

The Network of Foreign Direct Investment Flows: Theory and Empirical Analysis

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Abstract

We study the structure of the international network of foreign direct investment (FDI) flows. The political economy of FDI literature has established several theoretical claims and empirical regularities regarding exogenous political and economic determinants of FDI inflows. These include security alliances, preferential trade agreements, migration networks, and colonial history. However, existing studies—based on monadic and to a lesser degree, dyadic regression models—overlook the complex dependencies that are likely to characterize the network. Recent developments in methodology for studying international relations show that the regression framework is typically inadequate for quantitatively modeling dyadic relational data, such as FDI flows. In this paper, we integrate hypotheses regarding exogenous determinants and novel hypotheses regarding structural dependencies into a comprehensive exponential random graph model (ERGM) for weighted networks. Our findings reveal that the FDI flow network exhibits a number of complex dependencies, such as reciprocity, that have been omitted from previous empirical models of FDI flows.

1 Introduction

Research examining foreign direct investment (FDI) and its relationship with economic and political determinants is expansive. Much of this work is conducted using the gravity model, which was originally developed to predict trade flows. This framework models FDI flows using dyadic data and the product of partner GDPs as mass and some variant of distance as an independent variable. Our work highlights a key weakness of these models that rely on standard panel regression models. There has been a growing body of literature that brings into question the way we estimate models for dyadic data. The primary challenge is that dyadic data is an edge-list and therefore represents a network. Ignoring this unmodeled network structure violates assumptions within a generalized linear model, particularly independence, potentially leading to biased estimates. While there is a growing body of work that has addressed the interdependence problem in dyadic data, especially for trade, FDI has been largely ignored. We address this gap in the literature through the use of network modeling to test previous theories alongside of estimating dependence terms.

[John or Boliang, paragraph on what scholars have asked or know about FDI]

2 Independence Assumptions and the study of FDI

Paragraph on the focus of quantitative models of FDI, emphasizing that scholars typically assume that flows arise independently [Boliang].

Historically, statistical models used in international relations have involved the implicit assumption that countries and dyads are independent of each other (Diehl and Wright, 2016; Ward and Hoff, 2007). This assumption is now widely viewed as dubious (see, e.g., Ward and Hoff, 2007; Chu-Shore, 2010; Cranmer and Desmarais, 2016; Dorff and Ward, 2013; Lee and Bai, 2013; Howell, 2013; Kinne, 2016). The negative consequences of erroneously assuming independence are two-fold. First, the model is misspecified, which leads to biased estimates and hypothesis tests for covariates included in the model. Second, researchers arrive at

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a limited theoretical scope in which they only consider the relationship between the dependent variable and covariates, and do not consider the influences that relationships and countries have on each other. The methodological toolkit available to scholars of international relations has advanced well beyond conventional regression approaches, and now offers at least three prominent options for modeling interdependence in relational data—stochastic actor oriented models (e.g., [Camber Warren, 2010](#); [Kinne, 2016, 2013, 2014](#); [Warren, 2016](#)), exponential random graph models (e.g., [Cranmer, Desmarais and Menninga, 2012](#); [Cranmer, Desmarais and Kirkland, 2012](#); [Raeymaeckers and Kenis, 2016](#)), and latent space models (e.g., [Ward, Siverson and Cao, 2007](#); [Ward, Ahlquist and Rozenas, 2013](#); [Metternich et al., 2013](#)). As such, it is quite methodologically feasible to move beyond questionable independence assumptions in the study of FDI.

3 Dependence Hypotheses in FDI Flows

We would expect reciprocity because...[\[Boliang\]](#)

We would expect transitivity/clustering because...[\[Boliang\]](#)

4 Data and Research Design

4.1 The Count ERGM for Modeling FDI Networks

To model the FDI network, we must use a statistical modeling approach that is capable of representing the dependencies underlying the ties. The literature offers a number of options. These include the latent space family of models, such as those that have been used to model trade networks in political science ([Ward and Hoff, 2007](#); [Ward, Ahlquist and Rozenas, 2013](#)); the generalized exponential random graph model (GERGM), which can be used to model complex network features in networks with continuous-valued edges ([Desmarais and Cranmer, 2012](#); [Wilson et al., 2017](#)); and the ERGM for count-valued edges ([Krivitsky, 2012](#)). We select the count-valued ERGM for two reasons. First, if the researcher’s objective is to test hypotheses regarding dependent network structure, ERGM family models can accomplish this more precisely than can latent space models ([Cranmer et al., 2016](#); [Cranmer and Desmarais, 2016](#); [Desmarais and Cranmer, 2017](#)). Second, the count ERGM offers a modeling advantage over the GERGM for data such as FDI flows, which are zero for the majority of dyads. That is, the count ERGM is capable of modeling zero inflation in the network. This paper presents, as far as we are aware, the first application in political science of the count ERGM proposed by [Krivitsky \(2012\)](#).

