



Spring 2026 / Issue No. 20

AFGHAN RESEARCH INITIATIVE

NEWSLETTER



From the Director

The Afghanistan Research Initiative (ARI) continues to build on research and capacity gains, producing knowledge that is critical to Afghanistan's present and future. Based at UCA's Graduate School of Development in Bishkek, ARI is supported by a three-year grant from Canada's International Development Research Centre.

I am thrilled to announce the launch of ARI's second phase, running through 2028, and to welcome our first cohort of fellows, researchers, and doctoral students receiving ARI grants. I wish them every success as they pursue independent research on Afghanistan's development.

Afghanistan's socioeconomic situation makes independent research more urgent than ever. By supporting original scholarship and training the human capital, ARI aims to become a hub for rigorous and independent research to inform debate on the country's challenges and opportunities.

Lutfi Rahimi
Director, Afghanistan Research Initiative

IN THIS ISSUE:

- From the Director**
Reflections on Our Recent Work & Key Themes
- Spring 2026 Cohort & Research Priorities**
Fellows, Researchers & Doctoral Students
- Looking Ahead**
Goals & Directions

Stay tuned with ARI:



Email: ari@ucentralasia.org

2026 Spring Cohort

We are proud to welcome a first cohort of ARI fellows, researchers and doctoral students, each pursuing research that advances knowledge on Afghanistan.



ABDULLAH AMMAR
University of Marburg
(partially funded by ARI)

PhD & Emerging Scholars

- Afghan migration, forced displacement, and climate-induced mobility.
- Informal and digital livelihoods in transit contexts.
- Refugee agency, legal exclusion, and participation.

Exploring how Afghans in transit navigate legal exclusion through informal and digital survival strategies amid political, economic, and climate crises.

Examining how Afghans in transit navigate legal exclusion through informal and digital survival strategies amid intersecting political, economic, and climate crises.



ABDUL TAWAB BALAKARZAI
University of Victoria
(partially funded by ARI)

- Higher education for sustainable development and community resilience.
- Water governance, traditional irrigation, and climate adaptation.
- Nature-based solutions and sustainable water management in low-resource contexts.

Examining how traditional Karez irrigation systems interact with evolving water governance policies in Afghanistan.

ARI Non-Resident Fellows



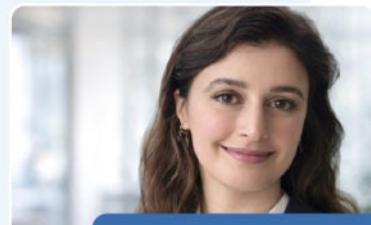
KAMBAIZ RAFI
Political Economist

- Political economy of development and postwar governance.
- Formal and informal institutions in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
- Private-sector investment, uncertainty, and political violence.
- Market-oriented reforms and digital development in Afghanistan.

How private-sector investors navigate uncertainty and political violence in Afghanistan's postwar, market-oriented economy.

- Politics of memory in wartime and periods of state collapse.
- Women's collective memory and political agency in Afghanistan.
- Commemorative practices in domestic and transnational spaces.
- Vernacular knowledge production and gendered sites of resistance.

Documenting how Afghan women sustain political agency and collective memory through intimate and digital commemorative practices.



MUNAZZA EBTIKAR

Anthropologist

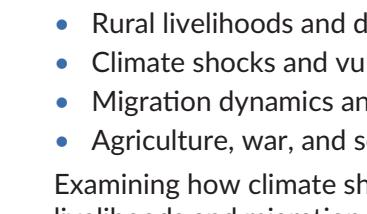
ARI Non-Resident Research Fellow



TARIQ BASIR
Political Economist
ARI Non-Resident Research Fellow

- Political economy of governance in Afghanistan.
- Authoritarianism, theocratic regimes, and information control.
- Democratisation movements and collective action in the MENA region.
- Formal theory applications to revolutions and non-democratic politics.

Examining how information and media are used to consolidate power under authoritarian regimes, with a focus on post-2021 Afghanistan.



- Rural livelihoods and development in Afghanistan.
- Climate shocks and vulnerability analysis.
- Migration dynamics and adaptation strategies.
- Agriculture, war, and socioeconomic resilience.

Examining how climate shocks and vulnerability shape rural livelihoods and migration patterns in Afghanistan.



REZA EHSAN
Development Economist
ARI Non-Resident Research Fellow

Research Grants



AHMAD WALID BARLAS

University of Greifswald
Development Economist | ARI Researcher

- Youth livelihoods and economic vulnerability in Afghanistan.
- Employment, income generation, and coping strategies.
- Education, migration, and economic development in fragile contexts.
- Survey-based research and policy-oriented economic analysis.

Mapping livelihood pathways and employment constraints for young men in rural and urban Afghanistan to inform targeted economic interventions.

Research Grants



NABI SAQEE

Oxford University

Literary Historian | ARI Researcher

- Medieval Afghan history with a focus on the Ghurid Empire.
- Social history of Ghur and Gharjistan using Persian documentary sources.
- Status and role of women in medieval Islamic societies.
- Persian historical texts and medieval documentary analysis (Firuzkuh Papers).

Studying the role and status of women in the Ghurids Empire (8th–13th century) based on the Firuzkuh historical papers.



MOHAMMAD HAMID HAMDARD

Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University

Ecologist | PhD Researcher

Looking Ahead

Over the coming months and years, ARI will continue to support research and foster new scholarship on Afghanistan. We look forward to:

Expanding our research networks with new fellows, doctoral students, and collaborative projects across Afghanistan and the region.

Showcasing original scholarship through supporting open access publications, public lecture series, debates, discussions to identify research priorities, attending conferences, and leveraging other social media platforms.

Strengthening capacity and debate by promoting knowledge exchange, bridging local expertise to global research practices and raising standards.

Through these efforts, ARI aims to remain a hub for independent, credible and high-quality research, shaping informed debate and policy choices for Afghanistan's future.

