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

Political Economy Doctoral Student at the University of Virginia

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Research Interests

Substantive: Political Economy, Public Finance Migration, Housing Policy

Methods: Computational Statistics, Optimization, Latent Factor Analysis and Measurement

Thesis

The House Always Wins: Housing, Migration, and Political Advantage
Committee: David Leblang, Ph.D. (Chair); Rachel Potter, Ph.D.; Kirill Zhirkov, Ph.D.

Education

Doctor of Philosophy, Political Science   2023 – 2028
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA

Master of Public Policy   2021 – 2023
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA

Master of Science, Behavioral Science   2020 – 2021
London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

Juris Doctor   2014 – 2017
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

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

Professional Experience

Lead Quantitative Methodologist, The Miller Center for Public Affairs   2024 – Present
Global Democracy and Capitalism Index

- Leading statistical design of an economic index quantifying institutional alignment across 190+ countries for finance, risk and policy applications.

- Developed multi-level adaptive PCA and latent factor model using R to measure "effective capitalism".

Summer Intern, The Tax Foundation   2023

- Researched state and local tax structures and authored policy briefs using tax datasets.

- Drafted reports and data visualizations on corporate and personal income tax reforms.

Associate Lawyer, Legacy Tax + Trust Lawyers   2018 – 2020

- Advised high-net-worth clients on cross-border tax strategies and estate planning.

- Collaborated with advisors to reduce tax exposure and ensure trust compliance.

- Drafted legal memoranda on tax planning, trust restructuring, and regulatory compliance.

Articling Student, DLA Piper LLP   2017 − 2018

  - Conducted legal research and drafted memoranda in corporate law, tax, and litigation.

  - Supported senior counsel in preparing briefs and compliance materials for corporate hearings.

  - Participated in due diligence for cross-border corporate transactions and estate matters.

Research Experience

Research Assistant, Department of Politics, University of Virginia   2025 - Present
Supervisor: David Leblang, Ph.D.

Research Assistant, Department of Politics, University of Virginia   2024
Supervisor: Carol Mershon, Ph.D.

Research Assistant, Department of Politics, University of Virginia   2023
Supervisor: Albert Rivero, J.D., Ph.D.

Research Assistant, Gould School of Law, University of Southern California   2022 − 2023
Supervisors: Abby Wood, J.D., Ph.D., and Pamela McCann, Ph.D.

Research Student, London School of Economics   2021
Supervisor: Liam Delaney, Ph.D.
Project: Behavioral Science & National Preparedness for Risks

Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant, University of Virginia   2026 - Present
Class: Migration (Undergraduate)

Teaching Assistant and Co-Instructor, University of Virginia   2025 - Present
Class: Regression Analysis (Doctoral)
Instructor of R Statistical Computing Class

Teaching Assistant, University of Virginia   2025
Class: Introduction to International Relations (Undergraduate)

Teaching Assistant, University of Virginia   2024
Class: Indian and Pakistani Politics (Undergraduate)

Course Grader, University of Southern California   2023
Class: Public Financial Management and Budgeting (Masters)

Course Assistant, University of Southern California   2021
Class: Contemporary International Politics (Undergraduate)

Peer-Review Papers in Progress

Sequential Confirmatory Factor Analysis: A Novel Approach to Latent Variable Measurement. OSF Preprints. *Under review*

Stacked Taxes: Uncovering the Layered Burden on U.S. Consumers *Under Review*

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

Published Policy Papers

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

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

Laws and Social Norms: Forces for Behaviour Change. London School of Economics and Political Science.

Presentations

Sequential Confirmatory Factor Analysis: 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

Service

Mentor for Incoming PhD Students, University of Virginia   2024 – Present

Editorial Assistant, American Journal of Political Science   2023 – 2025

Faculty-Class Liaison, London School of Economics and Political Science   2020 – 2021

Awards

Travel Grants   2025, 2026
University of Virginia ($750)

Bob Biller Award - Finalist   2023
University of Southern California

Sol Price School of Public Policy Scholarship   2021
University of Southern California ($60,000)

Undergraduate Research Award   2015
University of Manitoba ($5,000)

Coding/Software Skills

Python, R, Stata, SQL, LaTeX, Tableau, Excel, Gorilla, Qualtrics

Languages

English (Native), French (Basic), Turkish (Basic)