CARLSBERG FOUNDATION

AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

European Workshop: Critical Perspectives on Police and Civil Society in Democracies

Aalborg University, Centre for the Study of Coercion and Accountability (CECA)

Department of Politics and Society, Copenhagen, Denmark

January 26-27, 2026

Call for Participants

1. Description of the Workshop

This workshop takes place at a time of growing political polarisation and far-right resurgence, when longstanding assumptions about police legitimacy and democratic governance are being challenged. From Black Lives Matter to feminist and decolonial scholarship, critical voices have exposed how classed, racialised, and gendered policing practices persist – and how repressive institutions are being defended and empowered, rather than held accountable, in the face of transformative critique. At the same time, police forces across Europe and beyond are expanding their power under the banner of security by adopting surveillance technologies like Palantir (Egbert et al., 2024), experimenting with predictive policing (Hardyns & Rummens, 2018; Mugari & Obioha, 2021), and responding to protest movements with increasing force (Carey & Saavedra Cisneros, 2023; Rak, 2021; Trouillard, 2022). Policing is being privatised (Lea, 2024), militarised (Go, 2024) and reshaped by counter-insurgency strategies once used in colonial contexts and now deployed in the heart of Western democracies (Schrader, 2019). Concurrently, oversight institutions frequently encounter significant challenges in ensuring police accountability for misconduct. This phenomenon is observable across diverse national contexts (Beardall, 2022; Hope, 2021; Porter & Prenzler, 2015; Savage, 2013). While much research documents these developments in policing, however, less attention has been paid to how citizens actively contest and reshape police practices. This workshop addresses this gap by focusing on civilian responses across democratic contexts.

We welcome research employing all methodological approaches to studying policing, including ethnographic work conducted within police institutions, research examining policing from the perspective of targeted communities and individuals, and studies undertaken by or in collaboration with activist organizations and civil society groups.

Bridging the Divide in Critical Police Studies

Despite growing interest in critical perspectives on policing, the role of civil society in shaping police power has received limited systematic attention. Existing literature on civil contestation tends to follow two main strands: radical democratic theory (e.g., Honig, 1993; Mouffe, 2005) and neo-republican approaches (e.g., Pettit, 1999), each offering distinct understandings of how citizens engage with repressive institutions. These engagements span both social movements and more institutionalised arenas, such as civilian complaint review boards or formal oversight mechanisms, but are often treated separately in empirical and theoretical work. This workshop therefore aims to bridge theoretical and empirical divides in police studies by examining how civil society actors contest and reshape policing practices across diverse democratic contexts, with particular emphasis on cases beyond the traditionally studied US and UK settings. We will pay particular attention to the conditions and factors that enable such contestation to emerge and be sustained, which in turn will provide new insights into the intersection of civil society, policing, and democracy. The workshop seeks to explore the following question: *How do civil society actors contest and reshape police power in democratic contexts, and which political, social, and institutional factors enable or constrain their efforts?*

Practical Goals: Building Collaboration and Advancing Knowledge

This workshop aims to foster collaboration and critical dialogue among early-career researchers (from doctoral candidates to postdoctoral researchers and early-career assistant professors) working on policing, civil society, and democratic governance. It will provide a supportive environment for participants to engage with methodological and ethical challenges in researching repressive institutions. To enable such environment, it will include group discussions on such challenges, collaborative development of safety frameworks, and peer feedback on work-in-progress. A key objective is to lay the groundwork for a European network of scholars in critical police studies, build European competence, and facilitate sustained exchange beyond the event itself. The workshop will also serve as a springboard for developing collaborative research initiatives, including grant application, mobility initiatives, and panels at upcoming IPSA (International Political Science Association), ESA (European Sociological Association), and ECPR (European Consortium for Political Research) conferences.

