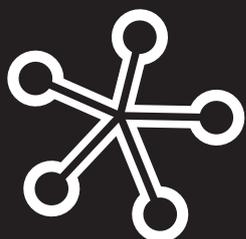




Does desire for social status promote solidarity?

Marii Paskov



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Does desire for social status promote solidarity?

**Investigating the role of egalitarian versus
inegalitarian societal contexts**

Marii Paskov

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Abstract

Research has shown that solidarity – contributions to the wellbeing of others – is often rewarded with social status. This can give status seekers (i.e. people interested in elevated position in the social hierarchy) motivation to help others. However, the reputational gains resulting from solidarity can differ across societies. The objective of this paper is to study whether desire for social status promotes solidarity, and how societal context moderates this relationship. The study is based on individual-level data (N=161 727) from the European Social Survey that combines six waves of cross-sectional surveys collected in 27 countries over the period of 2002 to 2012. The results show that there is a strong positive relationship between status seeking and solidarity. However, the positive association is stronger in inegalitarian societies characterized by higher income inequality and lower governmental welfare effort. This suggests that the reputational gains of solidarity might be higher in inegalitarian societal contexts, as compared to egalitarian contexts. The combination of between- and within-country over-time empirical evidence adds to the strength of these findings.

Keywords: solidarity, status seeking, income inequality, welfare effort, contextual moderators.

1. Introduction

Solidarity can generally be defined as an act or a goal to help others and care for their wellbeing. Individual's willingness to promote the welfare of others is often seen as a paradox in a social world where people are assumed or expected to have an inherently self-interested nature (Hobbes, 1651 [1996]). A whole range of explanations to what motivates or inhibits social solidarity have been proposed in the literature, including ideas that solidarity is not only an altruistic concern for other people but it is also based on self-interested considerations (De Swaan, 1988; Durkheim, 1983 [1964]; Hechter, 1987; Schokkaert, 2006). The latter implies that people are solidary partly because it can yield a number of positive personal consequences, one of them being heightened social status (Olson, 1965; Schokkaert, 2006; Willer, 2009). Empirical evidence from laboratory settings confirms that solidarity can indeed assist individuals to gain social status, respect and prestige in the eyes of others (Willer, 2009); and such reputational gains are important for stimulating solidarity – particularly among people with heightened desire for social status and reputation (Willer, Feinberg, Simpson, & Flynn, 2013). This literature suggests an important mechanism that promotes solidarity – the combination of desire for status and reputational gains resulting from acting in the interest of others.

For the reputational gain mechanism to work, solidarity needs to be visible and considered meritorious by other people – something worthy rewarding with status and reputation. Research in laboratory settings has shown that desire for status is particularly important for determining solidarity under conditions where strategic self-presentation is possible or when solidarity leads to greater reputational gains (Willer et al., 2013). People appear to be less solidary when the capacity for strategic self-presentation is diminished by cognitive load or when contributions to the wellbeing of others are made anonymous (ibid). This suggests that status seekers, in particular, are likely to be more solidary under conditions where reputational gains are higher. While laboratory settings are very useful for pinpointing causal relationships and investigating the underlying mechanisms, comparative studies of whole societies may provide insights that are not available in individual-based studies (Bowles, 1998). Comparative research can shed light on an important question about whether certain macro societal conditions determine the reputational gains of solidarity. The work by Herrmann, Thöni and Gächter (2008) demonstrates that solidarity is not equally valued across societies and solidarity is even punished in societies with weak rule of law and weak norms of civic cooperation. In societies where solidarity is not rewarded with status and esteem, or is even punished, there is less incentive for people to engage in solidary action. The latter

holds particularly for status seekers who have been shown to withdraw from solidary action if there are no opportunities to get rewarded accordingly (Willer et al., 2013). By contrast, status seekers should be especially eager to express solidarity in societies where they can expect higher reputational gains. As a general mechanism, we expect the reputational gains resulting from solidarity to depend on the extent to which solidarity is valued and acknowledged as a social norm in a particular context.

