Zachary Esses Johnson, J.D., M.P.P., M.Sc.

Political Economist — Country Risk & Institutional Measurement — Quantitative Policy Analysis

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Professional Summary

Political economist specializing in cross-country institutional analysis, fiscal risk assessment, quantitative measurement, and modeling. Expertise in building country-level economic indices, analyzing government finances, and evaluating policy impacts across jurisdictions. Combined legal, policy, and quantitative training enables comprehensive assessment of institutional integrity, regulatory frameworks, and fiscal health.

Professional Experience

Lead Quantitative Methodologist, Miller Center of Public Affairs — 2024 - Present
University of Virginia
Democracy and Capitalism Index Project

- **Built and designed a global capitalism index measuring institutional quality across 170+ countries**

- **Created novel methodology using multi-level principal components analysis** to quantify "effective capitalism" across economic freedom, property rights, rule of law, regulatory quality, and market efficiency dimensions.

- **Created data visualizations and analytical tools** for assessing country-level institutional risk and tracking governance trends over time.

- **Collaborated with senior faculty and policy experts** on research design, methodology validation, and dissemination to academic, business, and policy audiences.

State Tax Intern, The Tax Foundation — Summer 2023
Washington, DC

- **Authored published policy briefs** on state tax updates and sales tax holidays.

- **Provided analytic insights** into state tax change over time.

Associate Lawyer, Legacy Tax + Trust Lawyers — 2018 - 2020
Vancouver, Canada

- **Advised high-net-worth individual and business clients on tax strategies** involving U.S., Canadian, and international tax law.

- **Collaborated with financial advisors and accountants** to develop integrated tax and estate planning strategies reducing client tax exposure.

Articling Student, DLA Piper LLP — 2017 - 2018
Vancouver, Canada

- **Conducted legal research and analysis** in corporate law, tax, and commercial litigation supporting senior counsel on complex transactions.

- **Participated in due diligence** for cross-border corporate transactions, M&A activities, and regulatory compliance matters.

Education

Doctor of Philosophy (ABD), Political Science   2023 - 2028 (expected)
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA
Concentration: Comparative Political Economy & Quantitative Methods
Dissertation: "The House Always Wins: Housing, Migration, and Political Advantage"
Committee: David Leblang, Ph.D. (Chair); Rachel Potter, Ph.D.; Kirill Zhirkov, Ph.D.

Master of Public Policy   2021 - 2023
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA
Sol Price School of Public Policy ($60,000 Merit Scholarship)

Master of Science, Behavioural Science   2020 - 2021
London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

Juris Doctor   2014 - 2017
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada
Called to the Bar of British Columbia (2018)

Bachelor of Arts with Distinction, Political Science   2011 - 2014
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada

Research Papers

Methodology & Index Measurement:

- **Sequential Confirmatory Factor Analysis: A Novel Approach to Latent Variable Measurement**. SocArXiv (2025). Novel statistical methodology for index construction and measurement validation. Primarily applicable for building country risk indices and institutional quality scores.

Public Finance & Tax Policy:

- **The Impact of Vacancy Taxes on Housing Prices: A Synthetic Control Study**. SocArXiv (2026). Causal inference investigation into the effectiveness of Vacancy Taxes at lowering inflated housing prices.

- **State and Local Sales Tax Rates, Midyear 2023**. The Tax Foundation.

- **Sales Tax Holidays By State, 2023**. The Tax Foundation.

Political Economy & Comparative Politics:

- **Housing Markets, Migration, and Political Competition**. Dissertation research on how housing policy and migration patterns affect political stability and state capacity (in progress).

- **Diffusion of Violent Political Protest - Geographic Evidence from Bangladesh**. SocArXiv (2025). Measurement of protest diffusion across space and time in Bangladesh using a Hawkes process model.

Legal Research:

- **Laws and Social Norms: Forces for Behaviour Change**. London School of Economics.

Conference Presentations

Sequential CFA: A Novel Approach to Latent Variable Measurement   2026
Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois (Accepted)

Diffusion of Violent Political Protest - Geographic Evidence from Bangladesh   2025
Southern Political Science Association Annual Conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Technical Skills & Tools

Statistical & Programming: R, Python, Stata, SQL

Data & Visualization: Tableau, Excel

Research & Writing: LaTeX, Qualtrics, Gorilla

Additional Experience

Instructor, R Statistical Computing Tutorial, University of Virginia   2025 - Present
Led course twice on R statistical computing to complement Regression Analysis

Teaching Assistant, University of Virginia   2024 - Present
Teaching assistant for Regression Analysis, Introduction to International Relations, and the Politics of India and Pakistan

Research Assistant, University of Virginia Department of Politics   2023 - Present
Multiple faculty projects on comparative politics, international finance, and political institutions

Editorial Assistant, American Journal of Political Science   2023 - 2025
Manuscript review coordination and editorial support for top political science journal