Introduction

Africa’s Changing Security Landscape

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the enduring threat posed by Al Qaeda, ISIS, and other violent extremist organizations have produced a plethora of studies analyzing the driving forces behind jihadi Salafi activity across the globe. For more than a decade now, scholars, policymakers, and analysts have raised concerns about the spread of jihadi Salafism in sub-Saharan Africa. This debate calls for a new outlook on previous claims that state–Islamic relations in Africa are largely harmonious, and that the state and Islam are mutually constitutive (Gifford 2016; Haynes 2005, 2006; Sanneh 2016; Villalon 1994).

The most prominent jihadi Salafi organizations are Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the francophone Sahel, and Al-Shabaab in East Africa. In response to these new threats, many African governments have built up their military capabilities, engaged in regional security collaboration agreements, and allowed foreign powers to establish military bases on their soil (Larémont 2011; Nordic Africa Institute 2018; Tar and Bala 2019). Despite these initiatives, however, the number of attacks by jihadi Salafi groups across the continent has increased significantly since 2009.

Figure I.1 and Map I.1 illustrate these changing dynamics within sub-Saharan Africa’s security landscape. Figure I.1 contains data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). It compares the total number of jihadi Salafi terrorist attacks across sub-Saharan Africa between 2009 and 2019. In 2019, the number of such attacks peaked; since 2017, they have plateaued at a comparatively high level (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project 2019; The Economist 2020).

Jihadi Salafism clearly has emerged as a serious security challenger to many African states. In the francophone Sahel, for example, jihadi Salafism now constitutes the main security threat to the nation’s armed
forces (Elischer 2019b). Map I.1 highlights the individual countries that have been affected by jihadi Salafi violence since 2000, with the number thereof having grown steadily. Most if not all studies about jihadi Salafism in Africa examine countries or geographic areas in which related organizations have established a home base and in which such violence is escalating (Ahmad 2017; Botha 2017; Chivis 2016; Comolli 2015; S. J. Hansen 2013, 2019; I. Y. Ibrahim 2017; Kendhammer and McCain 2018; Pirio 2007; Rotberg 2005; Salem 2013; Thurston 2018a, 2020; Walther and Miles 2018; Zenn 2020). Mali, Nigeria, and Somalia are probably the most studied country cases in this regard.1 The literature has yielded many useful insights. It has shown that the emergence and subsequent evolution of jihadi Salafi organizations constitute a dynamic process. Yet, the focus on countries or regions in which jihadi Salafi groups have turned into lasting security challengers has distracted scholarly focus from those

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1 This is especially true for book-length studies. Nigeria’s geostrategic importance together with the regional threat that Boko Haram poses to the Lake Chad region account for that organization’s prominence in the scholarly literature on jihadi Salafism in sub-Saharan Africa.

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Figure I.1 Absolute number of jihadi Salafi terrorist attacks in sub-Saharan Africa between 2009 and 2019.
Source: ACLED: https://acleddata.com/#/dashboard
Notes: The graph compiles the following activities by groups, which the academic literature classifies as jihadi Salafi and which are operating in sub-Saharan Africa: explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, abduction/forced disappearance, remote explosive/landmine/improvised explosive device (IED), shelling/artillery/missile attack, suicide bomb, attack, grenade. All groups are listed in the Appendix.
countries that have prevented or curtailed such activity in their national territories. Very few authors have dedicated attention to the latter. Unfortunately, these observers have furthermore conducted their analysis within the confines of individual case studies (Kobo 2012; Ostebo 2011). As a result, systematic and comparative theorizing about why jihadi Salafi organizations establish a home base in some but not other countries has remained absent from the expanding literature on violent Islamic extremism in Africa. The discussion about the enabling factors of jihadi Salafism has thus come to represent an echo chamber. Scholars generally agree that explanations for the emergence of violent Islamic extremism must not be confined to a single variable or event. But there has been little comparative research about

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Map I.1 Countries affected by jihadi Salafi terrorist attacks since 2000
Source: Author’s own compilation, based on data from the Global Terrorism Database (www.start.umd.edu/data-tools/global-terrorism-database-gtd) and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (https://acleddata.com/#/dashboard).
Note: Countries affected by jihadi Salafi terrorist attacks are highlighted in black.

2 A recent and noteworthy exception is Saalfeld (2019).
which variables matter more than others during the different stages of a given conflict between a violent extremist organization and the state.

