

**VIEW to the U transcribed
Season 5: Checking in with Profs;
Episode #4
Professor Edward Schatz
Department of Political Science
U of T Mississauga**

[intro music fades in and out]

Edward Schatz (ES): It's always good when the politically right thing to do is the same as the morally right thing to do.

[theme music fades in]

Carla DeMarco (CD): Global connectivity in a crisis

Hello and welcome to VIEW to the U: An eye on UTM research. I'm Carla DeMarco at U of T Mississauga.

VIEW to the U is a monthly podcast that will feature UTM faculty members from a range of disciplines who will illuminate some of the inner workings of the science labs, and enlighten the social sciences and humanities hubs at UTM.

On this episode I chat with Professor Edward Schatz in UTM's Department of Political Science about his research that spans several areas including identity politics, social transformations, and anti-Americanism.

He also talks about the ways in which the current pandemic has illuminated some of the issues, like the flaws in our global capitalism and social inequalities that, no matter where you are living, the amplification of these universal problems is undeniable.

Ed Schatz is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto Mississauga and at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. He did his undergraduate studies at Yale University, and pursued an MA and PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

His book entitled *Slow Anti-Americanism* is due to come out later in 2020, and he is just embarking on a new collaborative project on China's Belt and Road Initiative and its impact across Eurasia.

Ed joined the Political Science department at UTM in 2005 and served as its Chair from 2012-18.

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- ES: I've been for 22, 23 years studying the politics of former Soviet Eurasia. Principally this is the central Asian States, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, and I've been studying various topics that ultimately boil down to the relationships between state and society in these contexts. And I do it with a heavy dose of field work. So I spend a fair amount of time in the region as I study these kinds of questions. And as a result of being committed to field work, I have a side research interest, which has to do with research methods and epistemology, how we can make the kinds of claims that we make. What are the best ways to construct knowledge and what is the value of field work in general in this endeavor, and then the more specific value of ethnographic field work as we construct knowledge.
- CD: I'm just curious how you got interested in that area of the world in the first place.
- ES: I was interested in the Soviet Union when there was the Soviet Union. I studied something called Soviet and East European studies as an undergraduate, and then in 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and I graduated with my undergraduate degree. There's no relationship between the two. And I found myself more and more interested in those parts of the former Soviet Union that we didn't know that much about. There was pretty decent knowledge, I would say about the European parts of the former Soviet Union, but much less about the Eurasian or Asian parts, especially the Muslim regions of the former Soviet state.
- ES: So now there were opportunities to go to the region, to find out a lot more, and really try to grapple with some of the variety of experiences that this huge territory represented. That's how it started, and I went to graduate school with an interest in studying the non-Russian, non-European parts of the former Soviet Union, and really started studying the Kazakh language and ended up doing a dissertation on Kazakhstan. And it went from there. And it's been a great journey so far. Not over by any stretch of the imagination, and we started probably 20 years ago with very few people doing field work in central Asia and very few central Asians actually doing research on their own societies. And now it's shifted really quite a lot. There's a huge mass of people who are doing research on this part of the world, including lots and lots of research scholars from the region itself.
- CD: So over the past few months, we have seen a range of the ways that various world leaders have dealt with the pandemic in their respective countries. So I just wondered if you could say, who do you think is getting it right? Or can you point to a country that has implemented some policies or measures that you think have been particularly effective with either the

way they are dealing with the health crisis or the lockdown or the subsequent economic fallout?

ES: These are the big questions. Like all important and big questions, they defy easy answers and we'll have a much better sense later on, because we're still in the midst of things. Just as soon as we declare a country like Singapore to have done a whole bunch of things right, and arguably they have, they've seen a resurgence. Germany recently as well has seen a resurgence. It doesn't mean that they did things wrong the first time. In fact, arguably they did the right things the first time, but it's a moving target when you try to study this and the governments change all the time, but you can think about it country by country. But I think the first thing to emphasize about the pandemic is that it's global. I mean, the country might find it tempting to address the issue in isolation, so you get the closing of borders, the self isolation, the interest in bringing manufacturing home and these kinds of impulses.