Social scientists have long been interested in the role of egalitarian versus inegalitarian contexts in promoting or hindering solidarity and affecting the social norms about solidarity (Arts, Halman, & Van Oorschot, 2003; Gërkhani & Koster, 2012; Kääriäinen & Lehtonen, 2006; Rothstein, 1998; Van der Meer, 2009; Van Oorschot & Arts, 2005). From one theoretical perspective, solidarity is argued to be more widespread and more strongly rooted in egalitarian societies (Rothstein, 1998). To the extent that solidarity is more of a social norm in egalitarian societies, there might also be more social pressure to act solidary in order to attain reputation and status in the eyes of others. Thus, there should be a stronger positive association between status seeking and solidarity in egalitarian contexts, while the association should be weaker in inegalitarian contexts. From another theoretical perspective, the ‘crowding-out hypothesis’ suggests the opposite: that egalitarian societies have negative moral consequences by reducing individual’s incentive and need to engage in helping others, instead, helping others is seen as the task of the state (Van Oorschot & Arts, 2005). This could mean that informal solidarity is less important for status attainment in egalitarian contexts, while it should play a stronger role in inegalitarian contexts.

The central objective of this paper is twofold. First, to test whether there is a positive association between status seeking and solidarity outside of the laboratory by using survey data including different countries in the European region over an extended time period. Second, to test the conflicting ideas about the role of egalitarian and inegalitarian societal context in moderating the relationship between status seeking and solidarity. Egalitarian context is defined in terms equality in the distribution of incomes and generous governmental welfare effort, while inegalitarian context is characterized by inequality of incomes and weak national level welfare effort. We use pooled cross-sectional survey data from the European Social Survey (ESS), which combines six waves of biannual data on 27 countries ranging from 2002 to 2012. The repeated cross-sectional ESS dataset is unique as it includes cross-national over-time information on both solidarity and status seeking. An important methodological asset of this paper is the focus on both the between- and within-country over-time empirical evidence

in studying the moderating role of societal context. Two methods are applied, the cross-classified multilevel analysis is used to capture the within and between country variance simultaneously, and the within country comparison models enable us to study the contextual effects within countries over time. The within country over-time analysis is particularly important for attaining robust evidence about the contextual effects – it has the advantage of eliminating the problem of between-country heterogeneity.

2. The relationship between status seeking and solidarity

Lindenberg (2006) puts forward that from the perspective of social sciences the most relevant goals for human beings have to do with self-concern versus other-concern. As self-oriented and other-regarding goals, this paper will focus on status seeking and solidarity, respectively. Status seeking can broadly be defined as individuals desire for a higher relative standing in the social hierarchy in terms of esteem, respect and influence (Flynn, Reagans, Amanatullah, & Ames, 2006; Paskov, Gërkhani, & van de Werfhorst, 2013). Since social status is largely based on other people's subjective evaluations of an individual and where someone deserves to rank in the social hierarchy (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972), status seeking means that people wish to attain a higher position in the eyes of others. Thus, the particular dimension of social status seeking is the pursuit for 'honor' (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Jasso, 2001; Weber, 1968 [1922]). In this paper status seeking is defined as a conscious personal goal to attain social status in terms of respect, admiration and recognition from other people.¹

Solidarity can generally be defined as a personal act or a goal to improve the wellbeing of other people.² According to Habermas (1995), solidarity involves concern for the wellbeing of both one's fellow human beings and of the community at large. Van Oorschot and Kompter (1998) argue that solidary behavior boils down to acting in the interest of the group and its members. In this paper solidarity is defined as a conscious personal goal to improve the wellbeing of others. Although this definition does not specify which group solidarity is aimed at, it captures solidarity beyond family and friends; and it extends to a broader group of people including strangers (Schwartz, 2010). Thus, it can be seen as a measure of *generalized solidarity*.

With status seeking and solidarity a distinction can be made between personal goals that put success, status and prestige to the forefront, and goals that put the welfare of other people in the forefront (Schwartz, 2010). While the two can be seen as contrasting goals (ibid), much of the literature suggests that solidarity can be used as a strategic effort to promote one's reputation in the eyes of others. Schokkaert (2006) argues that one of the reasons people act solidary is to attain more prestige and reputation in the

1 Thereby, status seeking is defined similarly to Flynn et al. (2006) and Willer et al. (2013) who study desire for status in terms of pursuit for enhanced social position in the eyes of others.

