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McCarrick, the Kingmaker?
A Social Network Analysis of Episcopal Promotion in the Roman Catholic Church

Giovanni Sadewo, Stephen Bullivant, and Stephen Cranney

The former Cardinal McCarrick was often dubbed as the "Kingmaker" for his power to influence episcopal promotion in the United States and even in the Vatican. However, most of the information to support this argument is often lacking in context, making the claim easy to downplay. The purpose of this study is to look at one of the networks of Catholic bishops in the United States and to provide empirical evidence of McCarrick as the "Kingmaker" using social network analysis. The result of this study supports the claim that McCarrick was indeed the "Kingmaker" in his appointments of his former subordinates.

With the long-awaited release of the 'Report on the Holy See's Institutional Knowledge and Decision-Making Related to Former Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick' (Secretariat of State 2020), how McCarrick ascended to, and remained for so long at, the top of the hierarchy in the United States has become clearer. There is much to be grateful for in the Report. It provides a huge amount of background detail on key 'moments' in McCarrick's ecclesiastical career—vastly more than has hitherto been released in relation to similar cases. Further, deeper, and more-ranging experiments in such transparency are to be encouraged. Nevertheless, the secret nature of the underlying documents (tantalizingly and frustratingly for scholars, these are precisely cited in the Report, but are mostly unavailable for consultation), limited scope of the Report's remit, no clear information about the drafting, vetting, and approval process (Berry 2020), and the 'in house' nature of the whole procedure, mean that many legitimate questions remain. The Report has, for example, a tendency for assigning (or implying) blame to church actors who are either now dead, or else comfortably away from the corridors of power and influence (Altieri 2020). Approaching the Report with what one might term a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' (Gadamer 1985; Kennedy 2014), then, can hardly be accused of being unduly cynical. In this paper, we empirically test a significant, longstanding, and *prima facie* plausible claim about McCarrick, which the Report appears to be at significant pains to rebut and/or downplay: McCarrick's purported influence over episcopal promotions. To do this, we apply certain theoretical insights and methodological tools from social network

analysis to a large dataset collected as part of a wider project exploring the role of social networks within ecclesial organizational culture and governance. This has, we argue, important implications for both the present and future of the Catholic Church in the US (and beyond).

BACKGROUND

McCarrick has been described as the "the *kingmaker* for appointments in the Curia and the United States" (Viganó 2018): an assessment widely shared by commentators on both the US Church and the Vatican, including—importantly—*prior* to the 2018 revelations that precipitated his demise. In 2014, for example, veteran Vaticanista Sandro Magister attributed Blase Cupich's surprise appointment to Chicago to Pope Francis's 'own personal consultation, parallel to that of the [Congregation of Bishops, which—Magister claims—did not include Cupich in its own discussions]. The appointment of Cupich is thought to have been recommended to the Pope with particular enthusiasm by [Cardinal Maradiaga] and above all by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick' (Magister 2014). *Whispers in the Loggia* reported that Joseph Tobin's translation from Indianapolis to Newark, a mere month after his being named a cardinal, was due to the fact that its "lead architect . . . McCarrick—who Francis is said to revere as 'a hero' of his—made a direct appeal over recent weeks for Tobin to be named to Newark" (Palmo 2016). McCarrick praised "this very special and great good man" in his own public statement at the news of his own former see being filled (Archdiocese of Newark 2016). Commenting on the elevation of Cupich and Tobin to the College of Cardinals, *Crux*'s John Allen observed "what one might call the 'McCarrick caucus' among the American cardinals has been swelled significantly" (Allen 2016). Viganò's testimony supports these judgements, while also ascribing the 2015 announcement of Robert McElroy as Bishop of San Diego to McCarrick's influence (Viganó 2018). Specifics aside, at least the *perception* of McCarrick's 'sway' over Church appointments was widely held, including in the secular media (e.g., Conconi 2004).