But the truth is that we need global solutions to this really global problem or at a minimum, governments that work in very close concert with other governments. And unfortunately, we've seen major countries really abdicating, I would say, their responsibility to help coordinate some of these kinds of efforts. Just thinking through it globally, I think that the pandemic reveals a whole bunch of things about our global connectivity and really what makes us connected. Most obviously the pandemic reveals that the health of people far on the other side of the planet affects everybody. In spite of the rhetoric coming from Washington at times, or from the Trump administration, calling it a Chinese virus, that's just deeply misleading and also not important. The issue is not really where it started. The point is that it is global and it inevitably will be global as long as we are globally connected.

ES: Another thing that the pandemic reveals I would say is the fragility of our global capitalism, in ways that we couldn't possibly have imagined, we assumed that we'd gotten it right. We know how modern markets work. Labor is mobile, global supply chains work reasonably seamlessly, and there's ever increasing specialization of labor. And in theory, that's terrific, but it's not clear to me that we can take these kinds of things for granted anymore. And that's going to be one of the challenges going forward. I mean, there's a whole bunch of other things that I think that the crisis reveals, for example, pervasive inequality. Pervasive inequality is hardly news, but if we think in the context of the pandemic about who has been shouldering the burden disproportionately of doing things like stocking our grocery stores, delivering our packages, caring for the sick, driving people in taxis and so on, I think it becomes pretty clear that socioeconomic inequality, and this is often racialized, it's often rooted in precarious labor,

that all of this plays a huge role and it lies at the heart of this system that has been created across the globe.

ES: And just one other point on that is, and this gets back to this country by country question, who's got it right, and who's got it not particularly right. It seems clear coming from this, that one of the things that makes a difference in the context of effective public health responses, and this is just one of the things, but I think it's important is that a strong sense of social solidarity, I think, makes a huge difference during a crisis like this. If person X can imagine herself to be essentially similar to person Y, in spite of whatever differences of skin color or salary or age, whatever it might be, then she is willing to make sacrifices for the common good.

So you notice this when it's missing. Many states in the US right now, I don't think we see a spirit of social solidarity, or if we do see it it's weak or uneven. Too many people imagine themselves to be... They imagine that their own individual wellbeing is somehow pitted against the welfare of the broader society, and this of course exacerbates the problems that we see during a crisis like this one. So by contrast, if you look at South Korea and its response, one potential explanation for their relative success has to do with this social solidarity that allows citizens to make some reasonable sacrifices in the face of a society wide crisis.

CD: I do find it interesting, because like you're saying though, too, you made me think about like, say a country like New Zealand, making very bold... Shutting down the borders and things like that. But then seeing a country like Sweden, not really putting in... It didn't seem like they put in that many measures because you still see people out and about at restaurants and things like that. But like you say, it's the social solidarity I think that what's important there.

ES: I think that to the Swedish example, it was pretty surprising to see Sweden do that, because it's always been described as a country with fairly high sense of social solidarity. I don't know that that has changed or I don't know that it had changed in the run up to the pandemic. But one of the things that this... I guess one final thing and a huge thing that the pandemic, I think, reveals for us is the need to confront some really hard to confront ethical questions. Questions that I don't think that we are equipped or let's say trained to confront. So just in the question of what's the role of governments in helping to keep people alive, to put it most baldly. I mean, it's hard to argue that government shouldn't be in the business of keeping people alive, but that said, there there've always been limits.

