

# New majorities' abuse of power: Effects of perceived control and social support

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Radmila Prislin,<sup>1</sup> Vanessa Sawicki<sup>2</sup>  
and Kipling Williams<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

Two studies examined how new majorities (minorities-turned-majorities) abused power by claiming privileges (in-group favoritism) and disparaging new minorities (out-group hostility). Study 1 found that new majorities low in perceived control showed significantly more in-group favoritism than new majorities high in perceived control and stable majorities. The effect of control on new majorities' in-group favoritism was mediated by certainty about status stability. Study 2 replicated the effect of control on new majorities' in-group favoritism. In addition, Study 2 found that new majorities were most likely to engage in out-group hostility when they were low in perceived control and received social support for such discrimination. Our studies suggest that power abuse is most egregious among minorities who rise to majority status without a sense of control in the context where abuse is socially endorsed.

## Keywords

minority, majority, power, social change, social influence

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The will of the people, moreover, practically means the will of the most numerous or the most active part of the people; the majority, or those who succeed in making themselves accepted as the majority; the people, consequently *may* desire to oppress a part of their number ... (John Stuart Mill, 1859/1956, p. 6)

experience of being in a minority does not guard against abuse of power once minorities become majorities. This would suggest that social change

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, San Diego University

<sup>2</sup>Ohio State University

<sup>3</sup>Purdue University

Writing in the aftermath of a turbulent period in history that saw minorities' become "the people" (majority), Mill warned about their potential to abuse power. According to this view, the

## Corresponding author:

Radmila Prislin, Department of Psychology, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA 92182-4611, USA.

Email: rprislin@sunstroke.sdsu.edu

represents a cyclical renewal in which minorities and majorities switch positions but perpetuate power abuse (Harper, 1998; Patterson, 1999). Yet, it would be too simplistic to equate rise to power with its inevitable abuse. Mill recognized this when he qualified his warning against “the tyranny of the majority” stating that “those who succeed in making themselves accepted as the majority... *may* desire to oppress”. In this research, we examine one factor that may facilitate abuse by the new majority: A perception that that ascent to majority status was due to factors outside of majority’s control because it was not based on merit but instead, it was arbitrary. We propose that lack of control over ascent to majority leads to uncertainty that the majority status can be maintained, which, in turn, causes abuse of power.

### **Attribution of social change and abuse of power**

Becoming ‘the people’ (majorities) is a goal pursued by many minorities motivated by advantages associated with the majority status (Prislin & Christensen, 2005a). In their efforts to become majority, minorities seek to influence others, trying to convince them about the merits of their position. In doing so, they follow a legitimate means of social change, trying to win the coveted status by the power of their arguments. Minorities typically claim that shift to their position would benefit not only them but also most if not all in the system that they seek to change. Yet, as history teaches, it need not always be the case.

How does social change that elevates minorities affect their reactions to others? Scarce research in this domain has been limited to former minorities’ reactions to the group in which they become a majority. This research has revealed that former minorities are reluctant to identify with the group that elevates them to the majority status and maintain the same level of hostility toward the group as they had before social change (Prislin, Limbert, & Bauer, 2000). This lack of identification with the group suggests that new majorities may not be favorably disposed toward

any faction within the group other than their own (Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1994). To date, however, research has yet to address the impact of attaining the majority status on reactions toward newly established factions within a group after social change.

We propose that new majorities’ treatment of new minorities should depend on the amount of control over the acquisition of status and the resultant (un)certainty that the newly acquired status can be retained. To the extent that new majorities’ ascent to status results from efforts within their control (e.g., strong persuasive argumentation), new majorities should feel certain about the stability of their status, and consequently treat new minorities relatively fairly. If new majorities perceive that it was strength of their reasoned arguments that swayed others to their position, then they should perceive others’ conversion to their position as authentic and reliable (Prislin, Levine, & Christensen, 2006). Others’ reliable change should make new majorities relatively certain that they will be able to maintain their newly won status and in turn, less motivated to abuse power by discriminating against new minorities.

New majorities lacking control should react differently. To the extent that new majorities’ ascent to status results from factors outside of their control (e.g., chance), they should perceive their new status as unstable and consequently discriminate against new minorities. New majorities who perceive that others moved to their position due to reasons unrelated to their advocacy should feel uncertain about their new position. If they could not control others’ move to their position, they are unlikely to control others’ move away from their position should new minorities try to lure them back. For new majorities lacking control, new minorities are potentially threatening. Thus, they should be motivated to discriminate against new minorities.

This reasoning is grounded in research on the construct of control defined as the extent to which an individual has influence over their environment (Bandura, 1989; Skinner, 1996). When outcomes are accompanied by a sense of control,

an individual feels confidence in outcome stability over time. Conversely, outcomes brought about without a sense of control breed insecurity and motivate behaviors directed at reestablishing control (Pittman & Pittman, 1980). These behaviors could include various forms of aggression (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994; Warburton, Williams, & Cairns, 2006). Aggression is especially likely when lack of control, or threat in general, is coupled with high status or power. The mixture of threat and power yields destructive consequences for others. When the powerful feel threatened, they may lash out by endorsing social inequality (Morrison, Fast, & Ybarra, 2009) or exhibit aggressive attitudes and behaviors towards subordinates (Georgeson & Harris, 2006) and unknown others (Fast & Chen, 2009). In line with this theorizing, we hypothesized that lack of control over acquisition of their status would make new majorities uncertain about status stability and in turn, motivated to abuse of power as a means of securing that they remain in the majority.

