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THE TIES THAT BIND
ANCIENT POLITICS AND NETWORK ANALYSIS

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Informal Political Communication and Network Theory in the Late Roman Republic

Keywords

Abstract

This paper aims at analysing informal conversations between senators during the Late Roman Republic through the lens of network theory in order to discern strategies to look for and circulate information. Elite informal conversations (frequently defined as *sermo* by the sources) were an everyday event in politics and went beyond relationships of *amicitia* or friendship. Informal exchanges framed the way in which political deals were made, opinions were tentatively questioned, news circulated, and Roman senators looked for information, exactly as described by the Latin verb *expiscor,* which expresses the same metaphor as the modern expression "to angle (or fish) for information". I shall analyse such informal conversations through social network analysis (SNA) looking for relevant nodes, liaisons and relevant information channels, in order to understand how such informal conversations worked as an informal part of the political system.

1 Introduction*

Let us imagine being able to go behind the scenes of any parliament or senate around the world, getting top politicians to describe their informal political deals and meetings. Such an opportunity would be highly unlikely today, or indeed throughout many periods of history, since such conversations, deals and informal pacts are not (and were not) usually accessible either to the general public or to academics. The following study offers the possibility of analysing this kind of information through social network analysis. It examines the workings of everyday politics through the study of informal and interpersonal political communication and discussion networks between the elite of the Roman Republic during the first century BCE.

Conversation, a concept with no agreed definition by specialists, could be defined simply as speech that occurs between at least two people with the purpose of establishing or maintaining social ties or exchanging information. Conversations define us as humans: the Turing test, devised to prove whether or not machines could think, was based on the capacity of the machine to engage in human-like conversations without being distinguishable from a human being.[1] This study will focus exclusively on political conversations.

Scholars of interpersonal political communication (IPPC) have mostly concentrated on communication between citizens, especially the influence of such discussions on political participation and the formation of political or electoral preferences.[2] Political discussions at parties or dinners between politicians, deals, or face-to-face meetings with other politicians represented, and still represent, a fundamental part of the political process. However, the academic study of such phenomena is complicated by the secretive (and occasionally even illegal) nature of these dealings. To address these problems, the examination of previous periods may prove fruitful.

The Roman Republic presents an ideal and privileged case for this kind of analysis. The geographical setting was sufficiently small as to be manageable; at

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[1]   Introduced first by TURING (1950).
[2]   SCHMITT-Beck (2008); BOOMGARDEN (2014). On IPPC and political participation and electoral
      preferences, cf. e.g. SCHUDSON (1997); NIR (2005).

the same time, oral communications constituted the main method of obtaining information. Furthermore, the sources are especially expansive on this issue. Cicero's letters and speeches give us a valuable and particularly rich view of political dealings within the Roman elite. He frequently narrated his quest for political information, either in person or though Atticus, and detailed his attempts to use this information for political negotiation. The perspective of his correspondents, especially Caelius, develops this rare insight into Roman politics. Later historians and biographers, such as Suetonius and Plutarch, inserted repeatedly into their narratives informal meetings between Roman senators. Such a study would hardly be possible today, since it would be the equivalent of having at academic disposal the private correspondence (from emails to text messages) of a senior politician, including his private views on closed doors agreements. Thanks to Cicero, the Late Roman Republic provides an exemplary case study for analysing how conversational interactions, especially those of an informal nature, shape politics and enable it to function beyond formal and official political structures.

As social interactions, conversations can be studied through social network analysis. Discussion networks are groups formed by people with whom an individual engages politically, that is, those with whom a person enters interpersonal political communication (IPPC). IPPC takes place between at least two people who share a direct, face-to-face living environment.[3] The nature of the conversation does not need to be too specific: some scholars, for instance, differentiate between narrow political discussion and sociable conversation.[4]

Which mechanisms and political frameworks allowed discussion networks to prosper amongst Roman politicians? How could these networks be characterised?

First of all, informal exchanges were essential for obtaining information and for the circulation of news among the elite within the city of Rome. Informal conversations framed the way in which political deals were made, opinions were tentatively questioned, news was circulated, and Roman senators sought information. This necessity for contacts was met through socialising.[5] These exchanges were necessary for the successful workings of politics.

Secondly, Roman politics of the first century BCE were not formed or controlled by parties or families; political alliances were established for a specific period of time among individuals who shared an interest in a particular issue.[6]

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[3]   BOOMGARDEN (2014), p. 472.
[4]   SCHUDSON (1997); SCHEUFELE (2000).
[5]   Cf. ROSILLO-LÓPEZ (2017) on socialising between the Roman political elite.
[6]   MEIER (1980), p. 174-190; BRUNT (1988), p. 36-45.

These alliances lasted only until the issue was resolved, meaning that senators constantly had to be on the lookout for new alliances and fresh relationships; the allies of yesterday could become today's opponents. In this scenario, politics could be considered an ever-changing terrain in which information and relationships were crucial to success. It was important to be able to gather information on what other politicians intended to do, and to assess support and resistance in the Senate or in assemblies. This information could be obtained directly or through others. Senators sounded out their peers to ascertain their opinions or interests in a certain law, or their position on an important political affair. In a world of imperfect information, a senator could only obtain from other colleagues enough political knowledge to thrive through personal effort, socialisation, informal conversations, and connections.

Political knowledge was vital not only for shaping the actions of politicians, but also for helping them to avoid mistakes. In this context, informal conversations between elite members (frequently defined as *sermo* by the sources) were essential tools for political negotiation. Information was not only useful but was a commodity of high demand and high worth, which could be traded upon, speculated upon, and exchanged; it was distributed, redistributed, and analysed. Its demand was subject to highs and lows, depending on the issue. It was one of the factors that oiled the growth and maintenance of networks. The exchange of informal communication increases trust and binds people together; at the same time, it is one of the objectives of the establishment of such networks. One must take into account not only the reasons why two actors or nodes established and maintained a relationship, nor focus solely on what they were obtaining. Given the way Roman politics worked, the cost of failing to maintain such relationships, and of being cut off from important flows of information, should also be kept in mind.