Like other forms of the ERGM, the count ERGM is a statistical model that operates on one or more network adjacency matrices. To specify the count ERGM, the researcher selects two types of network statistics—those that relate tie values to observed covariates (i.e., covariate effects), and those that relate the ties to each other via high order network structure (i.e., network effects). If an ERGM is specified without network effects, it reduces to a dyadic regression model in which ties are assumed to be independent and identically distributed [Cranmer and Desmarais \(2011\)](#). Under [Krivitsky’s \(2012\)](#) count ERGM, the probability of the observed $n \times n$ network adjacency matrix \mathbf{y} is

$$\Pr_{\theta;h;g}(\mathbf{Y} = \mathbf{y}) = \frac{h(\mathbf{y})\exp(\boldsymbol{\theta} \cdot \mathbf{g}(\mathbf{y}))}{\kappa_{h,g}(\boldsymbol{\theta})},$$

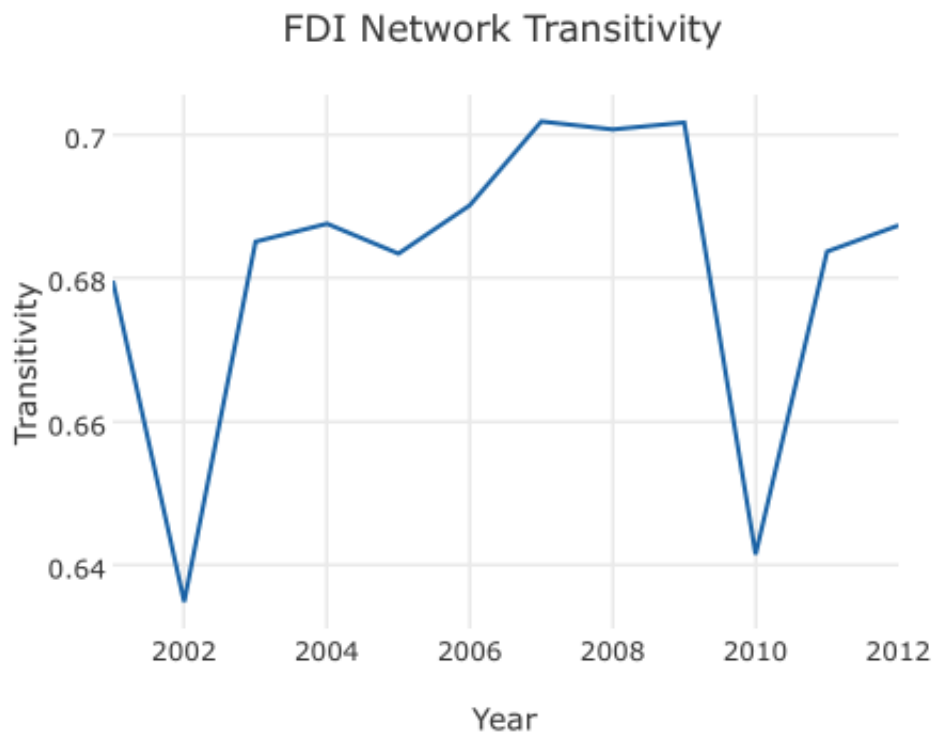
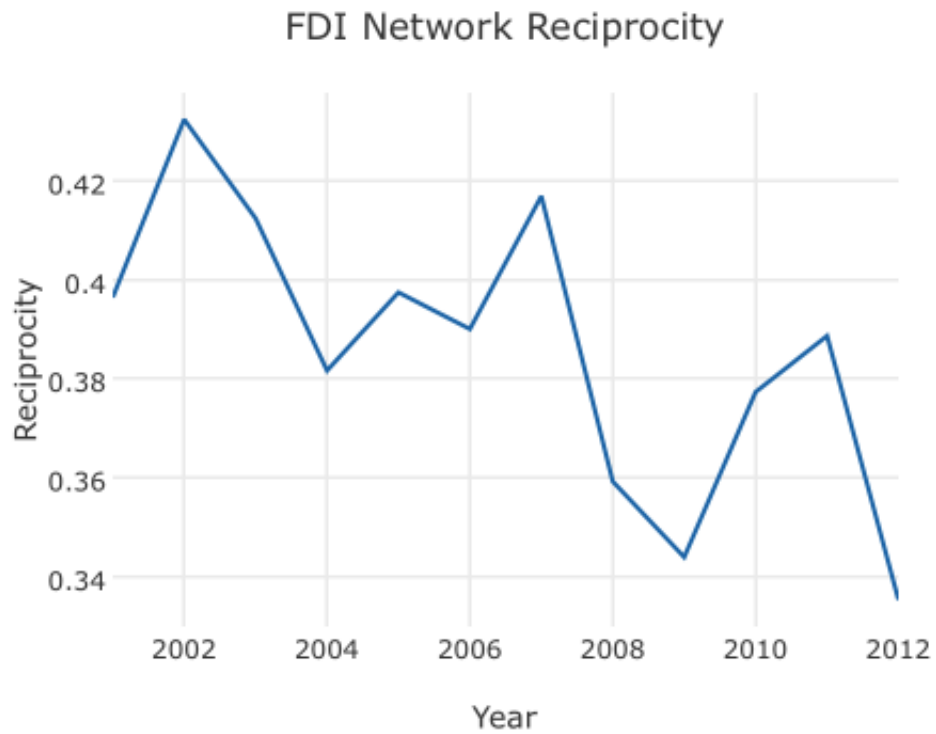
where $\mathbf{g}(\mathbf{y})$ is the vector of network statistics used to specify the model, $\boldsymbol{\theta}$ is the vector of parameters that describes how those statistic values relate to the probability of observing the network, $h(\mathbf{y})$ is a reference function defined on the support of \mathbf{y} and selected to affect the shape of the baseline distribution of dyadic data (e.g., Poisson reference measure), and $\kappa_{h,g}(\boldsymbol{\theta})$ is the normalizing constant that assures that the probabilities over all possible networks sums to one.

