

February, 2026

SOCIAL RESEARCH AS A CRAFT

Preliminary program and syllabus

PhD course in the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, fall 2026 (10 ECTS).

Deadline for uploading project description is October 15, 2026 (see below).

Instructors:

Svend-Erik Skaaning, Department of Political Science, Aarhus University (e-mail: skaaning@ps.au.dk)

Helene Helboe Pedersen, Department of Political Science, Aarhus University (e-mail: helene@ps.au.dk)

Time: All sessions are held on Thursdays 10:15 am – 4:00 pm:

October 22, October 29, November 12, November 19, November 26, December 3, December 10.

Place: Meetings will take place at Aarhus University, Universitetsparken, 8000 Aarhus C. The specific rooms/buildings for the different dates are shown here:

- Thursday 22/10 10.15 AM-4 PM, Room TBA
- Thursday 29/10 10.15 AM-4 PM, Room TBA
- No teaching November 5 due to Annual Meeting in Danish Political Science Association
- Thursday 12/11 10.15 AM-4 PM, Room TBA
- Thursday 19/11 10.15 AM-4 PM, Room TBA
- Thursday 26/11 10.15 AM-4 PM, Room TBA
- Thursday 3/12 10.15 AM-4 PM, Room TBA
- Thursday 10/12 10.15 AM-4 PM, Room TBA

Language: The course will be held in English.

Grading: All participants are graded passed or not passed. The evaluation is based on active participation in the course and the presentation of one's own project.

Course content:

This course is offered to PhD scholars in political science (and closely related fields) who want to learn more about how to systematically tackle some of the issues pertaining to the craft of designing good social science research. Political science is a broad discipline covering a wide range of research questions studied across diverse contexts by using a variety of methodological approaches. Even a cursory inspection of the research published by major scholarly journals and university presses reveal an almost infinite number of themes covered and an abundant variety of research methods and approaches. Within different research traditions, there are either established or developing best practices, suggesting that good social science is a craft that can be learned.

In this course, we will explore best practices in three research traditions in the social sciences: variance-based, case-based, and interpretivist approaches. This is not a philosophy of science course, but some rudimentary understanding of the core ontological and epistemological building blocks of each approach is required in order to make sense of the best practices of the three different research traditions. The aim of the course is to present and discuss how to identify puzzles and good research questions, develop theoretical arguments and propositions, and craft appropriate research designs within different research traditions. We will only pay scant attention to the different techniques of data collection and analysis (interviewing techniques, survey measures, regression analysis, etc.). A premise of the course is that scholars, regardless of their own methodological approach, will benefit from knowing and reflecting on how alternative research traditions approach the craft of social science research. Moreover, the course is intended to provide participants with the opportunity to critically reflect and get feedback on design-related elements of their projects. The goal of the course is to help foster more ambitious and cutting-edge PhD projects and to increase awareness about best-practices and pragmatic considerations in different research traditions.

Course requirements:

1. Each participant is expected to submit a description of his or her project in advance of the course. The focus of this description should be on research design, anticipating the core themes of this course. The deadline for uploading the project description is **October 15, 2026** (to be uploaded on the Brightspace-page in the designated 'Discussion'). Each project description must be no longer than five pages (font 12, 1½ line spacing, references should be included but do not count). The project description must include:

- An account of the research question/problem to be studied and a comment on the relevance of the project. Focus on the core 'puzzle' that your project deals with
- The normative premises underlying the project
- Definitions of core theoretical concepts in the project

- An account of YOUR theoretical argument(s), specific propositions/hypotheses, and – if applicable – the causal model. Do *not* include a long theoretical review
- A discussion of the data and methods – if applicable – that you plan on using
- Presentation of the case(s) that might be selected and why (if relevant), and what types of generalizations (if relevant) will be made

More focused versions of the project descriptions (memos) have to be prepared for each session and will be discussed by other participants during the course. This will happen in small weekly working groups that give feedback on specific aspects of the project related to that week's course topic.

