



Case-Based Research Design

Instructor: Professor Dr Derek Beach, Aarhus University

Course outline

This five-day course provides a hands-on introduction to case-based designs, enabling participants to use them in their own research. The course is designed to be relevant for participants from a range of different social science disciplines. A constant theme throughout the course will be on debating the strengths and limitations of different case-based methods, illustrating the types and scopes of inferences that are possible, and how they differ from what variance-based methods enable.

The course will first introduce the foundations of case-based designs in terms of taking cases as the analytical point of departure. The course will distinguish between comparative and within-case designs. Day 2 deals with concepts and theories in case-based designs. After discussing how concept structure is dealt with, we will explore different types of theoretical relationships that are assessed using case-based designs, including necessary and sufficiency, as well as theories of causal processes (aka mechanisms).

Day 3 unpacks different tools for comparative analysis, including more simple comparisons using tools such as Mill's methods, and most-similar and most-different systems designs. Participants will also be introduced to the basics of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA).

Day 4 deals with within-case analysis, focusing in particular on process-tracing methods. Using a published example, we will discuss how theories about causal processes can be developed and what elements they should include, as well as how process tracing works with empirical evidence.

Day 5 presents the most central case selection principles, including typicality, deviant cases, and theoretical likelihood (most- and least-likely cases). We will then discuss how cross-case comparisons and within-case tracing can be combined in practice.

Syllabus (indicative)

Day 1 – introduction to case-based designs

- Comparative designs
- Within-case designs

Readings

- 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.
- Beach and Pedersen (2016) *Causal Case Studies*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Chapter 1, 2.

Day 2 – Concepts and theories

- Concept structure
- Necessary and sufficient conditions
- Causal processes
- Theorizing causal process (example)

Readings

- Beach and Pedersen (2016) *Causal Case Studies*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Chapters 2, 3 and 4.
- Oana, I, C.Q. Schneider and E. Thomann (2021) *Qualitative comparative analysis using R: a beginner's guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-24.
- Camacho, Gabriela and Derek Beach (2023) ‘Theorizing how interventions work in evaluation: Process-tracing methods and theorizing process theories of change’. *Evaluation*, 29(4): 390-409.

Day 3 – Comparative analysis

- Simple comparisons – MoA, MoD, MSSD, MDSD (natural experiments)
- Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)
- Using QCA in practice

Readings

- Beach and Pedersen (2016) *Causal Case Studies*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Chapter 7.

- Ragin, C. (2008) *Redesigning Social Inquiry: Fuzzy Sets and Beyond*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 71-104.
- Hinterleitner, M. F. Sager and E. Thomann (2016) The politics of external approval: Explaining the IMF's evaluation of austerity programmes. *European Journal of Political Research* 55: 549–567. doi: 10.1111/1475-6765.12142

Day 4 – Within-case analysis – process-tracing

- Causal process theories
- Working with evidence
- Using process tracing in practice

Readings

- Beach (2023) Process Tracing Methods. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*.
- Beach and Pedersen (2019) *Process Tracing methods*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 155-194.
- Winward, Mark. 2021. Intelligence Capacity and Mass Violence: Evidence From Indonesia. *Comparative Political Studies*, 54(3-4): 553-584.

Day 5 – Case selection and combining methods

- Case selection principles
- Combining QCA and process tracing

Readings

- Beach and Pedersen (2019) *Process Tracing methods*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 89- 149. (can be skimmed)
- Kuehn and Trinkunas (2017) 'Conditions of Military Contestation in Populist Latin America.' *Democratization* 24(5):859–880.

About the Trainer

Derek Beach is a professor of Political Science at Aarhus University, Denmark, where he does research on research methodology and European integration. He has authored articles, chapters, and books on research methodology, policy evaluation, international negotiations, referendums, and European integration, and co-authored the book *Process-tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines* (2019, 2nd edition, University of Michigan Press). He has taught case study methods at numerous workshops and ph.d. level courses throughout the world, and conducted evaluations at the

national and international level. He was an academic fellow at the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group in spring 2022. He is an academic coordinator of the Methods Excellence Network (MethodsNet).