

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND POLITICS (B.A. Sociology)

Fall 2022, Tuesday 10:15-11:45, Room B143

Instructor: Benjamin Rohr, PhD

Room A514

Office hours: Tuesday, 12:30-14:00 and by appointment (email to rohr@uni-mannheim.de)

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? Why did thousands of women join the guerilla war in 1980s El Salvador? 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 adjacent fields) as one area 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 R or Gephi for network analysis.

PREREQUISITES

The course is intended for advanced BA students.

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 assigned readings provide the basic structure for each week's class. All students are expected to read carefully and participate actively in class discussions (which includes active listening). Fruitful discussions are possible only if students do all the readings ahead of class. Thus, if you think you will not be able to do all the readings, this class might not be for you.

6 response memos. Each student will write 6 response memos over the course of the class. Students will be divided into two groups. Group 1 will write memos for even weeks; group 2 will write memos for odd weeks. These memos will engage with the day's readings in the form of a question, a critique, or an implication. Responses should be no longer than 200 words and submitted by 6pm the night before class (using ILIAS).

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 6pm the night before class (using ILIAS).

Final paper. The goal of the final paper is to apply the analytical tools introduced in class to new empirical contexts. Students will choose their own case and are encouraged to experiment with ideas they find interesting and topics they are invested in. 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 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, September 6: 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, September 13: Homophily and Cohesion

Besides discussing the readings, today I will also give a brief introduction to R and Gephi for network analysis and hand out assignment 1, to be submitted before class next week.

- 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.

Additional readings:

- 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.
- 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.

Week 3, September 20: Weak Ties, Structural Holes, and Brokerage

< Assignment 1 due at 6pm the day before class >

- 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]**

Additional readings:

- Granovetter, Mark S. 1983. "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited." *Sociological Theory* 1: 201-233.

Week 4, September 27: Network Measures and Community Detection

Today's class will focus on practical aspects of network analysis. I will demonstrate how to calculate various network measures and how to detect communities in networks using R and Gephi. I will hand out assignments 2 and 3, to be submitted before class in weeks 5 and 6. 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
- Wang, Cuijuan, Wenzhong Tang, Bo Sun, Jing Fang and Yanyang Wang. 2015. "Review on community detection algorithms in social networks." *IEEE International Conference on Progress in Informatics and Computing (PIC)*: 551-555.

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.
- Shwed, Uri and Peter S. Bearman. 2010. "The Temporal Structure of Scientific Consensus Formation." *American Sociological Review* 75(6): 817-840.

Week 5, October 4: Civic Associations and Democracy

< Assignment 2 due at 6pm the day before class >

- 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.
- Koshar, Rudy. 1986. *Social Life, Local Politics, and Nazism: Marburg 1880-1935*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- 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.
- Bearman, Peter S., and Katherine Stovel. 2000. "Becoming a Nazi: A model for narrative networks." *Poetics* 27: 69-90.

Week 6, October 11: Multiple Networks

< Assignment 3 due at 6pm 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.

Week 7, October 18: Social Networks and 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]** Gould, Roger V. 1995. *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. **[ch. 1]**
- **[Group 2]** Bearman, Peter S. 1993. *Relations into Rhetorics: Local Elite Social Structure in Norfolk, England, 1540-1640*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. **[ch. 1]**
- 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.]**

Additional readings:

- DiMaggio, Paul. 1986. "Structural analysis of organizational fields: A blockmodel approach." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 8: 335-370.

Week 8, October 25: Social Movements

- 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.

Additional readings:

- Kim, Hyojoung, and Peter S. Bearman. 1997. "The structure and dynamics of movement participation." *American Sociological Review* 62(1): 70-93.
- Pfaff, Steven. 1996. Collective identity and informal groups in revolutionary mobilization: East Germany in 1989. *Social Forces* 75: 91-118.

Week 9, November 1: Public Holiday

Week 10, November 8: Civil Wars

- Staniland, Paul. 2014. *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*. Cornell University Press. [ch. 1, 5]

Week 11, November 15: Elite Networks and Policy

- Burris, Val. 2005. "Interlocking Directorates and Political Cohesion among Corporate Elites." *American Journal of Sociology* 111(1): 249-283.
- Mizruchi, Mark S. 1996. "What Do Interlocks Do? An Analysis, Critique, and Assessment of Research on Interlocking Directorates." *Annual Review of Sociology* 22: 271-98. [skim]

Week 12, November 22: Political Polarization

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]** 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.

Week 13, November 29: 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.
- https://cbail.github.io/textasdata/text-networks/rmarkdown/Text_Networks.html [R package for the analysis of semantic networks]

Week 14, December 6

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.