

## **SOCIAL NETWORKS AND POLITICS (B.A. Sociology)**

**Spring 2025, Monday 15:30-17:00, Room B143**

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

“But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual.  
In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.” – Karl Marx

What explains the rise of the Medici in 15th century Florence? What distinguishes protesters who participated in the 2015 Charlie Hebdo protests in Paris from nonprotesters? What can online book co-purchases tell us about ideological differences between Republicans and Democrats in contemporary America? These are some of the questions we will grapple with as we explore how social scientists have applied network analysis to the study of politics. The course is designed as a general introduction to social network analysis, but it focuses heavily on examples from political sociology and political science as areas in which network theories and methodologies have had a great influence. We will treat network analysis both as a theoretical approach that regards relations as the basic building blocks of social life, and as a methodological toolkit for visualizing and analyzing the structure of relations. Many of these methods involve the quantitative measurement of network structures (e.g., the degree to which networks are clustered) and different positions within the network (e.g., central vs. peripheral actors). The course is organized around a set of key concepts and theoretical insights in network analysis – such as weak ties, brokerage, and diffusion – which we will apply to a variety of substantive issues ranging from recruitment into social movements to the emergence of new political identities to the nature of political action.

The best way to learn about social networks is to work with them, which is why the class has a large practical component. After developing the theoretical foundations in class discussions, students will learn how to analyze networks in a series of practical assignments. The final project will give students an opportunity to follow their own curiosity and apply the analytical tools introduced in class to an empirical context of their choosing.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the course, students will be able to

1. see the (political) world through the lens of networks and appreciate the extent to which political actors are a product of their position in the social world.
2. transpose the analytical tools introduced in class to new empirical contexts.
3. develop and answer a small research question applying the theories and methodologies from the course. This includes becoming familiar with programs for network analysis such as R or Gephi.

## PREREQUISITES

Much of the social networks literature, including many of the readings on this syllabus, is quantitative. Background in statistics and other formal data analysis techniques is useful, but not required. The course includes brief introductions to network analysis in R and Gephi, which provide the tools necessary to complete the assignments and the final project.

## REQUIREMENTS

*Class participation.* In-class discussions based on the assigned readings form the foundation of this course. Students are expected to read carefully and participate actively in class discussions (which includes active listening). Each student should bring at least one comment or question about the week's readings to class. Fruitful discussions are possible only if everyone does the readings in advance. If you anticipate being unable to do so regularly, this course may not be a good fit. If you must miss a class, please notify me *in advance* via email.

*3 homework assignments.* Each homework assignment will include a small data analysis task using data provided by the instructor. The assignments will give students an opportunity to work with network data structures and will introduce tools that can be used for the final project. Assignments are due by 4pm the day before class (as a PDF using ILIAS).

*Final paper.* The goal of the final paper is to apply the analytical tools introduced in class to new empirical contexts. The final paper will take the form of a small research paper, either based on students' own data collection or, more likely, based on an existing dataset. Other, more theoretical papers are also possible. Topics will be chosen in consultation with the instructor.

## COURSE OVERVIEW

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Bonding vs. Bridging

Week 3: Civil Society and Democracy

Week 4: Structural Equivalence

Week 5: Network Measures and Community Detection

Week 6: Multiple Networks

Week 7: Diffusion

Week 8: Elite Networks and Policy

Week 9: Social Movements I – Differential Recruitment

Week 10: Social Movements II – Identity

Week 11: Political Polarization

Week 12: Semantic Networks

Week 13: Open Topic

Week 14: Last Class

## COURSE SCHEDULE

The course begins with a set of concepts that are central to social network theory/analysis. The second part of the course then looks at work that has applied these ideas to various empirical problems.

If you want to familiarize yourself with some basics, here are useful introductions to social network analysis:

- Kadushin, Charles. 2012. *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wasserman, Stanley and Katherine Faust. 1994. *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Freeman, Linton C. 2004. *The Development of Social Network Analysis: A Study in the Sociology of Science*. Vancouver, B. C.: Empirical Press.
- Fuhse, Jan. 2015. "Theorizing social networks: the relational sociology of and around Harrison White." *International Review of Sociology—Revue Internationale de Sociologie* 25(1): 15-44.
- Erikson, Emily, and Nicholas Occhiuto. 2017. "Social Networks and Macrosocial Change." *Annual Review of Sociology* 43: 229-48.

## Week 1, February 10: Introduction

- Borgatti, Stephen P., Ajay Mehra, Daniel J. Brass, and Giuseppe Labianca. 2009. "Network Analysis in the Social Sciences." *Science* 323(5916): 892-895.