In light of this, the book examines why some African countries have become home bases for jihadi Salafi activity while others have managed to prevent or curb homegrown forms thereof in their national territories. It directs attention to the role of the state and the effect of different official strategies in undermining the ability of jihadi Salafi organizations to establish a home base. It further examines the effect of such strategies on the subsequent stages of the conflict between homegrown jihadi Salafi organizations and the state in countries in which these organizations have established a home base. The book thus applies a state-centric approach to a geographic area of the world in which “weak statehood” – defined as the absence of viable administrative structures (H. Soifer and Vom Hau 2008) – is seen as a major impediment to the imposition of state authority and public order (International Crisis Group 2015b; Mentan 2014; Steinberg and Weber 2015). The empirical findings demonstrate that the absence of such viable administrative structures does not provide an accurate impression of the capacity of African states to structure and regulate social life regardless.

Through a comparative, inductive, and historically grounded analysis of the evolution of state–Islamic relations in ten countries of the continent, the book argues that some African states are more capable of imposing state authority on Islamic practice than others. Put differently: African states may be weak in administrative terms, but this does not impede their ability to influence social behavior (Migdal 1988) – and, hence, their ability to undermine radicalization processes. The book holds that a full account of the current dynamics of violent Islamic extremism requires an understanding of long-established patterns of state–Islamic interactions. Depending on the nature and evolution of these patterns, African states can be either radicalizers or deradicalizers of their domestic Salafi communities.

The book rests on three premises. First, religious leaders can be a resource for or a threat to the consolidation of state authority. This is particularly true in societies in which religious leaders enjoy a high degree of legitimacy and in which state leaders suffer from a low degree of public trust (Gill 1998; Koessel 2014). Second, to understand the causes behind the formation and subsequent expansion of jihadi Salafi groups, scholars need to take religious doctrine seriously. It is difficult – if not impossible – to understand the actions of any extremist organization without looking at its
ideological or religious tenets (Neumann 2016; Thurston 2016b). The book regards the appeal of jihadi Salafi groups to religious texts as an important tool for them gaining legitimacy for their actions. Third, to understand why jihadi Salafism has emerged as a lasting security challenger in some but not other African countries requires an understanding of the wider political and organizational playing fields in which Islamic and Salafi activity is now unfolding (Elischer 2019c; Hafez 2003; Robbins and Rubin 2013; Wiktorowicz 2001).

**Reexamining Africa’s Security Landscape: The Territorial Origins of Jihadi Salafism and Their Implications for the Study of State–Islamic Relations**

Salafism has become an integral part of Africa’s Islamic landscape. As elsewhere in the world, jihadis constitute a minority within the Salafi community there (Boukhars 2016b; Meijer 2009; Neumann 2016; Ostebo 2015). The Salafi creed antecedes its jihadi variant by more than a millennium. Organizations and groups are rarely born extreme; their members become radicalized over time. Radicalization constitutes a process in which individuals increasingly endorse hostile and violent actions against an identified out-group (J. Berger 2018, 46–48). This process has an ideological and behavioral component to it. The former concerns ideas that are opposed to the core values of a given society, while the latter refers to the methods by which actors try to bring about changes to the status quo. Adherents to or supporters of jihadi Salafism might support resorting to violence against the state or apostates in principle but refrain from actually indulging in the practice itself (Maher 2016; Neumann 2013; Wagemakers 2012).

Although there is general agreement that radicalization processes are complex, there is no current consensus about the salience of what the individual drivers behind such radicalization are. To identify the role of the state in the radicalization processes of groups requires a distinction between homegrown (domestic) and external (foreign) jihadi Salafi organizations. In terrorism research, scholars regard groups as homegrown if perpetrator, victim, and location all match in terms of

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3 The author wishes to thank Fonteh Akum and Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni from the Institute for Security Studies in Dakar, Senegal, for sharing their thoughts about the role and purpose of religious ideology.
nationality (Berkebile 2017, 1–5; for an empirical application, see Dambruoso 2014).

This study focuses on organizations, not on individuals. It examines the following features of a given jihadi Salafi organization: its territorial origins; the nationalities of its leaders; the nationalities of its victims; the extent to which the group recruits jihadi fighters within a particular national territory; and the group’s ability to access a country’s Islamic sphere. The conceptual boundaries between a homegrown and an external jihadi Salafi organization are fluid. Over time, an external group may establish a foothold in more than one territory and become a domestic one outside of the country in which it originally formed.

