

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, and quantitative measurement. Expertise in building country risk indices, analyzing government finances, and evaluating policy impacts across jurisdictions. Combined legal, policy, and quantitative training enables comprehensive assessment of institutional quality, regulatory frameworks, and fiscal sustainability.

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.
- **Developed cross-country database** integrating World Bank, V-Dem, Heritage Foundation, and proprietary institutional data for comparative analysis.
- **Created data visualizations and analytical tools** for assessing country-level institutional risk and tracking governance trends over time.
- **Collaborate 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

- **Researched state and local tax structures** across all 50 U.S. states, analyzing sales tax rates, income tax burdens, and combined federal-state-local tax impacts on consumers and businesses.
- **Authored published policy briefs** on state tax updates and sales tax holidays.

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

- **Advised high-net-worth clients on cross-border tax strategies** involving U.S., Canadian, and international tax law, including estate planning and wealth structuring.
- **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 <i>Concentration: Comparative Political Economy & Quantitative Methods</i> 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)	
Juris Doctor	2014 – 2017
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada Called to the Bar of British Columbia (2018)	
Master of Science, Behavioural Science	2020 – 2021
London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK	
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:

- **Stacked Taxes: Uncovering the Layered Burden on U.S. Consumers.** Working paper analyzing combined federal, state, and local tax burdens and implications for fiscal sustainability (*under review*).
- **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.
- **Can Social Democratic Parties Attract Left-Authoritarian Voters? Evidence from Election Simulations in the Netherlands, 1994–2021** (with Kirill Zhirkov). Analysis of voter behavior and party strategy using large-scale election simulations (*under review*).

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
- 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 (Advanced), Python (Intermediate), Stata (Advanced), SQL (Intermediate)

Data & Visualization: Tableau, Excel

Research & Writing: L^AT_EX, Qualtrics, Gorilla

Additional Experience

Instructor, R Statistical Computing, University of Virginia 2025 – Present
Designed and taught course on R statistical computing

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

Teaching Recognition

Doctoral-Level R Statistical Computing — University of Virginia Spring 2025

Well-above department averages on student evaluation scores across all metrics (communication, effectiveness, feedback, accessibility). Selected student feedback:

- "One of the best TAs for a methods class I've had... organized, articulate, and a master on R"
- "You were stellar... my confidence has increased tenfold"
- "He made sure we felt welcome regardless of our coding experience. Despite his immense knowledge with R, it felt like he was on our level."