## Week 2, February 17: Bonding vs. Bridging

- Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6): 1360-1380.
- Burt, Ronald S. 1997. "The Contingent Value of Social Capital." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 42(2): 339-365. **[only pp. 339-343]**
- McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook. 2001. "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 415-44. **[skim]**

### Additional readings:

- DiPrete, Thomas A., Andrew Gelman, Tyler McCormick, Julien Teitler, and Tian Zheng. 2011. "Segregation in Social Networks Based on Acquaintanceship and Trust." *American Journal of Sociology* 116(4): 1234-1283.
- McFarland, D. A., Moody, J., Diehl, D., Smith, J. A., & Thomas, R. J. (2014). "Network Ecology and Adolescent Social Structure." *American Sociological Review* 79(6): 1088-1121.
- Granovetter, Mark S. 1983. "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited." *Sociological Theory* 1: 201-233.
- Rajkumar, Karthik, Guillaume Saint-Jacques, Iavor Bojinov, Erik Brynjolfsson, and Sinan Aral. 2022. "A causal test of the strength of weak ties." *Science* 377:1304-1310.
- Burt, Ronald S. 2004. "Structural Holes and Good Ideas." *American Journal of Sociology* 110(2):349-399.

## Week 3, February 24: Civil Society and Democracy

- Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/16643>
- Riley, Dylan. 2005. "Civic Associations and Authoritarian Regimes in Interwar Europe: Italy and Spain in Comparative Perspective." *American Sociological Review* 70(2): 288-310.

### Additional readings:

- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Kosher, Rudy. 1987. "From Stammtisch to Party: Nazi Joiners and the Contradictions of Grass Roots Fascism in Weimar Germany." *The Journal of Modern History* 59(1): 1-24.
- Berman, Sheri. 1997. "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic." *World Politics* 49(3): 401-429.
- Satyanath, Shanker, Nico Voigtländer, and Hans-Joachim Voth. 2017. "Bowling for Fascism: Social Capital and the Rise of the Nazi Party." *Journal of Political Economy* 125(2): 478-526.

## Week 4, March 3: Structural Equivalence

Besides discussing the reading, today I will also introduce R and Gephi for network analysis and show how to visualize network data.

- Borgatti, Stephen, and Travis Grosser. 2015. "Structural Equivalence: Meaning and Measures." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*. [You can skip the "Methods" and "History and Significance of the Concept" sections.]
- Burt, Ronald S. 1987. "Social Contagion and Innovation: Cohesion versus Structural Equivalence." *American Journal of Sociology* 92(6): 1287-1335. [skim]

*Additional readings:*

- DiMaggio, Paul. 1986. "Structural analysis of organizational fields: A blockmodel approach." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 8: 335-370.
- Gould, Roger V. 1995. *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bearman, Peter S. 1993. *Relations into Rhetorics: Local Elite Social Structure in Norfolk, England, 1540-1640*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

## Week 5, March 10: Network Measures and Community Detection

Today's class will focus on practical aspects of network analysis. After last week's introduction, today I will show how to calculate various network measures and how to detect communities in networks. I will hand out assignments 1-3, to be submitted in weeks 6, 7, and 8. After completing these assignments, you should be equipped to conduct your own small network analysis for your final paper.

- [https://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/C10\\_Centrality.html](https://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/C10_Centrality.html)
- Edelman, Achim, Tom Wolff, Danielle Montagne, and Christopher A. Bail. 2020. "Computational Social Science and Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46:61-81.

*Additional readings:*

- Freeman, Linton C. 1978. "Centrality in Social Networks: Conceptual Clarification." *Social Networks* 1(3): 215-239.
- Gould, Roger V. and Roberto M. Fernandez. 1989. "Structures of Mediation: A Formal Approach to Brokerage in Transaction Networks." *Sociological Methodology* 19: 89-126.
- Burris, Val. 2004. "The Academic Caste System: Prestige Hierarchies in PhD Exchange Networks." *American Sociological Review* 69(2): 239-264.

## Week 6, March 17: Multiple Networks

**< Assignment 1 due at 4pm the day before class >**

- Padgett, John F. and Christopher K. Ansell. 1993. "Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434." *American Journal of Sociology* 98(6): 1259-1319.

*Additional readings:*

- Gould, Roger V. 1991. "Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871." *American Sociological Review* 56(6): 716-729.

### **Week 7, March 24: Diffusion**

**< Assignment 2 due at 4pm the day before class >**

*Today, students will split into two groups. Each group will read different articles. The two groups will then teach each other the readings in class.*

- Bond, Robert M. et al. 2012. "A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization." *Nature* 489: 295-298.
- Andrews, Kenneth T. and Michael Biggs. 2006. "The Dynamics of Protest Diffusion: Movement Organizations, Social Networks, and News Media in the 1960 Sit-Ins." *American Sociological Review* 71(5): 752-777. **[skim]**

*Additional readings:*

- Hedström, Peter, Rickard Sandell, and Charlotta Stern. 2000. "Mesolevel Networks and the Diffusion of Social Movements: The Case of the Swedish Social Democratic Party." *American Journal of Sociology* 106(1): 145-172.
- Kim, Hyojoung, and Peter S. Bearman. 1997. "The structure and dynamics of movement participation." *American Sociological Review* 62(1): 70-93.