A short discussion of Boko Haram’s geographic roots and the territorial range of its activities in Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon illustrates how a distinction between homegrown and external jihadi Salafi groups can be made. In Nigeria, Boko Haram is a textbook case of a homegrown jihadi Salafi organization. The group first formed in the northeast area of the country. Nigerian nationals are in charge of it. Nigerian Salafi scholars and clerics have played a key role in its evolution. Boko Haram’s geographic origins, the nationalities of its leadership, recruits, and victims, as well as the location of its operations all match. The number of Boko Haram attacks on civilians and state representatives has escalated in recent years (Comolli 2015; Kendhammer and McCain 2018; Thurston 2016a, 2018a).

In Chad, Boko Haram has gradually emerged as a significant security threat (Elischer 2018; International Crisis Group 2017b). The leadership of the organization does not contain any Chadian nationals. Its attacks on Chadian territory all occur in the Lac region, an area located along the country’s border with Nigeria. It is unclear to what extent Boko Haram has been able to recruit from among the Chadian population. There is no indication that the organization’s ideology has established a presence in Chad’s Islamic sphere. Taking all of these factors into consideration, Boko Haram can be classified as an external jihadi Salafi group in the context of Chad.

In Cameroon, Boko Haram has conducted attacks in the Far North Region. Studies indicate that several Cameroonian clerics propagate

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4 To state that Boko Haram is a homegrown jihadi Salafi group in Nigeria is compatible with the finding that international jihadists contributed to its formation and ideological development. On this, see Zenn’s insightful analysis (2020).
support for Boko Haram, and there are several such nationals within Boko Haram’s leadership. The organization itself is known to recruit among the Cameroonian population in the Far North region (Tull 2015; Vincent et al. 2017). In Cameroon, therefore, Boko Haram has become a homegrown jihadi group.

The distinction between homegrown and external jihadi Salafism allows for a historically accurate and process-driven analysis of the origins and subsequent evolution of jihadi Salafi organizations. It enables a distinction to be made between the territorial origins of a group and the areas to which it expanded or retreated at a later stage. In Nigeria, jihadi radicalization emerged from within the country itself. In Chad and Cameroon, jihadi Salafism entered from abroad. In Cameroon, meanwhile, jihadi Salafism appears to have established a local constituency.

Moreover, the conceptual distinction between homegrown and external jihadi Salafi organizations facilitates analysis of the role of the state in religious radicalization processes. The Nigerian state clearly failed to prevent or curb Boko Haram’s activities. Since the emergence of the group in 2009, Nigeria has seen the escalation of jihadi Salafi violence within its borders. This raises two interrelated questions: First, how could Boko Haram emerge and establish a home base for its operations in Nigeria? Second, why has the Nigerian state been unable to engage with the group in a manner that is conducive to ensuring the security and safety of its citizens? Both of these questions touch on the relationship between secular and Islamic authority. The same is true of Cameroon, where Boko Haram has, as noted, established a visible local base. In Chad, the emergence of jihadi Salafism cannot be ascribed to state-Islamic relations, however; Boko Haram activities there are the joint outcome of geographic proximity between Chad and Nigeria and porous borders between the two countries. The Appendix applies the conceptual distinction between homegrown and external jihadi Salafi groups to all countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have been victim to jihadi Salafi attacks over the course of the past twenty years.

The Core Argument: The African State as Mobilizer and Demobilizer of Homegrown Jihadi Salafism

Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations would emerge as major promoters of the Salafi creed in sub-Saharan Africa during the 1970s. The book’s core argument is that African states that established
organizational gatekeepers in the Islamic sphere prior to these developments have since managed to prevent or curb homegrown jihadi Salafi activities. To establish steering capacity in the Islamic sphere, autocratic incumbents created what this book refers to as “state-led national Islamic associations.” On paper, the activities of such associations are confined to the following: determining the date and time of the commencement of Ramadan; assisting the faithful with their annual pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia; organizing and conducting Islamic jurisprudence; and serving as an interlocutor between the state and the Muslim community.

In addition, the autocratic state elites of the 1970s provided these associations with the informal mandate to regulate access to the Islamic sphere. The purpose of such state-led national Islamic associations is to undermine challengers to state authority emanating from within the Islamic sphere by acting as informal guardians of state authority and as gatekeepers. At the same time, they provide resources and recognition to Muslim groups that the state regards as acquiescent to state authority.

