. **Chien-Ru Sun:** Investigation, resources. **Morten Tønnessen:** Investigation, resources. **Claudio Torres:** Investigation, resources. **Kiều Thị Thanh Trà:** Investigation, resources. **Vladimir Turjačanin:** Investigation, resources. **Wijnand van Tilburg:** Investigation, resources. **Christin-Melanie Vauclair:** Investigation, resources, writing – review & editing. **Jorge Vergara-Morales:** Investigation, resources. **Cai Xing:** Investigation, resources. **Belkacem Yakhlef:** Investigation, resources. **Jae-Won Yang:** Investigation, resources. **Eric Kenson Yau:** Investigation, resources. **June Chun Yeung:** Investigation, conceptualization, methodology. **John Zelenski:** Investigation, resources. **Kuba Krys:** Conceptualization, investigation, funding acquisition, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing, methodology, project administration, supervision, data curation, resources.esources.

AFFILIATIONS

[1]Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland
[2]Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
[3]Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Business, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China
[4]Department of Psychology, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China
[5]Department of Sociology and Social Policy, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China
[6]Faculty of Medicine, Gulu University, Gulu, Uganda
[7]Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan
[8]Department of Psychology, Keimyung University, Daegu, South Korea
[9]Higher School of Economics, Ronald F. Inglehart Laboratory for Comparative Social Research, Moscow, Russia
[10]Department of Finance and Economics, College of Business Administration, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE

[11]Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University, Roskilde, Denmark
[12]Department of Psychology and Centre for Psychosocial Health, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
[13]School of Psychology, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK
[14]Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghine–Setif 2, Setif, Algeria
[15]BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh
[16]Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia
[17]Department of Psychology, SWPS University, Sopot, Poland
[18]Department of Psychology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA
[19]Department of Social Psychology and Anthropology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain
[20]Institute of Education Science, Osnabrück University, Osnabrück, Germany
[21]Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Centre for Islamic Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam
[22]Department of Psychology, Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul, Turkey
[23]Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal
[24]Institute of Psychology, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, Budapest, Hungary
[25]Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience and Psychology, HUN-REN Research Centre of Natural Sciences, Budapest, Hungary
[26]Department of Psychology, Baze University, Abuja, Nigeria
[27]King's Business School, King's College London, London, UK
[28]Faculty of Psychology, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland
[29]Département Psychologie Clinique Du Sujet, Université Toulouse II, Toulouse, France
[30]Department of Management, Society & Communication, Copenhagen Business School, Frederiksberg, Denmark
[31]School of Liberal Arts, M. Narikbayev KAZGUU University, Astana, Kazakhstan
[32]Department of Psychology, School of Social Sciences, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana
[33]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan
[34]Institute of Psychology, University of Brasilia, Brasília, Brazil
[35]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia
[36]Département de Philosophie et de Psychologie, Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
[37]School of Natural Sciences and Health, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia
[38]Psychology Department, Iberoamerican University, Mexico City, Mexico
[39]Departamento Académico de Psicología, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, Peru
[40]Department of Psychology, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
[41]Department of Information Systems and Technologies, University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia, Bulgaria
[42]Department of Psychology, West University of Timişoara, Timişoara, Romania
[43]Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Skopje, North Macedonia
[44]Department of Psychology, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland
[45]Department of Psychology, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India
[46]Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences, Palestine Technical University – Kadoorie, Tulkarm, Palestine
[47]Olomouc University Social Health Institute, Palacky University, Olomouc, Czechia
[48]Psychiatric Clinic Pro Mente Sana, Bratislava, Slovakia
[49]Department of Educational Psychology, Baku State University, Baku, Azerbaijan
[50]Department of Psychology, SWPS University, Wroclaw, Poland
[51]Institute of Education and Psychology, Johannes Kepler University Linz, Linz, Austria
[52]Department of Psychology, University of Malta, Msida, Malta
[53]Department of Psychology, Indiana University Northwest, Gary, Indiana, USA
[54]Department of General and Social Psychology, Dostoevsky Omsk State University, Omsk, Russia
[55]Department of Education, University of Roma Tre, Rome, Italy
[56]Institute of Criminology and Public Safety, University of Trinidad and Tobago, Arima, Trinidad and Tobago
[57]Department of Education, Psychology, Philosophy, University of Cagliari, Cagliari, Italy
[58]Research Unit INSIDE, University of Luxembourg, Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg
[59]Department of Organizational Management, Universidad ICESI, Cali, Colombia
[60]Department of Psychology, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
[61]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
[62]Institute of Psychology, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czechia
[63]Institute of Psychology, SWPS University, Warsaw, Poland
[64]Institute of Psychology, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland
[65]University of Haripur, Karachi, Pakistan
[66]Catholic University of Angola, Luanda, Angola
[67]King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
[68]Interfaculty for Graduate Studies and Research, Anton de Kom University of Suriname, Paramaribo, Suriname
[69]Institute of Psychology, University of Koblenz, Koblenz, Germany
[70]Department of Psychology, National Chengchi University, Taiwan, China
[71]Department of Social Studies, University of Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway
[72]Department of Psychology, HCMC University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
[73]Faculty of Philosophy, University of Banja Luka, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina
[74]Department of Psychology, University of Essex, Colchester, UK
[75]Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal
[76]Universidad de Las Américas, Concepción, Chile
[77]Department of Psychology, Renmin University of China, Beijing, China
[78]École Normale Supérieure of Constantine, Constantine, Algeria

[79]Department of Psychology, The Catholic University of Korea, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea
[80]Department of Psychology, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

FUNDING INFORMATION
This work was supported by the Norway Funds and the Polish National Science Centre under grants 2019/34/H/HS6/00597 and 2020/37/B/HS6/03142; Hungarian NKFIH- OTKA-K 135963; Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development Grant 301,298/2018–1; NPO "Systemic Risk Institute" Grant LX22NPO5101 funded by the European Union–Next Generation EU (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, NPO: EXCELES, Czechia); HSE University Basic Research Program; and University of Roma Department of Educational Studies Grant DSF 2017–2018.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Data and code for all analyses are available at https://osf.io/mvtnp/.

ETHICS STATEMENT
The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (approval no. #22/XI/2019).

ORCID
Arkadiusz Wasiel https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7715-4743
Maciej R. Górski https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7737-4632
Michael Harris Bond https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5409-9614
Victoria Wai Lan Yeung https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3479-3198
Plamen Akaliyski https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0157-0246
Grace Akello https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1228-013X
Joonha Park https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0764-5173
Mohsen Joshanloo https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9350-6219
Boris Sokolov https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5151-8147
M. Azhar Hussain https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7928-7136
Liman Man Wai Li https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3687-4490
Mateusz Olechowski https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7207-889X
Vivian L. Vignoles https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7628-6776
Farida Guemaz https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4278-6840
Mahmoud Boussena https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0150-7631
Md. Reza-A Rabby https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4538-0636
Ayu Okvitawanli https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1387-4263
Katarzyna Myślińska-Szarek https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2656-7593
Brian W. Haas https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6860-448X
Ángel Sánchez-Rodríguez https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9749-8508
Olha Vlasenko https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7258-2108
Vivian Miu-Chi Lun https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3868-5538
Nur Amali Aminnuddin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5105-766X
İdil Işık https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6709-9717
Márta Fülöp https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5020-041X
David Igbokwe https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1430-0453
Ragna Benedikta Garðarsdóttir https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3368-4616
Fumiko Kano Glückstad https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8618-2479

Adil Samekin https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9684-1944
Charity Akotia https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8572-8708
Petra Anić https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8841-5988
Vlad Costin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5413-8174
Alejandra Domínguez Espinosa https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2697-8627
Agustin Espinosa https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2275-5792
Vladimer Gamsakhurdia https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5297-4777
Magdalena Garvanova https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2387-1442
Alin Gavreliuc https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8411-0327
Biljana Gjoneska https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1200-6672
Eric Raymond Igou https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7744-9648
Naved Iqbal https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5558-8938
Nuha Iter https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5562-3545
Natalia Kascakova https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2021-2847
Nicole Kronberger https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7128-3990
Mary Anne Lauri https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5219-8010
Arina Malyonova https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5778-0739
Fridanna Maricchiolo https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6230-6609
Oriana Mosca https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4873-3161
Elke Murdock https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2032-1261
Danielle Ochoa https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9914-9590
Zoran Pavlović https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9231-5100
Iva Poláčková Šolcová https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3130-5416
Ewelina Purc https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0021-4802
Ana Maria Rocha https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5331-8491
Heyla Selim https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6974-7175
Rosita Sobhie https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3627-974X
Morten Tønnessen https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8692-1289
Claudio Torres https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3727-7391
Kiều Thị Thanh Trà https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6269-7796
Vladimir Turjačanin https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8706-3503
Christin-Melanie Vauclair https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4940-1185
Jorge Vergara-Morales https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3655-813X
Cai Xing https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2790-2103
Jae-Won Yang https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5909-250X
June Chun Yeung https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1293-8576
John Zelenski https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3668-5764
Kuba Krys https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0365-423X

REFERENCES

Adler, N. E., Epel, E. S., Castellazzo, G., & Ickovics, J. R. (2000). Relationship of subjective and objective social status with psychological and physiological functioning: Preliminary data in healthy, white women. *Health Psychology*, *19*(6), 586–592. https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.19.6.586

Aguinis, H., Gottfredson, R. K., & Culpepper, S. A. (2013). Best-practice recommendations for estimating cross-level interaction effects using multilevel modeling. *Journal of Management*, *39*(6), 1490–1528. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313478188

Aktas, M., Gelfand, M. J., & Hanges, P. J. (2016). Cultural tightness–looseness and perceptions of effective leadership. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *47*(2), 294–309. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115606802

Anderson, C., & Brown, C. E. (2010). The functions and dysfunctions of hierarchy. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *30*, 55–89. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2010.08.002

Anderson, C., John, O. P., Keltner, D., & Kring, A. M. (2001). Who attains social status? Effects of personality and physical attractiveness in social groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *81*(1), 116–132. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.1.116

Anderson, C., & Kilduff, G. J. (2009). The pursuit of status in social groups. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *18*(5), 295–298. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2009.01655.x

Anderson, C., Kraus, M. W., Galinsky, A. D., & Keltner, D. (2012). The local-ladder effect: Social status and subjective well-being. *Psychological Science*, *23*(7), 764–771. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611434537

Anicich, E. M., Fast, N. J., Halevy, N., & Galinsky, A. D. (2016). When the bases of social hierarchy collide: Power without status drives interpersonal conflict. *Organization Science*, *27*(1), 123–140. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2015.1019

Berger, J., Cohen, B. P., & Zelditch, M., Jr. (1972). Status characteristics and social interaction. *American Sociological Review*, *37*, 241–255. https://doi.org/10.2307/2093465

Bitterly, T. B., Brooks, A. W., & Schweitzer, M. E. (2017). Risky business: When humor increases and decreases status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *112*(3), 431–455. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000079

Blader, S. L., & Chen, Y. R. (2014). What's in a name? Status, power, and other forms of social hierarchy. In J. T. Cheng, J. L. Tracy, & C. Anderson (Eds.), *The psychology of social status* (pp. 71–95). Springer New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-0867-7_4

Blader, S. L., & Chen, Y.-R. (2012). Differentiating the effects of status and power: A justice perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*(5), 994–1014. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026651

Bruun, M. H., Jakobsen, G. S., & Krøijer, S. (2011). Introduction: The concern for sociality—Practicing equality and hierarchy in Denmark. *Social Analysis*, *55*(2), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2011.550201

Buss, D. M., Durkee, P. K., Shackelford, T. K., Bowdle, B. F., Schmitt, D. P., Brase, G. L., Choe, J. C., & Trofimova, I. (2020). Human status criteria: Sex differences and similarities across 14 nations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *119*(5), 979–998. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000206

Chen, Y. R., Peterson, R. S., Phillips, D. J., Podolny, J. M., & Ridgeway, C. L. (2012). Introduction to the special issue: Bringing status to the table—Attaining, maintaining, and experiencing status in organizations and markets. *Organization Science*, *23*(2), 299–307. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1110.0668

Cheng, B. S., Boer, D., Chou, L. F., Huang, M. P., Yoneyama, S., Shim, D., Sun, J.-M., Lin, T.-T., Chou, W.-J., & Tsai, C. Y. (2014). Paternalistic leadership in four east Asian societies: Generalizability and cultural differences of the triad model. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *45*(1), 82–90. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022113490070

Cheng, J. T., Tracy, J. L., & Henrich, J. (2010). Pride, personality, and the evolutionary foundations of human social status. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *31*, 334–347. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2010.02.004

Cheung, M. W. L., Leung, K., & Au, K. (2006). Evaluating multilevel models in cross-cultural research: An illustration with social axioms. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *37*(5), 522–541. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022106290477

Chiu, C. Y., Gelfand, M. J., Yamagishi, T., Shteynberg, G., & Wan, C. (2010). Intersubjective culture: The role of intersubjective perceptions in cross-cultural research. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *5*(4), 482–493. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691610375562

Clark, L. A., & Watson, D. (2016). Constructing validity: Basic issues in objective scale development. In A. E. Kazdin (Ed.), *Methodological issues and strategies in clinical research* (4th ed., pp. 187–203). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/14805-012

Dahl, R. A. (1957). The concept of power. *Behavioral Science*, *2*(3), 201–215. https://doi.org/10.1002/bs.3830020303