So even the Canadian context where we have universal healthcare, the government is still unlikely to pay for an experimental treatment for cancer

- ES: if the patient is 100 years old and if the treatment is super expensive, so where exactly do we draw the line or what exactly is the responsibility of government in keeping people alive? I don't think we know the answer, but I do think that we need to confront the issue head on. I would argue that Sweden probably didn't go about it particularly the right way, but people make reasoned ethical decisions and come down on different sides of an issue. And it's possible make the argument that the disruption to the economy is something that is also costly and therefore the government will go to some lengths to help save lives, but that there are limits.
- CD: Yeah, you've brought up so many points too, because I'm thinking about there was the whole issue with the lack of ventilators and the people talking about making ethical decisions based on that also, like if you don't have enough of those machines for everybody, how do you decide who lives and who dies? And there's so much involved with that question too.
- ES: There is, it's so hard. And it's not like people on the front lines in healthcare haven't had to make those kinds of tough decisions. There have been limited resources before this crisis. I think the challenge is that it's now... The decision making is now scaled up so high and it's fairly visible, the decisions that policy makers are making, and it becomes something that we all have to confront as really quite real. Whereas in the past it might've been something that students studying medical ethics might confront in some kind of theoretical case study in a textbook. Well, it's not a textbook anymore.
- CD: Absolutely. So I know that one of your research interests, it says anti-Americanism, and I just wondered if you could talk a little bit more about this and I'm particularly interested, because in a time when there has been a lot of criticism of US leadership and the way they've handled this situation.
- ES: Anti-Americanism is the easy way to describe what I'm interested in. This is a project that has a book that's coming out by the end of the year, and it's a book that I had been working on for an embarrassingly long time. Scholarly books take a while to come out, but this one was particularly long. I guess fortunately, unfortunately anti-Americanism is an issue and it has been an issue for a very long time. Under the Trump administration it takes on a particular kind of cast, but it's been around for a very long time and just manifests itself in a variety of different ways. So for me, anti-Americanism is... Well, let me just say what I think anti-Americanism is not best understood as. There's normal ways of thinking about anti-Americanism and they have to do with... We might have images of flags that are burning or some kind of rising tide of popular sentiment that forces a government to reverse its stance vis-a-vis the United States or something

like that. So it's a matter of public opinion and hatred towards the United States and this sort of thing.

ES: I'm sure that in some cases that might be a useful kind of way to think about it, but not really in the cases that I'm interested in, which is in the former Soviet space. The way that I think about it and actually the title of that book is *Slow Anti-Americanism*, and it's a much slower process. The process by which changes in the image of the United States begins to filter into domestic society, into domestic politics in country X. The way that I look at it in the context of former Soviet central Asia is through social mobilizers. So these are the actors involved in social movements who use the United States as a symbol, as a resonant symbol. Because one thing you could say about the United States is that it's pretty symbolically resonant. Sometimes it's positive. Sometimes it's negative. Sometimes it's a mix of these kinds of things. There are lots of different dimensions. But its resonance is always pretty clear.

Social mobilizers recognized this as an opportunity to deploy the image of the United States in pursuit of whatever their own local agendas might be. So in the context of central Asia, I look at how different groups use the image of the United States. I look at human rights groups, how they use the image of the United States and how their use of the image changes over time, I look at Islamist actors, and I look at labor mobilizers, and it's a fascinating thing to watch, but the general story is one of how the image of the US deteriorated in former Soviet space over the course of 20 years. And that provided certain opportunities for certain kinds of groups to mobilize and it really created liabilities for other kinds of groups that had positive things to say about the United States. So the bottom line here is that anti-Americanism is a very slow moving process. It makes it maybe slightly unsexy to study it because there are no flags burning. There may not be death and destruction surrounding it. But I think that this is how it works probably in most parts of the world.

CD: Yeah. It sounds like it's good timing for you. You just might have a bestseller on your hands the way people are dealing right now.

ES: I hope not. I mean, I hope so, but I hope not. I wish this topic were irrelevant. And the reality is that it's the topic that keeps on giving, and I try to provide a framework that isn't sensationalistic, that it gives a sober assessment of where things stand and how they actually work. But you're absolutely right that the fallout from some of the actions of the Trump administration, I think they'll keep on giving for years if not decades.