2 The concept of 'solidarity' can be equated with the concept of 'prosociality', they both refer to attitudes and/or behavior assumed to be intentionally beneficial to others. According to Lindenberg et al. (2006), the two can be used interchangeably: 'solidarity' is a concept more commonly used by sociologists while 'prosociality' is more common among (social) psychologists and behavioral economists.

eyes of others. Willer (2009) suggests that our willingness to behave in solidary ways and make sacrifices for the group's welfare may stem fundamentally from our concern for what others think of us, thus our status concerns. Also Schwartz (2010) points out that status oriented individuals can act solidary in case it will bring them public acclaim. Research in experimental laboratory settings has shown evidence that there are indeed reputational benefits to helping others, solidary people are rewarded with status, prestige, and esteem (Willer, 2009). People who make greater contributions to the collective good enjoy higher esteem and more status in the eyes of the others. Prior research has also shown that solidary behavior earns an individual status largely because it signals an underlying desire to benefit the larger community (Willer, 2009). Thus, it is precisely the intention to benefit others, rather than solidary behavior alone, that people find meritorious and reward with status (Willer et al., 2013). Status is rewarded to those who appear 'sincerely motivated' to help others and more 'convincing acts' of solidarity will be rewarded with greater status (Willer, 2009). From this it follows that it would be rational for status seeking individuals to 'play their parts well' by not only acting solidary when others are there to judge but also by emphasizing the importance of helping others when asked about their goals and attitudes. This would result in status seekers expressing heightened levels of solidarity. Hence, our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between status seeking and solidarity.

3. The moderating role of societal context

If status seekers are solidary in order to attain status, then it only makes sense under conditions where solidarity actually leads to greater reputational gains. Willer (2009) demonstrates that people's motivation to help others is socially constructed and it depends on other's feedback and signs of respect. When people have had positive experience with solidarity resulting in increased status feedback, then they also tend to give more to the group. Furthermore, under conditions where solidarity is more visible, status seekers are particularly eager to help others (Willer et al., 2013). This demonstrates that solidarity is strongly dependent on the reputational gains that can be derived from solidarity in a particular context. While the laboratory experiments have shown that people generally reward solidary behavior, it has also been shown that in some societies people punish solidary behavior instead of rewarding it (Herrmann et al., 2008). Differing social norms about solidarity and civic cooperation might explain whether solidarity is expected from others and whether solidarity is considered meritorious – something worthy rewarding with status.³ The stronger the norms about solidarity and civic cooperation in a society, the more solidarity should be expected from others and the more it should matter for status attainment.

Social scientists have long been interested in the role of egalitarian versus inegalitarian contexts in promoting or hindering solidarity and the social norms about solidarity. From one perspective, egalitarian societies are likely to promote solidarity by increasing collective resources (Van der Meer, 2009) and fostering societal norms of solidarity (Mau, 2004). The idea of collective resources implies that in egalitarian societies people have more economic security, which can give a general boost for people to engage in helping others. The idea of social norms implies that people have the tendency to adjust to the national culture of solidarity: if the society is more egalitarian, then people may also adjust their attitudes and internalize the notion that equality and solidarity are important (Mau, 2004; Rothstein, 1998). With solidarity being more widespread and more socially ingrained in egalitarian societies, we could expect that being helpful is more likely to be an admired trait in others or that people feel more social pressure to help each other. Thus, we could expect that solidarity is more likely to be rewarded with status and esteem in egalitarian societies. The opposite can be expected from inegalitarian societies with less collective resources and weaker social norms to help others (Larsen, 2008; Rodger, 2003). With lower levels of informal solidarity and weaker norms of

³ Social norms refer to widely shared views about acceptable and expected attitudes and behavior (Herrmann et al., 2008).

civic cooperation, solidarity is likely to be less important for impression management or it can even lead to the sanctioning of people who behave in the interest of others (Herrmann et al., 2008). Thus, in inegalitarian societies contributions to the wellbeing of others might also be less important for status attainment, while in egalitarian societies the reputational returns of solidarity could be higher. Hence, the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Egalitarian societies promote solidarity and strengthen the association between status seeking and solidarity.