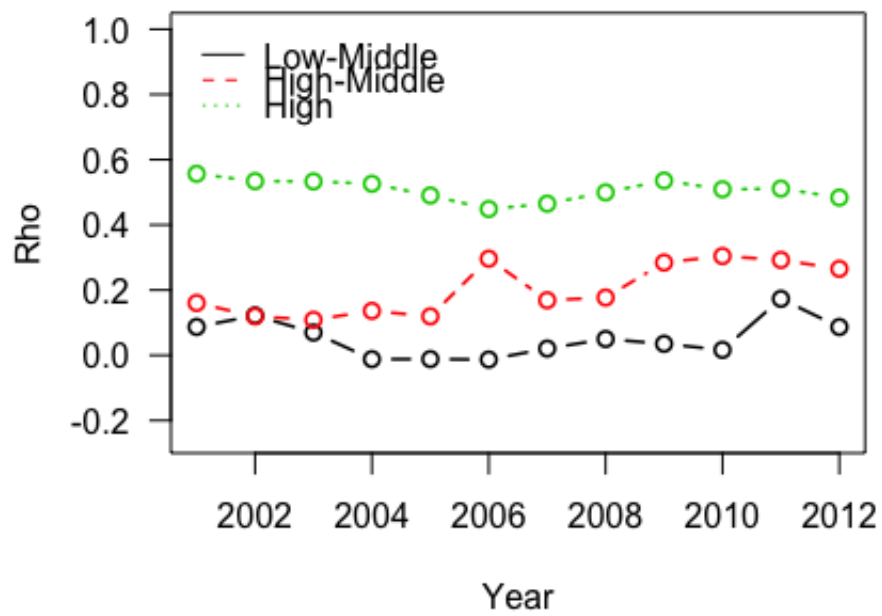
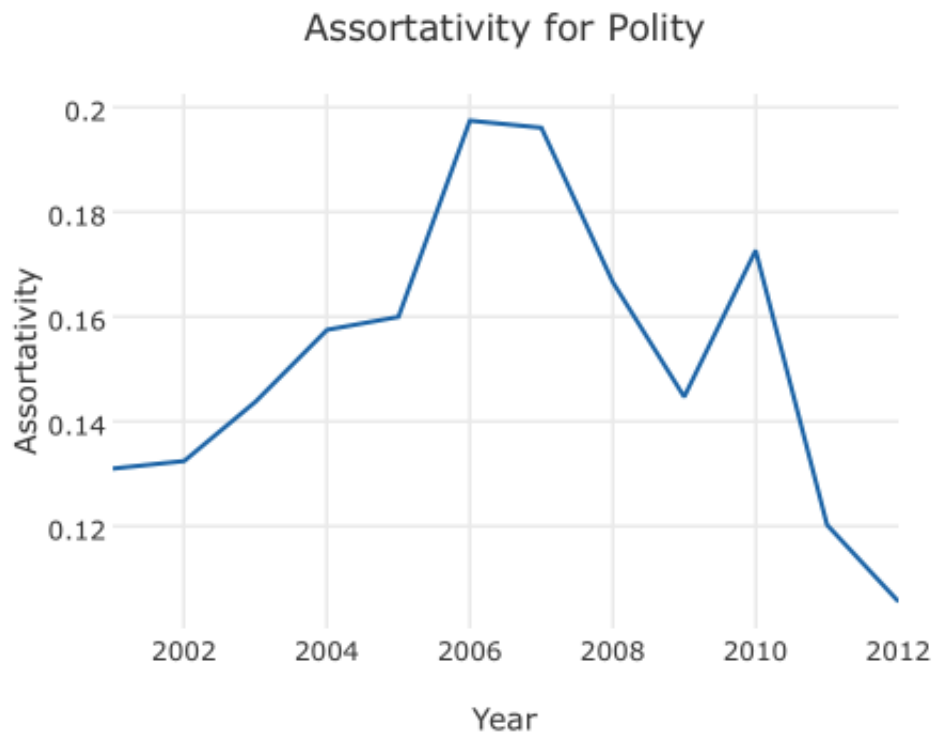
4.2 FDI inflows