2. Each participant is expected to read all assigned materials before each class and to be prepared to participate actively in discussions of the materials.
3. Each participant is expected to write short 1–2-page (font 12, 1½ line spacing) memos answering a research design related question and upload on the Craft-course Brightspace-page (see designated 'Discussions') in due time before Lessons 2 through 7 (see instructions below).
4. Each participant is expected to participate with constructive comments and suggestions on parts of projects discussed in both small working groups and plenary sessions throughout the course.

For uploading and sharing materials, we will use the Craft-course Brightspace page. Project descriptions and memos should be uploaded by participants to the appropriate folders under 'Course tools'/'Discussions'. Make sure to include your name in the saved file name.

About the instructors:

Svend-Erik Skaaning is a professor of Political Science at Aarhus University, Denmark. His research interests include the conceptualization and measurement of democracy, the causes and consequences of political regimes, and comparative methodology. He has published on conceptualization, measurement, case selection, comparative methods, and the use of historical sources. He has employed a wide range of methods, including case-studies, cross-national studies, and surveys. He has taught methodological courses at the MA- and PhD-level.

Helene Helboe Pedersen is a professor of Political Science at Aarhus University, Denmark, and vice-head of the department of political science, Aarhus University. Her work focuses on multiple aspects of political representation from theoretical conceptualizations to empirical investigations of how representation is carried out by political parties, politicians, parliaments, and interest groups and how voters perceive of and prefer to be represented. In her research she has employed a wide range of methods, including individual interviews, focus group interviews, surveys, survey experiments, and manual and computational content

analyses. She has taught methodological or substantive courses at the BA-, MA- and PhD-level.

Course plan:

There are seven teaching days, each six hours. We will start at 10:15. In the first two hours we will have lectures and discussions of the general topics of the session. Most often (with the exception of the 7th sessions) we will then proceed with the following structure: discussions of participants' own project-related memo in small groups, followed by plenary discussions. In the panel discussions, weekly selected course participants present their project in relation to the given theme based on their memo. Presentations should not be about 7 minutes, followed by questions, comments, and suggestions from participants and teachers. All participants will present their project during the course.

The readings will be a combination of uploaded texts to the course page on Brightspace and texts you will be responsible for getting through libraries.

Lunch is provided for participants on all teaching days

Lesson 1: Social Research as a Craft (October 22)

- The triangle of subject-theory-method and problem-driven research
- What is science and social science?
- Unified and Distinct: Can methods and methodologies speak to each other?

Schedule:

10.15-12.00: Discussion of research approaches: Methodologies and methods

12.00 – 12.45: Lunch

12.45 – 14.15: Small group discussions based on memos

14.15 – 16.00: Presentations and plenary discussion about research questions and approaches.

Memo:

Please prepare *before* class a 1-2 page answer to the following questions and upload by **October 19** to the Brightspace-page [make sure to include your name in the saved file name]:

- What is the core research question of your project?

- Is the research agenda rooted in one of the overall approaches or does it suggest a mixed-methods approach? Why?

Readings:

Schwartz, Martin A. (2008). "The Importance of Stupidity in Scientific Research." *Journal of Cell Science* 121: 1771. AUL

Gerring, John (2012). *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework, 2nd edition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-12. Can be found as e-book [link](#)

Beach, Derek and Jonas Gejl Kaas (2020) "The Great Divides: Incommensurability, the Impossibility of Mixed-Methodology, and What to Do about It." *International Studies Review* 22(2): 214-235. AUL

Kuorikoski, Jaakko and Caterina Marchionni (2023). "Evidential Variety and Mixed-Methods Research in Social Science." *Philosophy of Science* 90(5): 1449-1458.

Pedersen, Helene Helboe (2025) *Note on methodologies meeting in practice*. Can be found on Brightspace

Lesson 2: Research Questions, Puzzles, and Theorizing (October 29)

- Theorizing and finding interesting puzzles
- Cohesion vs. eclecticism

Schedule:

10.15-11:15: Discussion of how to find interesting puzzles and research questions

11:15-12:00: Methodology of political theory (ved Marion Godman)

12.00-12.45: Lunch

12.45-14.15: Small group discussions based on memos

14.15-16.00: Presentations and plenary discussion about theoretical arguments

Memo:

Please prepare *before* class a 1-2 page answer to the following questions and upload by **October 26** to the Brightspace-page [make sure to include your name in the saved file name]:

- What are the normative premises and motivations of your project?
- What is the core theoretical argument of your project?