Alternatively, egalitarian contexts could also hinder social norms about informal solidarity and potentially weaken the reputational gains of solidarity. According to the ‘crowding-out hypothesis’ egalitarian societies ‘crowd-out’ informal caring relations because people have less (economic) incentive to engage in contributing to the wellbeing of others. This, however, might have negative moral consequences – help is likely to be seen as something arranged by the state rather than being a responsibility of an individual (Arts et al., 2003; Van Oorschot & Arts, 2005). If the role of helping is shifted to the state, then informal caring relations might become less popular and less acknowledged as a social norm. To the extent that there is a weaker social norm about helping others, solidarity might become less influential for status attainment in egalitarian contexts. Next to this, egalitarian societies might have a stronger normative conformity (i.e., a desire and expectation to behave as all others do) about social equality and out of dislike for inequality people might be less eager to reward ‘do-gooders’ with a heightened social status (Herrmann et al., 2008). Another explanation could be that people in egalitarian societies feel overburdened by egalitarian social arrangements and think that they already contribute enough to the wellbeing of others (Chung & Meuleman, 2011), in which case reduced reputational gains to solidarity could be a way to diminish the social pressure to make additional contributions to the wellbeing of others (Herrmann et al., 2008).

The opposite could be expected from inegalitarian societies that may encourage solidarity in the face of lacking support systems provided by the state (Van der Meer, 2009). Furthermore, others have argued that inegalitarian context might encourage solidarity and improve the reputation of acting in favor of others (Halevy, Chou, & Galinsky, 2011; Simpson, Willer, & Ridgeway, 2012). For instance, inegalitarian contexts could help organize solidarity because social hierarchies facilitate determining who should contribute what, when, and how much – something that is less obvious in egalitarian contexts (Simpson et al., 2012). Furthermore, social hierarchies may encourage early and large contributions from high status members (ibid).

.....

If high status individuals (e.g., the rich people) initiate other-regarding action, helping others is likely to become more prestigious and foster a cascade of contributions from other members of the society as well. Another argument is that in an inegalitarian context it is more noticeable and more impressive if someone takes effort to help others (Halevy et al., 2011). From this perspective, we could expect less individual solidarity and lower reputational gains to solidarity in egalitarian societies. Instead, status seekers might have more incentive to express solidarity in inegalitarian settings due to heightened reputational gains . Hence the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Egalitarian societies undermine solidarity and weaken the association between status seeking and solidarity.

4. Data and methods

4.1. Data

We combine all the waves of the European Social Survey (ESS) currently available, resulting in a dataset with six time points (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012), 27 countries in the European region, 130 country-years, and 191 345 individuals under the age of 65. The sample is restricted to the population under the age of 65 in order to capture the relationship between solidarity and status seeking among working age people. In the statistical models the cases with missing values on one of our study variables were eliminated, thereby resulting in a reduced dataset of 161 727 individuals.⁴ Data for income inequality, as Gini indices for each country-year, is obtained from the Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID) (Solt, 2009). Data on government welfare expenditure (as a % of GDP) is from Eurostat (Eurostat, 2012). To control for the wealth of the country, GDP per capita in PPS is attained from the Eurostat (Eurostat, 2012). Each ESS survey round is matched with Gini, social expenditure and GDP data accordingly. However, when macro indicators were not available for the year appropriate then the closest observations were matched.

4.2. Variables

Solidarity. In this paper, solidarity is the dependent variable. Respondents in the European Social Survey were presented with a list of different personality portraits and they were asked the following: ‘How much like you is this person?’⁵. To capture solidarity, the following personality characteristic is used: ‘It is important to her/him to help people and care for others well-being’. The responses were recorded on a scale from 1 to 6: not like me at all, not like me, a little like me, somewhat like me, like me, very much like me.

