

The Accumulation of Influence: Case Studies of Political Capital

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ABSTRACT

As a member of Dr. Victor's Political Capital manuscript, I focused on influence as a form of political capital. I conducted a case study research on four influential members of Congress, looking at their journey through their congressional careers to see how, visually, influence develops.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Jennifer Victor's manuscript includes different forms of political capital as emerging properties of political networks. One of the forms of political capital is influence, demonstrated as high out-degree centrality in a network. I explored this form of political capital using the campaign finance network, where the nodes are members of Congress while the edges are campaign contributions. In this network, nodes with influence would be prominent donors. Further, I wanted to see the correlation between influence and authority as demonstrated by leadership positions.

METHODOLOGY

I input the campaign finance network data for the 103rd-115th Congresses into Gephi. I then used the force atlas 2 layout and expansion to determine a general structure of the network. I colored the nodes by leadership, where pink is rank-and-file and purple is a member in a leadership position. I also sized the nodes by out-degree and included node labels to identify each House member. I then looked at the largest two nodes of each category, leader and rank-and-file, in each party of the 115th Congress. Finally, I looked back through their Congressional career to see how their nodes changed in size and color.

RESEARCH QUESTION

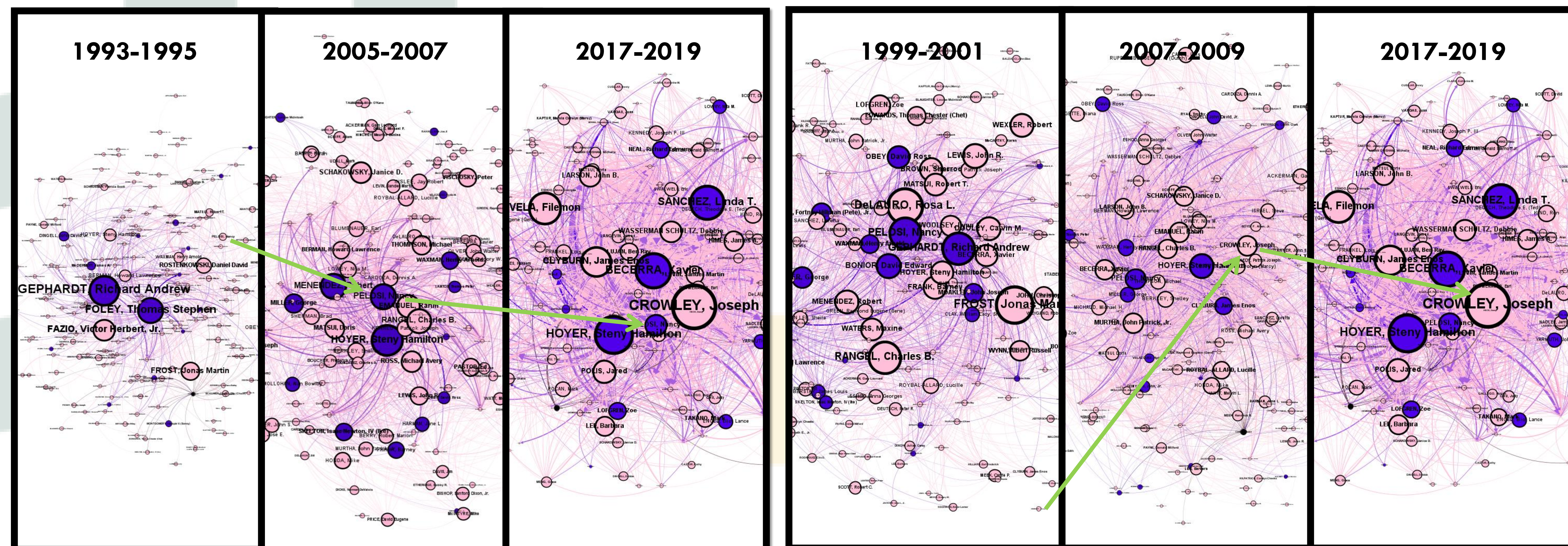
Can we observe the evolution of party leaders' influence over the course of their career by examining their campaign finance relationships?