CD: You did mention about social movements and I just wondered, based on your knowledge and expertise related to social movements, what kinds of social movements do you foresee coming out of this crisis?

ES: It's hard. One of the things that we know about social movements is that it's not purely related to how bad life is. So it's actually very difficult to mobilize when there are no resources or opportunity to do so. So while we're in the midst of the crisis, it's hard to imagine a ton of social mobilization about the things that people actually need to mobilize about, because economies are contracting, because people aren't able to go out and be the activist that they might want to be otherwise. But once all that settles, and once we begin to see a return to whatever the new normal looks like, I do think that there are a couple of things that are... They're not new, but I think they're accelerated by the crisis. The first thing is precarious labor. One of the things that becomes clear, and again, this often can be racialized, is that everyone's affected by this global pandemic. I think I mean that. Everybody. I don't know anybody who's not been affected by this. And yet at the same time, we're not all affected equally, so that disparities in income, disparities in terms of job security, disparities across the board, these become enormously significant.

The whole notion that in the gig economy that there's flexibility and people can move from one place to another without particular consequence. Well, that's nice as far as it goes and as long as things are booming, but at a moments like this, and there will be others, other moments like this, we realize just how precarious the situation is for people in these kinds of wage jobs, gig economy jobs, and any other kind of situation where there's no job security. So I think that there's going to be significant mobilization there. I also think... I don't know where the second one goes, but I've been thinking about it a lot recently. Here we are under stay at home orders and so on, and I don't know about you, but I've found myself prioritizing things differently. It's a lot more about family. I do not think... It doesn't even cross my mind to buy things that aren't really essential.

ES: And I think that the patterns of consumption may undergo a pretty fundamental change across the globe. Where people may begin to say, "I'd rather be prepared for uncertainty. I'd rather have all my basics covered than to be thinking about spending on something that is not essential." What's essential, what's not, people could have those and will have those discussions for themselves, but what happens to the travel industry? What happens to the leisure industries? What happens to tourism? What happens to these kinds of things? I think that there are major changes afoot in terms of consumption. And it may be that our economies going forward will be less driven by consumerism. I think that there's a serious possibility there, and that would really entail a major reordering of the principles that undergird our societies, particularly in North America, to a lesser extent elsewhere.

And we've seen this right as states reopened in the US. Those states that are early to that process where people aren't going to the stores. Is it a

ES: caution that's temporary or is it perhaps a slightly more permanent change in habits? I don't know, but I do think that this could actually give fuel to environmental movements, environmental activism, which has long been calling for changes in how people think about what their life necessities are and how essentially people make the priorities that they do as they live their lives.

CD: I totally relate to everything you're saying because I feel exactly that. Either, if I'm going to go do a grocery shopping trip, I am only going to get the groceries that are on my list and not be influenced by anything else that's in the store. And same with if I have to get something from an online, it's all been just the essentials. There's something kind of nice about that though.

ES: It is. There's a radical simplicity. There's a kind of reveling in the simple pleasures. We have three teenagers at home. It's not always quiet, but we had a quiet moment and we pulled out a thousand piece puzzle and we slowly and carefully did it. I mean, it took a couple of days and it wasn't super easy for somebody like me, but nonetheless, we got through it and it was a very different kind of experience that, okay, theoretically, we all know what it means to do a puzzle, but how many of us stop and actually do that? I don't mean to project on anybody else, but let's just say for me it was a pretty lovely experience because it reminded me that some of the greatest things are really simple.

CD: I can't agree more with you on that one. So you mentioned, then, some of your life at home shifting a little bit. Has your research shifted at all?

ES: Yes and no. I mentioned that this book is in production, so really I'm kind of in a way between projects. I've been doing a lot of different thinking on a lot of different issues as we faculty members do, but it's hard to say how my research has shifted except to say that I guess it's slowed down. I was reminded by a colleague Aisha Ahmad, she's a professor of political science at UTSC, and she has a nice piece in the Chronicle of Higher Education where basically she gives advice to people in their lockdown because she's been, she says, through a number of crises herself and lived through them and she reminds people of a bunch of different things and they're all very useful.