This study will address two questions: 1) how could we estimate the relative importance of a node in a discussion network, with the objective of analysing the ties of a Roman senator; 2) how behaved a discussion network in a moment of crisis, and particularly the consequences of a senator being partially disconnected from a network. In this framework, Social Network Analysis allows us not only to better conceptualize the relationship between those people, but also provide a useful analytical tool to view discussion networks and information exchanges in a wide frame.

2   The Discussion Network of a Roman Senator

What were the potential connections of a Roman politician? After Sulla's reforms in 81, the *lectio senatus* kept membership of the Senate to around six hundred people (three hundred before that date, although many of them would

already be magistrates waiting to be enrolled between two censuses).[7] These numbers are similar to those of many modern democracies.[8] In theory, each senator could potentially have ties with every other senator, although, as we shall see, in practice cliques and strong and weak ties were the rule. The network of a senator was not restricted to other fellow senators: knights, younger members of the aristocracy, local elites, elite women, freedmen and slaves should be also included.[9] In any case, the Roman political elite could certainly be defined as a small world.[10]

It should be taken into account that attendance at the senate was not enforced, with some exceptions. Sources highlighted from time to time that a specific meeting was well attended, suggesting that it was clearly a sporadic occurrence.[11] Some senators, in fact, retired from politics. However, their apparent lack of involvement in political matters did not exclude them from being interesting and significant interlocutors in informal politics. Someone like Lucullus, who in theory removed himself from Rome and was secluded in his villa, could be considered a worthy interlocutor because of his past deeds. Pompey, for instance, had had terrible fights in public with Lucullus in former days, but visited him after his retirement.[12] Social capital has to be maintained actively but, as popular wisdom states, some things stay with you to the grave.

Furthermore, in informal politics, potential ties were not limited to politicians. The nature of informal politics permitted the active involvement of other groups, such as knights, friends, women, freedmen, slaves, foreigners, low-grade officials and non-elite citizens, among others.[13]

How could we calculate the degree of interaction of someone involved in politics in order to measure the density of his links and his importance in the whole network? Obviously the density of links evolved during their political careers, as this was the work of a lifetime. Becoming a magistrate and entering

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[7]   On the Senate of Sulla, cf. HANTOS (1988), p. 45-61. SANTANGELO (2007), p. 100-102 proposes an initial reform of ca. 450 senators; with twenty new ex-quaestors every year, it will soon bring the number to 600.

[8]   The numbers are not unmanageable, though. To put it into perspective, the Congress of the Deputies in Spain has 350 members, and the Senate 266; the US Congress has 535 voting members; in UK Parliament is composed of 781 Lords and 650 Members of Parliament. These numbers may vary in from election to election.

[9]   ROSILLO-LÓPEZ (2017b)

[10]   ROLLINGER (2014), p. 424-429.

[11]   On Senate frequentation, WILLEMS (1885, vol. 2), p. 165-171; BONNEFOND-COUDRY (1989), p. 357-436; RYAN (1998) 13-51; DETTENHOFER (2013) 163-165.

[12]   PLUT. *Luc*. 39,4. On Lucullus' retirement cf. KEAVENEY (1992), p. 143-163.

[13]   Cf. a detailed study in ROSILLO-LÓPEZ (2017b).

the Senate represented, of course, one of the first steps, since it allowed for the possibility of mingling with more powerful politicians during sessions or even on official senatorial occasions, allowing the creation of new ties with powerful and well-connected people, along with entrance to other cliques.

Electoral campaigns signified another important moment in the political career of a senator. At the end of a successful career, a Roman consular would have won at least four or five elections (quaestor, tribune, aedile, praetor and consul); as not everybody was elected on their first attempt, the number of electoral campaigns could be higher.[14] An electoral campaign forced a candidate to mobilise all possible ties, both strong and weak, and to create new ones. For instance, in the case of Cicero's candidacy for the consulship, his brother Quintus recommended him to rally all his possible connections: friends, friends of friends, clients, big names in Roman towns, former clients from his time in the courts of justice (especially if they controlled votes, cf. Cornelius, for instance); in sum, everybody who might owe him something and everybody who could further their careers through him. As the *Commentariolum petitionis* highlighted, elections provided the unique possibility of engaging in *amicitia* with anybody (*adiungere ad amicitiam*, in this case, understood in the sense of political friendship), that is, to create new ties.[15] As elections for magistracies were carried out each year, the flurry of mobilisation of connections, be it for oneself, friends, family members or acquaintances, was not exceptional, but rather a recurrent annual feature.

Is it possible to measure centrality in Roman informal politics? What was the degree of centrality of a Roman senator, that is, how many people could he reach directly? The obvious case study would be Cicero; however, the fact that the available evidence was produced or received by him distorts his possible centrality. In order to test it, we need another candidate: Marcus Caelius Rufus. A scion of an equestrian Italian family, he entered politics in his twenties in the late 60s, although his first attested magistracy is as tribune of the plebs in 52, followed by the curule aedileship in 50.[16] Cicero gave high praise to Caelius' acute political sense, calling him *politikôteron*.[17] Between 51 and 50, he corresponded with Cicero, who had reluctantly taken charge of the province of

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[14]   PINA POLO 2012.

[15]   *Comm. Pet.* 25. Cf. TATUM 2007.

[16]   His quaestorship is a matter of debate, since it is not explicitly attested (MÜNZER (1897), col. 1266-1271. On Caelius' political life see BOISSIER (1877), p. 167-219; CLAUSS (1990); DETTENHO-FER (1992), p. 79-99; CORDIER (1994).

[17]   CIC. *Fam.* 2,8. See ZARECKI (2009) for Cicero's definition of *politikos* as someone ready to take action to ensure the continuation of the Republic; ZARECKI explains that it was applied to Caelius as someone who was a "*politikos*-in-waiting".

Cilicia as proconsul.[18] His letters provide us with an interesting glimpse into the number of connections and the centrality of a well-connected politician in mid-career (a rare situation, since usually such information is mostly available for people in more established positions, with the exception of Cicero, of course).