To control the actions of state-led national Islamic associations, state elites maintain control over their leadership structures. In countries where state elites did establish such entities, all previously existing Islamic groups and associations were cajoled into joining the new supreme one. State-led national Islamic associations target one aspect of Islamic practice in particular: access to the Friday prayer mosques that fulfill a particularly important role within Muslim life. They bring together large gatherings of the faithful in compulsory weekly prayer. The weekly sermons provide social guidance, but they can also foster support for or resentment against secular authorities. Following Friday prayer, those remaining behind often listen to clerics in smaller circles and discuss political life. Friday prayer mosques also provide opportunities for religious education. Islamic schools are frequently affiliated with a Friday prayer mosque and its leadership. Several scholars have highlighted not only the importance of Friday prayer mosques as organizational resources for political engagement, but also their role in radicalizing the faithful (Cesari 2014; Egerton 2011; Rabasa and Benard 2015; Wiktorowicz 2001).

The creation of state-led national Islamic associations has benefited Sufi Islam, sub-Saharan Africa’s Islamic establishment, and also effectively has undermined the formation of viable Salafi communities.
the late 1980s onward, and for reasons that differed from country to country, certain incumbents permitted the establishment of such communities. However, domestic Sala fi activity still remained tied to certain informal conditions. In recent decades, these regulatory frameworks have helped negate violent Islamic extremist organizations. In line with their original intention, state-led national Islamic associations continue to undermine politically aspiring Sala fi groups.

In other states, the autocratic rulers of the 1970s did not create organizational gatekeepers to the Islamic sphere. These countries saw the formation of what this book refers to as “Islamic federations,” national organizational entities that formed on the initiative of Islamic clerics. State elites recognize them as the official mouthpiece of the Muslim community, but do not interfere in their internal affairs. As a result, these associations are not subject to state involvement and have no informal mandate to regulate access to the Islamic sphere. Some countries, though, have refrained from the creation of a national Islamic association. In those with Islamic federations and those without a national Islamic organization, Sala fi leaders changed the composition of the Islamic sphere to their advantage early on. Subsequently, the lack of state capacity in the Islamic sphere made these countries more susceptible to the spread of political and jihadi Sala fi sm. Figures I.2 and I.3 display the modus operandi and the effect of state-led Islamic associations and Islamic federations, respectively, on the national Islamic landscape.

**Figure I.2** Modus operandi of state-led national Islamic associations.
Source: Author’s own compilation
By retracing the process (or lack thereof) that led to the formation of organizational gatekeepers in the Islamic sphere and by analyzing the latter’s effect on state–Islamic relations over several decades, the book makes two key contributions to the literature. First, it helps further the long-standing political debate on state–society relations in areas of weak statehood. Migdal (1988) was the first to argue that governments in weak states can influence societal behavior via alliances between bureaucrats and representatives of civil society. Scholars analyzing the modus operandi of governance in areas of weak statehood frequently highlight the role of nonstate actors in the provision of public services (Reno 1997; Risse 2011), the promotion of state-backed societal norms (Nuñez-Mietz and Iommi 2017), or the emergence of alternative policies (Farrell and Quiggin 2017). A fourth strand examines how the tacit collaboration between the state and civil society weakens opposition movements and parties (Lust-Okar 2007; Riedl 2014). The present analysis extends this last strand of research to the relationship between the state and the Islamic sphere in sub-Saharan Africa.

Second, the book contributes to the debate about the mobilization and demobilization of jihadi Salafism. Countries with state-led national Islamic associations undermine political and security

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5 It is important to note that cooperation between the state and nonstate actors may lead to the erosion of the former’s authority. For more on this argument, see Mendelsohn (2016).
challengers through four interrelated mechanisms, as overseen by those associations: (1) the identification and subsequent banning of religious challengers to state authority, (2) the strengthening of Islamic groups that the state regards as loyal to its authority, (3) the ability to co-opt potential opponents, and (4) the creation of institutional proximity between secular and Islamic elites (Figure I.4). Institutional arrangements nested in organizational entities do more than enforce rules. Regular and institutionally prescribed interactions between state and Islamic leaders provide state elites with deeper knowledge about the Islamic sphere. This furnishes state elites with the capacity to differentiate between Islam, the Salafi minority, and a violent fringe within that Salafi minority. Scholars working on Muslim minority countries have identified national Islamic associations as an organizational tool for the emancipation of Islam vis-à-vis the state (Laurence 2012). The book builds on these insights.

Countries with state-led national Islamic associations become demobilizers of homegrown jihadi Salafism. Such associations prevent and curb jihadi Salafi ideology and recruitment. The empirical chapters of this book will illustrate the four outlined mechanisms in greater detail. It is important to note at the outset that states engage with their domestic Salafi communities in a variety of ways. State action in the Islamic sphere must therefore not be confined to its identification by the presence or absence of informal institutional regulatory mechanisms. Chapter 1 spells out these different forms of engagement further.

