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, quantitative measurement, and modeling. Expertise in building country-level economic indices, analyzing sovereign finances, and evaluating policy across jurisdictions. Combined legal, policy, and quantitative training enables comprehensive assessment of institutional integrity, regulatory frameworks, and fiscal health.

Professional Experience

Lead Quantitative Methodologist, Karsh Institute for Democracy   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.

- **Funded through the generosity of private donors and various internal/external grants.**

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

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

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.

Education

Doctor of Philosophy (ABD), Political Science   2023 - 2028 (expected)
University of Virginia

Concentration: Comparative Political Economy & Quantitative Methods

Master of Public Policy	2021 - 2023

University of Southern California

Master of Science, Behavioural Science	2020 - 2021

London School of Economics and Political Science

Juris Doctor	2014 - 2017

University of British Columbia
Called to the Bar of British Columbia (2018)

Bachelor of Arts with Distinction, Political Science	2011 - 2014

University of Manitoba

Software

`sovereign_debt_xl`: PyXLL is an Excel add-in exposing Python UDFs for sovereign debt analysis. Contains debt sustainability modeling, yield curve forecasting, rolling averages, and portfolio indexing. No VBA, no context switching.

Papers Under Review

Sequential Confirmatory Factor Analysis: A Novel Approach to Latent Variable Measurement. SocArXiv. Novel statistical method for index construction and measurement validation. Applicable for building country risk indices and institutional scores.

Can Social Democratic Parties Attract Left-Authoritarian Voters? Evidence from Election Simulations in the Netherlands, 1994–2021 (with Kirill Zhirkov).

Trust Factors Across Faith Lines: Muslim-American Trust in Catholic Healthcare Providers (with Margaret Tait, Robert Brehm, and Kerissa MacPherson).

Other Publications

Political Economy:

- **The Impact of Vacancy Taxes on Housing Prices: A Synthetic Control Study**. SocArXiv (2026).

- **Diffusion of Violent Political Protest - Geographic Evidence from Bangladesh**. SocArXiv (2025).

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

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

Legal Research:

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

- **"Till Death Do Us Part - Hopefully": Planning in Uncertain Times** (with Lauren Blake). Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia.

Conference Presentations

Midwest Political Science Association	2025, 2026
UVA Computational Research Exhibition	2026
Southern Political Science Association	2025
Academyhealth Annual Research Meeting (Two Papers)	2022

Awards

Travel Grants, University of Virginia $750	2025, 2026
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 Ogrodnick Memorial Prize, University of Manitoba $500	2014

Additional Experience

Instructor, R Statistical Computing Tutorial, University of Virginia	2025 - Present
Teaching Assistant, University of Virginia	2024 - Present
Research Assistant, University of Virginia Department of Politics	2023 - Present
Editorial Assistant, American Journal of Political Science	2023 - 2025

Technical Skills & Tools

Python, Excel, PyXLL, Git, R, SQL, Stata, Tableau, LaTeX