This reasoning resonates with a social identity theory postulate that perceived instability of social structure threatens privileged groups, motivating behaviors aimed at preserving privileged status (Tajfel, 1981). Thus, perceived instability of a newly acquired majority status may motivate new majorities to acquire the means that will reinforce their status by engaging in in-group bias. Supporting this theorizing, a meta-analytical synthesis of research on in-group bias suggested that insecurity among the privileged concerning the stability of the extant social structure could be responsible for their in-group bias (Bettencourt, Charlton, Dorr, & Hume, 2001). Similarly, insecurity among the powerful who acquired their status illegitimately may motivate their power abuse aimed at reaffirming the extant power structure (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008).

Power abuses can be categorized as in-group favoritism or out-group derogation (Mummendey & Otten, 1998; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006). In-group favoritism enables the powerful to optimize their welfare at the

expense of the powerless whereas out-group derogation enables them to disparage and humiliate the powerless. In-group favoritism is primarily a pro in-group behavior often evident in biased allocation of material and other resources to the in-group over an out-group. Because these resources strengthen the group and arm them with the means to regulate social change, in-group favoritism should be particularly evident under the conditions of social instability and insecurity about one's status. Out-group derogation represents a harsher form of bias. Although it can serve an important role in expressing in-group superiority, its extreme nature makes it less socially palatable (Scheepers et al., 2006). Thus, out-group derogation should be less pronounced form of power abuse than in-group favoritism, at least until in-group favoritism is proven insufficient in regulating social change. However, when social norms condone out-group derogation, it is likely to be used as an additional means of reaffirming power status.

In summary, we hypothesize that new majorities who rise to power without a sense of control, in comparison to those who gain majority status through factors within their control should (1) perceive their newly won status more insecure and consequently, (2) abuse power by exhibiting more in-group favoritism (though not out-group derogation). Moreover, (3) majorities who rise to power without a sense of control, but not those who perceive control over status attainment, should exhibit more in-group favoritism compared to stable majorities whose status is secure. However, (4) irrespective of how they rise to power, new majorities should support privileges for the majority more strongly than stable minorities. The latter should reject any form of privilege for the majority because these privileges arm majorities with the means to prevent social change while making it difficult for minorities to instigate social change. Empirical support for this hypothesis would suggest that what minorities profess while striving to rise to power (i.e., not to abuse power to benefit themselves) may soon be forgotten once they are in power.

These hypotheses were examined in a study in which participants, in the context of a mock political campaign, tried to win others' support for their position on an important social issue. The participant was initially placed in a minority status by virtue of receiving support from one confederate while being opposed by the remaining four. This initial minority status either remained stable throughout the interaction (stable minorities) or was reversed to the majority status when two confederates switched from opposing to supporting the participant (new majorities). Confederates who switched from opposing to supporting the participant attributed their conversion either to factors unrelated to the participant's campaign, thereby conveying that the participant had low level of control over majority status, or to the participant's campaign, thereby conveying that the participant had high level of control over majority status. An additional group of participants was initially placed in a majority status by virtue of receiving support from three confederates while being opposed by the remaining two. Their majority status remained stable throughout the interaction (control, stable majority). In anticipation of the alleged second part of the study in which new majorities and new minorities would engage in a trading game, participants expressed their preferences for rules that would regulate their trading. Some of these rules operationalized abuse of power as majority-favoritism in allocation of resources and decision-making authority whereas others degraded minority. As elaborated earlier, we anticipated an interactive effect of numerical status (stable minorities vs. new majorities) and control (low vs. high) on endorsement of these rules. Rules favoring majority should be endorsed more strongly by new majorities low in control than those high in control whose endorsement should be comparable to that among stable majorities. Stable minorities should uniformly reject these rules irrespective of control. Endorsement of the rules disparaging minority should be similarly low among all majorities but higher than that among stable minorities.

## Study 1

### *Participants and design*

Of the 175 undergraduate students who participated in exchange for partial fulfillment of a course requirement, 131 were women and 34 were men, with the mean age of  $M = 19.41$  ( $SD = 2.05$ ). One hundred participants were White (non-Hispanic) American, 41 were Hispanic American, 16 were Asian American, 2 were African American, and 16 reported being of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions of the 2 (numerical status: stable minority vs. new majority)  $\times$  2 (control: low vs. high) design and the control (stable majority) condition.

### *Procedure*

When one participant and five confederates gathered in the laboratory, the experimenter explained that the goal of the study was to examine the process of political campaigns. In an ostensibly random procedure, the participant was assigned the role of the political candidate whose goal was to win voters' (confederates') support for his or her position on the controversial issue of legalization of marijuana. In preparation for the campaign, the candidate responded to a ten-item questionnaire assessing his or her reactions to arguments often used to advocate or oppose legalization of marijuana (e.g., marijuana as a gateway drug vs. a painkiller). Next, the candidate stated out loud his or her position on each of the arguments one at a time and offered a few self-generated reasons for the stated position. After each of the candidate's statements, the voters indicated their (dis)agreement verbally. Following the last round, the voters decided whether to elect the candidate by a simple majority vote with the participant's ballot also counted.

Voters' pattern of (dis)agreement with the candidate operationalized the candidate's numerical status. Initially, four voters disagreed with the candidate and one voter agreed thereby placing the candidate in the minority position. In the *stable minority* condition, this 4:2 ratio was maintained

for all ten rounds. In the *new majority* condition, two voters who initially disagreed with the candidate switched their alignment for the six round through the final vote (2:4). After the final vote, the experimenter invited all voters who cast “elect” ballots to explain their reasons for supporting the candidate, so that research “can better understand what gets a candidate elected”. In the *high control* condition, voters attributed their support to the candidate’s campaign (e.g., “What the candidate said made me rethink my position so I support her (him)”). In the *low control* conditions, voters attributed their support to factors unrelated to the campaign (e.g., “I just wanted to get over with this discussion so I vote for her (him)”).