His ties were diverse and wide-ranging. Sometimes he named his discussants; in other cases, he just referred to hearsay (*dicitur*), and did not identify them explicitly. He depended greatly on rumours and informal conversations, as would any ambitious man wanting to promote his career.[19] For a single event (e.g. the debate over Caesar's return after his campaigns in Gaul and the upcoming civil war) he mentioned at least four different opinions.[20]

What is the degree of Caelius, that is, how many people could he reach directly?
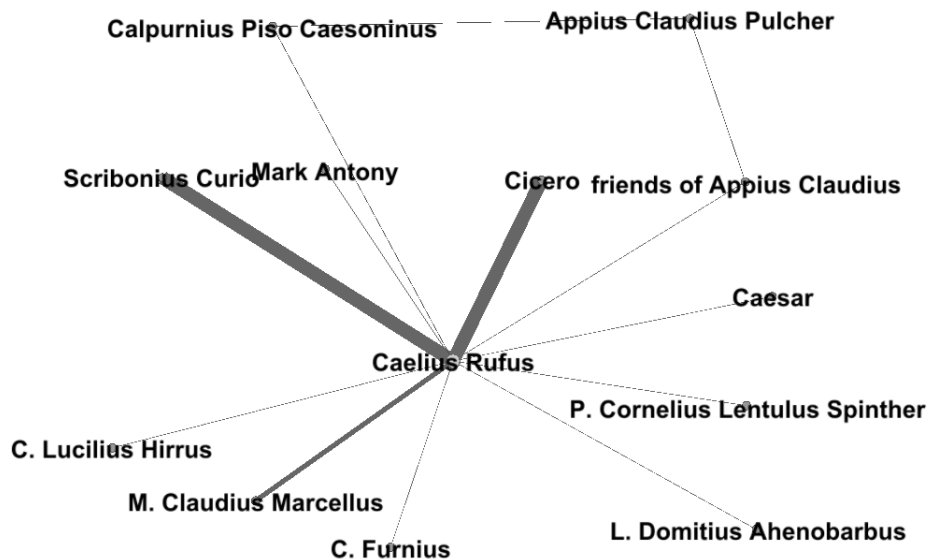

Fig. 1. Discussion network of M. Caelius Rufus[21]

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[18]   Cael. in Cic. *Fam*. 8.

[19]   Rosillo-López 2017, on Caelius and rumours.

[20]   Cael. in Cic. *Fam* 8,10,2.

[21]   All the graphs in this chapter were done with *Gephi*. The graph represents the politicians who talked with Caelius Rufus (as mentioned by him in his letters). A thicker edge means several talks.

He had informal, direct access to the highest positions in Rome: informing Cicero about the problem of the consul Marcellus and the Gallic provinces, Caelius knew that the debate would be put off until June, "…because he himself has told me so" (*"ut mihi ipse dixit"*), meaning the consul.[22] Together with Curio, he also talked informally with the two consuls of the year 50, L. Aemilius Lepidus Paullus and Cn. Claudius Marcellus, to negotiate the recall of Cicero and the possibility of a *supplicatio* minor triumph being awarded to him.[23] In 50, at least, Caelius did not need any broker or intermediary to access the top of government.

Among his strong ties and preferential attachments, we should highlight Scribonius Curio, another promising young man in Roman politics, a close friend of his.[24] He was also well-acquainted with P. Cornelius Dolabella, Cicero's son-in-law, a young man who had not yet started his political career.[25] Caelius also collaborated politically with Gaius Furnius, a fellow magistrate in 50.[26]

His contacts with other senators were not limited to friends, fellow magistrates, or rank and file senators. Caelius also worked with people of much higher political status, such as Publius Cornelius Lentulus Spinther, consul 57 and proconsul of Cilicia 56-54.[27] Appius Claudius Pulcher was his enemy, but Caelius could consult with Appius' friends about his designs.[28] He was aware of the conversations of the cliques that criticised Caesar, and knew what L. Domitius Ahenobarbus, consul 54, was circulating rumours against the former in private talks.[29] At the same time, Caelius enjoyed a direct connection with Caesar, who was still proconsul in Gaul, and a strong link with Cicero, another prestigious consular. Caelius' direct and strong ties were therefore not limited to people at the same stage in their political careers.

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[22]   CAEL. in CIC. *Fam*. 8,1,2.

[23]   *Fam*. 8,11,1. On Cicero's *supplicatio*, cf. WISTRAND (1979); BEARD (2007), p. 187-199; ROLLINGER (2017).

[24]   *Fam*. 9,9,3; *Fam*. 8,11,1-2: Curio worked with Caelius to get the *supplicatio* for Cicero, leaving aside his own scheme (especially after Balbus talked him out of opposing it). Caelius claimed in *Fam*. 8,17,1 that it was his friendship (*amicitia*) with Curio, together with his own enmity with Appius Claudius Pulcher, which landed him in Caesar's camp in the civil war.

[25]   CIC. *Fam*. 2,15,2. Dolabella would be tribune in 47 (after a transfer to the plebs, since he was patrician) and suffect consul in 44. Dolabella and Tullia, Cicero's daughter, were married between 50-46, when they divorced; cf. TREGGIARI (2007). Although Dolabella is absent from the letters in 51-50, it is probably only by chance, as their relationship was close.

[26]   *Fam*. 8,11,2. In 50, Furnius was tribune of the plebs while Caelius was aedile.

[27]   *Fam*. 8,11,2.

[28]   *Fam*. 8,12,2.

[29]   *Fam*. 8,1,4.

In the small-world phenomenon, such strong ties are complemented with weak ties. The importance of the latter should not be underestimated, since they are long-distance links, connecting separate local clusters. [30] In the case of Caelius, they allowed him to reach directly fellow magistrates with whom he did not usually have contact. An example of his weak ties occurred during his feud with Appius Claudius Pulcher: Caelius talked with L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, censor in 50 and a colleague of Appius, about this issue. Caelius stated that they were not really acquainted (*homini alienissimo mihi)* and that he was not much disposed towards him because of Caelius' friendship with Cicero.[31] Nevertheless, he did not need an intermediary in order to talk to him. Such weak ties allowed the passing of information to other clusters with which Caelius did not have strong ties.