Status seeking. Status seeking is measured using items from the same list of personality portraits as described for solidarity. Status seeking was captured with the following items: 1) ‘It is important to her/him to get respect from others. She/he wants people to do what she/he says’; 2) ‘It is important to her/him to show her/his abilities. She/he wants people to admire what she/he does’; 3) ‘Being very successful

4 The largest number of missing cases resulted from a control variable that captures socio-economic position (ISEI), which has 11% of missing cases (24 842 individuals). Many of the missing cases represent people that are still in education.

5 The questions were asked in the form of Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ). This is designed to reduce cognitive complexity of the items, by introducing respondents to short verbal portraits of different people: the person’s goals, aspirations, or wishes that point implicitly to the importance of a single value (Schwartz, 1992). People are thus asked to compare these portraits to themselves.

is important to her/him. She/he hopes people will recognize her/his achievements'. Responses were again recorded on a scale from 1 to 6 (not like me at all, not like me, a little like me, somewhat like me, like me, very much like me). To equalize the weight of each item, the variables were combined using a standardized option. The scale results in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70. This status seeking index captures three indicators, which ascertain whether the respondent is the type of person for whom it is important to 'get respect from others/get people to do what they say', 'want people to admire what they do', and 'want people to recognize their achievements'. Other studies have used a comparable measure of status seeking (see Flynn et al., 2006; Willer et al., 2013).

Egalitarian and inegalitarian context. In order to capture egalitarian and inegalitarian contexts, we look at two dimensions: inequality of incomes and governmental social spending. **Income inequality** is measured with Gini-coefficient. The Gini-coefficient is a widely used measure that ranges from 0 (everyone has the same income) to 1 (one person owns all the income). The Gini index indicates the level of inequality across the entire income distribution of an area. SWIID (Solt, 2009) provides comparable Gini-indices of net income inequality based on disposable household income and is hence well-suited for cross-national research. For the analysis a net income inequality is used, which is the income inequality after transfers. Thereby, the measure also captures some of social expenditure. **Governmental welfare effort** is measured as the size of the welfare state in terms social spending relative to GDP. Welfare generosity in terms of replacement rates might be a better measure to capture governmental welfare effort, however, such data is not available for so many different time points. In a way income inequality (after taxes and transfers) and welfare effort are similar indicators. High before tax and before transfer inequality implies that there is not much welfare effort, while low after tax and transfer inequality implies high welfare effort. Nevertheless, there are also differences between the two indicators. For instance, welfare effort could be targeted only at particular groups (e.g, pensioners), leaving income inequality still relatively high. Therefore, both measures are kept to capture egalitarian and inegalitarian societal contexts.

Control variables. A number of individual-level variables to account for the socio-demographic composition of the population in each country and year: gender, age, ethnic minority, religiousness, socio-economic position (measured as ISEI scale), and being unemployed. To account for the wealth of a country, we use the volume index of GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (i.e., a common currency that eliminates the differences in price levels between countries, allowing meaningful volume comparisons of GDP between countries). The GDP in PPS is expressed in relation to the European Union (EU-27) average

set to equal 100, making it suitable for country-comparative purposes.

Table 1 presents the descriptive information of all variables used in the analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables used in the analyses

Variable	N	Mean/proportion	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Solidarity ^a	183092	4.78	0.97	1	6
Status seeking ^a	183628	3.92	1.16	1	6
Gini ^a	191345	0.29	0.04	0.22	0.37
Social expenditure ^a	191345	24.8	4.9	12.1	34.3
GDP per capita ^a	191345	106.7	35.3	38	253
Age	191345	41.34	13.40	17	64
Religiousness	189795	4.48	2.96	0	10
Occupational position (ISEI)	171844	0.50	0.29	0.01	1
Male	191256	47.3%		0	1
Ethnic minority	188981	5.4%		0	1
Unemployed	191345	8.4%		0	1

^a Variable is standardized in the empirical analysis.

Source: ESS rounds 1-6.

