Bernardo Zacka

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ACADEMIC POSITIONS

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Associate Professor of Political Science (with tenure), 2024-Present

Assistant, then Associate Professor of Political Science (without tenure), 2018-2024

Class of 1943 Career Development Chair, 2021-2024

Christ's College, University of Cambridge

Junior Research Fellow, 2014-2015 and 2017-2018

Stanford University

Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for Ethics in Society, 2015-2017

EDUCATION

Harvard University

Ph.D. in Political Science, Department of Government, 2015

Dissertation: "When the state meets the street: Moral agency and discretionary power at the frontlines of public service"

Robert Noxon Toppan Prize for "the best dissertation upon a subject of political science," Harvard University

M.A., Department of Government, 2010

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

B.S. in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, 2005

GPA: 5.0/5.0; Tau Beta Pi; Minors in philosophy and mathematics

PUBLICATIONS

BOOKS

When the State Meets the Street: Public Service and Moral Agency (Harvard University Press, 2017)

2018 Charles Taylor Award for the "best book in political science that employs or develops interpretive methodologies and methods," Interpretive Methodologies and Methods group, APSA

Reviewed in: *Acta Politica, Administrative Science Quarterly, American Journal of Sociology, American Review of Public Administration, Constellations, Contemporary Political Theory, Contemporary Sociology, Critical Policy Studies, Governance, Journal of Law and Society, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, La Vie des Idées, LSE Review of Books, Perspectives*

on Politics, Political Quarterly, Polity, Psychology Today, Public Administration, Public Administration Review, Revue Française de Science Politique, Social & Legal Studies, Social Policy & Administration, Social Service Review, The University Bookman

Selected interviews and coverage: *The Atlantic*, *Salon*, *Rorotoko*, *Vox*, *The Guardian*, *Boston Review*

Translated into Traditional Chinese (2024)

Political Theory and Architecture (Bloomsbury, 2020) (co-edited with Duncan Bell)

Reviewed in: *Modern Intellectual History, Choice, Anatomies of Power, European Journal of Political Theory*

Subject of roundtables at: *Cornell University, Georgetown University, University of Queensland*

With contributions by: Jan-Werner Müller, Josiah Ober and Barry Weingast, Gabor Betegh, Bernardo Zacka, Ronald Beiner, Nancy Rosenblum, Duncan Bell, Ali Aslam, Margaret Kohn, Benjamin Hofmann, Nathaniel Coleman, Mihaela Mihai, Jeff Malpas and Randall Lindstrom, Antoine Picon, and Fonna Forman

Before a Word Is Spoken: The Interior Architecture of the Welfare State (forthcoming, Harvard University Press)

(125,000 words, 67 illustrations)

ARTICLES

"The Architectures of Waiting: Helmut Puff and Bernardo Zacka in Conversation," Critical Exchange, *Contemporary Political Theory* 22 (2023): 266-283. (with Helmut Puff)

"Political Theory Rediscovers Public Administration," *Annual Review of Political Science* 25 (2022): 21-42.

"The Politics of Sight: Re-Visiting Timothy Pachirat's *Every Twelve Seconds,*" *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 3 (2022): 1025-1037. (with Jasmine English)

2022 Kendra Koivu Award for the best paper, section on Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, APSA

"Political Theory with an Ethnographic Sensibility," Critical Exchange, *Contemporary Political Theory* 20 (2020): 385-418. (Editor and contributor)

"Political Theory in an Ethnographic Key," *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 4 (2019): 1066-1070. (with Matthew Longo)

"Fieldwork in Political Theory: Five Arguments for an Ethnographic Sensibility," *British Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 2 (2019): 763-784. (with Lisa Herzog)

"Adhocracy, Security, and Responsibility: Revisiting Abu Ghraib a Decade Later," *Contemporary Political Theory* 15, no. 1 (2016): 38-57.

"Travel as Ethos: Spatial Exercises in the Work of Tony Chakar," *Grey Room* 50, Winter (2013): 46-65.