At lower levels, Caelius had access to different groups of people who loitered around the Forum. These were of unknown composition, but probably did not constitute members of the elite: he termed them *columnarii* (8.9.5), *susurratores* (8.1.4), and *subrostrani* (8.1.4).[32] Shackleton Bailey translated them as "pavement-gossips".[33] All these groups fulfilled the same objectives: the collecting and spreading of information and opinions.[34]

The nature of the evidence does not allow us to establish the closeness of Caelius Rufus, that is, to assess how fast he could reach any given individual in the network. Caelius did not mention people whom he could not reach or whom he had to access through intermediaries. In sum, taking into account the information available, Caelius had a well-knitted network of strong ties and some weak ties that he could access directly, which is not that unusual for mid-career politicians. What is striking is how diverse his network is for a middle-

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[30]   On weak ties, cf. the classic study is GRANOVETTER (1973). See also GRANOVETTER (1983).

[31]   *Fam*. 8,12,2.

[32]   Debate on their composition: PINA POLO (2010), p. 79 and PINA POLO (1996), p. 130-131 proposes a low social background, linked with VANDERBROECK (1987)'s "intermediate leaders". ROSILLO-LÓPEZ 2017, chap. 6 points out that the composition of these groups shifted throughout the day, since they were made up of people who strolled casually in the Forum and later went back to their business.

[33]   SHACKLETON BAILEY (1977), p. 383.

[34]   PINA POLO (2010), p. 78 suggests that these words were probably common political catchphrases of the Republic, rather than neologisms invented by Caelius. CAVARZERE (1983), p. 208 proposes that they were colloquial terms, since Cicero seemed to prefer terms such as *contriti ad Regiam* (CIC. *Caec*. 14, although the text is not certain; some manuscripts prefer *cogniti*). The fact that Caelius was a politician on the rise must be also taken into account: he probably found that being in tune with the comments of such groups was important in order to survive and thrive in the political arena (cf. ROSILLO-LÓPEZ [2017, chap. 6]).

ranking politician, ranging from the top of the government to small casual groups on the street.

Was Caelius sufficiently relevant in the discussion networks in Republican Rome to act as a bridge? Cicero charged him, among others, with the task of avoiding his prorogation as proconsul of Cilicia and obtaining a *supplicatio*. As we have seen, in order to achieve this request, Caelius talked with a wide range of people. However, Cicero could not reach them directly, not because he had no relationship with them, but because he was thousands of kilometres away in his province, in present-day south-central Turkey, even though he claimed to have written to every senator.[35] Cicero was superior to Caelius in age, experience and had enjoyed a long political career, being a respected consular. Had Cicero been present in Rome, he would probably have used other intermediaries, such as his friend Atticus, a very-well connected *eques* (cf. fig.2).[36] There is probably just one exception: the case of C. Lucilius Hirrus. During the negotiation of Cicero's *supplicatio*, Caelius learned that the senator C. Lucilius Hirrus intended to talk the measure out. In 52 Cicero and Hirrus had been competitors in the elections for the augurship, which ended with the defeat of Hirrus, and caused a strained relationship between them in the following years.[37] Nevertheless, Caelius "seized him" (*prendimus*) and conversed with him about the matter. Caelius convinced him, and Hirrus refrained from opposing the measure.[38] Even in Rome, Cicero would probably have needed a broker to talk to him; in fact, although he had written him a letter, he also charged his friend Atticus to soften Hirrus' disposition towards Cicero's request.[39] In any case, Caelius affirmed that he had had the conclusive chat with Hirrus that convinced the latter not to oppose the measure that would favour Cicero. A politician in mid-career could serve as a bridge to an older and usually better-connected colleague only in the case of absence from Rome, or in situations of enmity.

How did Caelius Rufus stand in comparison with other mid-career politicians? Evidence fails us for a full review of this[40]; the letters of Caelius provide a mass of information that is not available for other people. However, the impression is that Caelius' range of contacts was very impressive for his stage in the career, although maybe not as impressive as he claimed. We could compare it with Cicero's own network in 63, the year in which he became consul,

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[35]   Cic. *Att.* 7.1.8. Wistrand (1979), p. 41 thinks it unfeasible; Rollinger (2017) considers it possible.

[36]   Perlwitz (1992), p. 97-120 on the ties of Atticus.

[37]   Cic. *Fam.* 2,15,1; 8,3,1.

[38]   *Fam.* 8,11,2.

[39]   Cic. *Att.* 7,1,7.

[40]   Cic. *Att.* 2,1.

even though it is several steps ahead of Caelius Rufus. In that year, he needed desperately Atticus' help to reach people during his campaign.

How dense were Caelius' discussion networks? In comparison with the discussion network of Atticus, Caelius appears to be less well connected.
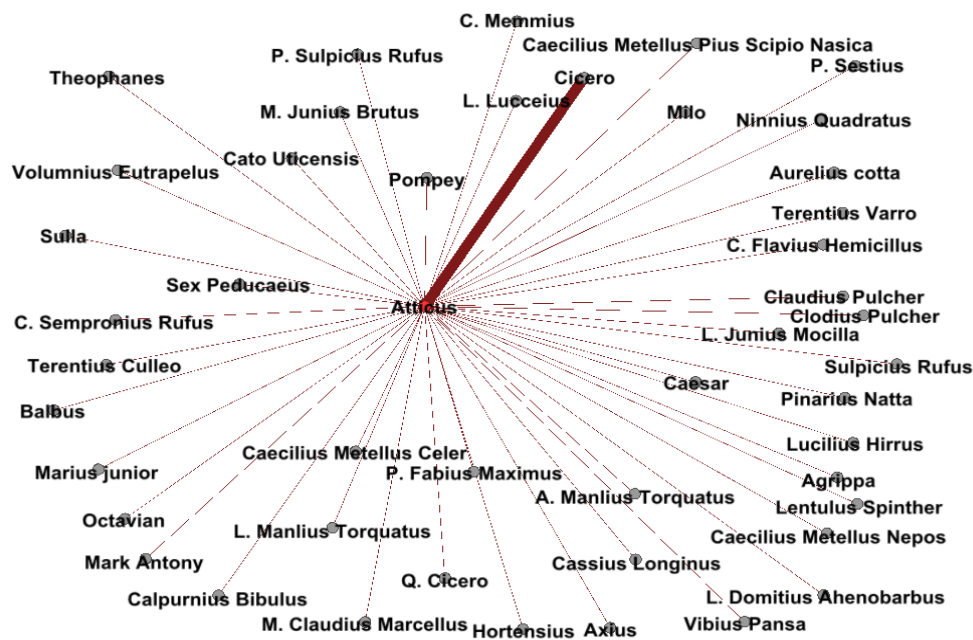