Davidov, E., Meulemann, B., Schwartz, S. H., & Schmidt, P. (2014). Individual values, cultural embeddedness, and anti-immigration sentiments: Explaining differences in the effect of values on attitudes toward immigration across Europe. *KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie Und Sozialpsychologie*, *66*, 263–285. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-014-0274-5

Dépret, E., & Fiske, S. T. (1993). Social cognition and power: Some cognitive consequences of social structure as a source of control deprivation. In G. Weary, F. Gleicher, & K. L. Marsh (Eds.), *Control motivation and social cognition* (pp. 176–202). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-8309-3_7

DesJardins, N. M. L., Srivastava, S., Küfner, A. C., & Back, M. D. (2015). Who attains status? Similarities and differences across social contexts. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *6*(6), 692–700. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550615558017

Diener, E., Diener, M., & Diener, C. (1995). Factors predicting the subjective well-being of nations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*(5), 851–864. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.5.851

Fast, N. J., Halevy, N., & Galinsky, A. D. (2012). The destructive nature of power without status. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *48*(1), 391–394. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.07.013

Fiske, S. T. (2010). Interpersonal stratification: Status, power, and subordination. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (5th ed., pp. 941–982). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470561119.socpsy002026

Fousiani, K., & van Prooijen, J. W. (2022). Motives for punishing powerful vs. prestigious offenders: The moderating role of group identity. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *61*(3), 729–747. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12525

Gelfand, M. J., Jackson, J. C., Pan, X., Nau, D., Pieper, D., Denison, E., Dagher, M., Van Lange, PAM, Chiu, C. Y., & Wang, M. (2021). The relationship between cultural tightness–looseness and COVID-19 cases and deaths: A global analysis. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, *5*(3), e135–e144. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(20)30301-6

Gelfand, M. J., Raver, J. L., Nishii, L., Leslie, L. M., Lun, J., Lim, B. C., Duan, L., Almaliach, A., Ang, S., Arnadottir, J., Aycan, Z., Boehnke, K., Boski, P., Cabecinhas, R., Chan, D., Chhokar, J., D'Amato, A., Subirats Ferrer, M., Fischlmayr, I. C., … Yamaguchi, S. (2011). Differences between tight and loose cultures: A 33-nation study. *Science*, *332*(6033), 1100–1104. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1197754

Gobel, M. S., & Miyamoto, Y. (2024). Self-and other-orientation in high rank: A cultural psychological approach to social hierarchy. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *28*(1), 54–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/10888683231172225

Gu, Z., Liu, L., Tan, X., Liang, Y., Dang, J., Wei, C., Ren, D., Su, Q., & Wang, G. (2020). Does power corrupt? The moderating effect of status. *International Journal of Psychology*, *55*(4), 499–508. https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12629

Henrich, J., Chudek, M., & Boyd, R. (2015). The big man mechanism: How prestige fosters cooperation and creates prosocial leaders. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, B: Biological Sciences*, *370*(1683), 20150013. https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2015.0013

Henrich, J. P. (2020). *The WEIRDest people in the world: How the west became psychologically peculiar and particularly prosperous* (1st ed.). Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work related values* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

House, R., Javidan, M., Hanges, P., & Dorfman, P. (2002). Understanding cultures and implicit leadership theories across the globe: An introduction to project GLOBE. *Journal of World Business*, *37*(1), 3–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1090-9516(01)00069-4

Imada, H., Hopthrow, T., & Zibell, H. (2023). Does the sense of power influence reputational concern? Tests with episodic and semantic power priming. Social. *Psychological Bulletin*, *18*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.32872/spb.7779

Inglehart, R., & Oyserman, D. (2004). Individualism, autonomy, self-expression: The human development syndrome. In *Comparing cultures* (pp. 73–96). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047412977_008

Ito, A., Gobel, M. S., & Uchida, Y. (2023). *Dominant leaders establish social assurance in east-asian but not in western cultural contexts*. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/9kt7h

Kafashan, S., Sparks, A., Griskevicius, V., & Barclay, P. (2014). Prosocial behavior and social status. In J. T. Cheng, J. L. Tracy, & C. Anderson (Eds.), *The Psychology of Social Status* (Vol. *139-158*). Springer New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-0867-7_7

Kim, Y., & Zhang, Y. (2014). The impact of power-distance belief on consumers' preference for status brands. *Journal of Global Marketing*, *27*(1), 13–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/08911762.2013.844290

Krys, K., de Almeida, I., Wasiel, A., & Vignoles, V. L. (2024). WEIRD–Confucian comparisons: Ongoing cultural biases in psychology's evidence base and some recommendations for improving global representation. *The American Psychologist*, *80*(2), 247–263. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001298

Krys, K., Dominguez-Espinosa, A., & Uchida, Y. (2023). Bridging cross-cultural psychology with societal development studies. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *54*(2), 165–169. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221221149385

Krys, K., Park, J., Kocimska-Zych, A., Kosiarczyk, A., Selim, H. A., Wojtczuk-Turek, A., Haas, B. W., Uchida, Y., Torres, C., Capaldi, C. A., Bond, M. H., Zelenski, J. M., Lun, V. M.-C., Maricchiolo, F., Vauclair, C.-M., Šolcová, I. P., Sirlopú, D., Xing, C., Vignoles, V. L., & Adamovic, M. (2021). Personal life satisfaction as a measure of societal happiness is an individualistic presumption: Evidence from fifty countries. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *22*, 2197–2214. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-020-00311-y

Li, M., Yang, F., & Han, Y. (2022). More power, more warmth: The enhancing effect of power on the perceived warmth about high-power individuals under Chinese culture. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 874861. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.874861

Li, W., Lu, Y., Makino, S., & Lau, C. M. (2017). National power distance, status incongruence, and CEO dismissal. *Journal of World Business*, *52*(6), 809–818. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2017.08.001

Liu, Y., Chen, S., Bell, C., & Tan, J. (2020). How do power and status differ in predicting unethical decisions? A cross-national comparison of China and Canada. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *167*, 745–760. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04150-7

Lyle, H. F., & Smith, E. A. (2014). The reputational and social network benefits of prosociality in an Andean community. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *111*, 4820–4825. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1318372111

Magee, J. C., & Galinsky, A. D. (2008). 8 social hierarchy: The self-reinforcing nature of power and status. *The Academy of Management Annals*, *2*(1), 351–398. https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520802211628

Marshall, L. (1976). *The! Kung of nyae nyae* (p. 433). Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674180574

Maskor, M., Fladerer, M. P., Fong, P., Steffens, N. K., & Haslam, S. A. (2023). The fish can rot from the heart, not just the head: Exploring the detrimental impact of transgressions by leaders at multiple levels of an organization. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *62*(1), 431–455. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12551

Miyamoto, Y., Yoo, J., Levine, C. S., Park, J., Boylan, J. M., Sims, T., Markus, H. R., Kitayama, S., Kawakami, N., Karasawa, M., Coe, C. L., Love, G. D., & Ryff, C. D. (2018). Culture and social hierarchy: Self-and other-oriented correlates of socioeconomic status across cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *115*(3), 427–445. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000133

Park, H. (2003). Determinants of corruption: A cross-national analysis. *Multinational Business Review*, *11*(2), 29–48. https://doi.org/10.1108/1525383X200300010

Piddocke, S. (1965). The potlatch system of the southern Kwakiutl: A new perspective. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, *21*(3), 244–264. https://doi.org/10.1086/soutjanth.21.3.3629231

Redhead, D., Cheng, J. T., Driver, C., Foulsham, T., & O'Gorman, R. (2019). On the dynamics of social hierarchy: A longitudinal investigation of the rise and fall of prestige, dominance, and social rank in naturalistic task groups. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *40*(2), 222–234. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2018.12.001

Ridgeway, C. L. (1987). Nonverbal behavior, dominance, and the basis of status in task groups. *American Sociological Review*, *52*(5), 683–694. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095603

Sandholtz, W., & Taagepera, R. (2005). Corruption, culture, and communism. *International Review of Sociology*, *15*(1), 109–131. https://doi.org/10.1080/03906700500038678

Schwartz, S. (2008). *The 7 Schwartz cultural value orientation scores for 80 countries*. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3313.3040

Schwartz, S. H. (2009). Causes of culture: National differences in cultural embeddedness. In A. Gari & K. Mylonas (Eds.), *Quod Erat Demonstrandum. From Herodotus' ethnographic journeys to cross-cultural research* (pp. 1–11). Pedio Books Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4087/WXSH9817

Selling, N., & Svallfors, S. (2019). The lure of power: Career paths and considerations among policy professionals in Sweden. *Politics & Policy*, *47*(5), 984–1012. https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12325

Sijtsma, K. (2009). On the use, the misuse, and the very limited usefulness of Cronbach's alpha. *Psychometrika*, *74*, 107–120. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11336-008-9101-0

Smith, P. B., & Bond, M. H. (2019). Cultures and persons: Characterizing national and other types of cultural difference can also aid our understanding and prediction of individual variability. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 2689. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02689

Thibaut, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. (1959). *The social psychology of groups*. Wiley.

To, C., Leslie, L. M., Torelli, C. J., & Stoner, J. L. (2020). Culture and social hierarchy: Collectivism as a driver of the relationship between power and status. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *157*, 159–176. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.12.006

Torelli, C. J., Leslie, L. M., To, C, & Kim, S. (2020). Power and status across cultures. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *33*, 12–17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.05.005

Torelli, C. J., & Shavitt, S. (2010). Culture and concepts of power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *99*(4), 703–723. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019973

Triandis, H. C., & Gelfand, M. J. (1998). Converging measurement of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *74*(1), 118–128. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.1.118

Uskul, A. K., Kirchner-Häusler, A., Vignoles, V. L., Rodriguez-Bailon, R., Castillo, V. A., Cross, S. E., Yalçın, M. G., Harb, C., Husnu, S., Ishii, K., Jin, S., Karamaouna, P., Kafetsios, K., Kateri, E., Matamoros-Lima, J., Liu, D., Miniesy, R., Na, J., Özkan, Z., … Uchida, Y. (2023). Neither eastern nor Western: Patterns of independence and interdependence in Mediterranean societies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *125*, 471–495. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000342

Uskul, A. K., Thalmayer, A. G., Bernardo, A. B., González, R., Kende, A., Laher, S., Lasticova, B., Saab, R., Salas, G., Singh, P., Zeinoun, P., Norenzayan, A., Chao, M., Shoda, Y., & Cooper, M. L. (2024). Challenges and opportunities for psychological research in the majority world. *Collabra Psychology*, *10*(1), 123703. https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.123703

van de Schoot, R., Lugtig, P., & Hox, J. (2012). A checklist for testing measurement invariance. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, *9*(4), 486–492. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2012.686740

Van Vugt, M., Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2008). Leadership, followership, and evolution: Some lessons from the past. *American Psychologist*, *63*(3), 182–196. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.63.3.182

Vignoles, V. L., Owe, E., Becker, M., Smith, P. B., Easterbrook, M. J., Brown, R., González, R., Didier, N., Carrasco, D., Cadena, M. P., Lay, S., Schwartz, S. J., Des Rosiers, S. E., Villamar, J. A., Gavreliuc, A., Zinkeng, M., Kreuzbauer, R., Baguma, P., Martin, M., … Bond, M. H. (2016). Beyond the 'east–west' dichotomy: Global variation in cultural models of selfhood. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *145*(8), 966–1000. https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000175

Wang, W., Yuan, P., & Yang, Y. (2021). The influence of mismatch between power and status on employee voice behavior. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, *49*(9), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.10552

Wasiel, A., Yeung, V. W. L., & Krys, K. (in press). Responsible powerholders may preserve the status Quo? A three cultures study into the relation between powerholder construals and societal development expectations. *BMC Psychology*.

