

# Introducing

# Adam Auerbach

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**Adam is an Associate Professor at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. His research focuses on local governance, urban politics, and the political economy of development, with a regional focus on South Asia and India in particular. In this interview, Adam tells us about his multiple roles in academia, his work on politics in the urban periphery of India, and his experience working on social sustainability and inclusion with the World Bank.**



**You are a GLD Fellow in 2024, but you are also: an associate professor in the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University; a non-resident visiting scholar at the Center for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania; and a non-resident fellow at the Mahbub ul Haq Research Center, at Lahore University of Management Sciences. Can you provide us with an overview of all your current roles?**

Absolutely. In January 2024, I joined the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University as an associate professor. I am very excited about this new position – SAIS is a vibrant, multi-disciplinary environment with faculty and students working on many of the most pressing challenges of our time. I also appreciate how the faculty at SAIS regularly engages policymakers and practitioners here in Washington, DC, and beyond. With a large group of faculty members working on international development, South Asia, and comparative politics, it is an ideal academic home for me.

In addition to my faculty position at SAIS, I am fortunate to be affiliated with several other research centers around the world. These affiliations provide invaluable opportunities for me to share my research with, and learn from, leading scholars working on governance, development, and South Asian studies. CASI is also the academic home of two of my co-authors, Shikhar Singh and Tariq Thachil, so I visit CASI

often to work on our ongoing research project, which focuses on governance and public service provision in India's small towns.

**You and Tanu Kumar authored a GLD Working Paper entitled “Politics in the Urban Periphery: Citizen-Led Expansion and Informality at the Edges of India’s Cities.” What sparked your interest in investigating the incorporation of peripheral private developments into municipal governance, and why is this a crucial area of study in the context of urban development in India?**

My research with Tanu Kumar started with conversations about the dramatic changes unfolding in India's urban peripheries as cities rapidly expand into the countryside. Not only does this include transformations in the built space, but also demographic changes through migration and shifting patterns in how land is classified and regulated. In Jaipur, a city of four million people, we observed significant unevenness in how peripheral urban neighborhoods have been “authorized” by urban authorities and incorporated into the city. We focus on a common and proliferating type of neighborhood at the edges of India's cities – cooperative housing societies – which are built by private developers and house middle-class residents. In Jaipur alone, there are more than 4,000 such cooperative housing society colonies, about a quarter of which have not been authorized by the

city government. Tanu and I find that neighborhood authorization status shapes outcomes in the provision of public infrastructure and services.

Tanu and I are grateful to GLD for funding our initial data collection for the project. We look forward to pushing the project forward (now with Emily Rains) through further qualitative fieldwork, a more extensive resident survey, and interviews with land developers, neighborhood association leaders, and city officials.

**"It afforded me a chance to examine a new research area—how local governance and public participation jointly shape outcomes in climate change resilience—and visit a new world region."**

**In the past year, you served as a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow in the Social Sustainability and Inclusion Global Practice at the World Bank. How did this experience shape your perspective on social sustainability and inclusion, particularly concerning local-level practices?**

Yes, between August 2022 and August 2023, I was a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow and spent my fellowship year with the Social Sustainability and Inclusion Unit at the World Bank. My time at the World Bank was thrilling; I was especially lucky to be able to work with Audrey Sacks, Senior Social Development Specialist. My work at the World Bank centered on local governance, social inclusion, and climate change in Central Asia, Uzbekistan in particular. It afforded me a chance to examine a new research area—how local governance and public participation jointly shape outcomes in climate change resilience—and visit a new world region.

Alongside my co-author Dilmurad Yusupov, I spent November 2022 conducting fieldwork in Uzbekistan to better understand the threats of climate change to marginalized social groups. Uzbekistan faces a range of threats from climate change: under the highest projected emissions pathway, average temperatures in Uzbekistan will increase by 4.8°C by the end of the century. This will be accompanied by severe droughts, flash flooding, wildfires, and mudslides (see the World Bank's 2021 report, *Climate Risk Country Profile: Uzbekistan*). Our findings underscore the importance of local state capacity in climate change resilience. They also highlight the importance of systematically including marginalized groups—women, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities—in adaptation efforts. Without doing so, these groups' preferences and intersectional vulnerabilities are often overlooked, intensifying their risks in the face of climate change.



Rural Uzbekistan  
Photo credit: Adam Auerbach

**GLD Working Paper by Adam Auerbach and Tanu Kumar**

"Politics in the Urban Periphery: Citizen-Led Expansion and Informality at the Edges of India's Cities," *Governance and Local Development Working Paper Series*, No.63. University of Gothenburg. Available At: [https://gld.gu.se/media/2985/gld\\_workingpaper\\_63\\_auerbach\\_kumar\\_202303.pdf](https://gld.gu.se/media/2985/gld_workingpaper_63_auerbach_kumar_202303.pdf)

**Listen to Governance Uncovered with Adam!**

In May 2021, Adam was a guest on GLD's podcast, together with Tariq Thachil, in conversation about COVID-19 challenges in India so-called "slum settlements."



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