### **Week 8, March 31: Elite Networks and Policy**

**< Assignment 3 due at 4pm the day before class >**

- Burris, Val. 2005. "Interlocking Directorates and Political Cohesion among Corporate Elites." *American Journal of Sociology* 111(1): 249-283.
- Safford, Sean. 2009. *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown: The Transformation of the Rust Belt*. **[ch. 4]**

### **Week 9, April 7: Social Movements I – Differential Recruitment**

- Krinsky, John and Nick Crossley. 2014. "Social Movements and Social Networks: Introduction." *Social Movement Studies* 13(1): 1-21. **[1-10, skim the rest]**
- Larson, Jennifer M., Jonathan Nagler, Jonathan Ronen, and Joshua A. Tucker. 2019. "Social Networks and Protest Participation: Evidence from 130 Million Twitter Users." *American Journal of Political Science* 63(3): 509-718.

*Additional readings:*

- McAdam, Doug. 1986. "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer." *American Journal of Sociology* 92(1): 64-90.

- Viterna, Jocelyn S. 2006. "Pulled, Pushed, and Persuaded: Explaining Women's Mobilization into the Salvadoran Guerrilla Army." *American Journal of Sociology* 112(1): 1-45.

### **April 14 and April 21: Easter break**

### **Week 10, April 28: Social Movements II – Identity**

*Today, students will split into two groups. Each group will read different articles. The two groups will then teach each other the readings in class.*

- **[Group 1]** Heaney, Michael T. and Fabio Rojas. 2014. "Hybrid Activism: Social Movement Mobilization in a Multimovement Environment." *American Journal of Sociology* 119(4): 1047-1103.
- **[Group 2]** Pfaff, Steven. 1996. "Collective identity and informal groups in revolutionary mobilization: East Germany in 1989." *Social Forces* 75: 91-118.

*Additional readings:*

- Robert Ackland and Mathieu O'Neil. 2011. "Online collective identity: The case of the environmental movement." *Social Networks* 33(3): 177-190.

### **Week 11, May 5: Political Polarization**

- **[Group 1]** Shi, Feng, Yongren Shi, Fedor A. Dokshin, James A. Evans, and Michael W. Macy. 2017. "Millions of online book co-purchases reveal partisan differences in the consumption of science." *Nature Human Behavior* 1, 0079.
- **[Group 2]** Bail, Christopher A., Lisa P. Argyle, Taylor W. Brown, John P. Bumpus, Haohan Chen, M. B. Fallin Hunzaker, Jaemin Lee, Marcus Mann, Friedolin Merhout, and Alexander Volfovsky. 2018. "Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization." *PNAS* 115(37): 9216-9221.

*Additional readings:*

- DellaPosta, Daniel, Yongren Shi, and Michael Macy. 2015. "Why Do Liberals Drink Lattes?" *American Journal of Sociology* 120(5): 1473-1511.
- Boutyline, Andrei and Robb Willer. 2017. "The Social Structure of Political Echo Chambers: Variation in Ideological Homophily in Online Networks." *Political Psychology* 38(3): 551-569.

### **Week 12, May 12: Semantic Networks**

- Hoffman, Mark A. 2019. "The Materiality of Ideology: Cultural Consumption and Political Thought after the American Revolution." *American Journal of Sociology* 125(1): 1-62.

*Additional readings:*

- Evans, James A. and Pedro Aceves. 2016. "Machine Translation: Mining Text for Social Theory." *Annual Review of Sociology* 42: 21-50.
- Hoffman, Mark A., Jean-Philippe Cointet, Philipp Brandt, Newton Key, Peter Bearman. "The (Protestant) Bible, the (printed) sermon, and the word(s): The semantic structure of the Conformist and Dissenting Bible, 1660–1780." *Poetics* 68.
- Fuhse, Jan, Oscar Stuhler, Jan Riebling, and John Levi Martin. 2020. "Relating social and symbolic relations in quantitative text analysis: A study of parliamentary discourse in the Weimar Republic." *Poetics* 78.
- Bearman, Peter, Robert Faris, and James Moody. 1999. "Blocking the Future: New Solutions for Old Problems in Historical Social Science." *Social Science History* 23(4): 501-533.
- [https://cbail.github.io/textasdata/text-networks/rmarkdown/Text\\_Networks.html](https://cbail.github.io/textasdata/text-networks/rmarkdown/Text_Networks.html) [R package for the analysis of semantic networks]

### **Week 13, May 19: Open Topic**

Suggestion: Citation Networks

- McMahan, Peter, and Daniel A. McFarland. 2021. "Creative Destruction: The Structural Consequences of Scientific Curation." *American Sociological Review* 86(2):341-376.

### **Week 14, May 26**

*No readings today. We will use this class to talk about the final paper and to answer questions that have come up over the course of the class.*