That McCarrick actively lobbied on behalf of his preferred candidates is, in light of what else we know of him, indeed plausible. He certainly took an interest in the future church 'careers' of priests who worked closely with him in his own dioceses. Commenting on his former personal secretaries, for example, he wrote in 2003:

> I am very proud of the "alumni," among them are a vicar general, diocesan chancellors, rectors of seminaries, and two directors of development, as well as a number of episcopal vicars, consultors and distinguished canon lawyers, scripture scholars, and theologians. (McCarrick 2011: 266)

Furthermore, the Report itself provides evidence of McCarrick's keenness to have an 'insider' at the Holy See's Permanent Observer Mission to the UN, to spy on the contents of diplomatic communications relating to US episcopal appointments (Secretariat of State 2020: 90). Also in the Report, there was a confession from a seminarian where he mentioned that since he agreed to share a bed with McCarrick, he was sent to Rome for study (Secretariat of State 2020: 188). Naturally, we are in no way implying here that all McCarrick 'alumni' who went onto to high office (or any others on behalf of whom he may have lobbied) were being so rewarded. Our point is simply that McCarrick was not above making use of people in positions to do him favors, nor in offering inducements, of all kinds, in order to further his own ends.

However, the widespread image of McCarrick as a "kingmaker" is one that the official Report is at pains to undermine. It does this in several ways, both explicit and implicit. For example, while it is admitted that 'On a few occasions, and as was the case during previous papacies, McCarrick's letters provided Pope Francis with suggestions regarding episcopal appointments'—i.e., McCarrick *did* actively lobby for his favoured candidates—it adds: 'However, there is no evidence that McCarrick played a significant role with respect to episcopal appointments in the United States or elsewhere during this period' (Secretariat of State 2020: 415). The accompanying footnote specifically denies his involvement in the appointments of Cupich or Tobin:

> [W]hile McCarrick's correspondence with Pope Francis contained suggestions as to whom he thought would make a good candidate for the Chicago Archbishopric, the bishop chosen by Francis, Bishop Blase Cupich, was never mentioned by McCarrick. Similarly, despite public speculation that McCarrick recommended Archbishop Joseph Tobin for the Newark Archbishopric, McCarrick never raised the possibility of Tobin for that position. . . . While it is not unusual for cardinals to offer their views as to the qualities of potential candidates for episcopal offices, the examination did not reveal evidence that McCarrick affected decision-making regarding any specific appointment between 2013 and 2018. (Ibid.: 415 n. 1302; see also)

Elsewhere, the Report goes out of its way to get 'on the record' that various prominent US bishops, widely regarded as being McCarrick protégés, were in no way close to him (e.g., ibid.: 289-90 n. 935; 365 n. 1116; 429 n. 1348).

Leaving aside the question of McCarrick's (lack of) influence in particular instances, if the "kingmaker" hypothesis is true, then we would expect to find a significant number of his former subordinates—and es-

pecially those 'alumni' who held more senior/trusted roles under him—in important posts. The nature of the episcopal appointment process means that a candidate's own bishop, and/or any former bishops, play a significant role in the deliberation process, both in the likelihood of one's name being put forward in the first place, and in the subsequent vetting process (O'Callaghan 2007; Reese 1984). There is also, of course, the potential for exerting influence outside of the ordinary process. (A clear example of this is contained in the Report, with McCarrick's emissaries to Pope St John Paul II on his *own* behalf in the run-up to his being named to Washington.) As such, if a given bishop's recommendations *were* accorded particular weight, through whatever means, one would expect his own former subordinates to be over-represented among the episcopacy, and/or in particularly powerful roles within it.

That there *are* former McCarrick subordinates in key roles within the Church is not in dispute. Most obvious is Cardinal Kevin Farrell, who served as his auxiliary bishop and vicar general for several years in Washington. He subsequently became Bishop of Dallas, before being named by Pope Francis as Prefect of the newly created Dicastery for the Laity, the Family, and Life in 2016. In 2019, he was appointed Camerlengo of the Church, and in 2020 made the president of the Commission for Confidential Matters, in addition to being a member of four other Curial bodies (Sala Stampa 2020). One can say that among McCarrick's former subordinates, Farrell was the one who managed to climb highest up the "ecclesiastical ladder."