Fig. 2. Discussion network of Titus Pomponius Atticus (data from PERLWITZ [1992], p. 97-120).[41]

It is not just a question of the number of sources available to us. However, time is a variable that must be taken into account. The discussion network of Caelius provides us a snapshot of his connections between May 51 and the end of 50, that is, over a year and a half, and only through a small batch of correspondence. By contrast, Atticus had already begun making ties in the late 80s, with correspondents such as Sulla and Marius junior, and this ended only with his death in 32; his graph therefore describes almost fifty years of connections. Atticus was without doubt a well-connected man in Rome, one

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[41]   The graph represents every conversation mentioned in the *Letters* in which Atticus was involved. The connection with Cicero is thicker because of their frequent talks.

who could talk to people from both sides of the political spectrum, from Clodius to Pompey, from Caesar to Cato, from Mark Antony to Octavian. His presence in many cliques was priceless for Cicero. Furthermore, his association with Cicero, who benefited greatly from such ties, means that we are especially well informed about Atticus's life and deeds.

We could compare the two by showing Atticus' discussion network between May 51 to the end of 50, the same period as that of Caelius:
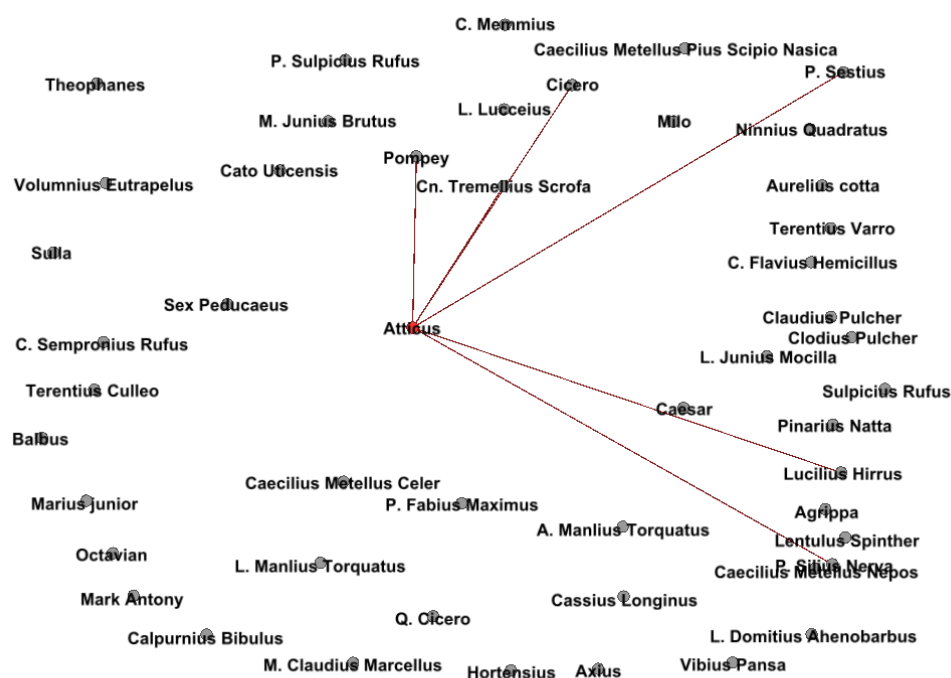

Fig. 3. Atticus' discussion network May 51 to late 50

In this period, Atticus is recorded to have spoken in person with Pompey, P. Sestius, Cicero, Lucilius Hirrus, Silius Nerva and Tremellius Scrofa. Side by side and in a narrow timeframe, the discussion network of Caelius does not pale in comparison with that of Atticus (with the caveat that Caelius' own letters have survived, and Atticus' references come second-hand from Cicero).

Cicero praised Caelius' flair for politics. When they corresponded frequently during Cicero's stay outside Rome, the orator did not ask Caelius for information about what happened, since he had other sources who kept him up to date. From Caelius Cicero wanted analysis and interpretation. He wanted *futura*, an idea of what was going to happen. In fact, Cicero begged him

constantly for political information and analysis.[42] Caelius had access to many elements within the elite, but also outside it. His sources of information stemmed from different levels of public opinion, which increased the value of his reflections. Thus, for instance, in August 50, Caelius analysed the political situation and suggested accurately to Cicero that that a civil war was looming, and indeed it started five months later.[43] Furthermore, he was not committed exclusively to one side, politically speaking: he began his career under the patronage of Crassus and, later, operated under that of Cicero, which brought him close to the *optimates*.[44] While he was tribune of the plebs in 52, he approached Caesar, due to his friendship with Curio and his enmity with Appius Claudius.[45] Nevertheless, he supported Milo during the latter's trial for the murder of Clodius and tried to have him acquitted.[46] When the war started, he joined Caesar; later on, he abandoned his side and engaged, along with Milo, in a battle that would cost him his own life. The number and variety of cliques to which he belonged was rather impressive, since he was not constricted to a fixed or closed political group.

The relative richness of the information about Caelius Rufus (and the dearth of similar data for other senators) necessitates qualitative rather than quantitative conclusions about his centrality and his position in the informal networks of Roman politics. In any case, the fact that he was able to entertain informal conversation with high magistrates, fellow magistrates, other senators (more conservatives or pro-Caesar) and even with lower class citizens made him a well-connected node with a high degree of centrality for a politician in mid-career.

3   Discussion networks in times of crisis

Why choose the months of January-April 49 as a relevant period for the study of discussion networks and interpersonal political communication? The conflict had developed slowly over the previous months, with long debates in the Senate over the future of Caesar. His term of office as proconsul in Gaul having expired, Caesar was forbidden to stand for election *in absentia* and was deprived of his army. The general feared that he would be brought to trial as soon as he stepped down from his magistracy. The situation worsened during the first days of January 49; on 7 January the senate stripped Caesar of his command and declared him a public enemy. On 11 January Caesar crossed the Rubicon, the

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[42]   Cic. *Fam*. 2,11,3.
[43]   Cael. in Cic. *Fam*. 8,14.
[44]   Gruen (1974), p. 455.
[45]   Syme (1939), p. 41; Gruen (1974), p. 187.
[46]   Gruen (1974), p. 341 with more details.

small river that marked the boundary between Caesar's province and Italy, thus breaking the law. A civil war had begun.