To operationalize the control *stable majority condition*, three voters initially agreed with the candidate and two voters disagreed. This 4:2 pattern of (dis)agreement was maintained throughout the entire interaction and the final balloting. Voters in the stable majority condition did not elaborate reasons for their support for the candidate.

Next, the experimenter remarked that the campaign revealed that there are two groups consisting of the candidate and his or her supporters and another group of opponents. The experimenter placed differently colored sticker to members of each group “to remember who is in which group”. This was done with an explanation that the two groups created in the first part of the study would now engage in trading and bargaining. The experimenter stated, “Just as in real life, once political parties win or lose elections, they have to trade and bargain with their counterparts”. With everyone still present in the room, the experimenter then described and demonstrated the StarPower game ([http://www.stsintl.com/schools-charities/star\\_power.html](http://www.stsintl.com/schools-charities/star_power.html)), ostensibly to be played in the second part of the study. The objective in the game was to accumulate the highest score by trading differently colored chips that varied in value. There were few but most valuable yellow chips, more numerous but less valuable red chips, even more numerous but worth even less white chips, and the most abundant but least valuable blue chips.

The experimenter then explained the traditional rules of the game (i.e., players must clasp hands to make a trade, only the best five chips in your hand count, chips of unequal value must be traded once hands are clasped, no trading or talking unless hands are clasped, if arms are folded, you do not have to trade, all chips are to be hidden at all time). Upon establishing that the participant understood the game, the experiment asked “each of you to answer a few questions on the computer” before the game starts. The participant was given “the candidate’s” computer that was in an adjacent. Upon responding to the questionnaire, the participant was debriefed and thanked for participation.

### *Dependent measures*

**Majority privileges** Participants indicated the extent ( $-4 = \textit{completely disagree}$ ;  $4 = \textit{completely agree}$ ) to which they endorsed rules that (a) authorized exclusively majority members to decide whether or not a trade must occur; (b) ensured that majority members have chips of a better-than-minimal value; (c) required each minority member holding a bonus-worth combination of chips to hand it over to the majority; and (d) authorized majority members to change any rule they find unacceptable at any point in the trade.

**Minority derogation** Participants indicated the extent to which they endorsed rules that (a) required minority members to negotiate on their hands and knees; (b) penalized minority members who show disrespect during trading; (c) required minority members to wear a sign “second class citizen”; and (d) majority members to wear a sign “first class citizen”.

**Status certainty** Participants indicated (a) the likelihood that the current majority and the current minority would remain in the same status; (b) certainty that the current majority would make decisions in the future; and (c) the chance that the current majority would preserve its advantages over the current minority ( $0 = \textit{not at all/none}$ ,  $4 = \textit{very much/very strong}$ ).

### Manipulation checks

The effectiveness of the stability of minority status manipulation was assessed by questions about how much others in the group agreed with the participant "at the beginning of the session" and "at the end of the session". The effectiveness of the control manipulation was assessed by questions about the extent to which the participant attributed received votes to (a) the power of their arguments; (b) their campaign; (c) factors unrelated to their campaign (reverse coded). To test whether only participants in the majority perceived that they were in power, participants additionally indicated the extent to which they had control over (a) their in-group outcomes; and (b) out-group outcomes in the Starpower game. This assessment is in line with conceptualization of power in terms of control over others' or one's own fate (Jones, 1972).

### Results

#### Manipulation checks

**Status** A  $2 \times 2$  (status  $\times$  control) ANOVA on participants' estimates of others' agreement at the beginning of the session did not yield significant effects, all  $F$ 's  $< 1.41$ , *ns*. An overall high estimate of disagreement ( $M = -2.53$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) indicates that participants in all conditions correctly perceived that they initially held a minority status in the group. A parallel analysis on estimates of agreement at the end of the session yielded *only* a significant main effect of status,  $F(1, 136) = 542.09$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .80$ ,  $p < .001$ . As expected, participants whose minority status remained stable perceived a high level of disagreement ( $M = -2.37$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) whereas those whose status changed from minority to majority perceived a high level of agreement at the end of the session ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ).

Dunnett's test, used to compare multiple experimental conditions with the single control (stable majority) condition, revealed that participants in each of the four experimental conditions perceived a significantly lower level of initial agreement than those in the stable majority condition ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = .95$ ; all  $t_s(170) > 20.36$ , all  $p_s < .001$ ). Also, participants in each of the stable

minority conditions perceived a significantly lower level of final agreement than those in the stable majority condition ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ; both  $t_s(170) > 17.79$ , both  $p_s < .001$ ). As intended, participants in each of the new majority conditions perceived a comparable level of final agreement as those in the stable majority conditions (both  $t_s(170) < .76$ , both *ns*).

**Perceived control** Responses to three questions about attribution of received votes were averaged into an index of control ( $\alpha = .93$ ). An ANOVA revealed *only* a significant main effect of control,  $F(1, 136) = 712.70$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .84$ ,  $p < .001$ . As intended, participants in the high control conditions ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) attributed the votes they received to the quality of their campaign significantly more than those in the low control condition ( $M = -2.11$ ,  $SD = .98$ ).