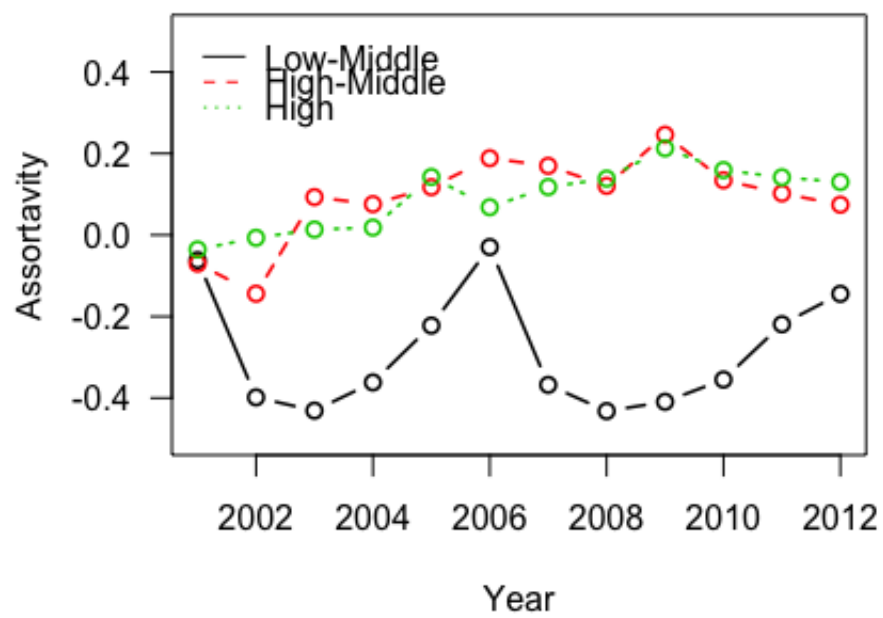
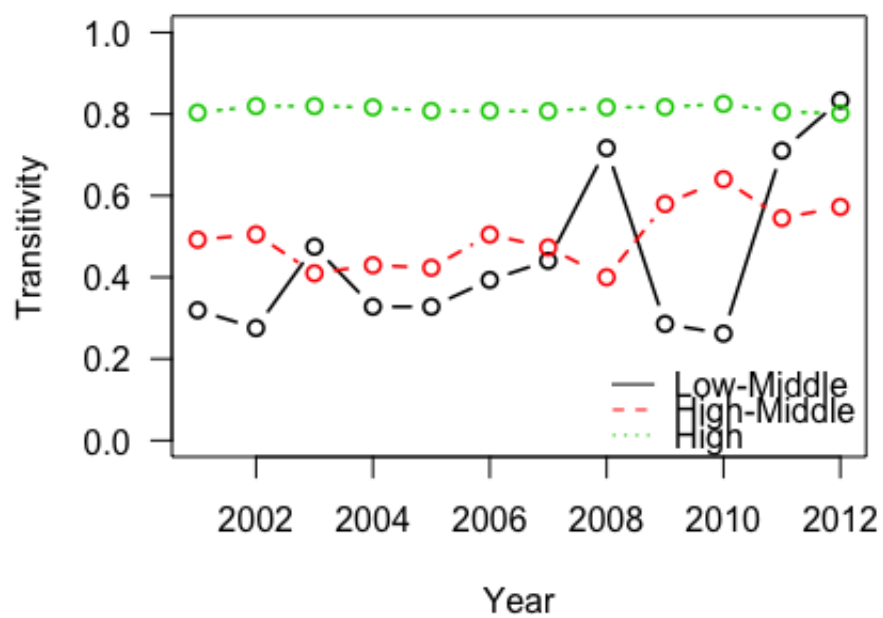
For the dependent variable we are using bilateral FDI inflows. These are from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and were first made available in 2014 ([UNCTAD, 2014](#)). We use the entire time-period available, which is 2001-2012. Past work that has looked at country-year FDI relationships

relied on monadic data. The advantage of using dyadic data is that it not only lets us model network relationships, but the disaggregation allows us to measure changes in FDI inflows related to covariates that are at the dyad level, such as PTAs. Because FDI flows tend to be highly dispersed we use the natural log of the values.

4.3 Network Statistics







4.4 Covariates

We control for both economic and political variables. Following the literature’s standard for predicting FDI inflows we include standard gravity variables. This includes the log product of the dyad’s GDP and logged euclidean distance. Generally, larger products of GDP are associated with higher levels of FDI while longer distances are associated with less FDI (Mayer and Zignago, 2011; Bank, 2012a).

The other key economic variable that is included trade in intermediate goods (OECD, 2016). This is constructed according to the UN Broad Economic Category classification definitions that separates goods by end-use category. Intermediate goods include unprocessed and partially processed agricultural goods and industrial goods. Past research has shown that FDI and trade are compliments (Aizenman and Noy, 2006) and the advantage of using trade in intermediate goods is that it proxies for production supply chains, which we expect to be strongly positively associated with FDI inflows.

A more minor economic variable included is the growth rate of the economy, which has been used in past studies to stand in for the general health of a country’s economy (Bank, 2012b).

We include two categories of international agreement variables. The first is dummy variables for defense agreements (Gibler, 2009). This includes defense, entente, non-aggression, and neutrality treaties. We expect these variables to positively associated with FDI inflows, particularly defense treaties since this indicates political cooperation and a lower risk of expropriation. The second international agreement variable is preferential trade agreement (PTA) depth (Dür, Baccini and Elsig, 2014). Past work has argued that PTAs represent a commitment to liberal markets that investors would favor and therefore would be associated with increased FDI inflows (Büthe and Milner, 2014). However, this study used monadic data and only a count PTAs signed. Our work takes this further since we are using network data and increases in PTA depth and FDI inflows is measured at the dyadic level and the PTA variable we use is built using latent trait analysis with 48 different variables.

There is substantial amount of work that explores the relationship between regime type and FDI inflows. The work is inconclusive, but include controls for it nonetheless using the Polity IV score (Polity, 2012). We also include political violence to proxy for state stability, which expect to be negatively correlated with FDI inflows (Marshall, 2005).