At this point, senators had to choose the side they would support.[47] Many different factors weighed upon such a decision, and these varied from person to person: family ties, political loyalties, friendships, political expectations, financial reasons, affinities and enmities… The aftermath of the previous civil war (83-82) remained vividly in the minds of many: Sulla's proscription lists had turned family members against one another and had struck terror into the minds of the political elite. It was not confined to the past: the sons of those proscribed were banned from entering public life. This prohibition, still in force at the time under discussion, was not abolished until Caesar's victory.[48] Many of those who had to choose sides in 49 had been alive during the previous civil war, just thirty-three years earlier, or they had heard first-hand testimonies.[49] Furthermore, many of them feared that Caesar would become a new Sulla.[50]

This context explains why there was such a flurry of informal meetings in the months following the start of the war. The circumstances were contrary: Italy was at war, levies were taking place, the armies of Caesar were advancing south and Pompey's forces were retreating, finally crossing to Greece with his allies in order to prepare a maritime blockade of the Italian peninsula. Regardless of these adverse circumstances, undecided senators travelled to meet other colleagues and talk to them in person, and envoys from Pompey and Caesar were sent to woo these people.

In such troubled times, information was a hot commodity. People wanted to take counsel from others, they needed to ask tentatively what they were going to do, they required information about the decisions of other senators, and, in those uncertain times, ties needed to be activated. Such matters were too delicate for a letter and had to be conducted in person. Scholars consider face-to-face interaction as the most effective means of communication when one of the speakers wants to persuade the other, or when conflicts must be resolved. Negotiations require high social presence.[51] Servius Sulpicius Rufus, for instance, travelled almost two hundred and fifty kilometres despite his ill health, in order to talk with Cicero and C. Claudius Marcellus minor. It was not a sudden decision, but one that was carefully considered, and he mobilised three other persons (his son, his wife and Trebatius) to make that decision. Between

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[47]   List of neutrals in SHACKLETON BAILEY (1969), p. 260-261 (he added: "In some cases "neutral-ity" or support for Caesar might be a matter of interpretation").
[48]   D.C. 41,18,2.
[49]   D.C. 41,8,5-6.
[50]   E.g. D.C. 41,16,2-3.
[51]   KING / XIA (1997), p. 880.

January and April 49 forty-four face-to-face meetings are attested throughout Italy (cf. fig. 4). Such discussion networks, especially in the troubled and uncertain times of the beginning of the civil war, had to be activated in person.
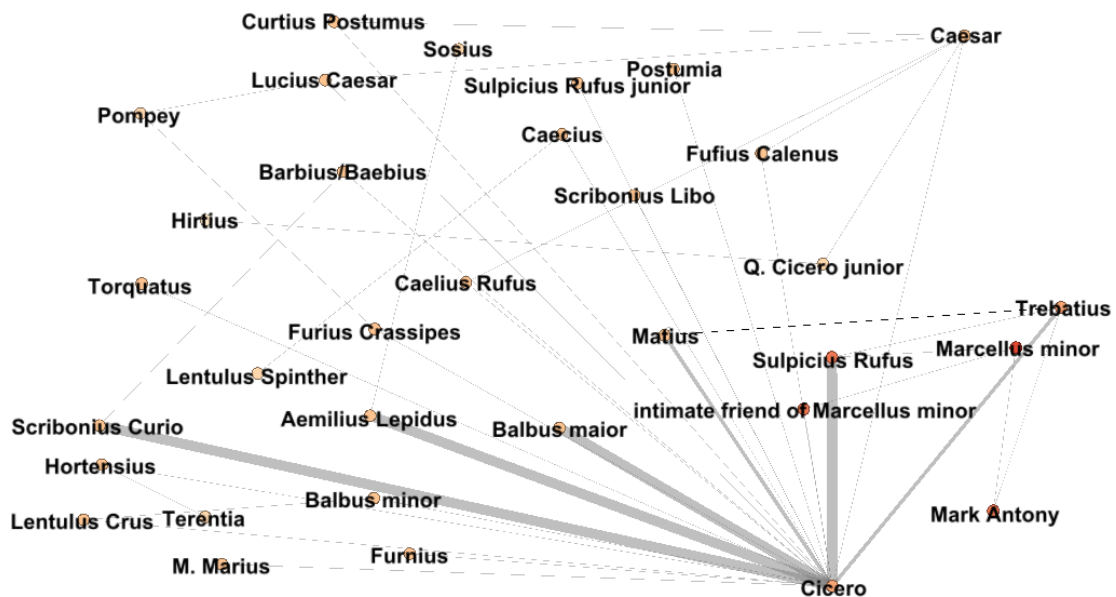

Fig. 4. Discussion networks between January and May 49 in Italy[52]

For the sake of this study and to test the limits of this network, I will focus not only on these face-to-face meetings, but on their absence, that is, the dyads and triads of people who did not meet intentionally, despite being geographically close. Deliberate lack of communication was linked not only to political choices, but also to status. The following case illustrates the point (fig. 5.).

This clique involves three high-ranking consulars (Cicero, Marcellus minor, Sulpicius Rufus), who had not yet chosen a side, and who met to ponder their decisions.[53] At the same time, Mark Antony, the most powerful person in Italy after Caesar, was also present at that time in the region. Despite being ill, Servius Sulpicius Rufus travelled for several days from Rome to Cumae in order to talk with Cicero and Claudius Marcellus minor. The latter also conversed with Mark Antony. We do not know whether Servius Sulpicius Rufus and Mark Antony