"Abu Ghraib, the Security Apparatus, and the Performativity of Power," *American Ethnologist* 37, no. 2 (2010): 203-211. (with Steven Caton)

CHAPTERS IN EDITED VOLUMES

"Introduction," in *Political Theory and Architecture*, eds. Duncan Bell and Bernardo Zacka (Bloomsbury, 2020). (with Duncan Bell)

"What's in a Balcony? The In-Between as Public Good," in *Political Theory and Architecture*, eds. Duncan Bell and Bernardo Zacka (Bloomsbury, 2020).

"What is Public Space For? Political Imaginaries and Policy Implications," in *The Routledge Handbook of Ethics and Public Policy*, eds. Annabelle Lever and Andrei Poama (Routledge, 2019).

"Street-Level Bureaucracy and Democratic Theory," in *Research Handbook on Street-Level Bureaucracy*, ed. Peter Hupe (Edward Elgar, 2019).

BOOK REVIEWS

Review of Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek's *The Policy State: An American Predicament, Contemporary Political Theory* 18, Supplement 1 (2019): 28-31.

Review of Timothy Pachirat's *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight*, *Contemporary Political Theory* 13, no. 2 (2014): e1-e3.

Review of Vincent Dubois's *The Bureaucrat and the Poor*, *Public Administration Review* 72, no. 2 (2012): 302-305.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

"An Ode to the Humble Balcony," *The New York Times*, May 20, 2020.

"Security," *International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Hilary Callan (Wiley, 2018).

"Are Bureaucracies a Public Good?," *Boston Review*, Forum 3 (2017): 69-80.

"Why Bureaucrats Don't Seem to Care," *The Atlantic,* October 12, 2017.

FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS AND HONORS

MIT Generative AI Impact Consortium Grant ($146,000) for "Moral Meshing: Diagnosing and Preventing Value Distortion in Preference Elicitation" (with Bailey Flanigan), 2026-2027

Keynote Lecture, Graduate Political Theory Conference, King's College London, 2026

Keynote Lecture, Ethnographilosophy Conference, Freie Universität, 2026

MIT Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing Seed Grant ($75,000) for "A New Criterion for AI Alignment: Moral Meshing" (with Bailey Flanigan), 2025-2026

MIT College of Computing Common Ground support ($75,000) for development of new class on AI Alignment (with Bailey Flanigan), 2025-2026

Keynote Lecture, Political Theory In/And/As Political Science, Annual Workshop organized by McGill, Duke, NYU and Stanford, 2025

Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) Fellowship, Princeton, 2024-2025

Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) Fellowship, Stanford University, 2024-2025 (declined)

Laurance S. Rockefeller Visiting Faculty Fellowship, Center for Human Values, Princeton University, 2024-2025 (declined)

Keynote Lecture, British and Irish Association for Political Thought, 2024

Visiting Fellowship, Balliol College, Oxford, 2023

Keynote Lecture, Annual Congress of Danish Municipalities, 2022

Kendra Koivu Award for the best paper, section on Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, APSA, 2022 (with Jasmine English)

Wissenschaftskolleg Fellowship, Berlin, 2021-2022

Visiting Professorship, Oslo Metropolitan University, 2022 (declined)

Visiting Professorship, University of Aalborg, 2020-2023

Keynote Lecture, Biennial Street-Level Bureaucracy Conference, Aalborg University, 2019

Keynote Lecture, GOV/LAB Political Behavior of Development Conference, MIT, 2018

Charles Taylor Book Award for the "best book in political science that employs or develops interpretive methodologies and methods," Interpretive Methodologies and Methods group, APSA, 2018

Robert Noxon Toppan prize for the "best dissertation upon a subject of political science," Harvard University, 2015

Post-Doctoral Fellowship, Center for Ethics in Society, Stanford University, 2015-2017

Junior Research Fellowship, Christ's College, University of Cambridge, 2014-2015 and 2017-2020 (last two years of fellowship forfeited to take up position at MIT)

Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Values and Public Policy, Center for Human Values and Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, 2014-2016 (Declined)

Pre-doctoral Visiting Scholarship, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2013-2014

Mellon Interdisciplinary Dissertation Completion Fellowship, Mahindra Humanities Center, Harvard University, 2013-2014

Dissertation Research Fellowship, Center for American Political Studies, Harvard University, 2012-2013

Graduate Fellowship in Ethics, Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, Harvard University, 2011-2012

Certificate of Distinction in Teaching, Harvard University, Spring 2010, Fall 2010, Fall 2012, Spring 2013