4.5 Model Specification

The count ERGM is extremely flexible in that there are very few constraints on the generative features that can be incorporated into the model through $\mathbf{g}(\mathbf{y})$. In the models we specify, we use statistics that model the shape of the individual edge distributions (i.e., the shapes of directed dyadic FDI flows), model the dependencies we have described above, and account for the effects of exogenous covariates. The statistics we use to account for the individual edge distribution include,

$$\text{Sum} : \mathbf{g}(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{(i,j) \in \mathbb{Y}} \mathbf{y}_{i,j},$$

which models the average edge value

$$\text{Sum, Fractional Moment} : \mathbf{g}(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{(i,j) \in \mathbb{Y}} \mathbf{y}_{i,j}^{1/2},$$

which accounts for dispersion in the edge distribution, and

$$\text{Non-Zero} : \mathbf{g}_k = \sum_{(i,j) \in \mathbb{Y}} \mathbb{I}(\mathbf{y}_{i,j} \neq 0),$$

which models the prevalence of zeros in dyadic FDI flows. We include two statistics to model the dependencies that correspond to our hypotheses. First,

$$\text{Reciprocity : } g(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{(i,j) \in \mathbb{Y}} \min(\mathbf{y}_{i,j}, \mathbf{y}_{j,i}),$$

in which we add up the lowest edge value within each dyad. If edges are reciprocated, this statistic will increase due to the co-occurrence of large edge values within the same dyad. Second,

$$\text{Transitive Weights : } g(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{(i,j) \in \mathbb{Y}} \min \left(\mathbf{y}_{i,j}, \max_{k \in N} \left(\min(\mathbf{y}_{i,k}, \mathbf{y}_{k,j}) \right) \right),$$

which accounts for the degree to which edge (i, j) co-occurs with pairs of large edge values with which edge (i, j) forms a transitive (i.e., non-cyclical) triangle. Exogenous covariates are accounted for with statistics that measure the degree to which large covariate values co-occur with large edge values. First,

$$\text{Dyadic Covariate : } g(\mathbf{y}, \mathbf{x}) = \sum_{(i,j)} \mathbf{y}_{i,j} x_{i,j},$$

measures this co-occurrence at the level of the directed dyad, in which there is a dyadic observation of the covariate corresponding to each potential FDI flow. There are two statistics that account for node (i.e., country) level covariates. Each statistic takes the product of the node's covariate value and a sum of the edge values in which the node is involved. The first, "Sender Covariate," uses the sum over the flows that the node sends. The second, "Receiver Covariate," uses the sum over the flows that the node receives. These two variants of node-level statistics differentiate between the effects of a variable on the volume of FDI originating from a state, and being invested in a state, respectively.

$$\text{Sender Covariate : } g(\mathbf{y}, \mathbf{x}) = \sum_i x_i \sum_j \mathbf{y}_{i,j}$$

$$\text{Receiver Covariate : } g(\mathbf{y}, \mathbf{x}) = \sum_j x_j \sum_i \mathbf{y}_{i,j}$$

4.6 Covariate Summary Statistics

Table 1:

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Contiguity	189,000	0.024	0.152	0	1
Common Official Language	189,000	0.112	0.315	0	1
Common Language and Ethnicity	189,000	0.115	0.318	0	1
Former Colonial Relationship	189,000	0.015	0.121	0	1
Common Colonizer	189,000	0.062	0.241	0	1
Defense Treaty	189,000	0.075	0.264	0	1
Non-aggression Treaty	189,000	0.064	0.245	0	1
Neutrality Treaty	189,000	0.004	0.063	0	1
Entente Treaty	189,000	0.066	0.248	0	1

5 Conclusion

Table 2: Year 2007

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	fdi_net	
	(1)	(2)
sum	-4.008*** (0.203)	-3.984*** (0.209)
sum0.5	15.231*** (0.457)	13.695*** (0.458)
nonzero	-16.176*** (0.376)	-14.982*** (0.364)
mutual.min		0.179*** (0.035)
transitiveweights.min.max.min		0.724*** (0.052)
edgescov.fdi_net.lag_stock.sum	0.376*** (0.009)	0.372*** (0.009)
edgescov.fdi_net.mass.sum	1.516*** (0.096)	0.934*** (0.105)
edgescov.fdi_net.distance.sum	-0.129*** (0.014)	-0.114*** (0.016)
edgescov.fdi_net.contig.sum	-0.116** (0.051)	-0.066 (0.056)
edgescov.fdi_net.colony.sum	-0.054 (0.053)	-0.103* (0.055)
edgescov.fdi_net.lang_ethno.sum	0.081** (0.033)	0.074** (0.034)
edgescov.fdi_net.defence_t.sum	-0.044 (0.082)	0.044 (0.090)
edgescov.fdi_net.nonagg_t.sum	-0.040 (0.093)	-0.068 (0.098)
edgescov.fdi_net.neut_t.sum	0.312*** (0.105)	0.407*** (0.118)
edgescov.fdi_net.entente_t.sum	-0.045 (0.100)	-0.088 (0.109)
edgescov.fdi_net.depth.sum	0.115*** (0.041)	0.080** (0.041)
nodecov.sum..Polity	0.198*** (0.044)	0.122*** (0.042)
nodecov.sum..TradeOpen	0.307*** (0.069)	0.183** (0.071)
nodecov.sum..GDP.g	-0.058 (0.099)	0.011 (0.100)
nodecov.sum..PV	-0.023 (0.064)	0.048 (0.066)
nodecov.sum..GDPpc	0.549*** (0.068)	0.504*** (0.075)
nodeicov.sum..Polity	0.051 (0.040)	-0.027 (0.040)
nodeicov.sum..TradeOpen	0.287*** (0.078)	0.164* (0.086)
nodeicov.sum..GDP.g	-0.236** (0.096)	-0.112 (0.093)
nodeicov.sum..PV	-0.125* (0.069)	-0.067 (0.077)
nodeicov.sum..GDPpc	-0.250*** (0.090)	-0.474*** (0.093)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	-42,994.640	-40,831.300
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	-42,811.080	-40,632.430