4.3. Estimation strategy

The dataset consists of individuals who were interviewed in different countries in Europe at different time points. The advantage of having individuals observed in different countries and time points is that it is possible to study the relationships both between and within countries over time. For the estimation, we have two approaches: cross-classified multilevel models and a within country comparison model. In the cross-classified multilevel models, individuals are nested in two higher-level contexts, country (j) and survey year (t). The response variable is the level of solidarity of individual i in country j in survey year t . Because these two contexts (survey year and country) are not nested among themselves, the cross-classified multilevel model specifies residual variances for both levels separately (for between-country variance and for between-survey year variance). Whereas standard multilevel models for nested levels 2 and 3 would estimate the variance at a level 2 within level 3, the cross-classified multilevel model for un-nested levels 2 and 3 estimates a residual variance at level 2 assuming that this variance is equal across units of level 3 and vice versa. Given that much of the variability is found between countries rather than within countries across years in the short time span of investigation, the results of this model are strongly driven by between-country effects of contextual variables. In that sense, the model suffers from similar weaknesses as cross-sectional analyses because it is uncertain whether egalitarian context or some other omitted country characteristic drives the

association between status seeking and solidarity. The within country comparison model delivers a stronger test of the relationship as it includes both a measure at the aggregate (country-year) level and fixed effects for country (country dummies) and survey year (year dummies). The model can be identified because the number of observations on which contextual variables are assessed is larger than the sum of the number of fixed effects included. Given that all invariant country characteristics are controlled and general time trends are invariant across countries, the identification of the effect of societal context rests on within-country variability. This model will be referred to as the within-country comparison model.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive statistics

In order to find out whether status seeking is positively associated with solidarity, we first look at partial correlations between the two variables. Partial correlation reflects the association between status seeking and solidarity after accounting for the effect of other relevant socio-economic characteristics: gender, age, whether someone is an ethnic minority, religiousness, unemployment status, and socio-economic position. It appears that partial correlation between status seeking and solidarity is positive in all countries in Europe, thereby giving support to Hypothesis 1: people more eager to attain status are also more eager to help others (see Figure 1). Furthermore, from the same figure it appears that the positive association between status seeking and solidarity differs across societal contexts; it is stronger in unequal societies and weaker in societies with high social expenditure. The strength of the relationship differs between time points largely because the sample of countries differs in each survey wave. The sample difference between time points make the slopes non-comparable, however, we can conclude that the positive association holds for all time points under observation. This gives some preliminary support to the idea that the association between desire for status and solidarity is weaker in egalitarian social contexts (Hypothesis 3).

in terms of social expenditure and the wealth of the country in terms of GDP per capita (see Model 1 and Model 5 in Table 2). Thereby, these findings give confirmation for Hypothesis 1: there is a positive relationship between status seeking and solidarity across countries and over time. When breaking the status-seeking index apart into separate items then it appears that all three items are positively related with solidarity (results not presented here but available upon request from authors). Thus, solidarity is higher among people who seek for more admiration, recognition and respect from others.

Table 2. Solidarity regressed on individual and macro level predictors^a

	Cross-classified multilevel models				Within country comparison models			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Status seeking	b/se 0.265*** [0.003]	b/se 0.272*** [0.003]	b/se 0.266*** [0.003]	b/se 0.270*** [0.003]	b/se 0.267*** [0.003]	b/se 0.274*** [0.003]	b/se 0.268*** [0.003]	b/se 0.273*** [0.003]
Gini	0.074*** [0.011]	0.074*** [0.011]	0.074*** [0.011]	0.074*** [0.011]	0.073** [0.028]	0.072* [0.028]	0.073* [0.028]	0.072* [0.029]
Social expenditure	-0.032*** [0.009]	-0.033*** [0.009]	-0.032*** [0.009]	-0.033*** [0.009]	-0.052* [0.026]	-0.055* [0.026]	-0.053* [0.026]	-0.055* [0.027]
Gini*status seeking		0.036*** [0.004]		0.024*** [0.004]		0.040*** [0.004]		0.027*** [0.004]
Social expenditure*status seeking			-0.038*** [0.003]	-0.033*** [0.003]			-0.041*** [0.003]	-0.035*** [0.003]
Control variables ^b	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country effect	Random	Random	Random	Random	Fixed	Fixed	Fixed	Fixed
Year effect	Random	Random	Random	Random	Fixed	Fixed	Fixed	Fixed
Log-likelihood	-213205	-213163	-213125	-213108	-212901	-212852	-212811	-212791
N individuals	161727	161727	161727	161727	161727	161727	161727	161727
N countries	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27
N country-years					130	130	130	130
AIC (smaller is better)	426439	426357	426279	426248	425891	425793	425712	425673
BIC (smaller is better)	426579	426507	426429	426408	426331	426243	426162	426132

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Standard errors in parentheses.

a All variables presented in the table are standardized.

b Control variables: GDP per capita, male, age, religiosity, ethnic minority, unemployed, ISEI.