However, the rise of Kevin Farrell does not seem to be extraordinary compared to some other American cardinals. His promotion from auxiliary bishop to bishop and then to cardinal did not happen in lightning speed. When we compare him to the ascent of Dolan of New York, they both were quite comparable. Dolan had served under Rigali, arguably one of the most influential prelates for appointing US bishops, since he sat on the Congregation for Bishops. Both Dolan and Farrell were consecrated bishops in 2001. It took Dolan eleven years, compared to Farrell's fifteen years, from episcopal consecration to being made cardinal. Others have received their red hats much faster. Raymond Burke, for example, was elevated to the cardinalate only five years after becoming a bishop. Joseph Tobin took six years. If indeed McCarrick had such a pull in determining bishops' and curial appointment, why did he not push for his men to be given the red hat sooner? Or at least, promote Farrell to one of the more prestigious sees in the US more quickly? Furthermore, Farrell was promoted from auxiliary bishop to bishop when Donald Wuerl was his superior, not McCarrick. And if the number of subordinates made cardinal

is any indicator of the "kingmaker," then Wuerl should be a contender, as two of his former subordinates are now cardinals: Daniel DiNardo and the aforementioned Farrell. Looking at all the evidence, then, there seems to be a reasonable doubt about McCarrick's status as "the kingmaker" (see Weigel 2020a).

To the best of our knowledge, there has not been any systematic study to support this perception. Most of the claim about McCarrick's "kingmaker" status came from journalists' reporting, which typically focuses on case-to-case instances, rather than conducting a systematic enquiry. Accordingly, we are going to investigate a "serving" network—i.e., which bishops have served under which other bishops—for members of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). This way, we are able to see which US bishops have had the most other bishops serving under them. A bishop's position *within* the network could also be revealing. Are they in position where they would have the potential to influence other bishops, or in a marginal position, where they are unlikely to be able to exert much influence? By looking at the whole USCCB network, rather than simply a McCarrick-centric "ego-network" (see Perry, Pescosolido, and Borgatti 2018), we are be able compare him to other bishops in terms of the number and position of their subordinates.

These are not, we note, purely academic questions. Consider the fact that a given bishop's protégés are disproportionately likely to reflect either aspects of himself (e.g., character, theological orientation), and/or their own practice of 'being a bishop' to have been influenced at least partly by his example (cf. 'having worked in a bishop's office for a while, a priest really gains a very profound idea of the workings of the diocese'; McCarrick 2011: 266). These are properties one would expect to see, *mutatis mutandis*, in any network in which personal preferment and recommendation play an important role in getting ahead (Bourdieu 1984; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). We are not, moreover, the only scholars to suggest that Catholic episcopal networks may be especially susceptible to these kinds of dynamics (see Pogorelc 2020). As such, there would be good reasons to be concerned if a corrupt bishop *were* to have served as such a "kingmaker." Hence, of course, our interest in McCarrick.

METHODOLOGY

We constructed a "serving" network from 420 living bishops who are members of the USCCB. This network is a directed network and was constructed by linking bishops with other bishops that they had served previously, in a direct Ordinary-subordinate relationship. These links were coded into three types, based on the highest of the three "ranks" they had

served as: i) priests, ii) a select number of specially trusted positions (e.g., chancellor, secretary, vicar general, etc.), or iii) auxiliary (or co-adjutor) bishop. The information for the serving network was collated diocesan websites, Wikipedia, and Catholic-Hierarchy.org (Cheney 2018). We also collected data on age, length of service as a bishop, episcopal rank, status (active/retired), the diocese where they were ordained as a priest, the diocese where they were first consecrated as a bishop, and the latest diocese where they were posted. The data is current as of 31st August 2020.

To analyse the data, we employed a method called social network analysis. All our analyses were conducted using UCINET (Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 2002). In the first step, we measured the centrality of each bishop in the network. The concept of centrality refers to the position of a node or an actor in the network (Borgatti, Everett, and Johnson 2013). Nodes in a central position tend to be regarded as having more prestige, influence, power, autonomy, and so on. Studies show that people in a central position tend to reap certain benefits such as having higher personal accomplishment (Shapiro, Zhang, and Warm 2015), better organizational citizenship behavior that leads to better well-being (Tsang, Chen, Wang, and Tai 2012), and so forth. People in the central positions of the network might also determine the life and death of the network. In a criminal network, for example, it is sufficient to take out the key players to pacify the entire network (Sparrow 1991).