Readings:

Swedberg, Richard (2012). "Theorizing in Sociology and Social Science: Turning to the Context of Discovery." *Theory and Society* 41(2012):1–40. AUL

Gerring, John (2012). *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework, 2nd edition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 27-57. Can be found as e-book [link](#)

King, Keohane and Verba (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 14-23. Can be found as e-book [link](#)

Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine and Dvora Yanow (2012) *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. London: Routledge, pp. 24-38. (Ways of knowing. Research Questions and Logics of Inquiry). Can be found as e-book [link](#)

Lindauer, Matthew (2025). *The Fruitfulness of Normative Concepts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Ch 1. AUL

Lesson 3: Causality and Theoretical Claims (November 12)

- Causality (potential outcomes, counterfactual, mechanisms, necessity/sufficiency, constitutive)
- Complex relationships
- Consistency, parsimony

Schedule:

10.15-12.00: Discussion of types of causal claims

12.00-12.45: Lunch

12.45-14.15: Small group discussions based on memos

14.15-16.00: Presentations and plenary discussion about causal claims

Memo:

Please prepare before class a 1-2 page answer to the following questions and upload by **November 9** [make sure to include your name in the saved file name]:

- Explain how your project relates to the issue of causality
- If relevant, draw you causal claim in line with your approach to causality

Readings:

Angrist, Joshua A. and Jörn-Steffen Pischke (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empirist's Companion*. Princeton University Press. "Questions about Questions" (pp. 3-8). (Potential outcome framework; variance-based). Can be found as e-book [link](#)

Gerring, John (2012). *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework, 2nd edition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 197-217. Can be found as e-book [link](#)

Beach & Pedersen (2016). *Causal Case Study Methods*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 62-85 (different types of causal claims in case-based methods). Can be found as e-book [link](#)

Lukka, K. (2014). Exploring the possibilities for causal explanation in interpretive research. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 39(7), 559-566.

Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012). *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. London: Routledge, pp. 45-53. (on constitutive causality and contextuality) e-book [link](#)

Lesson 4: Conceptualization and Measurement (November 19)

- Ladder of abstraction
- Classical concepts, family resemblance concepts and radial concepts
- Conceptual trees
- Minimalist and maximalist definitions
- Conceptual stretching and contextuality
- Experience-distant and experience-near concepts
- Measurement validity

Schedule:

10.15-11.00: Introduction and discussion of conceptualization and measurement

11.15-12.00: Conceptualizing and measuring democracy (Talk by Svend-Erik)

12.00-12.45: Lunch

12.45-14.15 Small group discussions based on memos

14.15-16.00: Presentations and plenary discussion about concepts

Memo:

Please prepare before class a 1-2 page answer to the following questions and upload by **November 16** [make sure to include your name in the saved file name]:

- Discuss how you define one key concept in your research. In the discussion you may consider the structure of the concept and to how context matters for your definition.
- Discuss how you intend to operationalize and measure your concept. If you are not working empirically in your project, you should discuss how you intend to exemplify or employ your concept.

Readings:

Sartori, Giovanni (1970). "Concept Misinformation in Comparative Politics." *American Political Science Review* 64(4): 1033-1053. AUL

Goertz, Gary (2006). *Social Science Concepts – A User's Guide Princeton*. NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 27-67. (good discussion of concept structure). Book chapter on Brightspace

Schaffer, Frederic (2016) *Elucidating Social Science Concepts*. New York City: NY: Routledge, pp. 4-25. (introduction to 'experience-near' concepts and interpretivism) Can be found as e-book [link](#)

Adcock, Robert & David Collier (2001). "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *American Political Science Review* 95(3): 529-546. AUL

Lesson 5: Making Inferences and Interpreting Evidence (November 26)