Source: ESS rounds 1-6.

While we established that there is a strong positive association between status seeking and solidarity, the question is whether this relationship is moderated by the societal context. The cross-level interaction effects are added separately to the models, first the interaction between income inequality and status seeking (Model 2 and Model 6) and then the interaction effect between social expenditure and status seeking (Model 3 and Model 7). Finally, Model 4 and Model 8 include both interaction effects at the same time. The results consistently show a significant and positive cross-level interaction effect between status seeking and income inequality, confirming that the positive association between status seeking and solidarity is stronger in unequal societies. The negative cross-level interaction effect between social expenditure and status seeking, however, suggests that in more generous welfare states the positive link between solidarity and status seeking is weaker. The combination of between- and within-country over-time empirical evidence adds to the robustness of these findings. We can conclude that even when income inequality and social expenditure change within a country over time, the link between solidarity and status seeking weakens or strengthens accordingly. In general, the within country comparison models appear to be better in terms of goodness of fit reflected in lower scores on AIC and BIC values.

Furthermore, the findings show a positive association between income inequality and solidarity, and a negative association between social expenditure and solidarity. This can be seen as evidence for the ‘crowding-out’ hypothesis, suggesting that egalitarian societies in fact reduce individual incentive to help others while in inegalitarian contexts people are more eager to express their willingness to help others. Overall, there is support for Hypothesis 3 according to which egalitarian context undermines solidarity and weakens the association between status seeking and solidarity, while in inegalitarian context solidarity is higher and the link between status seeking and solidarity is stronger. This can be seen as an indication that in inegalitarian societies there are more reputational gains to solidarity, which motivates status seekers to contribute to the wellbeing of others. In egalitarian societies, however, people might see helping others as something organized by the state and therefore it is also less necessary for status attainment. Hence, we can reject Hypothesis 2.

From the findings from Table 2 we can also conclude that status seekers, people who care more about what others think of their social position, are more strongly influenced by the societal conditions, income inequality and social expenditure. People more eager to attain status are particularly likely to drop in their levels of solidarity in egalitarian social contexts. Solidarity among people who care less about status does not depend as much on welfare expenditure or levels of income equality. This could be seen as evidence

that people who care about status are more likely to adjust their solidary attitudes and behavior to the social environment, depending on whether or not they can expect reputation in return. This is in accordance with the literature and confirms the finding of Willer and colleagues (2013) that context affects particularly the people that are solidary out of strategic considerations.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Self-oriented goals are crucial in motivating people's attitudes and behavior. The central role of self-interest triggers an important question: what factors lead individuals to set aside narrow self-interest in favor of contributing to the wellbeing of others? Literature suggests that individual's self-interest is not always at odds with solidarity. For instance, solidarity may arise from self-oriented motivation to attain social status. Social status seeking is essentially a search for recognition and esteem in the eyes of others. If solidarity is rewarded with reputation, then people interested in status attainment might be more eager to express solidarity towards others. The results of this paper add to the literature by showing that status seeking is indeed positively associated with solidarity: people that care about their social status are also more eager to help others, and this holds with representative national samples of people in 27 countries in the European region. These findings can be interpreted as status seekers engaging in impression management and expressing solidarity in order to attain status in the eyes of others.

