

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

Spatial Political Economy — Institutional Measurement

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📍 Charlottesville, VA, USA

## Professional Summary

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I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Virginia specializing in spatial political economy. Specifically, I research domestic and international migration patterns that influence the makeup of electorates. I also develop methodological tools, including composite indices, to quantify market conditions and institutional environments across jurisdictions.

## Education

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<b>Doctor of Philosophy (ABD), Political Science</b> University of Virginia <i>Concentration: Political Economy &amp; Quantitative Methods</i>	2023 – 2028 (expected)
<b>Master of Public Policy</b> University of Southern California <i>Sol Price School of Public Policy</i>	2021 – 2023
<b>Master of Science, Behavioural Science</b> London School of Economics and Political Science	2020 – 2021
<b>Juris Doctor</b> University of British Columbia <i>Called to the Bar of British Columbia (2018)</i>	2014 – 2017
<b>Bachelor of Arts with Distinction, Political Science</b> University of Manitoba	2011 – 2014

## Professional Experience

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<b>Lead Quantitative Methodologist</b> , Karsh Institute for Democracy University of Virginia <i>Democracy and Capitalism Index Project</i>	2024 – Present
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Designed and built a global institutional quality index</b> across 170+ countries using multi-level principal components analysis, measuring economic freedom, property rights, rule of law, regulatory quality, and market efficiency; results disseminated to academic, business, and policy audiences.</li></ul>	
<b>State Tax Intern</b> , The Tax Foundation Washington, DC	Summer 2023
<b>Associate Lawyer</b> , Legacy Tax + Trust Lawyers Vancouver, Canada	2018 – 2020
<b>Articling Student</b> , DLA Piper LLP Vancouver, Canada	2017 – 2018

## Policy Work

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

## Papers Under Review

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**Sequential Confirmatory Factor Analysis: A Novel Approach to Latent Variable Measurement.** SocArXiv. Novel statistical method for index construction and measurement validation applicable to country risk and institutional scoring.

**Can Social Democratic Parties Attract Left-Authoritarian Voters? Evidence from Election Simulations in the Netherlands, 1994–2021.** Kirill Zhirkov, **Zach Esses Johnson.**

## Working Papers

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**The Global Capitalism Index: A Multimodal Index for Measuring Market Systems.** Thomas Villalobos Roberts, **Zach Esses Johnson**, Scott C. Miller, Hannah Knox Tucker, Michael J. Lenox, Sidney M. Milkis.

**The Global Capitalism Index: Construction and Validation Through Multilevel Principal Components Analysis.** **Zach Esses Johnson**, Thomas Villalobos Roberts, Scott C. Miller, Hannah Knox Tucker, Michael J. Lenox, Sidney M. Milkis.

## Conference/Workshop Presentations

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<b>International Schumpeter Society</b> (Accepted) <i>Strasbourg, France</i>	2026
<b>DIW Berlin/KTH: Workshop on Rent Control and Housing Policy</b> (Accepted) <i>Stockholm, Sweden</i>	2026
<b>Graduate Conference for the Social Sciences</b> (Accepted) <i>Fairfax, Virginia</i>	2026
<b>Midwest Political Science Association</b> <i>Chicago, Illinois</i>	2025, 2026
<b>UVA Computational Research Exhibition</b> <i>Charlottesville, Virginia</i>	2026
<b>Southern Political Science Association</b> <i>San Juan, Puerto Rico</i>	2025
<b>Academyhealth Annual Research Meeting</b> <i>Washington, District of Columbia</i>	2022

## Awards

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<b>Institute for Humane Studies Fellowship</b> \$3,000	2026
<b>Award Winner, UVA Research Computing Poster Exhibition</b> \$1,000	2026
<b>Travel Grants, University of Virginia</b>	2024, 2025, 2026

\$750

**Bob Biller Award for Best Capstone Project**, University of Southern California  
Finalist 2023

**Sol Price School of Public Policy Scholarship**, University of Southern California  
\$60,000 2021

**Research Award**, University of Manitoba  
\$6,000 2015

**Margaret Ogradnick Memorial Prize**, University of Manitoba  
\$500 2014

## Built Software

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**scfa**: Two-stage estimator for hierarchical Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Useful for complex models and small-N samples where traditional hierarchical Confirmatory Factor Analysis fails to converge. Available as both an R package and a Python package.

**MPCA**: Measurement-error-corrected composite PCA indices with uncertainty propagation. Available as both an R package and a Python package.

**countyplus/county\_py**: R and Python packages designed to import various U.S. County Data (2003-2019) covering all 50 states and 78 economic and demographic variables. Original raw data collected by Ding and Zhao (2024).

**sovereign\_debt\_xl**: PyXLL Excel add-in exposing Python UDFs for sovereign debt analysis, including debt sustainability modeling, yield curve forecasting, rolling averages, and portfolio indexing.

## Service

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**Discussant** 2026  
Midwest Political Science Association

**Doctoral Student Mentor** 2024 – Present

**Editorial Assistant** 2023 – 2025  
American Journal of Political Science

## Additional Experience

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**Instructor, R Statistical Computing Tutorial**, University of Virginia 2025 – Present

**Teaching Assistant**, University of Virginia 2024 – Present

**Research Assistant**, University of Virginia 2023 – Present

**Teaching Assistant**, University of Southern California 2021 – 2023

**Research Assistant**, University of Southern California 2021 – 2023

## Affiliations and Memberships

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**Housing and Urban Finance Lab**, McIntire School of Commerce 2025 – Present

**Karsh Institute for Democracy**, University of Virginia 2025 – Present

Democracy and Capitalism Lab, University of Virginia

2024 – Present

Miller Center for Public Affairs

2024 – 2025