Note:

10

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

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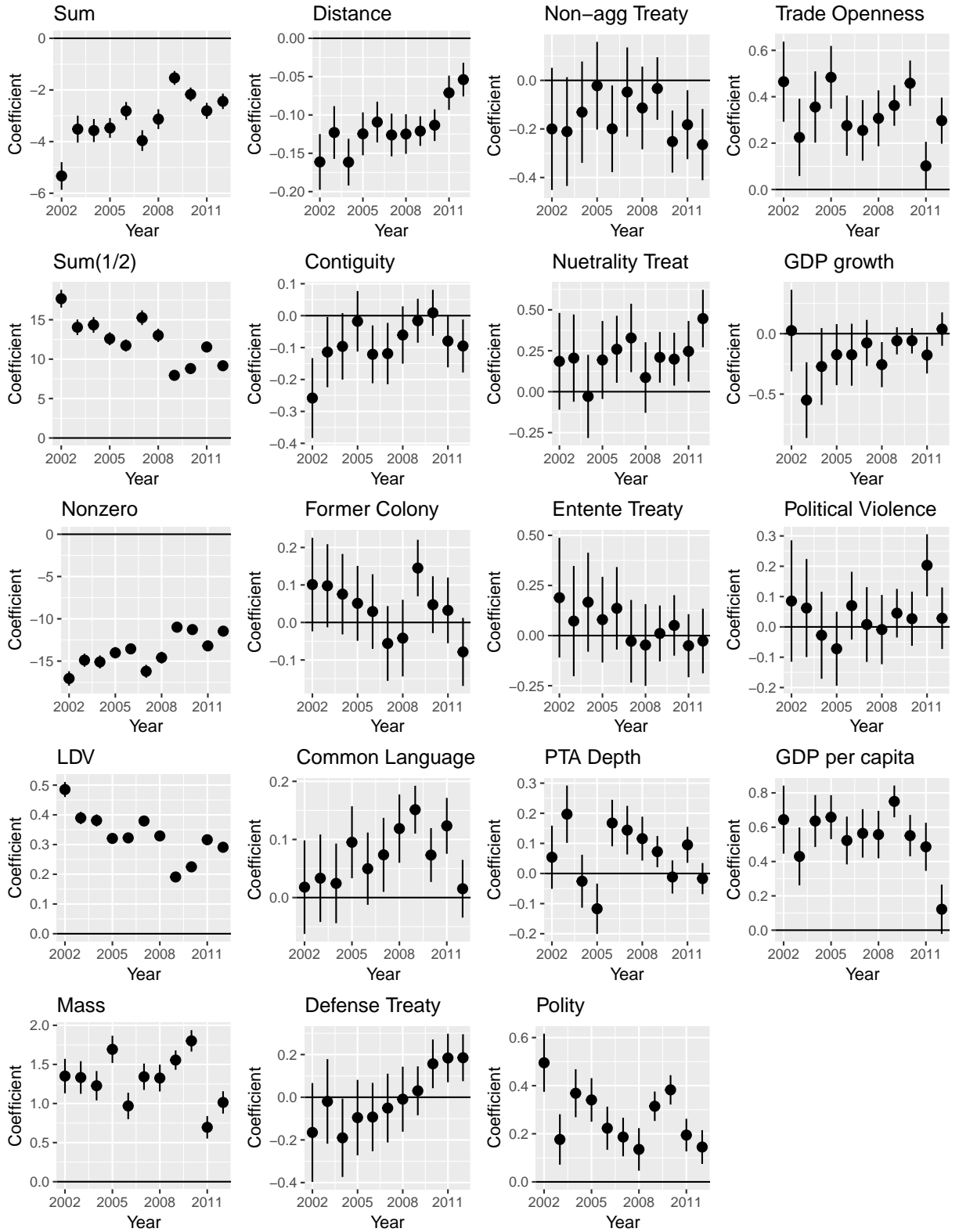