- Logic of control, potential outcomes, and experiments and statistical research
- Logics of elimination and invariant analysis (Mill's methods)
- Mechanistic evidence in case studies
- Abductive analysis and qualitative/interpretive methods

Schedule:

10.15-11:15: Discussion of inferences and learning about the world

11:15-12:00: Presentation by William Kjærgaard Egendal on collecting and interpreting fieldwork data

12:00-12:45: Lunch

12.45-14.15: Small group discussions based on memos

14.15-16.00: Presentations and plenary discussion about making inferences

Memo:

Please prepare before class a 1-2 page answer to the following question and upload by **November 23** [make sure to include your name in the saved file name]:

- Describe the design that you plan on using to make inferences about key theoretical claims in your project.

Readings:

Gerring, John (2012) *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework, 2nd edition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 256-290. (Discussion of variance-based causal strategies). [link](#)

Beach & Pedersen (2019). *Process-Tracing Methods*. 2nd Edition. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Chapter 5. Can be found as e-book [link](#).

Van Hulst, M., & Visser, E. L. (2025). "Abductive Analysis in Qualitative Analysis." *Public Administration Review* 85(2): 567-580.

Lesson 6: Case Selection and Generalization (December 3).

- Case selection
- Nesting and generalization
- Multi-method research

Schedule:

10.15-12.00: Discussion of case selection in the three traditions

12.00-12.45: Lunch

12.45-14.15: Small group discussions based on memos

14.15-16.00: Presentations and plenary discussion about case selection/generalization

Memo:

Please prepare before class a 1-2 page answer to the following questions and upload by **November 30** [make sure to include your name in the saved file name]:

- What case(s) do you plan on selecting? Why? (if relevant)
- What types of generalizations, if any, can you make in your work? If you are not planning on generalizations, why?

Readings:

Mutz, Diana C. (2011). "External validity reconsidered", in *Population-Based Survey Experiments*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 131-154. (On generalizability of experimental research). Can be found as e-book [link](#)

Collier, David and James Mahoney (1996). "Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research." *World Politics* 49(1): 56-91. (Case-based response to the variance-based critique about case selection). AUL

Seawright, Jason and John Gerring (2008). "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." *Political Research Quarterly* 61(2), 294-308. (Variance-based vocabulary about different types of cases). AUL

Beach & Pedersen (2019). *Process-Tracing Methods*. 2nd Edition. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Chapter 4 (only pp. 89-111). Can be found as e-book [link](#).

Soss, Joe (2018) 'On Casing a Study versus Studying a Case.', *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 2018, Vol. 16, No. 1. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2562167> AUL

Lesson 7: Research Quality and Transparency (December 10)

- Exemplary research. What defines good research?
- Research transparency

Schedule:

10.15-12.00: Plenary discussion of research quality within the three traditions: What makes these articles exemplary/good?

12.00 – 13.00: Lunch

13.00-15.30: Plenary discussion of research transparency

15.30-16.00: Course evaluation

Readings:

Møller, Anne Mette, and Mathilde Cecchini, (2023). "Same position, different roles? How professional, organizational, and public policy logics shape frontline managers' role conceptions." *Public Management Review* (2023): 1-25. (*Interpretivist – note there are several appendices that detail evidence*). AUL

Krishnarajan, Suthan (2023). "Rationalizing Democracy: The Perceptual Bias and (Un)Democratic Behavior." *American Political Science Review* 117(2):474-496. (*Variance-based – note there is also an online appendix with supplementary analyses*). AUL

Andersen, David. (2023). "Impartial Administration and Peaceful Agrarian Reform: The Foundations for Democracy in Scandinavia." *American Political Science Review* 118, no. 1 (2024): 54-68. (*Case-based – note there is also an online appendix that details evidence*). AUL

“Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT): A Joint Statement by Political Science Journal Editors.” Available at: <http://www.dartstatement.org/2014-journal-editors-statement-jets>

Tim Büthe and Alan M. Jacobs (2015). “Conclusion: Research Transparency for a Diverse Discipline.” *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research* 13 (1): 52-64.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.892983>