Welzel, C., Kruse, S., & Brunkert, L. (2023). Against the mainstream: On the limitations of non-invariance diagnostics: Response to Fischer et al. and Meuleman et al. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *52*(3), 1438–1455. https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241221091754

Willer, R. (2009). Groups reward individual sacrifice: The status solution to the collective action problem. *American Sociological Review*, *74*(1), 23–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400102

Xu, T., Evans, M. B., & Benson, A. J. (2024). The nature of status: Navigating the varied approaches to conceptualizing and measuring status. *Organizational Psychology Review*, *14*(2), 204–237. https://doi.org/10.1177/20413866231220505

Yang, S. (2018). *Multidimensional self-construals: Testing the model and refining measurement*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Sussex, UK.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Wasiel, A., Górski, M. R., Bond, M. H., Yeung, V. W. L., Akaliyski, P., Akello, G., Park, J., Joshanloo, M., Sokolov, B., Hussain, M. A., Li, L. M. W., Olechowski, M., Vignoles, V. L., Guemaz, F., Boussena, M., Rabby, M.-A., Okvitawanli, A., Myślińska-Szarek, K., Haas, B. W., … Krys, K. (2025). Examining the connection between position-based power and social status across 70 cultures. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *64*, e12871. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12871

Are Positive Views of Authority a Privilege? Socioeconomic Status and Perceptions of Powerholders Across 80 Cultures

Arkadiusz Wasiel[1], Maciej R. Górski[1, 2], Victoria Wai Lan Yeung[3], Ángel Sánchez-Rodríguez[4], Mohsen Joshanloo[5], Eric Raymond Igou[6], Michael Harris Bond[7], Brian W. Haas[8], Heyla Selim[9], Mladen Adamovic[10], Olga Aimaganbetova[11], Plamen Akaliyski[12], Grace Akello[13], Charity Akotia[14], Marwan Al-Zoubi[15], Anna Almakaeva[16], Afiqah Amin[17], Nur Amali Aminnuddin[18], Laura Andrade[19], Lily Appoh[20], Rasmata Bakyono-Nabaloum[21], Arno Baltin[22], Oumar Barry[23], Tatiana Basanez[24], Dashamir Bërxulli[25], Mahmoud Boussena[26], Aleksandra Buźniak[27], Carmen Coral-Guerrero[28], Vlad Costin[29], Gergely Czukor[30], Ana Debes[31], Patrick Denoux[32], Alejandra Domínguez Espinosa[33], Agustin Espinosa[34], Márta Fülöp[35, 36], Vladimer Gamsakhurdia[37], Ragna Benedikta Garðarsdóttir[38], Magdalena Garvanova[39], Alin Gavreliuc[40], Biljana Gjoneska[41], Fumiko Kano Glückstad[42], Farida Guemaz[26], Angela Anarfi Gyasi-Gyamerah[14], Katharina Henk[43], M. Azhar Hussain[44, 45], David Igbokwe[46], Naved Iqbal[47], İdil Işık[48], Nuha Iter[49], Miłosz Kalinowski[1], Natalia Kascakova[50, 51], Elmina Kazimzade[52], Agata Kocimska-Bortnowska[53], Olga Kostoula[54, 55], Nicole Kronberger[56], Katarzyna Kubik[1], J. Hannah Lee[57], Liman Man Wai Li[58], Vivian Miu-Chi Lun[3], Alexander Malyonov[59], Arina Malyonova[59], Efisio Manunta[60], Fridanna Maricchiolo[61], Marta Miklikowska[62], Ioana E. Militaru[63], Linda Mohammed[64], Fatma Mokadem[26], Magdalena Mosanya[65], Oriana Mosca[66], Elke Murdock[67], Martin Nader [68], Ragnhild, Bang Nes[69], Laina Ngom-Dieng[70], Danielle Ochoa[71], Ayu Okvitawanli[72], Mateusz Olechowski[1], Carina Orendain Pelka[73], Ewa Palikot[1], Joonha Park[74], Zoran Pavlović[75], Iva Poláčková Šolcová[76], Srdjan Puhalo[77], Md. Reza-A-Rabby[78], Muhammad Rizwan[79], Ana Maria Rocha[80], Maryam Roshan[81], Adil Samekin[82], Rūta Sargautytė[83], Federica Scarci[61], David Sirlopú[84], Rosita Sobhie[85], Natalia Soboleva[16], Chien-Ru Sun[86], Ewa Szumowska[87], Julien Teyssier[32], Suwatchanee Jaruenying[88], Morten Tønnessen[89], Claudio Torres[19], Kiều Thị Thanh Trà[90], Vladimir Turjačanin[91], Wijnand van Tilburg[92], Christin-Melanie Vauclair[93], Olha Vlasenko[94], Shuang Wang[95], Juthatip Wiwattanapantuwong[96], Cai Xing[97], Homer Yabut[98], Belkacem Yakhlef[99], Eric Kenson Yau[3], June Chun Yeung[1, 100], John Zelenski[101], Kuba Krys[1]

[1]Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland
[2]Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
[3]Department of Psychology, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China
[4]Department of Social Psychology and Anthropology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain
[5]Department of Psychology, Keimyung University, South Korea
[6]Department of Psychology, University of Limerick, Limerick, Republic of Ireland
[7]Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Business, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China
[8]Department of Psychology, University of Georgia, Athens, United States
[9]King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
[10]King's Business School, King's College London, London, United Kingdom
[11]Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan
[12]Department of Sociology and Social Policy, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China
[13]Faculty of Medicine, Gulu University, Gulu, Uganda
[14]University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana
[15]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan
[16]Ronald F. Inglehart Laboratory for Comparative Social Research, Higher School of Economics,

Moscow, Russia
[17]School of Business and Economics, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam
[18]Sultan Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Centre for Islamic Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Jalan Tungku Link, Brunei
[19]Institute of Psychology, University of Brasilia, Brasília, Brazil
[20]Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, Nord University, Bodø, Norway
[21]Département de Philosophie et de Psychologie, Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
[22]School of Natural Sciences and Health, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia
[23]Département de psychologie, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Sénégal
[24]California State Polytechnic University Pomona, Pomona, United States of America
[25]University of Prishtina, Pristina, Kosovo
[26]Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghine, Setif 2, Setif, Algeria
[27]Institute of Psychology, University of Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland
[28]Universidad Internacional SEK, Quito, Ecuador
[29]School of Psychology, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom
[30]Department of Psychology, Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul, Türkiye
[31]Universidad Católica de Cuyo, San Juan, Argentina
[32]Département Psychologie Clinique Du Sujet, Université Toulouse II, Toulouse, France
[33]Psychology Department, Iberoamerican University, Mexico City, Mexico
[34]Departamento Académico de Psicología, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, Peru
[35]Institute of Psychology, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Budapest, Hungary
[36]HUN-REN Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience and Psychology, Research Centre of Natural Sciences, Budapest, Hungary
[37]Department of Psychology, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
[38]Faculty of Psychology, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland
[39]University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia, Bulgaria
[40]Department of Psychology, West University of Timis¸oara, Timis¸oara, Romania
[41]Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Skopje, North Macedonia
[42]Department of Management, Society & Communication, Copenhagen Business School, Frederiksberg, Denmark
[43]Institute for Psychology, University Koblenz, Koblenz, Germany
[44]Department of Finance and Economics, College of Business Administration, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
[45]Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University, Roskilde, Denmark
[46]Department of Psychology, Baze University, Abuja, Nigeria
[47]Department of Psychology, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India
[48]Department of Psychology, Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul, Türkiye
[49]Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences, Palestine Technical University – Kadoorie, Tulkarm, Palestine
[50]Olomouc University Social Health Institute, Palacky University, Olomouc, Czechia
[51]Psychiatric Clinic Pro Mente Sana, Bratislava, Slovakia
[52]Department of Educational Psychology, Baku State University, Baku, Azerbaijan
[53]Department of Psychology, SWPS University, Wrocław, Poland
[54]Private University of Education Diocese Linz, Linz, Austria
[55]Johannes Kepler University Linz, Linz, Austria
[56]Institute of Psychology, Johannes Kepler University Linz, Linz, Austria
[57]Department of Psychology, Indiana University Northwest, Gary, Indiana, United States
[58]Department of Psychology and Centre for Psychosocial Health, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
[59]Department of General and Social Psychology, Dostoevsky Omsk State University, Omsk, Russia
[60]CLLE, Université de Toulouse, CNRS, Toulouse, France
[61]Department of Education, Roma Tre University, Roma, Italy
[62]Institute for Globally Distributed Open Research and Education Sweden; Linnaeus University, Sweden
[63]University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

[64]Institute of Criminology and Public Safety, University of Trinidad and Tobago, Arima, Trinidad and Tobago
[65]Murdoch University Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
[66]Department of Education, Psychology, Philosophy, University of Cagliari, Cagliari, Italy
[67]Department of Behavioural and Cognitive Sciences, University of Luxembourg, Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg
[68]Department of Organizational Management, Universidad ICESI, Cali, Colombia
[69]University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
[70]Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal
[71]Department of Psychology, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
[72]Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia
[73]Instituto Universitário de Lisboa(Iscte-IUL), Department of Psychology, Lisbon, Portugal
[74]Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan
[75]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
[76]Institute of Psychology, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czechia
[77]NGO Pro Educa, Banjaluka, BaH, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina
[78]Department of Developmental Psychology and Socialisation, University of Padua, Padua, Italy
[79]Department of Psychology, University of Wah, Wah Cantt, Pakistan
[80]Catholic University of Angola, Luanda, Angola
[81]Payame Noor University, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Tehran, Iran
[82]School of Liberal Arts, M. Narikbayev KAZGUU University, Astana, Kazakhstan
[83]Institute of Psychology, Vilnius university, Vilnius, Lithuania
[84]Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción, Concepción, Chile
[85]Inter-faculty for Graduate Studies, Anton de Kom University of Suriname, Paramaribo, Suriname
[86]Department of Psychology, National Chengchi University, Taiwan, China
[87]Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland
[88]Faculty of Psychology, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
[89]University of Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway
[90]Department of Psychology, HCMC University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
[91]Faculty of Philosophy, University of Banja Luka, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina
[92]Department of Psychology, University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom
[93]Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal
[94]Institute of Education Science, Osnabrück University, Osnabrück, Germany
[95]The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
[96]Research Unit of Disaster Psychology and Well-Being, Faculty of Psychology, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
[97]Department of Psychology, Renmin University of China, Beijing, China
[98]Department of Psychology, De La Salle University-Manila, Philippines
[99]École Normale Supérieure of Constantine, Constantine, Algeria
[100]Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland
[101]Department of Psychology, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

*** Corresponding author**: Arkadiusz Wasiel, Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Jaracza 1, 00-378 Warsaw, Poland, e-mail: awasiel@sd.psych.pan.pl.
Funding details: This work was supported by the Norway Funds and the Polish National Science Centre under grants 2019/34/H/HS6/00597 and 2020/37/B/HS6/03142; ongoing Research Funding program (ORF-2026-1204), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
Data availability: Data and code for all analyses are available at https://osf.io/uvm6b
Disclosure statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.
Ethics statement: The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Science (approval no. #22/XI/2019 and #32/X/2024).

Abstract

Public evaluation of those in power is fundamental to societal stability. However, how people judge powerholders depends on their positions within the socioeconomic hierarchy. Drawing on two large-scale cross-cultural studies encompassing 160 samples from 80 cultures, we examined whether socioeconomic status (SES) shapes how people appraise the motive of institutional powerholders. Though scepticism toward powerholders was widespread across the socioeconomic spectrum, higher-SES individuals consistently attributed lesser self-orientation and greater other-orientation to powerholders. In less corrupt societies, perceptions of powerholders were more favourable, and SES-based differences were more pronounced, indicating that the quality of national governance matters as well. In contrast, in highly corrupt national contexts, class-based distinctions largely disappeared. These findings suggest that viewing authorities as serving the common good may be both a privilege of one's socioeconomic position and a privilege of living in a well-governed society. The results carry important implications for institutional legitimacy, social mobility, and the possible psychological foundations of populist movements.

Keywords: socioeconomic status, culture, powerholders, self-orientation, other-orientation

Are Positive Views of Authority a Privilege? Socioeconomic Status and Perceptions of Powerholders Across 80 Cultures

Modern societies rely on the belief that those who hold structural power act on behalf of others rather than for personal gain (Tost & Johnson, 2019). Whether the figures of authority are government officials, police officers, or managers, people interpret their motives, asking whether power is used to fulfil public responsibilities or to secure private benefits (Wang & Li, 2024; Wasiel et al., 2025). These appraisals shape trust in institutions, willingness to comply with rules, and support certain policies over others (Tyler, 2006; Wasiel et al., 2025). Yet we still know relatively little about why some individuals see powerholders as other-oriented (using power for the benefit of others), while others see them as self-oriented (using power for self-interest). In this article, we examine whether other-oriented views of powerholders are related to occupying higher positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy. We address this question using two original large-scale cross-cultural studies spanning 160 samples across 80 cultures in total. First, we test how the subjective socioeconomic status (SES) of an individual relates to perceiving powerholders as self-oriented and other-oriented. Second, we examine whether this association varies across societies as a function of broader social conditions. By doing so, we seek to extend research on social inequality and social power by linking socioeconomic hierarchy to how people evaluate the motives of those who hold position-based power.

Socioeconomic Status and Perception of Powerholders

Within many social contexts, certain individuals occupy positions of elevated power that enable them to shape the experiences, outcomes, and behaviours of others (Wasiel et al., 2025) — we refer to these individuals as powerholders (specifically police officers, judges, teachers and managers). Trust in powerholders is foundational to societal development (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016), as it shapes compliance with laws and policies (Marien &

Hooghe, 2016; Badman et al., 2022) as well as engagement and commitment within organizations (Liu et al., 2022; González-Cánovas et al., 2024). On the other hand, power may also be abused, increasing self-interested behavior at the expense of others (Cislak et al., 2018; DeCelles et al., 2012). Studying perceptions of powerholders is therefore crucial for understanding attitudes toward the system and its priorities (Wasiel et al., 2025). A key differentiator may be socioeconomic status, which reflects individuals' access to tangible and intangible resources (Baker, 2025). SES systematically shapes attributions about others as well as attitudes toward governance and inequality (Kraus et al., 2011; Manstead, 2018; Büchel et al., 2021; Bornard & Klein, 2022). SES situates individuals within particular socialization patterns (Stephens et al., 2014), shaping their lay theories of power. Lower-SES individuals often endorse a coercive view, perceiving power as rooted in use of force and deceit, while higher-SES individuals construe it as responsible and virtuous (ten Brinke & Keltner, 2022). These differences have tangible consequences: lower-SES individuals are less likely to pursue authority, believing it requires immoral means (Belmi & Laurin, 2016), thereby perpetuating inequality as the high-SES minority disproportionately occupies positions of power. In this study, we aim to extend past research on social power by examining how SES relates to perceptions of self- and other-orientation of institutional powerholders across major cultural regions.