Dunnett's tests revealed that participants in each of the two low control conditions made a significantly lower attribution of their votes to their campaign than those in the stable majority condition ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = .79$ ; both  $t_s(170) > 22.66$ , both  $p_s < .001$ ). In contrast, participants in the two high control conditions made comparably strong attribution of the votes they received to their campaign as participants in the stable majority condition; both  $t_s(170) < 2.12$ , both *ns*.

Responses to two questions about control over in-group and out-group outcomes were averaged into an index of power ( $r = .88$ ). An ANOVA revealed *only* a significant main effect of status,  $F(1, 136) = 229.53$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .63$ ,  $p < .001$ . As intended, participants in the new majority conditions ( $M = 1.34$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) felt more in power than those in the stable minority conditions ( $M = -1.53$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ).

Dunnett's tests revealed that participants in each of the two stable minority conditions felt significantly less in power than those in the stable majority condition ( $M = 1.39$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ; both  $t_s(170) > 9.94$ , both  $p_s < .001$ ). In contrast, those in the two new majority conditions felt as much in power as those in the stable majority condition; both  $t_s(170) < .15$ , both *ns*.

**Table 1.** Endorsement of discriminatory rules and status certainty as a function of numerical status stability and control (Study 1)

	Stable minority		New majority	
	Low control (N = 35)	High control (N = 35)	Low control (N = 35)	High control (N = 35)
Rules favoring majority				
M	-2.88 <sub>a</sub>	-2.84 <sub>a</sub>	1.95 <sub>b</sub>	1.38 <sub>c</sub>
SD	.79	.97	.80	.96
Rules degrading minority				
M	-3.19 <sub>a</sub>	-3.34 <sub>a</sub>	-.33 <sub>b</sub>	-.17 <sub>b</sub>
SD	.67	.68	1.07	1.19
Status certainty				
M	2.85 <sub>a</sub>	2.71 <sub>a</sub>	.75 <sub>b</sub>	2.09 <sub>c</sub>
SD	.80	1.08	.65	1.10

Note. Higher numbers indicate stronger endorsement and certainty. Means with different subscripts within each row are statistically different at  $p < .05$ .

### Dependent measures

*Discrimination against minorities* Responses to the questions about privileges for the majority were averaged into an index of discrimination favoring majority ( $\alpha = .97$ ). Responses to the questions about derogation of minority were averaged into an index of discrimination derogating minority ( $\alpha = .90$ ). A  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  (status  $\times$  control  $\times$  type of discrimination) mixed model ANOVA with type of discrimination as a within subjects factor, yielded the anticipated significant 3-way interaction,  $F(1, 136) = 4.27$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ,  $p < .001$  (Table 1). This interaction was decomposed by conducting separate  $2 \times 2$  (status  $\times$  control) ANOVA on discrimination (a) favoring majority; and (b) derogating minority.

*Discrimination favoring majority* An ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of status,  $F(1, 136) = 915.34$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .87$ ,  $p < .001$ , which was qualified by a significant status  $\times$  control interaction,  $F(1, 136) = 4.22$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ,  $p < .05$ . Planned contrasts, performed using the overall error term and a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, revealed a significantly stronger endorsement of these rules among new majorities in the low control condition than in the high control condition,  $t(136) = 2.72$ ,  $p < .01$ . Stable minorities, however, showed similarly

low support for these rules regardless of control,  $t(139) = .18$ , *ns*. Planned contrasts within the perceived control conditions indicated a significantly stronger endorsement of majority-favoring rules among new majorities than stable minorities in both low control condition,  $t(136) = 21.50$ ,  $p < .001$ , and high control condition,  $t(136) = 18.61$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Dunnett's tests revealed that endorsement of majority-favoring rules in the stable majority condition ( $M = 1.34$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) was significantly lower than in the new majority/ low control condition,  $t(170) = 2.80$ ,  $p < .05$ , but comparable to that in the new majority/high control condition,  $t(170) = .84$ , *ns*. As it would be expected, endorsement of majority-favoring rules in each of the stable minority conditions was significantly lower than in the stable majority condition, both  $t_s(170) > -19.18$ , both  $p_s < .001$ .

*Discrimination derogating minority* An ANOVA yielded *only* a significant main effect of status,  $F(1, 136) = 388.22$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .74$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating a stronger opposition to these rules among stable minorities ( $M = -3.36$ ) than new majorities ( $M = -.25$ ).

Dunnett's tests revealed that endorsement of rules derogating minority in the stable majority condition ( $M = -.44$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) was significantly

higher than in either of the stable minority conditions, both  $t_s(170) > -12.24$ , both  $p_s < .001$  but comparable to that in each of the new majority conditions, both  $t_s(170) < -1.21$ , *ns*.

*Status certainty* Responses to three questions about irreversibility of the majority and minority status were averaged into an index of status certainty ( $\alpha = .89$ ). An ANOVA revealed significant main effects of status,  $F(1, 136) = 75.57$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ , and control  $F(1, 136) = 14.92$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .10$ ,  $p < .001$ , which were qualified by a significant status  $\times$  control interaction,  $F(1, 136) = 22.21$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .14$ ,  $p < .001$ . Planned contrasts within the status conditions revealed a significantly higher status certainty among new majorities in the high control condition than in the low control condition,  $t(136) = 6.04$ ,  $p < .001$ . Stable minorities, however, showed similarly high status certainty regardless of control,  $t(139) = .63$ , *ns*. Planned contrasts within the control conditions indicated a significantly lower status certainty among new majorities than stable minorities in both low control condition,  $t(136) = 9.47$ ,  $p < .001$ , and high control condition,  $t(136) = 2.80$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Dunnett's tests revealed that status certainty in the stable majority condition ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) was significantly higher than in the new majority/ low control condition,  $t(170) = 6.89$ ,  $p < .001$ , lower than in the stable minority/low control condition,  $t(170) = -2.50$ ,  $p < .05$ , and comparable to that in the remaining two (high control) conditions, all  $t_s(170) < 1.92$ , *ns*.