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met, since Cicero and other sources are silent on the matter. It is possible or even likely, since both of them were in the area of Cumae-Liternum in the same period.[54] However, note the absence of direct ties between Cicero and Marcellus minor and between Cicero and Mark Antony, despite being separated by mere 10 kilometres.[55] What does this pattern mean, and what were the implications and consequences?
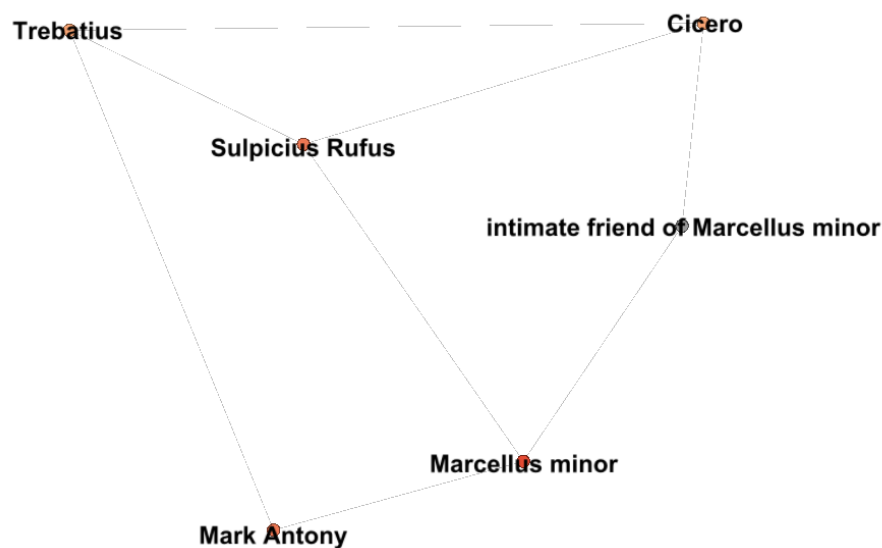

Fig. 5. Meetings in early May 49 in the area of Cumae-Liternum.

We could represent the cliques in the following triads in order to better show their transitivity, which is a property of networks: if A is related to B, and B is related to C, it would be expected that A and C would also be related. In the case in question, the triadic configurations differ:

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54   Caesar had tried to woo him for his own side, writing to him personally at the beginning of the war (Cɪᴄ. *Att*. 7,17,3).

55   Note the geographical distances. Sulpicius Rufus-Cicero: 250 kilometres (Sulpicius Rufus in ill-health, travelled from Rome). Marcellus minor-Cicero: 10 kilometres. Mark Antony-Cicero: 10 kilometres.
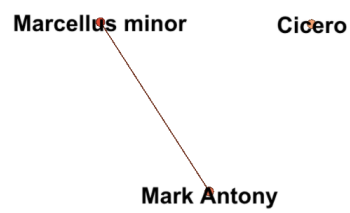
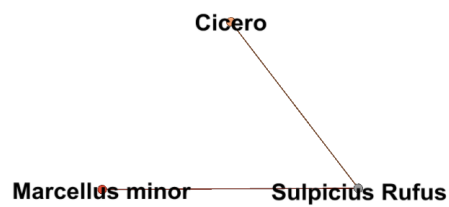**Fig. 6.** Triad 102 (one mutual dyad and two unrelated nodes)

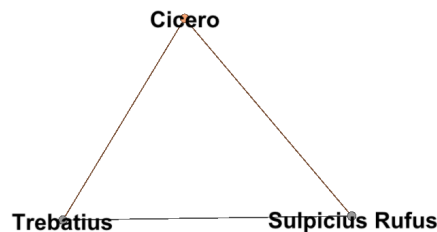**Fig. 7.** Triad 201 (two mutual dyads and one unrelated node)

Fig. 8. Triad 300 (all are connected).

C. Claudius Marcellus minor had been consul in 50 and turned out to be a strong opponent of Caesar.[56] In fact, he could be identified as one of the hawks who opposed any negotiated settlement. However, Marcellus minor did not fight against Caesar. At the beginning of the war, he did not follow his brother and cousin (consuls 51 and 49 respectively), who went with Pompey; instead he retired to his house in Liternum, which is situated less than 10 kilometres away from Cumae, where Cicero sojourned from 29 March to 19 May 49. Despite their proximity, Cicero and Marcellus did not meet. The orator was aware of what his close neighbour was doing because he had talked to one of Marcellus' closest friends.[57] In fact, all Cicero's comments about Marcellus exuded venom. He doubted the sincerity of his hesitations about which side to join: "we have C. Marcellus here, who is entertaining the same thoughts as myself, either sincerely, or making a good pretence of doing so". He described Marcellus as timid ("I never knew anyone more timid except Gaius Marcellus, who is sorry that he was ever consul") and called him mean.[58]

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[56]   Interestingly, Cicero pointed out that he had not seen Marcellus, although he knew of his thoughts from one of his close friends (CIC. *Att*. 10,12,3). The distance between Liternum and Cumae is roughly ten kilometres. They did not meet, and their relationship was not friendly.

[57]   CIC. *Att*. 10,12,3. The name of the friend is unknown.

[58]   CIC. *Att*. 10,15.

Cicero's malicious comments are linked to the fact that he was excluded from major discussion networks taking place in Italy in early May. Such networks took place near his home and, furthermore, involved Marcellus and other consulars. Cicero had news that Antony was arriving in the area of Cumae, where he was staying. Mark Antony was an important and powerful figure: he was Caesar's second in command, appointed *pro praetore*, and was left in charge of Italy during the campaign in Hispania.[59] From 3 to 10 May, Antony remained there without calling on Cicero, who agonised for eight long days, waiting expectantly for his visit.[60] The orator even attempted to justify the absence and save face before Atticus, speculating in a letter that Antony might not even deign to visit, since the latter had already written him a letter.[61] Finally, once he had left the area, Antony sent Cicero a message stating that a sense of shame (*pudor*) had deterred him from visiting, arguing that he thought the orator was angry with him.[62] Antony had not been a recluse during his short stay in Cumae: he conversed at least with Trebatius and Claudius Marcellus minor.[63] Trebatius belonged to his side in the war[64], but Marcellus minor had been one of the fiercest opponents of Caesar, and could be considered at that moment a neutral, at best.

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[59] Cic. *Att*. 10,8a; 8,10; 9,3; Plut. *Ant*. 6,4-7; Ap. *BC*. 2,41.