Higher Socioeconomic Status and Perceptions of Powerholders

Evaluations of authority figures often extend beyond the individual to encompass evaluations of the social system itself (van der Toorn et al., 2011). When citizens perceive officials as responsible and public-serving, they may infer that the broader institutional order is legitimate, and vice versa (Hough et al., 2013). Perceptions of powerholders and perceptions of the system are closely intertwined, as powerholders are the most visible agents through which the system is enacted in everyday life. This logic aligns with System

Justification Theory (SJT; Jost & Banaji, 1994), which posits that people are motivated to view existing social arrangements as fair and appropriate to satisfy epistemic needs for order (Jost et al., 2011) and broader needs for security and well-being (Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018). Because powerholders embody the system, system-justification should foster more favourable interpretations of their motives. Perceiving powerholders as other-oriented may thus function as a mechanism for sustaining the belief that the system is legitimate and operates as intended. SJT further implies that socioeconomic position shapes these tendencies. Higher-SES individuals are better situated within the existing system, making system-justifying beliefs more consistent with lived experience and easier to maintain (Valdes et al., 2023). While SJT predicts that low-SES individuals may show stronger system-justifying beliefs than high-SES individuals in specific contexts, cross-cultural evidence suggests this is not the general pattern. Drawing on 66 samples from 30 countries, Brandt et al. (2020) found that higher SES was reliably associated with stronger legitimacy perceptions, though the strength of this association varied across cultural contexts. Building on this logic, we propose that other-oriented perceptions of powerholders follow the same pattern, partly because such perceptions help sustain a coherent and affirming view of one's place in the social order.

Another possible explanation of the relationship between SES and perception of powerholders lies in social identity. Power and socioeconomic status are closely linked (Rucker & Galinsky, 2017). Authority roles typically confer direct economic rewards that facilitate upward mobility, while greater resources reduce barriers to entering high-power positions through education and social capital (Côté, 2011). Even in egalitarian groups, higher-SES individuals gravitate toward informal leadership (Loignon & Kodydek, 2022). The resulting overlap between high-power and high-wealth individuals brings these groups closer in social ties and perceived psychological similarity (Ellersgaard et al., 2019). This overlap shapes how SES relates to attitudes toward authority. Social Identity Theory (SIT;

Tajfel & Turner, 1979) holds that people derive part of their self-concept from group memberships and are motivated to maintain a positive social identity, commonly expressed as ingroup favoritism — evaluating ingroups more positively than outgroups when group boundaries are salient (Tajfel et al., 1971). Because high SES and positions of authority frequently coexist, higher-SES individuals may more often perceive authority figures as ingroup members (e.g., people higher in hierarchy), amplifying attributions of responsibility and other-oriented use of power. This tendency may be further reinforced by evidence that higher-SES individuals exhibit stronger ingroup favoritism than working-class members (Elenbaas et al., 2025), potentially producing visibly more other-oriented perceptions of institutional powerholders.

Lower Socioeconomic Status and Perceptions of Powerholders

We suspect appraisals of powerholders among lower-SES individuals are shaped by different psychological processes than among higher-SES individuals. Central among these is relative deprivation — a perceived gap between what one has and what one believes one deserves relative to others (Runciman, 1966). Relative deprivation is commonly associated with feelings of injustice and grievance that translate into negative attitudes toward authorities (Smith et al., 2012; Isbell, 2023). For lower-SES individuals, powerholders may constitute a salient advantaged outgroup, as status asymmetries are repeatedly reinforced through unequal everyday interactions. Though upward social comparisons can target a range of reference points, from slightly more affluent peers to distant elites, relative deprivation theory suggests that comparisons are most potent when directed at proximate, observable others who control valued resources and outcomes (Runciman, 1966). This suggests that lower-SES individuals may be particularly susceptible to those who exercise direct authority over their lives, such as employers or institutional authorities. Under these conditions, lower-SES individuals may more readily infer that authorities protect their own interests or maintain arrangements that

benefit those at the top. Upward social comparisons cause people to adopt more negative views of social power (ten Brinke & Keltner, 2022). Since lower-SES individuals more often feel relatively deprived (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984; Smith et al., 2012), the resulting negative emotions are likely to be partially directed at proximate powerholders, producing stronger perceptions of their self-oriented motives.

While relative deprivation is likely relevant for the perceptions of powerholders, people experience not only outcomes but also the processes by which decisions are made — whether their perspectives are heard, and whether they are treated with respect (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). SES shapes both dependence on institutions and the quality of interactions with powerholders (Stephens et al., 2014), which provides a basis for inferring what powerholders value. Procedural justice theory holds that people judge authorities by the fairness of decision-making procedures, not only outcomes (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 2006). Fair procedures foster perceptions of responsible powerholders, whereas unfair ones suggest bias or self-interest. Lower-SES individuals consistently report lower perceived procedural justice across institutions (Ansems et al., 2021; Pryce & Whitaker, 2022; van Hall et al., 2023) and workplaces (Diekmann et al., 2007). Such repeated experiences may shape stable expectations about how authorities typically behave and whom they ultimately serve. Accordingly, lower subjective SES is likely to weaken perceptions that powerholders are other-oriented and strengthen perceptions of their self-orientation.

Does Context Shape the Perception of Powerholders?

Existing work offers mixed findings about the role of societal context: Brandt et al. (2020) found the association between SES and system-justifying beliefs was stronger in societies with greater civil liberties, whereas Valdes et al. (2025) reported no moderating effects of civil liberties or economic inequality on the relationship between SES and system justification. We argue that contextual moderation may be more detectable when focusing on

powerholder motives rather than system justification, as self- versus other-oriented attributions are less abstract and more easily anchored in everyday experiences with specific authorities (e.g., managers, officials, police). Evidence from corruption research —one of the most prototypically self-interested behaviors attributed to powerholders —supports this claim. In China and many European countries, lower-SES individuals report higher perceptions of corruption (Tan et al., 2021; Zhang, 2022), whereas in Latin America the pattern reverses (Canache et al., 2019). Synthesizing cross-cultural datasets, Maeda and Ziegfeld (2015) found that country affluence moderates this relationship: in wealthier countries, higher-SES individuals tend to perceive less corruption, while in poorer countries this pattern is weak or inconsistent.

We argue that economic factors such as national wealth may be insufficient to explain the relationship between SES and perceptions of powerholders. Corruption is particularly relevant for perceptions of self-oriented motives: when powerholders routinely misuse their position for personal gain, such behavior is directly observable and provides a concrete basis for attributing self-interested intentions to those in authority. Rule of law and institutional transparency, by contrast, are more relevant for perceptions of other-oriented motives: when authorities operate within accountability frameworks and their decisions are open to public scrutiny, other-oriented behavior becomes more credible and visible. Lower-SES individuals, who engage with institutions more frequently and with less recourse, may be particularly exposed to both of these governance effects, suggesting that institutional transparency (Lambsdorff, 2006; Aidt, 2009) and the rule of law (Kaufmann et al., 2011) are central to understanding how SES shapes powerholder perceptions. However, the direction of this effect remains theoretically ambiguous. Stronger governance could amplify SES differences by reinforcing system justification among higher-SES individuals while leaving lower-SES relative deprivation unaddressed, thereby strengthening the positive association between SES

and other-oriented perceptions of powerholders. Alternatively, fair institutions could reduce SES differences by enhancing perceptions of procedural justice among lower-SES individuals, narrowing the gap between high- and low-SES individuals in how they evaluate authority. In this study, we aim to resolve this ambiguity.

The Present Studies

The goal of the present research is to examine whether socioeconomic status is related to perceptions of powerholders as self- and other-oriented, and whether this relationship varies across societies as a function of governance quality. We address these questions across two large-scale cross-cultural studies spanning 160 samples from 80 cultures. In Study 1, we test the individual-level association between subjective SES and powerholder perceptions across 70 cultures, and examine whether national governance moderates this relationship at the cultural level. Study 2 replicates and extends these findings across an independent selection of 62 cultures, using governance indicators matched to the corresponding data collection period. Together, the two studies offer a cross-cultural test of whether favorable views of authority are linked to one's socioeconomic position, and of the conditions under which this relationship may be amplified or attenuated.

We operationalize governance quality using two complementary country-level indicators. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI; Lambsdorff, 2006) aggregates expert assessments of public sector integrity, capturing the degree to which self-serving conduct is normalized within a given institutional context — making it a possible meaningful moderator of how citizens form general impressions of powerholder motives. The Rule of Law Index (RLI; Kaufmann et al., 2011) reflects the extent to which authorities operate within accountability frameworks and legal constraints, providing a complementary indicator more directly relevant to other-oriented perceptions. Together, CPI and RLI capture distinct aspects of governance quality: one indexed to the prevalence of self-interested conduct, the other to

the presence of institutional accountability. Drawing on insights from System Justification Theory (Jost et al., 2014), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), relative deprivation research (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984), and procedural justice research (Lind & Tyler, 1992), we formulated three hypotheses (Table 1).

Table 1

Summary of the Hypotheses Tested in this Investigation

Hypotheses	
H1	Higher socioeconomic status is associated with more favorable perceptions of institutional powerholders. Specifically, higher-SES individuals are more likely to view powerholders as other-oriented and less likely to see them as self-oriented.
H2	Individuals living in countries with lower corruption and stronger rule of law are more likely to perceive institutional powerholders as other-oriented and less likely to perceive them as self-oriented.
H3	The relationship between SES and perceptions of powerholders depends on the governance quality, as measured by Corruption Perception Index and Rule of Law Index.

Study 1

This study examines both individual and contextual predictors of perceiving powerholders as self-oriented versus other-oriented. Our aim is to broaden this literature by testing whether the link between SES and perceiving powerholders as self- versus other-oriented generalizes across 70 cultures and whether it depends on societal governance conditions. At the individual level, we focus on socioeconomic status (SES) and its association with perceptions of powerholders' motives. At the cultural level, we examine two governance indicators that capture the conduct of the authorities: the Corruption Perceptions Index and the Rule of Law Index.

Method

The present study forms part of an extensive cross-cultural project examining cultural factors linked to support for societal development goals, well-being, and perceptions of powerholders.

Participants and Cultures

Data were drawn from a large cross-cultural dataset spanning 77 samples collected across 70 cultures. The targeted minimum for the sample size per culture was n=200, although several cultures contributed smaller samples. Participants were excluded if they failed more than one of the 12 attention checks or had missing data on focal variables. The resulting analytic sample comprised 18,096 participants. A detailed overview of the samples is provided in Table 2. Data collection occurred between late 2022 and early 2024. Study materials were prepared by the last author and implemented by collaborators in each culture. The questionnaire was originally created in English and distributed via Qualtrics and Google Forms for online administration, with a separate version prepared for paper-and-pencil use. Local teams translated the materials using a back-translation procedure and recruited participants using convenience-based strategies, including university samples, online research panels, and snowball sampling. The dataset includes 66 online samples, 7 paper-and-pencil samples, and 4 mixed-mode samples. Informed consent was obtained in all cultures. Collaborators in several cultures contributed multiple, independently collected samples (three in Algeria; two each in Australia, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States), which were aggregated within that national culture for analysis.

Table 2

Demographic Information for Study 1 and Study 2

Culture		Study 1						Study 2			
	Language of the Questionnaire	*n*	Age (*SD*)	% female	% student	α Perceived Self-Orientation	α Perceived Other-Orientation	*n*	Age (*SD*)	% female	% student
Confucianism-influenced											
China	Chinese	235	26.51 (6.77)	49.79	60.00	0.82	0.79	447	28.07 (7.88)	74.93	50.71
Hong Kong S.A.R	English	136	22.36 (3.20)	67.67	96.99	0.80	0.72	399	42.79 (13.82)	54.29	10.65
Japan	Japanese	133	21.72 (1.27)	73.64	100.00	0.69	0.80				
South Korea	Korean	201	22.44 (2.12)	59.70	100.00	0.83	0.71	232	21.20 (2.62)	62.07	99.14
Taiwan	Chinese	204	27.36 (6.78)	74.02	55.39	0.85	0.77	188	35.52 (10.42)	62.77	18.09
Latin America/Caribbean											
Argentina	Spanish							357	27.39 (13.09)	63.51	78.20
Brazil	Portuguese	96	30.36 (9.66)	54.88%	93.90	0.94	0.84	358	33.03 (11.38)	55.27	37.82
Chile	Spanish	170	29.15 (9.88)	70.63%	95.80	0.81	0.69	244	23.41 (7.40)	70.42	99.06
Colombia	Spanish	252	29.30 (11.00)	48.41%	58.73	0.67	0.77				
Ecuador	Spanish	246	28.22 (9.00)	46.67	46.19	0.86	0.75	206	36.93 (13.90)	49.74	20.94
Mexico	Spanish	154	34.17 (15.14)	74.19	50.40	0.84	0.84				
Peru	Spanish	195	30.68 (13.98)	55.97	54.09	0.87	0.77	289	27.01 (12.15)	54.24	61.02
Suriname	Dutch	140	31.42 (11.54)	51.43	39.29	0.89	0.77	319	32.49 (13.21)	60.25	46.86
Trinidad and Tobago	English	179	28.34 (9.46)	70.86	99.34	0.84	0.82	133	26.24 (10.84)	70.24	95.24
Venezuela	Spanish	307	37.10 (12.04)	48.00	26.55	0.84	0.75				
MENA (Middle East and North Africa)											
Algeria	Arabic	981	35.55 (12.61)	52.40%	46.38	0.81	0.80	998	31.29 (11.41)	68.69	51.93
Egypt	Arabic	70	28.04 (7.74)	36.76	45.59	0.89	0.91	238	29.68 (8.66)	51.17	30.05