Although there is a strong positive association between status seeking and solidarity, the question is whether this is equally the case under different societal conditions. The results show that the positive association between solidarity and status seeking is weaker in egalitarian societies where incomes are more equally distributed and governmental welfare effort is higher. Furthermore, people are in general less solidary in egalitarian contexts. These findings give support to the idea that egalitarian societies have negative moral consequences by reducing individual incentive to engage in helping others. To explain this, in egalitarian contexts taking care of fellow countrymen is probably seen as a task of the state and thus there would be weak social norms to take individual action to help others. Furthermore, egalitarian societies might have a stronger normative conformity about equality – reputational gains could be kept low in order to restrict some people standing out with more social status. Next to this, people might also feel that the egalitarian society is already established as a form of institutionalized solidarity. Thus, additional social pressure to help others might not be welcomed and this could explain why solidarity is less likely to be rewarded with status and esteem. Overall, we can conclude that status seekers are less eager to be solidary in egalitarian contexts probably because the reputational gains are lower and individual solidary action is likely to be underappreciated and insufficiently rewarded by others. The findings also show that in inegalitarian societies, characterized by higher income inequality and lower governmental welfare effort, the positive association between status seeking and solidarity is stronger. Moreover, not only is the association stronger in inegalitarian con-

texts but people also express more solidarity, in general. To the extent that status seekers express solidarity out of a self-interested attempt to improve their social status, we can conclude that the reputational gains of solidarity are likely to be higher in inegalitarian contexts. To explain this, it could be that the lack of formal solidarity is substituted with mechanisms that reinforce informal solidarity – helping others is probably more popular and more noticeable in inegalitarian societies, and also rewarded with reputational gains. Furthermore, people in inegalitarian contexts might be less resistant towards reinforcing social inequalities by rewarding ‘do-gooders’ with heightened social position.

These conclusions come with some caveats. First, in this paper we talk about solidarity in terms of a generalized goal to help others. While people in egalitarian societies may have lower interest in informal caring relations, support for institutionalized solidarity – the welfare state – might be higher. Thus, it could be a matter of preferring different types of solidarity – individual versus institutionalized solidarity, or compensating for what is lacking on the societal level. Second concern is that the ‘crowding-out’ hypothesis suggests that egalitarian context causes weaker incentive for people to be solidary. Alternatively, the direction of causality between social context and solidarity could also be reversed. According to Spicker (2008), societies where people adhere to the idea that it is an individual’s responsibility to provide help and take care of others, there is also more selectivity who is helped and who is not helped. Hence, there will be more inequality as a consequence of people having a preference for informal solidarity. While theoretically it is an important argument, we think that the idea of reversed causality is less important considering that our findings also found confirmation in a within country context. It is less likely that in such a short period of time people’s preference for individually provided solidarity would manage to translate into economic inequality and social policy.

While inegalitarian societal contexts are associated with many social ills (Marmot, 2004; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010), egalitarian contexts are also sometimes criticized for the adverse moral consequences – such as taking away individual incentives to help others (Arts et al., 2003). This paper makes an important contribution to the literature by presenting convincing empirical evidence from between and within-country over-time analysis of 27 countries over the period of 2002 to 2012. We can conclude that egalitarian societies undermine informal solidarity and weaken the association between status seeking and solidarity, while inegalitarian societies promote informal solidarity and strengthen the association between status seeking and solidarity. The fact that status seekers are more eager to be solidary in inegalitarian contexts suggests that the reputational gains of solidarity are probably higher in inegalitarian societies. As a more general conclusion,

this analysis suggests that self-oriented and other-regarding goals are not necessarily incompatible. People are interested in being solidary if it brings them public acclaim. However, for informal solidarity to prosper, it is important that the members of the society find solidarity meritorious – something worthy rewarding with status and reputation.

Finally, we could speculate that informal and institutionalized solidarity are functional equivalents: if one is underdeveloped, the other one is likely to replace it. The question is, however, whether they are equally beneficial for people are societies more broadly. Coming back to Spicker (2009) – if people can choose, they are likely to be highly selective in who they want to help and who they do not want to help. Thus, solidarity that predominately relies on individual initiative might lead to more inequality as a consequence as people choose to help some groups and not others. Institutionalized solidarity, in contrast, can be seen as a more equal and consistent way of providing help. Ideally, we would then prefer for institutional and individual solidarity to complement each other. In the context of this paper, one option would be to think of ways how to promote the reputational gains of solidarity in egalitarian societies.

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