[60] Cic. *Att*. 10,10,3. Antony announced to Cicero at the beginning of May that he would send him his *familiarissimus* Calpurnius, in order to convince the orator not to join the Pompeians (Cic. *Att*. 10,8a,2). The envoy was probably L. Calpurnius Piso, legate of Antony in Macedonia in 43 (CIC. *Phil*. 10,13; 12,1). Calpurnius Bestia was in exile, the Bibuli already with the Pompeians. Ferriès (2007), p. 71 assumes that Cicero received him, despite the lack of any further mention in the sources. The presence of Antony himself in the area probably rendered such a meeting with a lower-ranking aristocrat unnecessary, and Cicero was convinced that he would meet Caesar's second in command.

[61] Cic. *Att*. 10,11,4. *Att*. 10,11,1 mentioned that Trebatius had indeed talked to Antony, and in turn informed Cicero about the conversation.

[62] Cic. *Att*. 10,15,3. On the emotional connotations of *pudor*, including the fear and remorse of transgressing one's obligations, as in Antony's case, cf. Barton (1999).

[63] Cic. *Att*. 10,11,1 (with Trebatius); 10,15 (with Claudius Marcellus).

[64] As with the case of Sulpicius Rufus, Trebatius Testa's position during the conflict is in some senses ambiguous. Cicero named him a *bonus civis*, and Trebatius expressed his despair at the situation after Pompey's passage to Greece (Cic. *Att*. 9,9,4). Nevertheless, at Caesar's request, at the beginning of the war, he asked Cicero to remain in Italy (*Att*. 7,17,3). His link with Caesar seemed strong in 44, when he was present in the problematic moment of the temple of Venus Genetrix, when the victor failed to rise before a deputy of senators. Furthermore, he was confident enough in their close relationship to reprimand Caesar for this action on the spot, who frowned angrily at him (Suet. *DI*. 78). Cf. Bauman (1985), p. 123-136 speaks of the myth, disproved, of a "Pompeian Trebatius"; Benferhat (2005), p. 274-281 classifies him as a "césarien discret", together with Matius. Trebatius also served as mediator between Matius and Cicero in 44 (Cic. *Fam*. 11,27).

In those troubled times, a letter was not a substitute, as attested by Cicero's reaction to the news that he would not receive a visit from Mark Antony. The excuse could not cover the breach of etiquette and the political neglect of Cicero, and the orator's resentment was strong. Cicero considered that Marcellus could be faking his political hesitations and called him a mean person who regretted having been elected consul. Furthermore, he blamed Claudius Marcellus minor for poisoning Mark Antony against him: Cicero claimed that Marcellus had encouraged Antony to prevent Cicero's departure in order, in Cicero's interpretation, to make his own stay in Italy more acceptable. [65]

In any case, Cicero found himself in a disadvantaged position, although he claimed already to have made the decision to join Pompey.[66] This point does not contradict the fact that, in times of war, information and access to the most important actors could mean not only political but also physical survival. Cicero found himself unable to establish contact or to be linked to the most important cliques of the discussion networks taking place. His direct ties with Servius Sulpicius Rufus or with Trebatius could not compensate for the absence of such links with Marcellus minor or, especially, with Mark Antony. He had felt and feared such isolation already in February 49, when he wondered why Caesar had not written to him directly to request his support. He presumed that the general, in contrast, had contacted Calpurnius Piso (Caesar's father-in-law) and Servius Sulpicius Rufus in person. Furthermore, the choice of Trebatius as the bridge for such a contact had puzzled Cicero, who had expected someone closer and more important, such as Caelius or Dolabella.[67] In fact, such disconnections from the most important hubs were a slap in the face for Cicero's self-image, and called into question his status as a consular. Neurologists have proved that rejection from a group creates activity in the brain in the same areas as physical pain.[68] Cicero's reaction reveals his disconnection, and conversational ostracism points in the same direction.

4   Conclusions

This paper has delved into social network analysis as a heuristic device and practical tool for examining interpersonal political communication (IPPC) in the first century BCE Rome. This study is clearly limited: the evidence for Roman politics of that time is relatively scarce, but even more meagre are mentions of something as fleeting as informal contacts between senators, conducted preferably in personal meetings, and through letters only when there was no

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65   Cic. *Att*. 10,15.
66   Cic. *Att*. 10,15.
67   Cic. *Att*. 7,17,3-4.
68   Einsenberger (2012).

other option. However, such meetings and conversations were fundamental for everyday politics, since they enabled the establishment of agreements and alliances and the circulation of information. The analysis of Cicero's network of informal relations yields a picture of him as a very central and important node. The case of Caelius allows us to examine a less Cicero-centric network analysis of informal contacts: Caelius appears as a young senator in mid-career with a well-honed political acumen, which allowed him to complement the density of his network with a variety of ties to many cliques, not only at the core, but also on the periphery of Roman politics, even at quite low levels.

The study of IPPC through the lens of social network analysis leads to the identification of the discussion networks of Roman senators. The study of the absence of connections also yields fruitful results. It shows the isolation of Cicero from the main high-rank discussion cliques taking place in Italy in May 49, a decisive moment for the choice of sides. Cicero's fears of being disconnected, which he voiced at the start of the war, became a reality some months later. Furthermore, although not present, Cicero had written reports concerning the heavy criticism towards him that the *boni*, the political circle to which Cicero belonged, exerted through rumours and gossip as a means of maintaining group control and social discipline.[69] Although he crossed over to Pompey's side, Cicero returned to Italy in October 48, disillusioned with the Pompeian cause and its leaders. Having decided to beg for pardon, Cicero was ready to offer just one simple but revealing explanation to the victor for having chosen a side: *non potuisse, cum cupissem, sermones hominum sustinere*.[70] Conversations in his absence, and his lack of participation in them, constituted Cicero's experience at the beginning of the war. If "interpersonal communication is a means to reassure one's own identity by exposing oneself to affirming information",[71] the use of social network analysis has shown that its absence may entail political isolation and loss of status. Survival in Rome meant being as widely and as strongly linked as possible.

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[69]   CIC. *Att*. 8,16; 9,1,3; 9,2b; *Fam*. 2,16,3; PLUT. *Caes*. 33,5. Cf. ROSILLO-LÓPEZ (2007); ROSILLO-LÓPEZ (2017).

[70]   CIC. Att. 11,12,1: "I could not put up with people's talk, although I wanted to".

[71]   SCHMITT-BECK (2008), p. 346.

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