

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

Spatial Political Economy — Index Methodologist

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Professional Summary

I am a political economist specializing in housing markets and fiscal policy, researching how taxation, regulatory design, and institutional quality shape residential mobility, price dynamics, and market stability. My work combines causal inference with novel measurement techniques to evaluate policies (e.g., property taxation) across the US, UK, and Sweden. I develop composite indices and statistical frameworks to quantify market conditions and institutional environments with greater precision than existing approaches, producing empirically rigorous, policy-relevant analysis at the intersection of politics, economics, and law.

Education

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

Research Experience

Lead Quantitative Methodologist , Karsh Institute for Democracy University of Virginia <i>Democracy and Capitalism Index Project</i>	2024 - Present
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- Co-created and serve as lead quantitative methodologist for a multi-million dollar, 170+ country global capitalism index, overseeing all aspects of design, construction, and validation from inception to public launch.
- Designed the full measurement framework quantifying institutional quality across dimensions of economic freedom, property rights, rule of law, regulatory quality, and market efficiency.
- Served as the sole methodologist for an eight-researcher cross-institutional collaboration spanning the University of Virginia, Darden School of Business, Copenhagen Business School and partner institutions, working alongside senior faculty, policy experts, and industry advisors.
- Developed published software packages for country-level institutional risk assessment and governance tracking, with outputs disseminated to academic, business, and policy audiences.

Research Assistant , University of Virginia	2023 – Present
Research Assistant , University of Southern California	2021 – 2023

Papers Under Review

Sequential Confirmatory Factor Analysis: A Novel Approach to Latent Variable Measurement. Zach Esses Johnson. 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

Property Tax Changes and Residential Migration: Political and Economic Repercussions. Zach Esses Johnson.

Priced Out: How Council Tax Reform Shaped England’s Local Electorate. Zach Esses Johnson.

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

International Schumpeter Society 2026
Strasbourg, France

KTH Royal Institute of Technology: Workshop on Rent Control and Housing Policy 2026
Stockholm, Sweden

International Political Economy Society 2026
New Haven, Connecticut

Markets and Society, Mercatus Center (Accepted) 2026
Fairfax, Virginia

Conference for the Social Sciences, Institute for Humane Studies (Accepted) 2026
Fairfax, Virginia

Midwest Political Science Association 2025, 2026
Chicago, Illinois

UVA Computational Research Exhibition 2026
Charlottesville, Virginia

Southern Political Science Association 2025
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Academyhealth Annual Research Meeting 2022 (two papers)
Washington, District of Columbia

Teaching Experience

Co-Instructor (R Computing), Regression Analysis, University of Virginia 2025 – Present

Teaching Assistant, University of Virginia 2024 – Present

Teaching Assistant, University of Southern California 2021 – 2023

Policy Publications

State and Local Sales Tax Rates, Midyear 2023. The Tax Foundation. Comparative analysis of state and local sales tax rates across all U.S. jurisdictions at mid-year 2023.

Sales Tax Holidays By State, 2023. The Tax Foundation. State-by-state inventory and analysis of sales tax holiday policies for 2023.

Software Packages

scfa: Two-stage estimator for hierarchical Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Useful for complex models and small-N samples where traditional hierarchical CFA 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 for importing U.S. county-level data (2003–2019) covering all 50 states and 78 economic and demographic variables. Original raw data collected by Ding and Zhao (2024).

Awards & Fellowships

Fully-Funded Doctoral Tuition and Stipend , University of Virginia	2023 – 2028
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Institute for Humane Studies Fellowship \$3,000	2026
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Award Winner, UVA Research Computing Poster Exhibition \$1,000	2026
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GSASC Research Grant Award , University of Virginia \$500	2026
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Travel Grants , University of Virginia \$750	2024 – 2026
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Bob Biller Award for Best Capstone Project , University of Southern California Finalist	2023
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Sol Price School of Public Policy Scholarship , University of Southern California \$60,000	2021
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Research Award , University of Manitoba \$6,000	2015
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Service

Discussant , Midwest Political Science Association	2026
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Doctoral Student Mentor , University of Virginia	2024 – Present
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Editorial Assistant , <i>American Journal of Political Science</i>	2023 – 2025
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Professional Experience

State Tax Intern , The Tax Foundation Washington, DC	Summer 2023
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Associate Lawyer , Legacy Tax + Trust Lawyers Vancouver, Canada	2018 – 2020
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Articling Student , DLA Piper LLP	2017 – 2018
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Vancouver, Canada

Affiliations

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 , University of Virginia	2024 – 2025