There are several measures of centrality: degree, betweenness, closeness, and Bonacich centrality (Borgatti et al. 2013). In this paper, we use degree centrality. Degree centrality refers to the number of ties that a node has (Robins 2015). The higher the number of ties, the higher the degree of centrality of the node. Nodes with a high degree of centrality would be highly visible and are considered important in the network (Borgatti et al. 2013). Most of the information that runs through the network would pass by these nodes, giving a clearer picture of what is happening in the network. Decision-makers, leaders, and social influencers tend to be in such a position. Based on this premise, bishops who have a high degree of centrality in a network would have more power or influence to control the network and they will have more knowledge about the network. The high number of people that they have direct contact with would mean that they have the potential to diffuse information to the network quickly.

In a directed network, the direction of the tie carries a meaning. For our network, when a node (bishop) sends a tie to another bishop, it would mean that the sender of the tie had served under the receiver of the tie (i.e., "X → Y" = "X served under Y"). Based on the direction of the tie, the degree centrality measure was divided into indegree centrality (calculated by the number of ties received) and outdegree centrality (calculated by the

number of tie sent; Borgatti et al. 2013). Hence, bishops who had a high indegree centrality were bishops with many bishops who had served as their subordinates, while those with high outdegree centrality have served under many bishops. Our focus here would be the use of indegree centrality, as having a high degree of centrality could mean that the bishops would have a greater influence on the network.

On the second step, we utilized core-periphery analysis (Borgatti and Everett 2000). In this analysis, the nodes of the network were divided into two classes: the core (where the nodes were connected in some maximal sense) and the periphery (where the nodes were connected more loosely to the cohesive subgraph). Nodes in the core position have more opportunity to control the flow of information or resources than those in the periphery, giving them advantages over the network (Richardson 2009). This is the position in which leaders are usually found. Nodes in the core position also tend to share the same values or worldviews and distance themselves from those who hold different values (Cattani, Ferriani, and Allison 2014). Nodes who do not share the values of the core will usually remain on the periphery. For our case, bishops in the core position would be bishops who had many bishops as their former or current subordinates or bishops who had served multiple bishops who were high in indegree. In short, these were the bishops who would be quite influential in the network. Those with higher indegree would have more opportunity to "mold" more bishops in the network, while those who had served multiple such bishops would be known by those influential bishops.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The average age of the bishops is $M = 71.27$ years, $SD = 11.07$ and the average length of time of being bishops is $M = 17.83$ years, $SD = 12.83$, as per 31 August 2020. Out of 420 bishops in this study, 264 bishops were still active (62.1 percent). Table 1 shows the breakdown of all active bishops.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistic on Active Bishops

Rank	Number	Percentage (from a total of 420)
Cardinal	7	1.7%
Archbishop	30	7.1%
Bishop	149	35.6%
Auxiliary Bishop	76	18.1%
Coadjutor Bishop	2	0.5%

Looking at the entirety of the network, the serving network had a density of .003 which indicates that the network has 0.3 percent ties of all

possible ties. Due to the nature of the episcopacy, the network did not have any reciprocated ties: that is, no instances where a bishop served another bishop and in return, the latter served the former. We then calculated the indegree of the bishops. The top 10 bishops with the highest indegree are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Bishops with the Highest Indegree for Serving Network

Name	Number of Indegree
Rigali	22
Maida	17
McCarrick	17
Dolan	16
Gómez	14
Wuerl	14
Chaput	13
Cupich	12
Mahony	11
DiMarzio	11

From Table 2, we can see that it was Rigali, and not McCarrick, who had more bishops who had served under him. McCarrick came second, tied with Maida. If we were only to look based on the number of bishops that had served them, then Rigali would be the "kingmaker," not McCarrick. We can also see that one of McCarrick's subordinates, DiMarzio, made it through the top ten list. This could serve as evidence that McCarrick managed to put one of his subordinates in a position where he in turn had lots of bishops as his subordinates. However, if we compared this to Rigali, one of Rigali's bishops, Dolan, made it to the list, and he had a better position than DiMarzio. So, it *seems* that Rigali is the real "kingmaker" for the USCCB.