Jordan	Arabic	242	34.33 (12.02)	65.15	40.50	0.83	0.84				
Iran	Persian							408	25.38 (5.76)	83.07	95.30
Morocco	Arabic	150	29.35 (7.90)	36.00	30.67	0.90	0.81	294	28.26 (7.58)	48.94	37.02
Pakistan	English	50	30.78 (8.38)	56.00	50.00	0.88	0.85	351	24.44 (7.19)	70.09	77.23
Palestine	Arabic	187	40.52 (11.54)	61.29	31.88	0.83	0.82				
Saudi Arabia	Arabic	131	26.15 (9.50)	64.12	70.23	0.78	0.79	325	30.69 (11.60)	81.09	55.22
Turkey	Turkish	1278	31.02 (11.85)	57.36	48,36	0.87	0.84	433	31.98 (14.67)	52.12	52.65
United Arab Emirates	English	97	21.96 (6.39)	82.47	94,85	0.81	0.78	170	21.56 (3.94)	55.33	96.67
Non-Confucian Asia/Oceania											
Bangladesh	English	96	27.76 (6.43)	59.38%	80.21	0.72	0.77	200	27.88 (8.69)	64.52	60.48
India	English	87	23.83 (3.66)	70.11	94.25	0.75	0.75	304	23.09 (4.84)	74.02	83.33
Indonesia	Bahasa Indonesia	236	20.58 (2.75)	77.13	98.65	0.86	0.83	330	20.42 (2.95)	80.79	98.68
Malaysia	English	1903	29.13 (6.62)	69.75	31.78	0.83	0.81	2,349	31.25 (11.52)	62.31	42.17
Philippines	English, Filipino	238	26.31 (8.26)	59.72	74.54	0.80	0.76	303	27.76 (18.59)	20.13	61.39
Vietnam	Vietnamese	198	24.92 (6.70)	62.12	59,09	0.87	0.77	263	23.06 (8.50)	68.02	90.69
Post-Soviet (outside EU)											
Albania	Albanian							67	20.11 (1.55)	87.50	100.00
Azerbaijan	Azerbaijani	173	25.44 (9.96)	17.52%	72.99	0.83	0.77	290	23.53 (9.16)	80.30	80.30
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian	356	30.80 (12.70)	76.12%	67.70	0.89	0.84	487	46.88 (10.93)	60.73	3.65
Georgia	Georgian	170	35.06 (15.17)	75.88	48.82	0.83	0.74	334	30.15 (13.96)	83.01	51.46
Kazakhstan	Russian	205	28.16 (11.64)	71.71	68.29	0.82	0.86	236	24.68 (9.97)	84.62	79.02
Kosovo	Albanian							218	20.92 (3.88)	76.51	96.39
North Macedonia	Macedonian	97	32.51 (12.55)	69.07	50.52	0.81	0.86	233	37.25 (14.10)	77.42	24.19
Russia	Russian	414	23.20 (3.63)	60.39	98.07	0.85	0.86	502	34.40 (16.50)	47.31	51.50
Serbia	Serbian	193	24.11 (3.49)	69.43	100.00	0.79	0.78	214	24.91 (8.87)	80.88	84.80
Ukraine	Ukrainian	167	31.23 (11.99)	73.65	73.05	0.87	0.85				

Sub-Saharan Africa											
Angola	Portuguese	83	24.62 (6.95)	56.63%	100.00	0.83	0.79				
Burkina Faso	French	28	23.64 (1.99)	21.43%	96.43	0.90	0.77				
Ethiopia	English							222	29.73 (7.57)	18.14	32.84
Ghana	English	179	24.70 (3.51)	56.42	92.86	0.66	0.77	151	22.10 (3.78)	56.29	96.69
Kenya	English	177	28.75 (6.19)	43.50	30.51	0.84	0.85	317	26.22 (5.40)	47.62	38.10
Madagascar	French	244	29.30 (7.59)	50.00	35.92	0.84	0.76				
Nigeria	English	279	24.48 (8.00)	66.40	75.10	0.78	0.82	207	25.17 (10.92)	55.77	64.10
Senegal	French	176	24.62 (4.82)	37.50	99.43	0.83	0.82	1,326	21.94 (3.44)	65.77	99.41
South Africa	English	475	31.70 (11.12)	49.68	41.19	0.86	0.88	280	35.40 (12.81)	70.52	27.61
Uganda	English	123	29.13 (5.75)	52.94	41.18	0.85	0.84	56	27.68 (9.54)	45.00	67.50
WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic)											
Australia	English	631	52.21 (19.34)	50.53%	12.85	0.91	0.90	203	39.88 (13.84)	53.47	15.35
Austria	German	250	27.13 (8.87)	74.49%	93.83	0.84	0.76	276	27.90 (11.08)	84.55	84.12
Bulgaria	Bulgarian	204	33.27 (10.75)	49.02%	100.00	0.93	0.79	336	27.53 (9.57)	30.82	97.80
Canada	English	276	21.62 (3.35)	77.41%	100.00	0.85	0.84	246	19.99 (3.30)	70.54	100.00
Croatia	Croatian	203	36.05 (13.68)	84.73%	44.33	0.88	0.89				
Czechia	Czech	285	34.51 (13.97)	76.80%	52.51	0.84	0.66	350	40.02 (14.43)	61.90	26.19
Denmark	Danish	86	26.02 (3.77)	60.78	92.16	0.83	0.84				
Estonia	Estonian	238	37.33 (13.72)	72.65	69.96	0.90	0.69				
France	French	164	36.38 (14.50)	79.27	74.39	0.87	0.78	488	37.42 (15.31)	60.88	38.88
Germany	German	305	29.06 (10.26)	59.34	82.78	0.87	0.83	270	29.13 (9.97)	62.08	80.00
Hungary	Hungarian	529	24.19 (6.56)	72.97	98.11	0.87	0.86				
Iceland	Icelandic	372	29.41 (9.04)	69.43	98.12	0.89	0.85	417	34.86 (14.67)	71.28	74.32
Ireland	English	262	25.54 (7.60)	60.69	98.47	0.86	0.84	340	27.38 (12.99)	56.54	80.59
Italy	Italian	136	33.07 (12.86)	57.35	55.88	0.91	0.87	747	29.72 (13.86)	70.10	70.26
Lithuania	Lithuanian							199	24.61 (8.88)	65.90	79.19
Luxembourg	German	162	39.04 (19.58)	70.92	50.35	0.93	0.84				

Malta	English	66	42.11 (15.16)	69.70	22.73	0.85	0.89				
Netherlands	Dutch							215	21.48 (5.44)	78.33	93.60
New Zealand	English							174	20.58 (4.21)	76.07	96.32
Norway	Norwegian	79	38.27 (15.34)	61.02	50.85	0.91	0.89	566	47.79 (17.84)	75.22	31.27
Poland	Polish	227	28.81 (7.94)	49.34	43.61	0.89	0.78	568	35.92 (16.95)	56.31	54.05
Portugal	Portuguese	176	36.89 (15.85)	73.30	46.02	0.81	0.82	286	23.81 (8.54)	74.88	83.89
Romania	Romanian	225	26.22 (8.85)	62.67	79.56	0.90	0.88	226	24.67 (8.89)	57.67	83.72
Slovakia	Slovak	272	39.43 (13.08)	85.29	50.74	0.88	0.71	253	39.68 (13.77)	73.31	30.83
Spain	Spanish	261	25.63 (7.23)	68.85	86.54	0.87	0.77	206	37.16 (11.13)	48.78	25.85
United Kingdom	English	193	29.38 (12.35)	73.02	69.84	0.86	0.80	468	28.77 (13.88)	74.36	64.96
United States of America	English	363	30.92 (12.03)	66.18	64.16	0.89	0.88	647	29.20 (13.02)	60.94	63.53

Note. In several countries (Angola, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) the questions regarding powerholders were not administered in Study 2. Although we retained information about these samples for transparency, they were excluded from analysis due to missing data.

Measures

Socioeconomic Status. SES was operationalized as a formative emergent index derived from multiple indicators capturing the respondent's perception of his/her objective and subjective social position. The indicators included (1) respondents' own education (*no schooling, primary or equivalent, secondary or equivalent, bachelor or equivalent, master or equivalent, doctorate or equivalent*), (2) parental higher education (assessed separately for each parent as categorical yes vs. no), (3) perceived household budget comfort (*not enough for me, just enough, moderately comfortable, very comfortable, much more than I need*), and (4) subjective rank within society, assessed with the MacArthur Ladder (from 1 = *worst off* to 10 = *best off* relative to others in one's culture; Adler et al., 2000). The exact wording of the items is provided in Supplementary Online Materials. All indicators were harmonized to a common scale. To ensure that parental education contributed comparably to the other components, mother's and father's higher-education indicators were averaged into a single parental-education score, weighted equally with each of the remaining SES indicators. The SES composite was then computed as the mean of the harmonized indicators, centered within each culture to capture relative socioeconomic standing in the local context.

Perceived Self- / and Other-Orientation of Powerholders. Perceptions of powerholders were assessed using a scale developed by Wasiel et al. (2025), designed to measure appraisal of how powerholders across various domains of social life (e.g., managers, teachers, judges, professors, police officers) use their authority. The measure included three items capturing self-orientation and three items capturing other-orientation, with identical instructions and response format to preceding scales. Self-orientation was measured with the following statements: (1) *In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy use power to increase their wealth,* (2) *In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy are concerned primarily with their own interests,* and (3) *In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy use power to*

increase their own privileges. Other-orientation was measured with: (1) *In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy act in the interest of citizens,* (2) *In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy take responsibility for well-being of citizens,* and (3) *In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy take responsibility for the good of their communities.* Under each question we reminded participants that *People higher in hierarchy are for example: managers, judges, professors, policemen or teachers.* Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Item scores were averaged separately to form indices of perceived self-orientation and perceived other-orientation of powerholders within each culture. Higher scores on the self-orientation scale reflected perceptions of powerholders as primarily self-interested, whereas higher scores on the other-orientation scale reflected perceptions of powerholders as acting for the benefit of citizens and their communities. Internal consistency across the full sample was strong for both self-orientation and other-orientation. Cronbach's α coefficients for each culture are presented in Table 2.

Individual-Level Covariates. Gender, age, and student status were included as control variables in the analyses. Adjusting for these factors allowed estimation of the association between SES and perceived self- and other-orientation of powerholders independently of basic demographic differences across participants.

Invariance of the Individual-level Measures Across Cultural Regions

We tested whether the individual-level measures functioned equivalently across cultures using multigroup confirmatory factor analyses (van de Schoot et al., 2012). Specifically, we examined the perceived self- / and other-orientations of powerholders across 70 cultures. The scale achieved metric invariance based on the criterion proposed by Cheung and Rensvold (2002), permitting between-culture comparison of within-culture associations of these variables. However, scalar invariance was not reached, indicating that item intercepts differed across groups and that individuals from different cultures may endorse items at

different baseline levels. However, this analysis focuses on the within-culture associations, not mean comparisons, it therefore does not require scalar invariance. Additionally scalar invariance may not be a necessary condition for studying mean cultural differences in perceptions of powerholders, as there are no strong a priori reasons to expect invariance across diverse social and economic contexts (see Welzel et al., 2023; Kusano et al., 2025). The results of invariance testing are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Invariance Testing of the Perception of Powerholders as Self- and Other-Oriented in Study 1.

Model	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	*SRMR*	*AIC*	*BIC*
Configural[a]	.986	.974	.070	.031	258167	268546
Metric invariance[b]	.977	.971	.074	.053	258351	266576
Scalar invariance[c]	.954	.956	.090	.065	259219	265290

Note. CFI = comparative fit index, TLI = Tucker-Lewis fit index, RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation, SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, AIC = Akaike Information Criterion, BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. [a]Model without constraints. [b]Model with items' factor loadings set equal across groups. [c]Model with items' factor loadings and intercepts set equal across groups.

Culture-Level Socioeconomic Variables

Corruption Perception Index. We used the CPI introduced by Transparency International (2024), a culture-level indicator of perceived public-sector corruption. CPI captures the extent to which corruption is present in a country's government and public institutions. In this context, corruption is defined as the use of power for private gain, including practices such as bribery, favouritism, and misuse of public resources. Higher CPI means the presence of lower levels of corruption in a given society. In the present study, CPI was treated as a contextual moderator to examine whether the relationship between socioeconomic status and perceptions of powerholders' self- versus other-orientation varies

across societies with different levels of perceived corruption. To account for the length of the data collection, CPI scores for each culture were averaged across 2022-2024. CPI is scored from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The scores in this investigation ranged from 12.3 to 90.

Rule of Law Index. RLI was taken from World Justice Project (2024) and served as a culture-level indicator of the extent to which societies are governed by clear, stable rules enforced fairly. Higher scores indicate stronger rule of law, meaning that powerholders are more constrained by legal norms and institutional oversight. Lower scores reflect weaker rule of law, where decision-making may be more arbitrary and rule enforcement less predictable. In the present study, as with CPI, we averaged RLI scores across the years of data collection (2022-2024). RLI is scored from 0 to 1. The scores in this investigation ranged from 0.26 to 0.90.

