
Political Networks

Manuel Fischer*¹

¹Eawag – Switzerland

Abstract

Title: Political Networks

Sponsored by the ECPR (European Consortium of Political Research) standing group on Political Networks

Chairs:

Karin Ingold, University of Bern, karin.ingold@ipw.unibe.ch

Manuel Fischer, Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science & Technology -Eawag, manuel.fischer@eawag.ch

Potential discussants (tbd):

Philip Leifeld, Dimitris Christopoulos, Mark Lubell, Manuel Fischer, Karin Ingold, Mario Diani

Political network studies focus on structural and relational patterns related to different issues and elements of politics. Political processes at the individual, group, state or international level automatically involve many different (types of) actors. They all have some influence on outputs and outcomes, but the influence of their behavior and strategies is often the result of a complex process of interactions. A network perspective focuses on how individuals and organizations interact beyond formal and traditionally hierarchical political procedures. A network perspective on politics is therefore especially important. Such a perspective can include many different types of political actors (individuals, organizations and/or institutions), and network ties can consist of exchanges of resources, information, as well as of conflict, collaboration and communication that may occur both on- and offline. A network approach to politics is thus important as it allows political scientists to disentangle how political actors mobilize and exchange resources, how they coordinate actions, and how relational performance shape decision-making and outputs.

Questions involving network aspects in political science abound: How do actors in policy processes coordinate and influence policy-making within coalitions or in the role of policy

*Speaker

brokers? How do actors in networks deal with uncertainties, and what are their strategies of gathering and dispersing information? How do different types of networks between actors and natural resources contribute to the management of natural resources in an integrated way? How does the perceived network environment and interdependence between issue sectors shape actors' strategic behavior? How do networks among individuals influence group dynamics such as mobilization within social movements? What is the effect of online communication on individuals' political preferences and behavior? Some of these questions have been discussed in the literature for some time, whereas others have rarely been examined systematically. Yet, re-examining older questions is crucial, given the rapid development of new methods in the field of network analysis, which could lead to new insights and questions.

The session welcomes both theoretical work and empirical applications of network theories and social network analysis to any question related to politics. It is open for scholars in public policy analysis, international relations, political sociology, political economy, and other domains of political sciences. A similar session at the 2014 EUSN conference in Barcelona was composed of three panels, containing presentations and discussions on highly diverse, interesting and qualitatively excellent work. The session was very well attended. Depending on paper submissions, we would think of the best way to organize the session into panels.

Keywords: political networks, policy networks, public policy, social movements, political science