Workshop Structure

The workshop will be a 2-day event, bringing together a maximum of nine early-career researchers, two guest speakers, and three senior discussants to promote mentorship. The format will be interactive, with participants presenting their work-in-progress in a poster format to facilitate open

discussion, rather than formal presentations. This structure encourages participants to share their challenges and receive constructive feedback. Senior scholars will act as discussants, offering guidance and insights in a supportive, non-evaluative manner. Participants will leave with constructive feedback on their work-in-progress, potential collaborative research ideas, and a clearer understanding of how to navigate the methodological and ethical challenges of researching the police.

2. Application and Support Details

The working language will be English.

Full funding will be provided for all selected participants, covering round-trip flights, accommodation in Copenhagen (3 nights), and catering for the duration of the workshop.

Complimentary childcare services will be available for participants who require them - please indicate your needs in your application so appropriate arrangements can be made.

The workshop venue at the university is fully accessible to people with disabilities, and we will ensure all provided accommodation meets accessibility requirements. We are committed to addressing any additional accessibility needs participants may have to ensure an inclusive and supportive environment for everyone.

To apply, please send the following to Melanie Hartvigsen (melaniesh@dps.aau.dk) and Charlotte Thomas-Hébert (charlotteth@dps.aau.dk) by October 15, 2025.

- A brief description of your current research (500 words max.)
- A statement explaining your interest in the workshop and what critical police studies means to you; how you hope to engage in collective discussions; and how you hope to contribute to a new, collective, and European research network (300 words max.)
- A short academic biography

The workshop is supported by the Carlsberg Foundation, grant CF25-0748.

3. Preliminary Programme

Senior Discussants:

- Magda Boutros, Department of Sociology, Science Po Paris
- Kristine Eck, Department of Politics and Society, Aalborg University
- Anja Kublitz, Department of Politics and Society, Aalborg University

Guest Speakers:

- Adam Diderichsen, lecturer, Royal Danish Defence College
- Mia Hartmann, special advisor, Royal Danish Defence College

Day 1

09:00-09:30	**Welcome and Introduction** • Workshop objectives and approach to research collaboration • Introductory round and establishing workshop norms • Introduction to the poster session format
09:30-11:00	**Session 1: Applied Methods and Methodological Challenges in Police Research** • **Guest speaker**: Mia Hartmann • Ethnographic approaches to studying police institutions • Navigating access and gatekeeping in police research • Addressing power dynamics in research relationships
11:00-11:30	Coffee break
11:30-13:00	**Session 2: Researcher Wellbeing and Safety** • Mental health considerations when researching sensitive topics • Self-care strategies for researchers in critical police studies • Security protocols for field research on policing **Workshop activity:** Developing collaborative safety frameworks and handbooks for researchers

13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00-15:30	**Research Showcase Session I** • Poster presentations by junior researchers (3 participants) • Structured feedback from senior scholars and other participants
15:30-16:00	Coffee break
16:00-17:30	**Research Showcase Session II** • Poster presentations by junior researchers (3 participants) • Structured feedback from senior scholars and other participants
19:00	Informal dinner (optional)

Day 2

09:00-09:30	**Welcome and Recap** • Reflections on day one
09:30-11:00	**Session 3: Doing Scholarship on Policing in Public and for the Public, Part 1** • **Guest speaker**: Adam Diderichsen • Engaging with public discourse on policing and democracy • Balancing academic and public-facing research outputs
11:00-11:30	Coffee break
11:30-13:00	**Session 3: Doing Scholarship on Policing in Public and for the Public, Part 2** • Managing institutional pressures when conducting critical police research • Identification of common challenges and potential collective responses **Workshop activity:** Developing a collaborative framework and resources for doing scholarship on policing in public

13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00-15:30	**Research Showcase Session III** • Poster presentations by junior researchers (3 participants) • Structured feedback from senior scholars and other participants
15:30-16:00	Coffee break
16:00-17:30	**Closing Session: What Now? Building Networks and Future Collaborations** • Mapping potential collaborative projects • Planning for research network development • Discussion of opportunities for panels at IPSA, ESA, and ECPR conferences • Discussion for an edited volume or special issue

4. References

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