Statistical Modelling

Psychology often relies on hierarchically structured data, in which individuals are nested within cultural contexts (Cheung et al., 2006). Multilevel modelling (MLM) is well-suited to such data because it allows simultaneous estimation of individual-level and culture-level effects, as well as their interactions. We used MLM to test both individual-level associations between SES and perceived self- and other-orientations of powerholders, and culture-level moderators of these relationships, following the stepwise model-building procedure proposed by Aguinis et al. (2013). Specifically, we first estimated null (unconditional) models to examine the degree of between-culture variance and compute intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs). Next, we added subjective SES as a Level-1 predictor in fixed-effects models and then tested random-slope models to allow the SES effect to vary across cultures. Subsequently, we introduced culture-level predictors (CPI and RLI) to explain between-culture differences in the outcomes as well as introduced cross-level

interactions to examine whether CPI and RLI moderated the SES slopes. Due to the high covariance of CPI and RLI, separate models were fitted for each predictor. Individual level variables were cluster-mean-centered to isolate within-culture variation and obtain unbiased estimates of individual-level effects, whereas culture-level predictors were grand-mean centered.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations

We first examined zero-order correlations among the focal variables at their respective levels of analysis. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations are reported in Table 4. At the individual level, across the full sample, SES was positively yet weakly associated with perceived other-orientation of powerholders and negatively associated with perceived self-orientation of powerholders.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations (*SD*), and Correlations of the Studied Variables in Study 1

Variable	1	2	3
Individual level			
1. Socioeconomic Status (SES)			
2. Perceived Self-orientation	-.05***		
3. Perceived Other-orientation	.07***	-.45***	
Culture level			
1. Perceived Self-orientation			
2. Perceived Other-orientation	-.80***		
3. Corruption Perception Index	-.63***	.50***	
4. Rule of Law Index	-.59***	.46***	.97***

*Note:*** $p < .001$. CPI and RLI represent average scores between 2022 and 2024.

Multilevel Models Testing the Role of SES

We estimated separate multilevel models for perceived self-orientation and perceived other-orientation of powerholders, with SES as the focal individual-level predictor.

Unconditional models were first fitted to estimate the proportion of variance attributed to cultural clustering, as indicated by the ICC. For both outcomes, clustering explained substantial variance ($ICC_{self\text{-}orientation}$=.21, $ICC_{other\text{-}orientation}$=.16), warranting cross-cultural investigation. SES was then added as a fixed effect at the individual level. We subsequently allowed the effect of SES to vary across cultures by specifying random-slope models, which improved model fit and indicated significant cross-cultural heterogeneity. To examine cultural moderation, we introduced cross-level interactions between SES and CPI and RLI. These moderators were tested in separate specifications to avoid collinearity. Because CPI and RLI were highly correlated (see Table 4), we present only models with CPI due to broader cultural coverage. Full results for RLI are available in the Supplementary Online Materials. Finally, we estimated models that additionally incorporated control variables at the individual level. Parameter estimates for all models are presented in Table 5 (perceived self-orientation), and Table 6 (perceived other-orientation of powerholders).

Across model specifications, SES was consistently related to perceptions of powerholders: higher SES was associated with lower perceived self-orientation and higher perceived other-orientation. These results provide support for Hypothesis 1. Socioeconomic context further explained these relationships. CPI and RLI significantly predicted perceptions of powerholders. In societies characterized by higher corruption and weaker rule of law, powerholders were perceived as more self-oriented and less other-oriented on average.

Additionally, CPI significantly moderated the association between SES and perceived self-orientation of powerholders. The negative association was strongest in less corrupt countries (+1*SD*: *Estimate*=-.10, *SE*=.01, $p<.001$), moderate in countries with average corruption (*M*: *Estimate*=-.05, *SE*=.01, $p<.001$), and non-significant in highly corrupt contexts (-1*SD*: *Estimate*=-.003, *SE*=.01, $p=.805$). A similar pattern emerged for the RLI: countries with stronger governance exhibited the most pronounced negative effect, (+1*SD*: *Estimate*=-

.10, *SE*=.01, *p*<.001), compared with moderate rule of law (*M*: *Estimate*=-.05, *SE*=.01, *p*<.001) and weak governance (-1*SD*: *Estimate*=-.01, *SE*=.01, *p*=.686).

The inclusion of individual-level controls (age and gender) did not substantively alter the pattern of results for perceived self-orientation of powerholders. However, the interaction between SES and CPI became non-significant for perceived other-orientation. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was only partially supported. Results are illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 5

Results of multilevel regression of perceived self-orientation of powerholders regressed on SES in Study 1

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	B	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Fixed effects										
Intercept	2.89***	0.06	2.89***	0.06	2.89***	0.06	2.99***	0.05	2.99***	0.05
Socioeconomic Status (SES)			-0.32***	0.05	-0.39***	0.07	-0.27***	0.05	-0.27***	0.06
Corruption Perception Index (CPI)							-0.32***	0.05	-0.32***	0.05
SES x CPI							-0.37***	0.06	-0.38***	0.06
Controls										
Age									-0.00	0.00
Gender (male)									0.03*	0.02
Random effects										
Residual variance	0.81		0.80		0.79		0.79		0.79	
Intercept variance	0.21		0.21		0.21		0.13		0.13	
Slope variance (SES)					0.15		0.03		0.03	
Model fit										
Conditional R^2	0.21		0.22		0.22		0.21		.21	
Log Likelihood	-22282		-22262		-22245		-21938		-21768	

Note. CPI was used as the primary cultural-level moderator due to its broader coverage. Parallel models employing the RLI as alternative moderator yielded comparable results and are reported in the Supplementary Online Materials.

Table 6

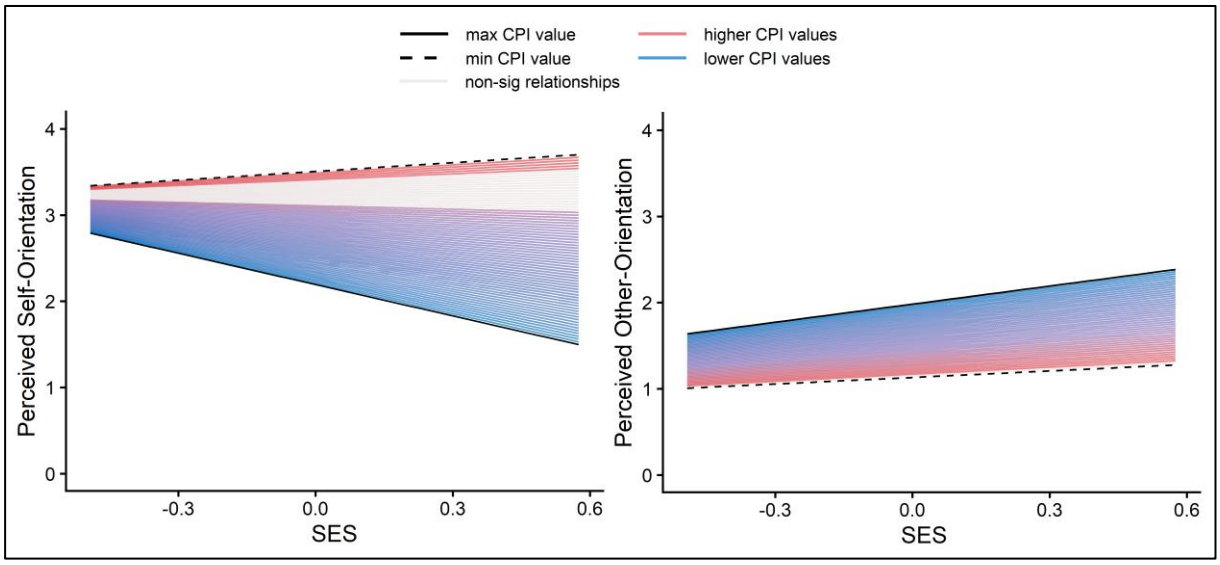
Results of multilevel regression of perceived other-orientation of powerholders regressed on SES in Study 1

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	B	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Fixed effects										
Intercept	1.53***	0.04	1.53***	0.04	1.47***	0.04	1.47***	0.04	1.46***	0.04
Socioeconomic Status (SES)			0.40***	0.04	0.38***	0.04	0.38***	0.07	0.43***	0.01
Corruption Perception Index (CPI)							0.20***	0.04	0.21***	0.04
SES x CPI							0.16*	0.07	0.11	0.07
Controls										
Age									-0.004***	0.00
Gender (male)									-0.04***	0.01
Random effects										
Residual variance	0.72		0.71		0.71		0.71		0.70	
Intercept variance	0.13		0.13		0.10		0.10		0.10	
Slope variance (SES)					0.13		0.13		0.12	
Model fit										
Conditional R^2	0.16		0.16		0.17		0.17		.17	
Log Likelihood	-21338		-21299		-21282		-21003		-20814	

Note. CPI was used as the primary cultural-level moderator due to its broader coverage. While the RLI significantly predicted the perceived other-orientation of powerholders, it did not moderate the effect of SES. The results are reported in the Supplementary Online Materials.

Figure 1

Associations of Socioeconomic Status with Perceived Self-Orientation (left panel) and Other-Orientation (right panel) of Powerholders at different levels of Corruption Perception Index (CPI) in Study 1



Note. Each line represents a cross-level interaction simple effect, controlling age and gender of participants.

Summary of Study 1

Socioeconomic status was systematically related to how individuals perceive institutional powerholders in their societies. Higher-SES individuals tended to view authorities as less self-oriented and more other-oriented toward the public good compared to low-SES individuals. This result supports Hypothesis 1. Importantly, however, powerholders were on average perceived as more self-oriented than other-oriented overall. In other words, individuals better situated within the socioeconomic hierarchy were less skeptical of institutional powerholders, though skepticism remained present across groups. At the cultural level, countries with lower corruption and stronger governance exhibited more positive appraisals of powerholders. This pattern suggests that our measures capture perceptions that correspond, at least in part, to real differences in sociopolitical conditions. This finding is consistent with Hypothesis 2. Finally, quality of governance shaped the relationship between

SES and perceived self-orientation (but not other-orientation) of powerholders. This lends partial support to Hypothesis 3. Lower corruption appears to intensify patterns more typical of higher-SES individuals. System justification may be more firmly grounded in reality, and identification with authorities more appealing under conditions of fair governance. At the same time, corruption—or its absence—does not eliminate social comparisons. Lower-SES individuals may continue to perceive themselves as disadvantaged, thereby experiencing relative deprivation. As a result, lower corruption may weaken anti-powerholder views among the high-SES individuals without equally reducing them among the low-SES individuals.

Study 2

Study 2 served as a conceptual replication of Study 1 designed to test the robustness of the findings using alternative measures and a separate dataset. This approach allowed us to assess whether the observed associations generalize beyond a single operationalization. As in Study 1, we examined whether SES is associated with perceptions of institutional powerholders. Consistent with our earlier findings, we expected higher SES to be linked to lower perceived self-orientation and higher perceived other-orientation of powerholders. Additionally, we included system legitimization in some analyses to investigate the overlap between positive views about the system and perceptions of powerholders. We expected that perception of powerholders as other-oriented would be related to higher system justification, and the reverse pattern would be present for perceived self-orientation. We also re-tested whether societal context moderates these associations. Specifically, we focused again on governance-related indicators—corruption and rule of law—as contextual moderators of the link between SES and powerholder appraisals. By repeating the analyses with different measures, we aimed to evaluate the stability and generalizability of the SES gradient in authority perceptions across cultures.

Method

Participants and Cultures

Data were drawn from a large cross-cultural dataset spanning 83 samples collected across 62 cultures, as in some cultures multiple samples were collected. The targeted minimum for the sample size per culture was n=200, but some smaller samples were also included. Due to a less robust measure, this time participants were excluded if they failed any of the 12 attention checks or had missing data on focal variables. The resulting analytic sample comprised 17,200 participants. A detailed overview of the samples is provided in Table 2. Data collection occurred between late 2024 and early 2026. Study materials were prepared by the coordinating authors and implemented by co-authors in each culture. The questionnaire was originally created in English and distributed via Qualtrics for online administration, with a separate version prepared for paper-and-pencil use. Local teams translated the materials using a back-translation procedure and recruited participants using convenience-based strategies, including university samples, online research panels, and snowball sampling. Informed consent was obtained in all cultures. The variables used for the current investigation have not been used previously.

Measures

Socioeconomic Status was operationalized in the same way as in Study 1. It was computed as a composite index of harmonized measures including participants' education, parents' education, perceived household budget comfort, and subjective social rank assessed with the MacArthur ladder.

Perceived Self- / versus Other-Orientation of Powerholders was assessed using a one-item semantic differential scale adapted from Wasiel et al. (2025). Participants were instructed: "*Which of the following statements about people in position of authority in [culture name] is closer to your thinking? If both are appealing to some extent, you can choose one of the middle options."*. Responses were recorded on a 6-point scale ranging from

1 (*People in position of authority in [culture name] use power in their own interest*) to 6 *(People in position of authority in [culture name] use power in the interest of others*). The shorter format was adopted to ensure the feasibility of administering the study across multiple cultures.

System Justification was measured using a single item from Kay and Jost (2003): *"In general, you find society to be fair"*. Responses were recorded on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*).

Individual-Level covariates

As in Study 1, gender and age were included as control variables in all final models.

Culture-Level Socioeconomic Variables

Corruption Perceptions Index. As in Study 1, we used the CPI (Transparency International, 2024) as a culture-level indicator of perceived public-sector corruption. CPI was treated as a contextual moderator of the SES–powerholder perception link. Scores from 2024 were used, as the 2025 index was not available at the time of analysis. The scores in Study 2 ranged from 22 to 83.