The next step of the analysis is the core-periphery analysis. Table 3 provides the list of bishops who sit in the core of the network. The names in bold are the names of McCarrick's subordinates.

Looking at the list, we can see that McCarrick is also part of the core section of the network. Given the number of bishops who had served under him, this is not surprising. But, we can also find Rigali and Maida. However, what is strikingly different here is that we can find the names of thirteen bishops who used to serve McCarrick. This means that more than 75 percent of McCarrick's former subordinates are in a highly influential position, as they either had a relatively high number of other bishops that had served under them (or, in the case of auxiliaries, currently are doing

Table 3: Core Bishops in the Serving Network

Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
Aquila	Cronin	González Nieves	Maida	Reilly
Baldacchino	Cruz	Gracida	Malloy	Rigali
Banks	Cunningham	Gregory	Mansell	Rodríguez-Novelo
Barbarito	Cupich	Harrington	Marconi	Saporito
Barres	Dewane	Hebda	McCarrick	Sartain
Battersby	DiMarzio	Hermann	McIntyre	Schnurr
Betancourt	DiNardo	Higgins	Morneau	Sheltz
Broglio	Dolan	J. Quinn	Muhm	Soens
Bruskewitz	Dorsonville-Rodríguez	J. Tobin	Murphy	Studerus
Burke	E. Clark	Jackels	Myers	Vásquez
Burns	Estévez	LaValley	O'Brien	Vigneron
Cahill	Farrell	Listecki	Olmsted	Weakland
Cantú	Favalora	Lori	O'Malley	Wenski
Chaput	Fiorenza	Loverde	Pérez	Wuerl
Checchio	Flesey	Lucia	Perry	Zubik
Coffey	Flores	M. Brennan	Pilla	
Conley	Gelineau	M. Fisher	R. Brennan	
Coyle	Gómez	Mahony	R. Campbell	

so), or they had served multiple influential bishops, or even both. This number is quite striking if we compare it to other influential bishops. Rigali, for example, has only five bishops in the core position. Maida, who had the same number of bishops as McCarrick, has only six bishops in the core position. Dolan, who was the third most influential bishop in term of subordinates, has only two.

DISCUSSION

The *Collins Dictionary* defines "kingmaker" as "a person or group who has control over which people are chosen for positions of authority" (Kingmaker, n.d.). Kingmakers are usually never king themselves since they usually lack some basis for their own coronation (Regazzi 2015). Although some people might argue about the latter on McCarrick, we believe this description fits McCarrick quite well.

If we look at McCarrick's ecclesiastical career, then, at least compared to other members of the "ecclesiastical elite," he was arguably fairly "average." He was appointed an auxiliary bishop at the age of 47, made bishop of his own diocese at 51, and a cardinal at 70. Rigali, by compari-

son, was ordained a bishop at 50, and made a cardinal at 68. Maida, who had the same number of bishops that had served under him as McCarrick, was ordained bishop at 54 and became a cardinal at 64. Wuerl, McCarrick's successor in Washington, was appointed an auxiliary bishop at 45, a diocesan bishop at 47 and a cardinal at the age of 70. So, in terms of the timeline of how McCarrick's career progressed, he was fairly typical.

McCarrick also never had the opportunity to go to Rome for his formation—long regarded as a marker of priestly promise—and never served in the Curia. If one is looking for a kingpin among US bishops, McCarrick would not be top of the list. And yet, he managed to accumulate a great deal of power, as the appointment of so many of his former subordinates to influential positions within the USCCB (and/or Rome) clearly demonstrates. Of thirteen of his former subordinates in the core network, one is a cardinal and head of a curial dicastery, two are archbishops, three are diocesan bishops, and seven are auxiliaries. Most of those bishops had served under McCarrick as priests, except for Marconi and Lori, who were already auxiliaries when McCarrick took over the archdioceses of Newark and Washington, respectively.