**Mediational analysis** To examine whether the effect of control on new majorities' endorsement of majority-favoring rules was mediated by status certainty, regression analyses were conducted as recommended by Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger (1998). Consistent with the ANOVA results, these analyses revealed that (within the new majority condition) control predicted endorsement of majority-favoring rules,  $B = -.29$ ,  $t(68) = -2.70$ ,  $p < .001$ , as well as status certainty,  $B = .67$ ,  $t(68) = 6.20$ ,  $p < .001$ . When the hypothesized mediator, status

certainty, was added to the original predictor, its predictive contribution emerged significant,  $B = -.56$ ,  $t(68) = -5.80$ ,  $p < .001$ , whereas the contribution of control was reduced to insignificance,  $B = .09$ ,  $t(68) = .86$ , *ns*. The reduction proved significant,  $Z = -4.20$ ,  $p = .001$ .

### Discussion

This study revealed that perceived control over status attainment significantly affected new majorities' reactions to new minorities. This effect emerged on self-serving rules that gave a competitive advantage to new majorities in their interactions with new minorities. Specifically, new majorities who gained status through support unrelated to their advocacy, in comparison to those who gained status by securing support through the power of their arguments, provided stronger endorsement for majority-favoring rules. These rules secured them privileges in allocation of material resources and decision-making authority.

The seemingly paradoxical finding that the less credit new majorities could take for their status, the more privileges they claimed, is understandable in light of how they felt about security of their new status. Majorities who acquired their status through means outside of their control, in comparison to those who rose to status on the power of their arguments, were much less certain that the newly established status hierarchy would be sustained. As a result, they claimed privileges that armed them with resources instrumental in regulating potential challenges to the newly established hierarchy. For example, they claimed decision-making privileges (e.g., exclusive majority right to regulate interactions between majority and minority members), which are almost certain to cement the status quo.

New majorities with control over their status, much like stable majorities, were more temperate in their claim for privileges. Both felt secure about their status: The former because they acquired status through means within their control that are likely to sustain the newly acquired status in the future; the latter because they have sustained their

status long enough to expect that it is firm. Status security lead to a moderate level of in-group favoritism and *ipso facto* less discrimination against new minorities. Apparently, being fair to minorities is a “luxury” that only majorities who are secure in their status can afford.

New majorities with substantial control over their status were not entirely immune to abuse of power. They showed stronger support for majority-favoring rules than stable minorities, suggesting that they were not immune to taking advantage of their position (Christensen, Prislin, & Jacobs, 2009). Noteworthy, their claim for privileges was comparable to stable majorities. Apparently, the experience of once being in the minority does not decrease majorities’ claim for privileges that come at the expense of new minorities. This apparent lack of empathy for the underprivileged suggests that standards advocated while minorities seek social change may be forgotten in the aftermath of social change. Thus, even groups in which majorities acquire their status through means within their control may do well to institute mechanisms of preventing power abuse.

The conclusion about majorities’ potential to abuse power is further indicated by their reactions to minority-degrading rules. All majorities opposed these rules significantly less strongly than stable minorities. One reason for this apparent lack of differentiation between low and high control majorities in their acceptance of minority degrading rules may be social undesirability of these rules. We suspect, and test in Study 2, that social support for this blatant form of out-group hostility may be required to loosen the reigns of this form of power abuse.

## Study 2

Writing about the tyranny of the majority, Mill (1859/1956) warned that it does not operate only through the acts of the public authorities. Whereas individuals acting on behalf of the majority may abuse power, such abuse is especially egregious when it is endorsed by the masses. In Mill’s words “Society can and does execute its own mandates; and if it issues wrong

mandates.... it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression” (p. 6). Thus, social support should not only intensify new majority members’ claim for privileges (in-group favoritism) but also their tendency to derogate the new minority (out-group hostility).

Mill’s reasoning about the powerful effects of social “mandates” is echoed in theorizing and research on the role of social influence in unleashing aggressive behavior (Levy & Nail, 1993). The acceptability of discrimination and expressions of hostility toward other groups closely follow social norms (Bar-Tal, 2000). Social support for out-group hostility transforms the questionable (hostile) behavior into accepted behavior, thus legitimizing it as a means toward desired goals (Kipnis, 1972; Zeldich, 2001). The “liberating” effect of social support that removes initial restraints produces disinhibitory contagion whereby individuals happily follow social norms (Nail, MacDonald, & Levy, 2000). Supporting this idea, studies have shown that prejudiced individuals are much more likely to practice discrimination in the social context that condones it than in the social context that condemns it (Sechrist & Stangor, 2001).

Applying this reasoning to our research, we hypothesized that social support from the group for minority derogation would affect more strongly reactions of new majorities low rather than high in control. Being less certain of their status, new majorities low in control should consider a wider range of means to sustain their status. Social support should dis-inhibit their presumed stronger willingness to use whatever means necessary to sustain status hierarchy. While the larger societal norm against the degradation of others may remain, a within-group norm may override it to set a context in which abusive behavior is acceptable. The use of group-specific norm over a societal norm was intended to convey that the people within the group endorsed power abuse. Thus, we anticipated an interaction among control, social support, and endorsement of different forms of power abuse. New majorities with low control should endorse minority

derogation more strongly than their high control counterparts only when derogation is socially approved. In the absence of social approval, their endorsement of new minority derogation should be lower and similar to that of high control new minorities, as it was found in Study 1. In contrast, endorsement of majority-favoring rules should be high and reach a ceiling among low control new majorities even in the absence of social support for minority derogation.