Harold Laski Graduate Fellowship, Harvard University, 2007-2009

Tau Beta Pi (National Engineering Honor Society), inducted 2003

PRESENTATIONS

INVITED TALKS

MIT, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, November 2026

Dartmouth College, Ethics Institute Moral and Political Philosophy Workshop, October 2026

Freie Universität, Ethnographilosophy Conference, June 2026

University College London, "The Spontaneity of Freedom" Research Seminar Series, May 2026

King's College London, Keynote Lecture, Political Theory Graduate Conference, May 2026

MIT, Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing Symposium, April 2026 (with Bailey Flanigan)

University of Chicago, Political Theory Workshop, April 2026

UC Berkeley, Political Theory Workshop, March 2026

Università di Bologna, Seminar Series in Political and Social Sciences, May 2025

University of Geneva, Geneva Colloquium in Political Theory, May 2025

New York University, Political Theory Workshop, May 2025

McGill University, Keynote Lecture, Political Theory In/And/As Political Science Annual Workshop, April 2025

Princeton University, Political Theory and Ethnography Workshop, March 2025

Columbia University, Political Theory Workshop, October 2024

Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), Social Science Seminar, October 2024

Harvard University, Roman Jakobson Workshop, Department of Anthropology, April 2024

Princeton University, Political Philosophy Colloquium, March 2024

Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM), Seminario Investigación Política, February 2024

British and Irish Association for Political Thought, Keynote Lecture, January 2024

Yale University, Comparative Politics Workshop, October 2023

University of South Carolina, Political Science Research Workshop, October 2023

Stanford University, Political Theory Workshop, April 2023

Harvard University, Political Theory Colloquium, March 2023

Yale University, Political Theory Workshop, February 2023

Cambridge University, Seminar in Political Thought, January 2023

UK Department for Work and Pensions, Workshop on the "Jobcentre of the Future," January 2023

Smith College, Pioneer Valley Political Theory Workshop, December 2022

Ludwig Maximilian University, Colloquium in Social and Political Philosophy, December 2022

Harvard University, Ash and Safra Center joint workshop on "What is good government?" November 2022

Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government Executive Education program "Innovations in Governance: The Netherlands," September 2022

Freie Universität, Workshop on "Philosophy with an ethnographic sensibility," June 2022

Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Colloquium of the Center for the History of Emotions, May 2022

Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin, Evening Colloquium, April 2022

European University Institute, Qualitative and Fieldwork working group, March 2022

Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin, Tuesday Colloquium, February 2022

Cornell University, Roundtable around the publication of *Political Theory and Architecture,* Genealogy in the Humanities working group, November 2021

Aalborg University, CUBB Research Seminar, October 2021

University of Edinburgh, Policy, Knowledge and Practice Group, July 2021

University of Queensland, Workshop around the publication of *Political Theory and Architecture,* Visual Politics Research Program, May 2021

University of Chicago, Political Theory Workshop, May 2021

Penn State University and Bocconi University, "Representation Rules" Seminar, May 2021

University of Michigan, "Horror and Enchantment" working group, April 2021

CUNY Graduate Center, Political Theory Workshop, April 2021

University of Ottawa, Administrative Law & Governance Colloquium, March 2021

Freie Universität, Social Philosophy Colloquium, November 2020

Boston University, Governance and Governmentality Seminar, November 2020

Brown University, Philosophy, Politics and Economics Research Seminar, November 2020

Georgetown University, Workshop around the publication of *Political Theory and Architecture,* Political Theory Speaker Series, June 2020

Harvard University, Political Theory Colloquium, March 2020

Princeton University, Qualitative Research Colloquium, February 2020

Oxford University, Workshop on "Institutional Trust, corruption and integrity," December 2019

University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht, Symposium around *When the State Meets the Street*, September 2019

Oslo Metropolitan University, Symposium around *When the State Meets the Street*, Center for the Study of Professions and Institute of Social Welfare and Social Policy, September 2019

Aalborg University, Keynote lecture, Biennial conference on "Street-Level Bureaucracy," June 2019

London School of Economics, Workshop on "New Methods in Political Theory," May 2019

King's College, London, Centre for the Study of Governance and Society, March 2019