Again, it is important to stress that a connection to McCarrick does not itself imply complicity in, or knowledge of, any of his crimes. Serial predators are, as we know from multiple examples, adept at covering their tracks, and "playing" others for their own ends. McCarrick was an expert at this, manipulating even a canonized saint (Weigel 2020b).
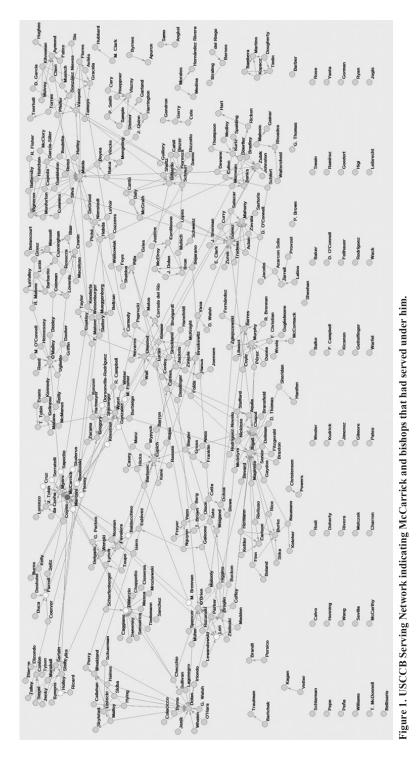
CONCLUSION: CONTRIBUTION AND LIMITATIONS

This study has provided systematic evidence to the claim that McCarrick was indeed a "kingmaker" within the USCCB. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that has made such an attempt. This study has also demonstrated how social network analysis can be a powerful tool in exploring the dynamics of individuals, without losing sight of how they fit within a larger picture and contexts. We strongly believe that this tool, in combination with other methods and theories from the social sciences, has much to offer future studies of church organization and governance (see also Pogorelc 2020).

Naturally, there are limits to this study. Most notably, we have here explored only one type of network. Bishops can, however, be meaningfully connected to each other in all sorts of other ways. Future research could, for example, look at "consecrator" networks, on the reasonable assumption that the consecrators of a new bishop are likely to be of particular personal/career significance to them (perhaps especially with regard to the co-consecrators, since there is more scope here for 'honoring' a particular

patron, or hoped-for one). According to media reports in August 2006, for example, McCarrick had been principal consecrator of twelve bishops by then, and 'was happy as a clam to see his episcopal line passed on' by one of them, DiMarzio, consecrating three "grandsons"—McCarrick's own phrase—for him (Palmo 2006). Relatedly, it would be interesting to investigate episcopal coats or arms, since these can be used to "nod" to one's mentors (e.g., Diocese of Richmond 2015). Another promising possibility, though very difficult in practice, would be to construct a friendship network. Our serving network does not, for example, include several bishops—including some prominent in the "core"—whom we have good reason to think are, or at least were, good friends of McCarrick (although this is not now something that many of them will be keen to broadcast).

That said, what we have been calling a "serving" network is nevertheless of pre-eminent significance in this context. This is due both to the *sui generis* nature of the Ordinary-subordinate relationship, and the important weight accorded to one's current and/or former Ordinaries' views in the Church's bishop-making/moving process. As such, we contend that this is the single most important network for the kind of analysis we have undertaken here. The fact that it is possible to collect all the relevant data, not just for McCarrick's former subordinates, but for the entire 420-strong network of USCCB members, is also a significant bonus, as our ability to make comparisons with other possible "kingmakers" has demonstrated. This took a great deal of work in itself, but was at least doable. Attempting to construct a similarly comprehensive friendship network for all living bishops would, with the best will in the world, be doomed to failure.

As mentioned in the introduction, this study forms part of an ongoing programme of research, applying proven social-scientific approaches to data-collection and analysis to several matters of urgent ecclesiological concern. We naturally welcome contact from other SCSS members interested in this and related areas.

Figure 1. USCCB Serving Network indicating McCarrick and bishops that had served under him.

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