In addition to extending Study 1 to the social context that provides explicit support for minority derogation, Study 2 broadened assessment of power abuse to include open-ended questions about treatment of new minorities. If new majorities exhibit the same tendencies when they themselves generate rules as when they respond to the externally offered rules, it would suggest that the observed patterns of reactions in response to an invitation to abuse power might also emerge in response to the question how to use power.

### Method

**Participants and design** Of the 102 undergraduate students who participated in exchange for partial fulfillment of a course requirement, 63 were women and 39 were men, with the mean age of  $M = 19.74$  ( $SD = 4.01$ ). Forty-eight participants were White (non-Hispanic) American, 16 were Hispanic American, 23 were Asian American, 3 were African American, and 12 reported being of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions of the 2 (perceived control of new majority: low vs. high)  $\times$  2 (social support for minority derogation: absent vs. present).

**Procedure** Procedure was identical to the new majority condition in Study 1. All participants underwent change from initial minority to new majority ostensibly because of the quality of their campaign (*high control*) or reasons unrelated to their campaign (*low control*). After they were explained StarPower game, they were invited to generate three new rules for the game with an explanation that it is democratic for the

majority to decide how the game is played. In the *condition where social support for minority derogation was absent*, each participant generated rules individually and then responded to the computer questionnaire as in Study 1. In the *condition where social support for minority derogation was present*, the experimenter first explained that the minority members' task in the second part of the experiment would be somewhat different than the majority's and asked minority members to wait for further instruction in an adjacent room. When minority members (confederates) left, the experimenter explained to the participant and his or her supporters that it was democratic that they as the majority decide how the game is played. The participant and each of his or her three supporters (confederates) were given a sheet of paper each to write down three new rules that they would later discuss. Those rules that they agreed upon as a group were to be announced to the members of the minority. The experimenter then left the room ostensibly to check on members of the minority while the participant and his or her supporters were generating new rules. When the experimenter left, one of the confederates commented "We should make them (minority) raise their hands and wait to be called before talking", to which another confederate seconded "Even better—let's make them wear a post-it that says second class citizens". One of the confederates advocating derogation of the new minority was a consistent supporter and another was a convert to the participant's position. A third confederate commented "That's good guys but let's not talk any more before we are done", repeating the comment if the participant made a remark. Once the participant and confederates finished writing new rules, the experimenter returned and invited the participant and the confederates "to respond to a few questions on a computer" before discussion of the rules that they generated. The participant was given "the candidate's" computer and confederates the alleged "voters'" computers. Upon responding to the questionnaire, the participant was debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

**Dependent measures** Support for *Majority privileges* and *Minority derogation* was assessed in two ways: (a) by having participants respond to the first three questions about majority-favoring rules (majority privileges) and first two questions about minority-derogating rules (minority derogation) used in Study 1 (external rules), and (b) by coding number of self-generated rules. Two undergraduate students blind to the experimental conditions and hypotheses independently categorized each of the three self-generated rules as a rule favoring majority (e.g., “If you are a member of the majority team, you can reject a trade”), derogating minority (e.g., “Minority members must call us ‘Master’”), or other (e.g., “Bonus points will be allowed on four or more green chips”). Inter-coder reliability was satisfactory as indicated by Kappa indices that ranged from .85 to .93.

**Manipulation checks** The effectiveness of the control manipulation was assessed by two questions about the extent to which the participant felt (a) influential in changing attitudes of other participants and (b) had the ability to significantly alter others’ attitudes (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). These questions probed whether participants perceived that they were the agents of change, directly influencing the change in their status from opinion-based minority to opinion-based majority. The effectiveness of the social support manipulation was assessed by questions about the extent to which others who voted to elect the participant indicated what kinds of rules they favored and whether they shared their opinions about new rules (−4 = *not at all*, 4 = *very much*).

## Results

### Manipulation checks

**Perceived control** Responses to two questions about influencing others’ attitudes were averaged into an index of control ( $\alpha = .94$ ). A  $2 \times 2$  (control  $\times$  social support) ANOVA yielded *only* a significant main effect of control,  $F(1, 86) = 12.41$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .13$ ,  $p < .001$ . As intended, participants in the high control condition perceived that they exerted

significantly more influence ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) than those in the low control condition ( $M = 2.20$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ).

**Social support** Responses to two questions about familiarity with other group members’ opinions were averaged into an index of social support ( $\alpha = .94$ ). An ANOVA yielded *only* a significant main effect of social support,  $F(1, 86) = 10.29$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .11$ . As intended, participants in the social support present condition were more familiar with others’ opinions ( $M = .60$ ,  $SD = 2.10$ ) than those in the social support absent condition ( $M = -1.26$ ,  $SD = 2.29$ ).

### Dependent measures

**External rules** A  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  (control  $\times$  social support  $\times$  type of rules) mixed model ANOVA with type of rules as a within subjects factor, yielded the anticipated significant three-way interaction,  $F(1, 98) = 11.34$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .10$ ,  $p < .001$  (Table 2, first two rows). This interaction was decomposed by performing separate  $2 \times 2$  (control  $\times$  social support) ANOVA on discrimination (a) favoring majority and (b) derogating minority.