But to us professors who are used to constantly thinking about how to be productive in terms of our research, that it's okay, in fact, it's probably best to embrace the fact that you're going to be at a radically reduced level of productivity just as everyone else's across society. There's no reason that we should have a different expectation of ourselves, and that if the ideas don't come, because part of what, at least my discipline is about is creative engagement with ideas. If you don't have the creative mental

- ES: space to do that, that you forgive yourself because I'm sure that at the end of all of this, we'll have plenty of food for thought and there'll be lots of terrific ideas that will come from it. But at the same time, while you're in the midst of it, if the ideas aren't flowing, that's actually probably pretty normal for somebody who's living through a crisis as we all are. So there's that.
- ES: Looking forward, I have a research grant to study the downstream effects of a Chinese project called the Belt and Road Initiative, the BRI as it's called, is a huge infrastructure investment project across over a hundred countries that is really poised to change in a lot of ways, some predictable, others unpredictable, the face of Eurasia, Southeast Asia, South Asia and beyond and into Africa, even Latin America. So I'm on the cusp of thinking about that project. And of course, now that we're in the midst of this crisis, I wonder, and I've been reading a lot about how the COVID-19 lockdowns have slowed down or maybe even stopped some of this investment. But we'll see how that develops going forward.
- CD: This is my last question, but I know you did mention a couple of things that you've been doing during lockdown, and I know you're busy with your work and you've got your kids at home, but is there any other thing you want to mention that you've been doing well in self isolation? Any books that you've been reading or I don't know runs or... What do you do?
- ES: What do we do? A lot depends on the particulars of any given day as I'm sure it is for everybody. I mean, I go back to Aisha Ahmad's great advice. She talks about the need to focus on your physical security and your sanity basically, and I allow myself to do things that would have seemed a bit of an indulgence in the past. So a lot of walks, a lot of yoga, whereas in the past I wouldn't have done that. Trying to keep myself busy and sometimes distracted, because I'm probably not the only one who finds himself bombarded by lots of different thoughts. Lots of different troubling questions about the world that we live in. They're questions that are bigger than us, and being an academic, I'm tempted to plow through them, address them directly, think harder to get to the bottom of them, but that doesn't work. That doesn't work. The questions I don't think were adequate, to the questions that that need to be asked. Sometimes you just got to say, "Nope, turning that switch off and I'm turning on Netflix." And that's okay. Give yourself a break. Give the people around you a break. I think that that's probably a good dose of humility, a good dose of humor and I think we'll all get through this.
- CD: Yeah, absolutely. I think I need to hear that today. I just wanted to thank you so much for your time today, Ed, and for telling me your thoughts about the way things are going right now, and it was just nice to have a chance to chat.

ES: It's great that you do this and it's a lifeline to what the university is. There's no reason that... I'm sure the university going forward will be a slightly different enterprise, at least for the near term. But some of its core things like generating discussion on important issues., There's no reason that that can't continue even if an altered form.

CD: Absolutely. And I'm going to make sure that we have a link to, you said it was Aisha's article in the Chronicle. I'll look that up. Thank you so much, Ed. Take care of yourself and...

ES: Yeah, you too. Take care, Carla.
Thanks so much.

[theme music fades in]

CD: I would like to thank everyone for lending me your ears as a “captive” audience for to today’s show.

I would like to thank my guest, Professor Ed Schatz from UTM’s Department of Political Science, for taking the time to chat with me and tell me about his research and for providing some good sensible ideas and thoughts to ponder as we all get through this time.

I would like to thank the Office of the Vice-Principal, Research for their support.

If you get a chance and you are listening regularly, please take a moment to rate the podcast. It helps others find the podcast and learn more about UTM’s research and its researchers.

Lastly, and as always, thank you to the tuneer Tim Lane for his tracks and support.

Thank you!

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