Copenhagen Business School, "Office as Vocation" project and the Centre for Public Organizations, Values, and Innovation, March 2019

Harvard University, Workshop in European Philosophy, December 2018

MIT, Keynote lecture, 3rd Annual GOV/LAB Political Behavior of Development Conference, November 2018

King's College, London, Public Law Project and UK Administrative Justice Institute, October 2018

Oxford University, Political Theory Research Seminar, March 2018

Harvard University, Safra Center "Ethics in your World" Speaker Series, February 2018

Leiden University, Public Ethics Talks, February 2018

Oxford University, Anthropology of Bureaucracy speaker series, February 2018

London School of Economics, Political Philosophy Research Seminar, January 2018

National Museum of Agriculture, Prague, Lecture accompanying exhibition on "Sustainability and the Lifecycle of Forestry," December 2017 (with Valentina Pugliano)

University of Cambridge, Seminar in Contemporary Political Thought, November 2017

University of Southampton, Seminar of the Centre for Citizenship, Globalization and Governance, November 2017

University of East Anglia, Politics Speaker Series, November 2017

London School of Economics, London Public Policy Seminar, October 2017

Oxford University, Political Theory Research Seminar, May 2015

University of Cambridge, Seminar in Political Thought and Intellectual History, December 2014

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS (Selected)

American Political Science Association (2013, 2014, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2025, 2026)

Biennial Street-Level Bureaucracy Research Conference, Copenhagen (2015, 2017, 2019, 2022, 2024, 2026)

Manchester Centre for Political Theory (MANCEPT) Annual Conference (2022)

European Consortium for Political Research (2019, 2021)

Midwest Political Science Association (2012, 2016)

Association for Political Theory (2011, 2014)

European Group for Public Administration Pre-conference Book Workshop (2017)

International Conference on Public Policy (2015)

DISCUSSANT (Selected)

Book manuscript workshop for **Tania Islas Weinstein**'s *Between Evidence and Imagination: Art, Cultural Policy, and Political Representation in Mexico*, McGill University, April 2026

Respondent, John T. Dunlop Lecture by **Kenzie Bok**, *The Past, Present, and Future of Public Housing*, Harvard Graduate School of Design, March 2026

Respondent, International Development Group Book Talk by **Alyssa Battistoni**, *Free Gifts: Capitalism and the Politics of Nature*, MIT DUSP, October 2025

Roundtable on **Amit Ron** and **Abraham Singer**'s *Everyone's Business: What Companies Owe Society*, APSA, September 2025

Book manuscript workshop for **Jan-Werner Müller**'s *Street, Palace, Square: Which Spaces for Democracy?*, Princeton University, September 2022

Book manuscript workshop for **Michelle Weitzel**'s *Sound Politics: Affective Governance and the State*, University of Basel, April 2021

Roundtable on **Rachel Friedman**'s *Probable Justice*, Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 2021

Roundtable on **Emanuela Ceva** and **Maria Paola Ferretti**'s *Political Corruption*, European Consortium for Political Research General Conference, August 2021

Book manuscript workshop for **Yuna Blajer de la Garza**'s *A House is Not a Home: Citizenship and Belonging in Contemporary Democracies*, Stanford University, January 2021

TEACHING

MIT

AI Alignment: Moral, Political, and Computational Foundations (with Bailey Flanigan), jointly listed in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and Political Science, Spring 2026, Spring 2027

Political Philosophy (PhD seminar), Fall 2018, Spring 2020, Fall 2020, Fall 2022, Fall 2023, Fall 2025, Fall 2026

Government Architecture (PhD Seminar), Fall 2022

Justice (Undergraduate) Fall 2018, Fall 2020, Spring 2023, Fall 2025, Fall 2026

Just Code: The Ethical Lifecycle of Machine Learning (Undergraduate), Spring 2020

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Architecture, Space, and Politics, Spring 2017

The Ethics and Politics of Collective Action, Spring 2016

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Power, Spring 2013

PHD DISSERTATION COMMITTEES

Jasmine English (Political Science, MIT), Committee Member. Graduated in 2024. Assistant Professor, Reed College.

Sonia Maria Pavel (Philosophy, MIT), Committee Member. Graduated in 2025. Assistant Professor, Clemson University.