Figure 1: Without Network Terms

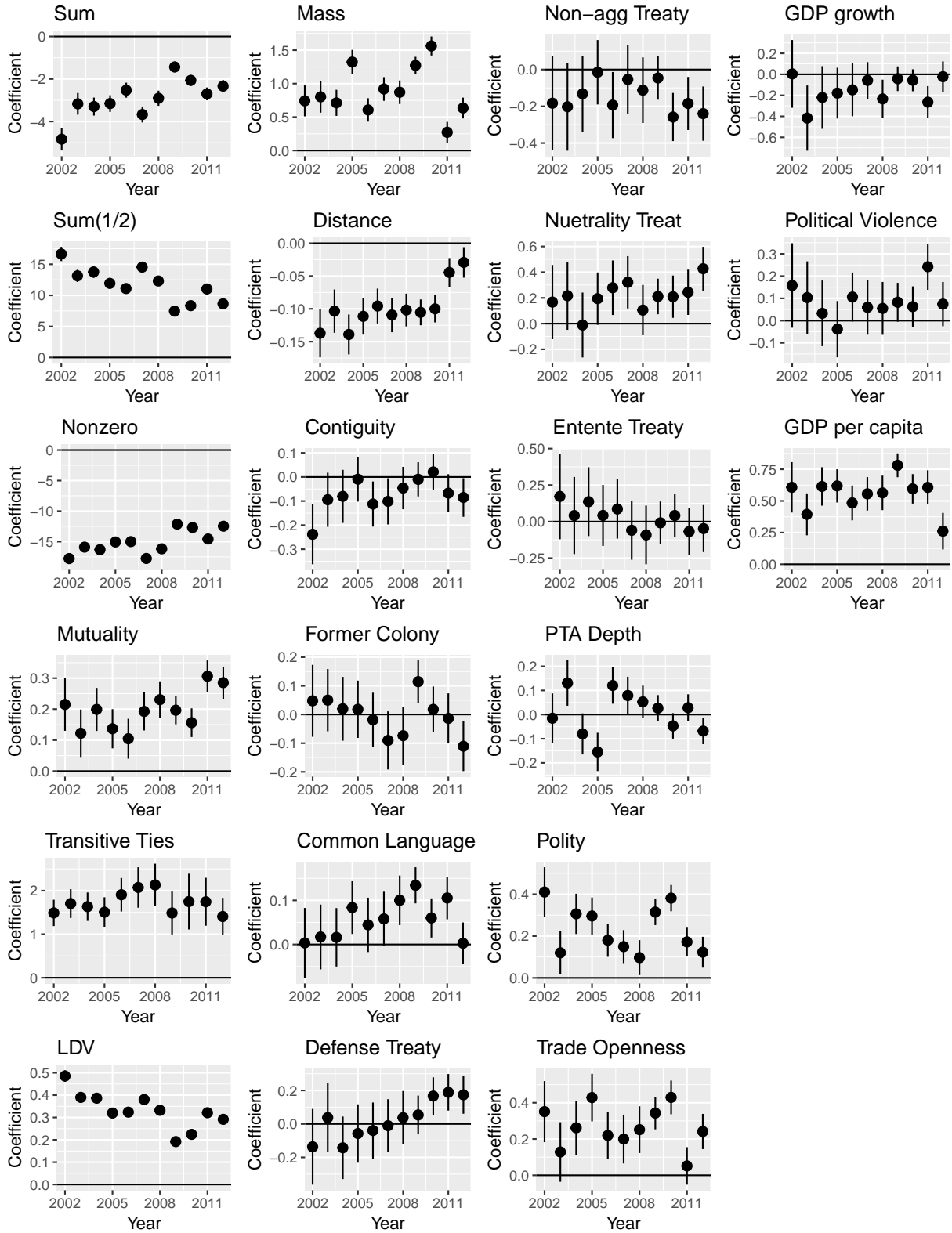


Figure 2: With Network Terms