**Discrimination favoring majority** An ANOVA revealed *only* significant main effects of social support,  $F(1, 98) = 4.27$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ , and control,  $F(1, 98) = 4.04$ ,  $p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ . Participants in the condition where there was social support for minority derogation endorsed rules favoring majority ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) significantly more than those in the condition where such support was absent ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ). Replicating the findings from Study 1, participants in the low control condition endorsed these rules ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) significantly more than those in the high control condition ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ).

**Discrimination derogating minority** Significant main effects of social support,  $F(1, 98) = 10.06$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .10$ , and control,  $F(1, 98) = 14.87$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .13$ , were qualified

**Table 2.** New majority's endorsement of discriminatory rules as a function of social support for minority oppression and control (Study 2)

	Social support absent		Social support present	
	Low control (N = 24)	High control (N = 26)	Low control (N = 27)	High control (N = 25)
Rules favoring majority (external)				
M	3.36 <sub>a,c</sub>	2.67 <sub>a,d</sub>	3.54 <sub>b,c</sub>	3.37 <sub>b,d</sub>
SD	1.14	1.26	1.03	.87
Rules degrading minority (external)				
M	2.37 <sub>a</sub>	1.85 <sub>a</sub>	3.63 <sub>b</sub>	2.11 <sub>a</sub>
SD	1.28	1.04	.84	1.15
Self-generated rules favoring majority				
M	.50 <sub>a,c</sub>	.35 <sub>a,d</sub>	1.00 <sub>b,c</sub>	.52 <sub>b,d</sub>
SD	.72	.69	.73	.82
Self-generated rules degrading minority				
M	.13 <sub>a</sub>	.04 <sub>a</sub>	1.00 <sub>b</sub>	.48 <sub>c</sub>
SD	.34	.20	.69	.87

*Note.* Higher numbers indicate stronger endorsement. Means with different subscripts within each row are statistically different at  $p < .05$ .

by a social support  $\times$  control interaction,  $F(1, 98) = 6.90, p < .001$  partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ . As hypothesized, there was a statistically stronger support for minority derogation among new majorities low than high in control in the presence of social support for minority derogation,  $t(98) = 4.62, p < .001$ , but not in the absence of such support,  $t(98) = .87, ns$ . Additionally, there was a significantly stronger support for minority derogation among new majorities in the presence of social support than in the absence of social support when new majorities were low in control,  $t(98) = 4.08, p < .001$ , but not when they were high in control,  $t(98) = .87, ns$ .

### Self-generated rules

*Discrimination favoring majority* An ANOVA revealed only significant main effects of social support,  $F(1, 98) = 5.23, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ , and control,  $F(1, 98) = 4.63, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$  (Table 2, third row). Participants in the social support condition generated significantly more rules favoring majority ( $M = .77, SD = .81$ ) than those in the no social support condition ( $M = .42, SD = .70$ ). Also, participants in the low control condition generated significantly more of these

rules ( $M = .76, SD = .76$ ) than those in the high control condition ( $M = .43, SD = .75$ ). These findings mirror those for the external rules favoring majority.

*Discrimination derogating minority* Significant main effects of social support,  $F(1, 98) = 31.95, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .25$ , and control,  $F(1, 98) = 6.78, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ , were qualified by a marginally significant social support  $\times$  control interaction,  $F(1, 98) = 3.47, p < .06$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$  (Table 2, fourth row). Planned contrasts revealed that new majorities low in control, compared to those high in control, generated significantly more minority-derogating rules in the presence of social support for such derogation,  $t(96) = 3.19, p < .001$ , but not in the absence of social support,  $t(98) = .52, ns$ . Additional contrasts revealed that new majorities in the social support condition, in comparison to those in the condition where social support was absent, generated significantly more minority-derogating rules when they were low in control,  $t(98) = 5.31, p < .001$ , and when they were high in control,  $t(98) = 2.69, p < .01$ . These findings closely resemble those for the external rules degrading minority.

*Other rules* The “other” category was further coded for rules that (a) create new bonus opportunities; (b) relax original rules to free trading and bargaining; (c) restrict trading and bargaining; (d) regulate interaction; (e) favor minority; and (d) unclassifiable. Analyses revealed that participants in the social support absent condition, in comparison to those in the social support present condition, generated more rules that create bonus opportunities ( $M = .88$  and  $.25$  for the social support absent and social support present conditions, respectively;  $F(1, 98) = 14.63, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .13$ ) and free trade ( $M = .36$ , and  $.10$  for the social support absent and social support present conditions, respectively;  $F(1, 98) = 7.61, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ ), but fewer rules that regulate interaction ( $M = .16$ , and  $.40$  for the social support absent and social support present conditions, respectively;  $F(1, 98) = 4.45, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ ). No other effect was significant.

### Discussion

Study 2 replicated findings from Study 1 showing that members of the new majority claimed more privileges for themselves when their new status was attained by means over which they had low rather than high control. This tendency for members of the new majority to favor their own was exacerbated in the context that revealed social contempt for the new minority. Others showing their contempt for the new minority possibly served to justify in-group favoritism. Importantly, it opened the gate for hostility against the new minority. The facilitating effect of social support in unleashing power abuse was especially strong for new majorities low in perceived control. When armed with (social) license to oppress, low control new majorities seized the opportunity.