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

I found that yes, we can observe the development of member's rise to influence by looking at their campaign contributions in the network over time. More specifically, I found that all four members' node size, or influence, over time could be explained by their leadership positions. In the case of Pelosi and McCarthy, their leadership positions became established throughout the given timeline. In the case of Crowley and McHenry, they develop leadership positions beyond the timeframe of the dataset. In all instances, there is a strong correlation between members' leadership positions and their campaign contributions. This is an important finding to better develop our understanding of this form of political capital. It is also a strong starting point for more research, such as the cause and direction of this correlation. In all, the campaign finance network and network analysis have been invaluable tools to examine influence as a form of political capital and its relationship to traditional authority.

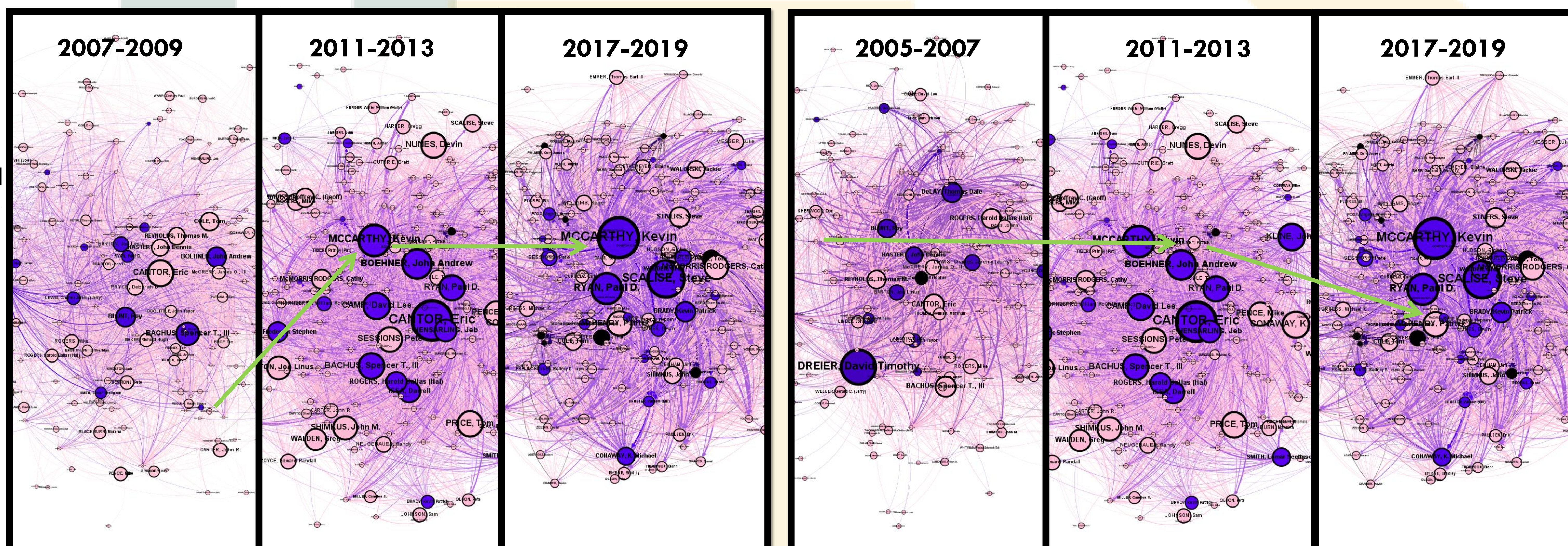
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Nancy Pelosi Through the 103rd, 109th, and 115th Congresses

Joseph Crowley Through the 106th, 110th, and 115th Congresses



Kevin McCarthy Through the 110th, 112th, and 115th Congresses

Patrick McHenry Through the 109th, 112th, and 115th Congresses