Rule of Law Index. RLI (Kaufmann, 2011) was employed as a culture-level indicator of institutional rule adherence and legal constraints on powerholders. RLI served as a contextual moderator of the SES–powerholder perception link. Scores were obtained from 2024, matching the data collection timeline, and ranged from 0.35 to 0.89.

Statistical Modelling

We followed the same analytic strategy as in Study 1, employing multilevel modelling to account for individuals nested within cultures. We estimated null, random-intercept, and random-slope models, then added culture-level predictors (CPI, RLI) and tested cross-level interactions. CPI and RLI were analyzed in separate models due to high covariance. SES was cluster-mean centered, and culture-level predictors were grand-mean centered. Because the

measure combined self- and other-orientations into a single continuum, models were estimated for this composite rather than separately for self- and other-orientation.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations

At the individual level, across the full sample, SES was weakly associated with perceiving powerholders as other-oriented (vs. self-oriented), as well as with system justification. Perceptions of powerholders as other-oriented were positively related to system justification. At the cultural level, CPI correlated with the perception of powerholders as other-oriented, but RLI did not. Neither of the indexes correlated with system justification. Full results are reported in Table 7.

Table 7

Means, Standard Deviations (*SD*), and Correlations of the Studied Variables in Study 2

Variable	1	2	3
Individual level			
1. Socioeconomic Status (SES)			
2. Perceived Other-orientation vs. Self-orientation	.06***		
3. System Justification	.14***	.30***	
Culture level			
1. Perceived Self-orientation vs. Other-orientation			
2. System Justification	.68***		
3. Corruption Perception Index	.26*	.15	
4. Rule of Law Index	.16	.02	.96***

*Note:*** $p < .001$. CPI represents the 2024 data; RLI represents averaged scores between 2024 and 2025.

Multilevel Models Testing the Role of SES

The unconditional model showed that the proportion of variance explained by cultural clustering was substantial for a large-scale cross-cultural study (ICC = .14). SES was then introduced as a fixed effect at the individual level. We subsequently added the random slopes for SES. Next, CPI and RLI were introduced as culture-level predictors and moderators of the

SES-powerholder perception link. As in Study 1, separate models were estimated due to the high covariance between CPI and RLI. Models including SES and RLI are available in Supplementary Online Materials. Finally, control variables were added at both the individual and cultural levels. Parameter estimates for all models are presented in Table 8. Across specifications, SES was consistently associated with higher perceived other-orientation (vs. self-orientation) of powerholders. Allowing slopes to vary improved model fit, confirming cross-cultural heterogeneity in the SES-powerholder relationship. These results support Hypothesis 1. Unlike Study 1, RLI did not exhibit a significant main effect on perceptions of powerholders, indicating that governance quality did not predict culture-average appraisals of authority. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported.

We observed significant interactions between SES and CPI. In societies with low levels of corruption, the SES effect on perceiving powerholders as other-oriented was strongest (+1*SD*: *Estimate*=.63, *SE*=.17, $p<.001$), moderate at average corruption levels (*M:* *Estimate*=.38, *SE*=.12, $p=.002$), and non-significant in highly corrupt societies (-1*SD*: *Estimate*=.14, *SE*=.17, $p=.414$). Full models are presented in Table 8. RLI was not a significant moderator; model specifications are presented in Supplementary Online Materials. Overall, these results provide partial support for Hypothesis 3.

Table 8

Results of multilevel regression of perceived other-orientation (vs. self-orientation) of powerholders regressed on SES in Study 2

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	B	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Fixed effects										
Intercept	2.49***	0.08	2.48***	0.08	2.48***	0.08	2.49***	0.08	2.49***	0.07
Socioeconomic Status (SES)			0.46***	0.08	0.35**	0.08	0.36**	0.12	0.37**	0.12
Corruption Perception Index (CPI)							0.17*	0.08	0.17**	0.07
SES x CPI							0.27*	0.12	0.26*	0.12
Controls										
Age									0.01**	0.00
Gender (male)									0.05*	0.03
Random effects										
Residual variance	2.20		2.17		2.16		2.16		2.14	
Intercept variance	0.36		0.36		0.36		0.34		0.34	
Slope variance (SES)					0.56		0.49		0.46	
Model fit										
Conditional R^2	0.14		0.14		0.15		0.15		.16	
Log Likelihood	-34748		-31186		-31152		-31150		-30465	

Note. CPI was used as the primary cultural-level moderator due to its broader coverage across societies.

Summary of Study 2

Study 2 reinforces the main conclusions of Study 1 while employing a different, more constrained measure of perceived self- versus other-orientation of powerholders. Socioeconomic position was again related to how individuals perceived powerholders: those who were better off tended to view authorities as somewhat less self-serving than those who were worse off. Although the pattern was consistent, the differences were moderate, and even high-SES participants did not evaluate powerholders especially favorably. At the cultural level, results showed that corruption predicted average perceptions of powerholders, even after accounting for economic development. Additionally, corruption shaped the strength of SES differences. In lower-corruption contexts, the gap between higher- and lower-SES individuals' perceptions was more pronounced, whereas in high-corruption contexts SES differences were attenuated. Taken together, these findings suggest that individuals' own social standing remains an important lens through which they judge authorities. Even in well-governed contexts, those who feel disadvantaged continue to express doubt toward powerholders, which suggests the persistent role of relative deprivation in shaping authority perceptions.

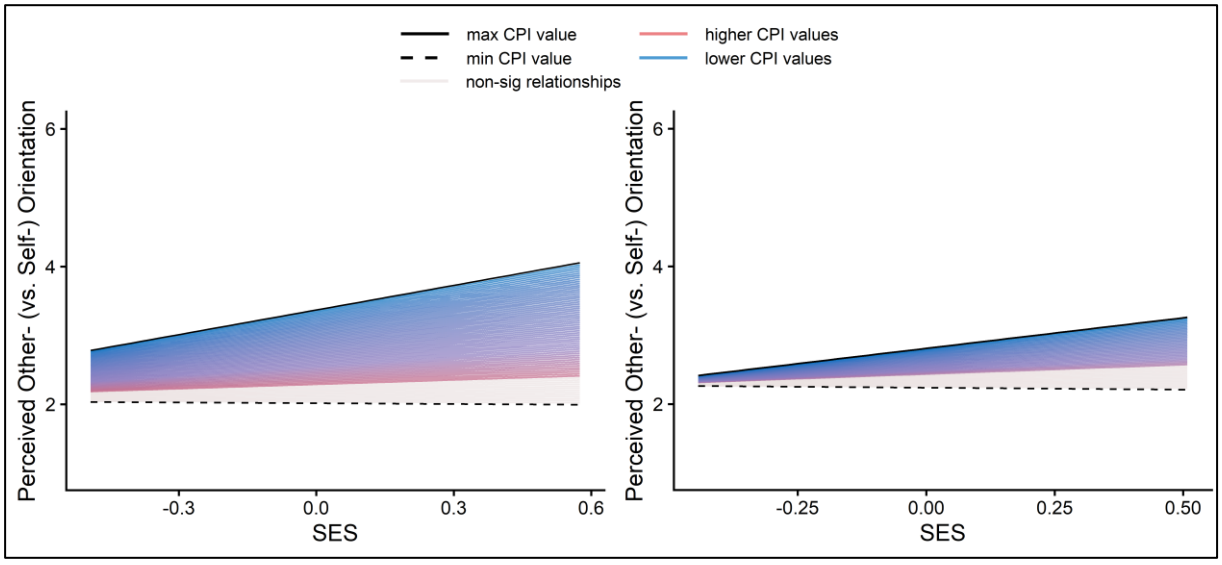
Synthesis of Study 1 and Study 2

To directly compare the results of Study 1 and Study 2, we harmonized the data on perceived self- and other-orientations of powerholders. Specifically, the two separate variables from Study 1 were collapsed into a single measure, such that higher scores represented perceived other-orientation (vs. self-orientation). The scores were then rescaled to a 1-6 metric to match the format used in Study 2. Subsequent multi-level analysis, with SES as the focal predictor and CPI as the moderator, controlling for gender and age, revealed that the models across both studies were nearly identical. Full specifications are provided in the Supplementary Online Materials. Figure 2 illustrates the comparison of the SES and CPI

interaction across the two studies. Results consistently showed that in countries with low corruption, SES exerted a stronger effect on perceiving powerholders as other-oriented (vs. self-oriented). In contrast, in countries with high levels of corruption, the SES effect was non-significant.

Figure 2

Associations of Socioeconomic Status with Perceived Other-Orientation (vs. Self-Orientation) of Powerholders at different levels of Corruption Perception Index for Study 1 (left panel) and Study 2 (right panel)



General Discussion

The most consistent finding across both studies is that socioeconomic status matters for how powerholders are perceived: Higher-SES individuals attributed less self-orientation and more other-orientation to authorities. This pattern emerged despite differences in measures and samples. The relationship is best reflected in the degree of skepticism toward powerholders. In Study 1, 78.5% of participants perceived powerholders as more self- than

other-oriented; in Study 2, this was true for 75.9% of participants. Thus, socioeconomic status appears to soften doubts about authority rather than eliminate them.

High-SES Individuals See Powerholders as More Other-Oriented

Our findings suggest that socioeconomic status shapes the lens through which people perceive institutional powerholders. From a system justification perspective, those who benefit more from the existing social order have stronger psychological incentives to see it as legitimate and functional (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015). Viewing powerholders as responsible and public-serving helps sustain a coherent and reassuring image of the system. Social identity processes are also likely at play: higher-SES individuals are often socially closer to people in authority and may perceive them as part of their broader ingroup, leading to more positive attributions of motives (Oveis et al., 2010). While the system justification theory posits that in certain contexts, lower-SES individuals may show more positive perceptions of the system, the cross-cultural data shows that their system justification motivations are usually weaker (Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018; Brandt et al., 2020). Relative deprivation and repeated exposure to unequal treatment can make authorities appear as representatives of an advantaged group rather than as protectors of common interests. Everyday encounters in workplaces, schools, or public institutions may reinforce perceptions of powerholders as biased or self-serving. Attributions of powerholders may therefore be a part of class-specific socialization (Stephens et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2024).

Governance Quality Shapes the Effect of SES on Perceptions of Powerholders

Beyond individual differences, cultural context shaped the link between SES and perceptions of powerholders. In Study 1, lower corruption and stronger rule of law predicted more positive overall appraisals of powerholders and amplified SES differences: in well-governed societies, higher SES was more strongly negatively associated with perceiving powerholders as self-oriented, while in highly corrupt contexts SES differences largely

disappeared. This suggests that societal conditions determine how much room exists for divergent interpretations of authority. Where corruption is widespread, negative views of powerholders may become so pervasive that they are shared across social classes, undermining respect for authority altogether (Wasiel et al., 2025). Where institutions function more equitably, socioeconomic position becomes a stronger filter: higher-SES individuals may more readily believe powerholders act responsibly, while lower-SES individuals continue to draw on experiences of deprivation. Governance quality thus shapes not only general attitudes toward authority but also the degree to which those attitudes diverge by class.

Implications for public institutions

Perceived self-orientation and other-orientation do not work symmetrically. Governance indicators consistently predicted lower attributions of self-orientation, whereas increases in perceived other-orientation were less robust. People may more readily withdraw negative attributions than actively develop positive ones: recognizing that authorities are less self-interested does not automatically translate into seeing them as genuinely altruistic. Signalling fairness alone may therefore be insufficient as a source of legitimacy. This challenge is not technical. Widespread perceptions of self-oriented powerholders can fuel anti-elitist sentiment and populist appeal even in relatively well-governed societies (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), with narratives portraying elites as corrupt resonating particularly among lower-SES individuals (Engler, 2020). When populist leaders gain power, they often weaken institutional constraints and increase corruption (Zhang, 2023), further amplifying self-interest perceptions and creating a self-reinforcing cycle that undermines societal confidence, trust, and flourishing.

Implications for inequality

The current findings highlight a psychological pathway through which social inequality can reproduce itself. If lower-SES individuals are systematically more likely to interpret powerholders as self-oriented, they may be less willing to engage with institutions (Zheng et al., 2017; Pitesa et al., 2017; Školník, 2020) or pursue positions of authority (Belmi & Laurin, 2016), reducing opportunities for social mobility and deepening political and social divides. While some research shows that perceived self-orientation of powerholders is connected to support of more equality in society (Wasiel et al., 2025), it remains unclear whether this actually translates into real-world change. Importantly, improving macro-level governance may be necessary but not sufficient to close the perception gap. Even in well-functioning societies, people at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy may continue to perceive authorities as distant or self-oriented. Appraisals of authority are likely shaped not only by formal rules and procedures but also by whether powerholders are seen as genuinely part of the communities they serve — for example, whether they include individuals from lower-SES backgrounds.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, both studies were cross-sectional, preventing firm causal conclusions. While SES plausibly shapes perceptions of powerholders (ten Brinke & Keltner, 2022), the reverse is also possible: chronic distrust in authorities may influence social mobility and therefore SES (Belmi & Laurin, 2016). Second, the studies used different measurement approaches. Study 1 relied on multi-item scales with good reliability, while Study 2 used a single-item semantic differential, reducing precision. Future research should combine efficient measurement with robust psychometric properties across cultures. Third, our convenience samples varied in recruitment and likely captured a limited range of the socioeconomic distribution, with probable over- or under-representation of certain groups depending on the cultural context. More representative samples would strengthen

generalizability. Future studies should also disentangle the contributions of objective resources, education, and subjective rank, given that in certain contexts the effects of subjective and objective SES are divergent (Antonoplis, 2023). Finally, although we proposed several mediating mechanisms—including system justification, social identity, relative deprivation and procedural justice—we did not test them directly. Future research should incorporate explicit measures of these processes to more precisely examine why SES shapes powerholder appraisals.