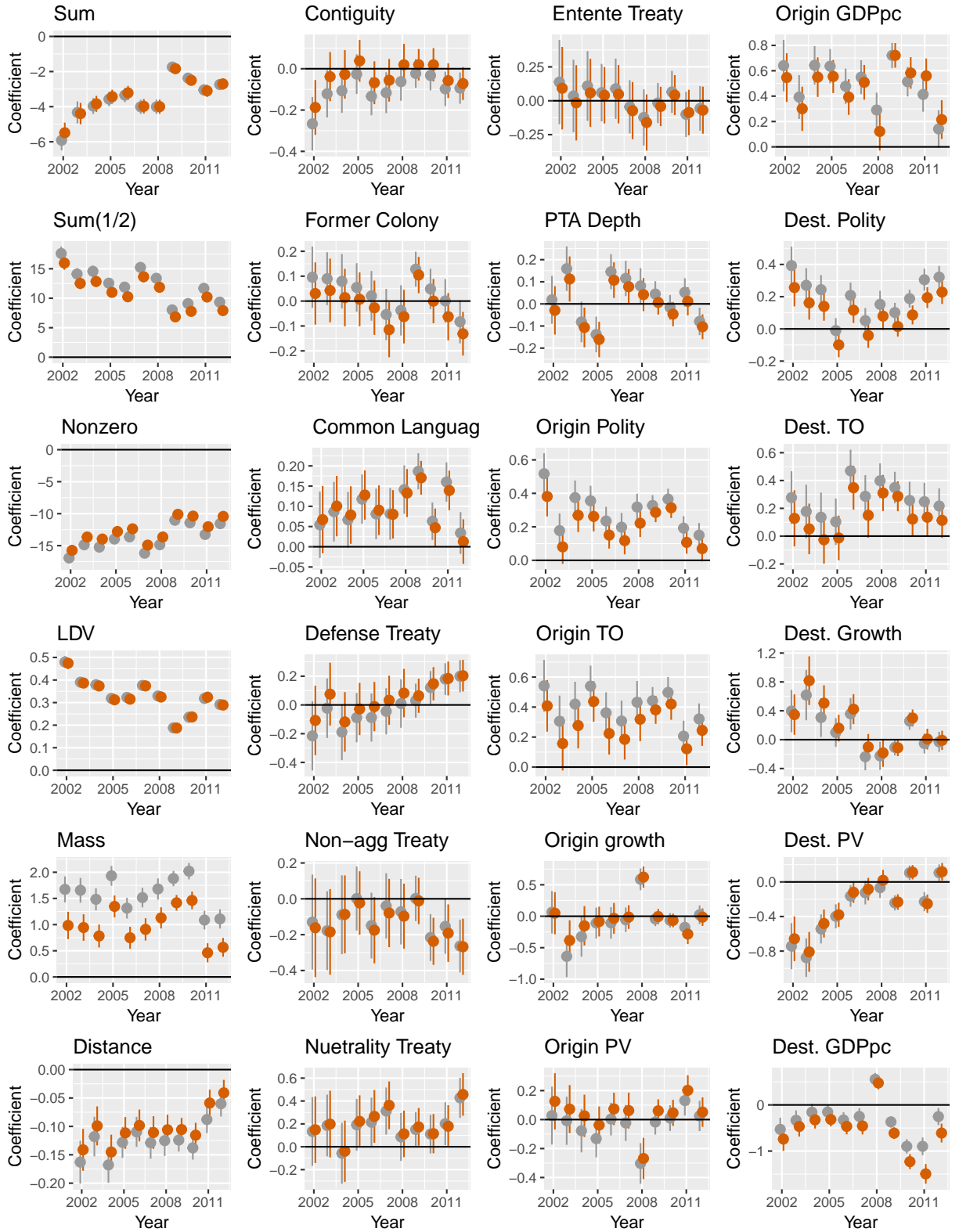


Figure 3: Model Comparison

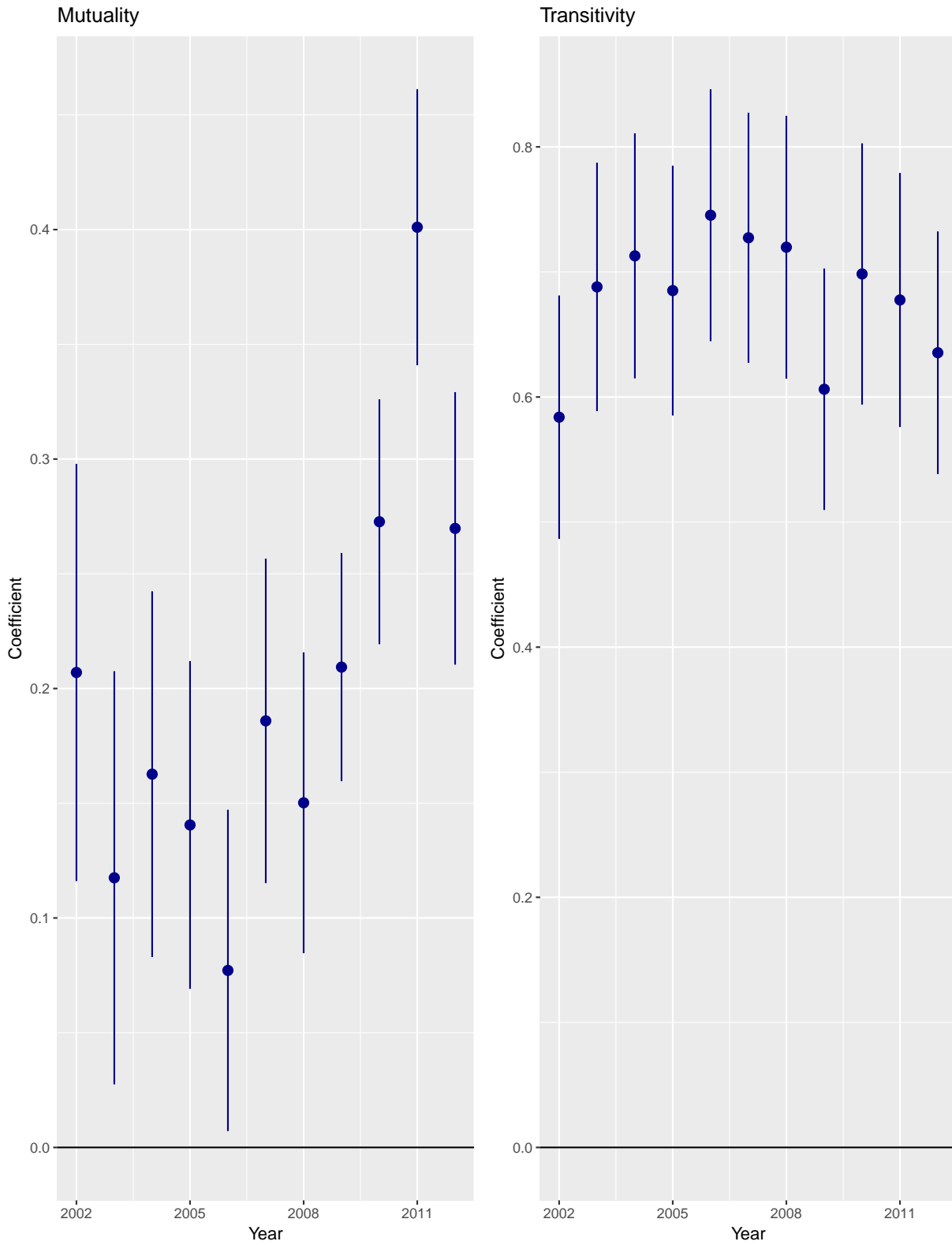


Figure 4: Network Terms