A tendency to abuse power was observed not only in answers to specific questions about majority privileges and minority derogation but also in response to open-ended questions about how the new minority should be treated. Rules-of-engagement generated by the new majority

revealed a highly similar pattern of reactions as responses to externally offered rules. Self-generated rules were produced before responding to externally offered rules and therefore represent willing contributions to the regulation of the relationship between new majorities and new minorities. With the exception of new majorities high in control and unaware of social support for minority abuse, all others generated the number of minority derogating rules that was significantly different from zero ( $t(26) = 7.65, p < .001$  and  $t(25) = 2.75, p < .05$ , for low control and high control new majorities in the social support present condition, respectively) or nearly significantly different from zero ( $t(23) = 1.88, p < .10$ , for the low control new majority in the social support absent condition). Whereas new majorities who were aware of social support for minority derogation might have only followed the norm, those who were not informed about others' support for abuse suggested it spontaneously. Thus, low control new majorities appear not only willing to endorse the norm to oppress but also volunteer their own ideas about how to oppress.

### General discussion

Our two studies demonstrated a strong tendency for new majorities to abuse power. No sooner do they acquire their new status than new majorities claim privileges for themselves at the expense of new minorities. This in-group favoritism would not be so surprising if it did not occur shortly after they experienced what it meant to be in the minority. Apparently, there is little preventive efficacy in knowing what it means to be disadvantaged. An important implication of this finding is that minorities' opposition to majority's abuse of power and a pledge to be different once they rise to majority, however sincere while seeking change, will soon be forgotten once the tide is turned in their favor. New majorities who rise to power without a sense of control are even worse in claiming privileges than stable majorities. Their uncertainty about their status makes their appetite for

privileges insatiate as if they want immediately what they fear might soon be taken away. Low control new majorities, whereas greedy, are not disparaging unless operating in the social context that condones minority oppression. However, when they are given social license to oppress, they are not only willing to endorse externally offered forms of oppression but also volunteer their own. Apparently, lack of control, coupled with social approval for oppression, spells egregious power abuse.

The abuse of power observed in our two studies was directed against the new minority who dominated the group before social change. Some suggestive evidence that it would extend to other groups comes from research on relative gratification, which occurs when a group advances its economic opportunities, social status, or dominance. In comparison to the status quo, relative gratification increases hostility toward all potentially threatening out-groups and not only those that were previously advantaged (Dambrun, Taylor, McDonald, Crush, & Méot, 2006; Guimond & Dambrun, 2002). Thus, new majority's power abuse likely serves a protective rather than vengeful function.

Although these protective behaviors may have the tangible benefit of maintaining status, it is possible that they may be driven by motivations other than restoration of control. New majorities who perceive themselves as illegitimate or who feel insecure may seek ways to bolster their threatened sense of self. That is, when experiencing threat, a majority may seek to compensate for feelings of inferiority. If so, status preservation notwithstanding, exercising or merely threatening dominance may be a way to increase feelings of legitimacy, competence, or self worth. Future research should further probe motivational underpinnings of new majorities' behaviors.

Our conclusions are necessarily limited to the conditions examined in the present research and may differ with changed circumstances in minority-majority interactions. For example, although we captured history in minority-majority relations by manipulating social change, our time frame was too narrow to depict many complex variables that

may influence power (ab)use beyond those examined in this research. Our minorities and majorities had a very brief history of relations and virtually no expectations for future interactions beyond those established in the laboratory. In real life, however, past relations and expectations for future relations may play as an important role as current circumstances. As rare studies within an extended time frame indicate, new majorities' reactions evolve over time (Prislin & Christensen, 2005b). In the process, new minorities' reactions are almost certain to have a feedback effect on new majorities. Thus, capturing multidirectional influence over a longer period of time (Mason, Conrey, & Smith, 2007) holds promise for better understanding of the effects of social change on majority-minority relationships.

Although generalization of any laboratory finding must necessarily be done with caution, historical examples suggest that our findings might have some bearing on interactions of "real world" majorities and minorities in the aftermath of social change. From French revolution to more recent Eastern block evolution, social change appears to be accompanied with power abuse. Even in established democratic systems where political parties regularly change in minority-majority status, minority parties' promises to change the culture of privileges (or power abuse by any other name), seems to fall by the wayside once they rise to the majority. For example, after years in the minority and pledges to be a different majority, in 2005, the Republican party as the "new" majority in the US Senate, threaten to eliminate the filibuster procedure as a tool of last resort for then "new" minority (Democratic) party to voice its opposition to judicial appointments. The (then minority) Democratic party pledged to act differently and work in the spirit of bi-partisanship once they rise to power. When it did rise to power in 2008, the pledge died quickly in the burst of lawmaking that mostly sidelined the new minority's (Republican) opposition. Not that minority's pledges are necessarily hypocritical. Rather, as our findings suggest, what minorities see as power abuse, majorities see as status entitlements. Thus, heeding Mill's warning

that new majorities may abuse power, groups are well advised to institute mechanisms that prevent such abuse.

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### Biographical notes

RADMILA PRISLIN earned her PhD at the University of Zagreb, Croatia in 1983. She taught at the University of Zagreb and Texas A&M University

before joining the Department of Psychology at San Diego State University. Her research interests are in the domain of social influence and group dynamics.

VANESSA SAWICKI is a Doctoral Student of Purdue University who is completing her dissertation at Ohio State University. She received her MA in Psychology from San Diego State University in 2007. Currently, her research examines the variables that impact amount and direction of social information processing in the context of selective exposure, judgment and decision making, and interpersonal attraction.

KIPLING WILLIAMS earned his PhD at Ohio State University in 1981. He taught at Drake University, University of Toledo, University of New South Wales, and Macquarie University before joining the Department of Psychological Sciences at Purdue University. His research interests fall broadly under the heading of social influence, with specific interests in ostracism, persuasion tactics, and individual motivation in group settings. He is currently the editor of the journal, *Social Influence*.