Conclusion

Across a broad range of national cultures, people's position in the socioeconomic hierarchy is linked to how they judge those who hold institutional power. Higher-status individuals tend to be less skeptical of authorities, whereas lower-status individuals are more inclined to see powerholders as self-oriented. These differences are not fixed: they depend on the quality of governance and the everyday functioning of institutions. In well-governed societies, differences in perceptions of powerholders are more pronounced. Reducing corruption and strengthening the rule of law are crucial steps toward more positive perceptions, but they do not automatically bridge the psychological divide between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. Building confidence in authority therefore requires attention to how institutional actions are interpreted across different socioeconomic groups, not only to how well institutions function in objective terms.

References

Adler, N. E., Epel, E. S., Castellazzo, G., & Ickovics, J. R. (2000). Relationship of subjective and objective social status with psychological and physiological functioning: Preliminary data in healthy, White women. *Health Psychology*, *19*(6), 586. https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.19.6.586

Aguinis, H., Gottfredson, R. K., & Culpepper, S. A. (2013). Best-practice recommendations for estimating cross-level interaction effects using multilevel modeling. *Journal of Management*, *39*(6), 1490-1528. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313478188

Aidt, T. S. (2009). Corruption, institutions, and economic development. *Oxford review of economic policy*, *25*(2), 271-291. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grp012

Ansems, L. F. M. (2021). *Procedural justice on trial: A critical test of perceived procedural justice from the perspective of criminal defendants* (Doctoral dissertation, Utrecht University). http://hdl.handle.net/1874/403085

Antonoplis, S. (2023). Studying socioeconomic status: Conceptual problems and an alternative path forward. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *18*(2), 275-292. https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221093615

Badman, R. P., Wang, A. X., Skrodzki, M., Cho, H. C., Aguilar-Lleyda, D., Shiono, N., ... & Akaishi, R. (2022). Trust in institutions, not in political leaders, determines compliance in COVID-19 prevention measures within societies across the globe. *Behavioral Sciences*, *12*(6), 170. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12060170

Baker, E. H. (2014). Socioeconomic status, definition. *The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of health, illness, behavior, and society*, 1-4. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118410868.wbehibs395.pub2

Bornand, T., & Klein, O. (2022). Political trust by individuals of low socioeconomic status: The key role of anomie. *Social Psychological Bulletin*, *17*, 1-22. https://doi.org/10.32872/spb.6897

Brandt, M. J., Kuppens, T., Spears, R., Andrighetto, L., Autin, F., Babincak, P., ... & Zimmerman, J. L. (2020). Subjective status and perceived legitimacy across countries. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *50*(5), 921-942. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2694

Bratton, M., & Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2016). Do trustworthy institutions matter for development? Corruption, trust, and government performance in Africa. *Afrobarometer Dispatch*, *112*(6).

Brown-Iannuzzi, J. L., Lundberg, K. B., Kay, A. C., & Payne, B. K. (2015). Subjective status shapes political preferences. *Psychological Science*, *26*(1), 15-26. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614553947

Buchel, O., Luijkx, R., & Achterberg, P. (2021). Objective and subjective socioeconomic status as sources of status-legitimacy effect and legitimation of income inequality. *Political Psychology*, *42*(3), 463-481. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12707

Canache, D., Cawvey, M., Hayes, M., & Mondak, J. J. (2019). Who sees corruption? The bases of mass perceptions of political corruption in Latin America. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, *11*(2), 133-160. https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X19876462

Cislak, A., Cichocka, A., Wojcik, A. D., & Frankowska, N. (2018). Power corrupts, but control does not: What stands behind the effects of holding high positions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *44*(6), 944–957. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167218757456

Côté, S. (2011). How social class shapes thoughts and actions in organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *31*, 43-71. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2011.09.004

DeCelles, K. A., DeRue, D. S., Margolis, J. D., & Ceranic, T. L. (2012). Does power corrupt or enable? When and why power facilitates self-interested behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *97*(3), 681–689. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026811

Diekmann, K. A., Sondak, H., & Barsness, Z. I. (2007). Does fairness matter more to some than to others? The moderating role of workplace status on the relationship between procedural fairness perceptions and job satisfaction. *Social Justice Research*, *20*(2), 161-180. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-007-0036-x

Dzhumashev, R. (2014). Corruption and growth: The role of governance, public spending, and economic development. *Economic Modelling*, *37*, 202-215. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econmod.2013.11.007

Elenbaas, L., McGuire, L., Ackerman, A., Kneeskern, E., Kinnard, L., Farooq, A., ... & Mistry, R. S. (2025). Social class group identity, intergroup attitudes, and views on social mobility and inequality in the UK and the US. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, *25*(1), e12431. https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12431Digital Object Identifier (DOI)

Ellersgaard, C. H., Lunding, J. A., Henriksen, L. F., & Larsen, A. G. (2019). Pathways to the power elite: The organizational landscape of elite careers. *The Sociological Review*, *67*(5), 1170-1192. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026119852301

Engler, S. (2020). “Fighting corruption” or “fighting the corrupt elite”? Politicizing corruption within and beyond the populist divide. *Democratization*, *27*(4), 643-661. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1713106

González-Cánovas, A., Trillo, A., Bretones, F. D., & Fernández-Millán, J. M. (2024). Trust in leadership and perceptions of justice in fostering employee commitment. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *15*, 1359581. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1359581

Hogg, M. A., Van Knippenberg, D., & Rast III, D. E. (2012). The social identity theory of leadership: Theoretical origins, research findings, and conceptual developments. *European Review of Social Psychology*, *23*(1), 258-304. https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2012.741134

Hooghe, M., Oser, J., & Marien, S. (2016). A comparative analysis of 'good citizenship': A latent class analysis of adolescents' citizenship norms in 38 countries. *International Political Science Review*, *37*(1), 115-129. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512114541562

Hough, M., Jackson, J., & Bradford, B. (2013). Trust in justice and the legitimacy of legal authorities: topline findings from a European comparative study. In *The Routledge handbook of European criminology* (pp. 243-265). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203083505

Isbell, T. (2023). *Keeping Tabs?: Perceptions of Relative Deprivation and Political Trust in Africa*. Afrobarometer. http://cssr.uct.ac.za/pub/wp/461

Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (1994). The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *33*(1), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1994.tb01008.x

Jost, J. T., Banaji, M. R., & Nosek, B. A. (2004). A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. *Political Psychology*, *25*(6), 881-919. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00402.x

Jost, J. T., Liviatan, I., Van Der Toorn, J., Ledgerwood, A., Mandisodza, A., & Nosek, B. A. (2011). System justification: How do we know it's motivated?. In *The psychology of justice and legitimacy* (pp. 173-203). Psychology Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203837658

Kaufmann, D., Kraay, A., & Mastruzzi, M. (2011). The worldwide governance indicators: Methodology and analytical issues1. *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law*, *3*(2), 220-246. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1876404511200046

Kay, A. C., & Jost, J. T. (2003). Complementary justice: effects of" poor but happy" and" poor but honest" stereotype exemplars on system justification and implicit activation of the justice motive. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *85*(5), 823. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.5.823

Kraus, M. W., Park, J. W., & Tan, J. J. (2017). Signs of social class: The experience of economic inequality in everyday life. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *12*(3), 422-435. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691616673192

Kusano, K., Napier, J. L., & Jost, J. T. (2025). The mismeasure of culture: Why measurement invariance is rarely appropriate for comparative research in psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 01461672251341402. https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672251341402

Lambsdorff, J. G. (2007). The methodology of the corruption perceptions index 2007. *Transparency International*.

Levi, M., & Stoker, L. (2000). Political trust and trustworthiness. *Annual review of political science*, *3*(1), 475-507. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.475

Lind, E. A., & Tyler, T. R. (1988). *The social psychology of procedural justice*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Liu, D., Bakari, H., Niaz, M., Zhang, Q., & Shah, I. A. (2022). Impact of managerial trustworthy behavior on employee engagement: mediating role of perceived insider status. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 942697. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.942697

Loignon, A. C., & Kodydek, G. (2022). The effects of objective and subjective social class on leadership emergence. *Journal of Management Studies*, *59*(5), 1162-1197. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12769

Maeda, K., & Ziegfeld, A. (2015). Socioeconomic status and corruption perceptions around the world. *Research & Politics*, *2*(2), 2053168015580838. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168015580838

Manstead, A. S. (2018). The psychology of social class: How socioeconomic status impacts thought, feelings, and behaviour. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *57*(2), 267-291. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12251

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. cambridge university press.

Oveis, C., Horberg, E. J., & Keltner, D. (2010). Compassion, pride, and social intuitions of self-other similarity. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *98*(4), 618. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017628

Pitesa, M., Thau, S., & Pillutla, M. M. (2017). Workplace trust as a mechanism of employee (dis) advantage: The case of employee socioeconomic status. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *37*, 83-101. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2017.10.006

Pryce, D. K., & Whitaker, I. P. (2023). The role of procedural justice in policing: A qualitative assessment of African Americans' perceptions and experiences in a large US City. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, *20*(1), 89-109. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X22000066

Rucker, D. D., & Galinsky, A. D. (2017). Social power and social class: Conceptualization, consequences, and current challenges. *Current opinion in psychology*, *18*, 26-30. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.07.028

Runciman, W. G. (1966). *Relative deprivation and social justice: A study of attitudes to social inequality in twentieth-century England*. University of California Press.

Školník, M. (2020). The effects of corruption on various forms of political participation in Colombia. *Latin American Policy*, *11*(1), 88-102. https://doi.org/10.1111/lamp.12180Digital Object Identifier (DOI)

Smith, H. J., Pettigrew, T. F., Pippin, G. M., & Bialosiewicz, S. (2012). Relative deprivation: A theoretical and meta-analytic review. *Personality and social psychology review*, *16*(3), 203-232. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868311430825

Stephens, N. M., Emery, L. F., Townsend, S. S., & Song, H. J. (2024). Taking a social-class-in-context perspective on the psychology of social class. *Journal of Social Issues*, *80*(4), 1484-1503. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12652

Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Phillips, L. T. (2014). Social class culture cycles: How three gateway contexts shape selves and fuel inequality. *Annual review of psychology*, *65*, 611-634. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115143

Tajfel, H., Billig, M. G., Bundy, R. P., & Flament, C. (1971). Social categorization and intergroup behaviour. *European journal of social psychology*, *1*(2), 149-178. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420010202

Tan, X., Zhang, Y., Liu, L., Dou, X., Gu, Z., Liang, Y., & Dang, J. (2021). Turning a blind eye: Meritocracy moderates the impacts of social status on corruption perception. *International Journal of Psychology*, *56*(5), 688-697. https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12731

Tost, L. P., & Johnson, H. H. (2019). The prosocial side of power: How structural power over subordinates can promote social responsibility. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *152*, 25-46. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.04.004

Tyler, T. R. (2006). *Why people obey the law*. Princeton university press.

Valdes, E. A., Liu, J. H., & Williams, M. (2023). Testing the status-legitimacy hypothesis: Predicting system justification using objective and subjective socioeconomic status in China and the United States. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, *26*(2), 238-253. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12555

van der Toorn, J., Tyler, T. R., & Jost, J. T. (2011). More than fair: Outcome dependence, system justification, and the perceived legitimacy of authority figures. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 47*(1), 127–138. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2010.09.003

van Hall, M., Dirkzwager, A. J., Van der Laan, P. H., & Nieuwbeerta, P. (2023). Procedural justice, perceived legitimacy, and reoffending behavior: In police and court setting. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *50*(12), 1874-1892. https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548231206833

Vargas-Salfate, S., Paez, D., Khan, S. S., Liu, J. H., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2018). System justification enhances well-being: A longitudinal analysis of the palliative function of system justification in 18 countries. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *57*(3), 567-590. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12254

Walker, I., & Pettigrew, T. F. (1984). Relative deprivation theory: An overview and conceptual critique. *British journal of social psychology*, *23*(4), 301-310. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1984.tb00645.x

Wang, X., & Li, H. How Do Power Holders and Powerless People Construe Power: Moderating Effect of Power Perspective. *Available at SSRN 4702988* http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4702988

Wasiel, A., Górski, M. R., Bond, M. H., Yeung, V. W. L., Akaliyski, P., Akello, G., ... & Krys, K. (2025). Examining the connection between position-based power and social status

across 70 cultures. *British journal of social psychology*, *64*(2), e12871. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12871

Wasiel, A., Yeung, V. W. L., & Krys, K. (2025). Responsible powerholders may preserve the status quo? A three cultures study into the relation between powerholder construals and societal development expectations: Powerholders and societal development. *BMC psychology*, *13*(1), 236. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02534-1

Welzel, C., Brunkert, L., Kruse, S., & Inglehart, R. F. (2023). Non-invariance? An overstated problem with misconceived causes. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *52*(3), 1368-1400. https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124121995521

Zhang, D. (2024). Draining the swamp? Populist leadership and corruption. *Governance*, *37*(4), 1141-1161. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12829Digital Object Identifier (DOI)

Zheng, W. W., Liu, L., Huang, Z. W., & Tan, X. Y. (2017). Life satisfaction as a buffer of the relationship between corruption perception and political participation. *Social Indicators Research*, *132*(2), 907-923. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1318-1