Celia Eckert (Government, Harvard), Committee Member. Graduated in 2026. Lecturer in the Core Curriculum, Columbia University.

Angie Jo (Political Science, MIT), Committee Member, in progress

Katharin Tai (Political Science, MIT), Committee Member, in progress

Anum Mustafa (Political Science, MIT), Committee Member, in progress

Samantha Puzzi (Political Science, McGill), Committee Member, in progress

Zoë Clark (Political Science, Brown), Committee Member, in progress

Richard Solomon (Political Science, MIT), Committee Member, in progress

SERVICE

DEPARTMENTAL

- Convener, MIT Workshop in Social and Political Theory [2018-Present; 30+ Invited speakers]
- Member, Undergraduate Program Committee (2018-2020, 2022-2023, 2025-Present)
- Hiring Manager, Research Support Associate search (2026)
- Undergraduate Concentration Advisor (2018-2020, 2022-2023)
- Member, PhD Admissions Committee (2021-2022)

MIT ACTIVITIES AND COMMITTEES

- Institute
  - Institute Committee on Campus Planning (2026-2029)
- School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences
  - School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Awards Committee (2025-Present)
  - School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Faculty Fellows Selection Committee (2025-2026)
  - Faculty Member, MIT steering committee for the creation of a Humanities Center (2023-2024)
  - Faculty Affiliate, MIT Philosophy Department
  - Faculty Associate, MIT Gov/Lab
  - Faculty Associate, MIT French Initiative
- Schwarzman College of Computing
  - Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing Seed Grant Selection Committee (2026)
  - Editorial Board, MIT Case Studies in Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing (2020-Present)
  - Selection Committee, MIT Case Studies in Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing Post-doc (2022)
  - Dean's Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing (SERC) Action Group (2021)

EXTERNAL

- Convener, Online work-in-progress workshop on Political Theory with an Ethnographic Sensibility (2025-Present; 10+ meetings)
  - With participating PhD students and postdoctoral researchers from Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Yale, Berkeley, Columbia, Cornell, UCLA, LSE, EUI, KCL, McGill, CUNY, Georgetown, Chicago
- Editorial board member, *The Journal of Politics* (2023-2025)
- Referee for monographs
  - Harvard University Press, Oxford University Press, Princeton University Press, Cambridge University Press

Referee for journals

American Journal of Political Science, American Political Science Review, British Journal of Political Science, Contemporary Political Theory, Ethical Perspectives, European Journal of Political Theory, Governance, HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, International Journal of Migration and Border Studies, Journal of the American Philosophical Association, Journal of Organizational Ethnography, Journal of Political Philosophy, Journal of Politics, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Journal of Social Philosophy, Perspectives on Politics, Philosophy Compass, Political Studies, Political Philosophy, Polity, PS: Political Science & Politics; Public Administration, Public Administration and Development, Public Administration Review, Res Publica, Social Policy & Administration

Referee and Selection Committee

European Research Council (2026)

Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin (2023, 2026)

Dutch Research Council (2020)

Center for American Political Studies Dissertation Completion Fellowship, Harvard University (2019)

Charles Taylor book award, Interpretive Methodologies and Methods group, APSA (2019)

Outside examiner (PhD)

Max Emmett, UCL, "Citizens Inside the Machine: The Advisory Role of Bureaucrats in Democratic States," Fall 2026, date tbd

Eric Shildroth, University of Toronto, "Ethical Pluralism and Public Office," September 2025

Advisory Board Member

Street-level Bureaucracy Conference, Aalborg University (2022-Present)

"BEHAVE: Behavioral Design of Public Service Work," funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark, based at Copenhagen Business School, led by Trine Pallesen and Kirstine Zinck Pedersen

"Platform Level Bureaucracy and Social Inclusion," funded by a European Union Marie-Sklodowska Curie grant, based at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, led by Rebecca Paraciani

"Hectic Waiting" for social services and youth vulnerability, funded by the Danish Research Council, based at the University of Aalborg, led by Merete Monrad

"Critical Agency," funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, based at the Freie Universität Berlin, led by Deborah Mühlebach

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

McKinsey & Company

Business Analyst, New York, 2005-2007

LANGUAGES

French (Native); Arabic (Native); Spanish (Intermediate)