Theoretical Illustration of the Core Argument

To trace the origins, evolution, and effects of different types of Islamic associations, the book draws on the theoretical assumptions of historical institutionalism. Historical institutionalism views outcomes as the product of a dynamic and long-term process, one in which institutional arrangements and organizational entities are key variables and in which organizational entities can have unintended long-term effects (Cortell and Peterson 2001; Fioretos, Falleti, and Sheingate 2016).

Historical institutionalists working with longitudinal and cross-sectional research designs highlight the effect of the temporal ordering of events (Bulmer 2009; Pierson 2000; Thelen 1999). Political choices at an initial stage of a process are particularly consequential, as they entrench early advantages and subsequently lead to the consolidation
identification and co-optation of political and security challengers

providing access and resources to groups accommodative of state authority

institutionalized proximity between secular and Islamic authority

ability to distinguish between Islamic sphere and challengers within that sphere through regular consultation

identification and subsequent banning of political and security challengers

continuous monitoring of the Islamic sphere in cooperation with state authority

prevention or curbing of homegrown jihadi Salafism; consolidation of quietist Salafism

institutional regulation through state-led national Islamic associations by the mid-1970s

Figure I.4 Informal institutional regulation and the prevention/curbing of homegrown jihadi Salafism
of political superiority (Pierson 2000). This book demonstrates that the timing of the creation of state-led national Islamic associations in sub-Saharan Africa was important for their effectiveness, as well as for the ability of secular governments to maintain state oversight in Islamic affairs in subsequent years. Where countries had failed to create such state-led national Islamic associations by the 1970s, subsequent attempts to create religious regulatory mechanisms would ultimately prove ineffective.

Countries with state-led national Islamic associations experienced a critical juncture in their Islamic sphere during the 1970s (Capoccia 2015; Capoccia and Kelemen 2007). To identify and examine the causal logic of critical junctures, Soifer (2012) distinguishes between “permissive” and “productive” conditions. Permissive conditions change the underlying political context, heighten the possibility for human agency, and increase the prospects of institutional divergence across cases. Productive conditions determine the outcome and create the divergence in outcomes across cases. Productive conditions are context specific. For a critical juncture to open, such permissive and productive conditions need to coincide. The presence of permissive conditions and the simultaneous absence of those that are productive constitute a crisis without change, meaning a missed opportunity (2012, 1574–76, 1579–80). In countries with state-led national Islamic associations, permissive and productive conditions would indeed coincide.

The permissive condition here was profound political uncertainty. By the 1970s, all post-independence leaders had eradicated multiparty competition; military and single-party rule had become the norm. Africa’s postcolonial economies were beginning to collapse because of mismanagement and the global dominance of Western markets and capital. Political regimes were becoming highly personalized. Estranged from former political allies and their populations, incumbents suffered a loss of popular legitimacy. In countries with ruling military juntas, leaders faced resistance not only from their populations but also from other members of the junta. Primal identities and neopatrimonial networks substituted or replaced formal constitutional arrangements (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Nic Cheeseman 2015; Nicholas Cheeseman 2018).

The productive condition that triggered the formation of state-led national Islamic associations meanwhile was the emerging perception
of Salafism and other orthodox Sunni movements as challengers to public order and the authority of the state. The reasons why individual incumbents and their supporters came to view Salafism as a threat differed from country to country. In those lacking state-led national Islamic associations, this productive condition was lacking: the autocratic incumbents of the 1970s viewed Salafism as a useful resource for the consolidation of authoritarian rule.

Most historical institutionalists examine formal institutional arrangements. In non-Western societies, informal institutions are highly relevant to the study of politics (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; MacLean 2010). State-led national Islamic associations embrace formal rules. The informal rule to ban Salafi activity accommodated official rules and enabled state elites to pursue goals that would deviate from the formal arrangements already in place (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). The informal regulation of Islamic activity is an example of an adaptive informal rule, an informal rule that is put in place by the state (Tsai 2006, 2016). The informal religious regulatory mechanisms have remained in place despite political turmoil, upheaval, and regime change.

The book draws on Mahoney’s (2000) proposed power mechanism to explain path dependency: Institutions persist because they empower a certain group – secular elites – at the expense of other groups – the Salafi community. Path dependency does not mean that the institutional rules embedded in organizational entities remain static. As Mahoney and Thelen (2010, 2015) show, institutions are vulnerable to contestation and change. On the one hand, the rules embedded in institutions can never be precise enough, which facilitates alternative interpretations across time; on the other hand, rule enforcement in itself carries the potential for political change. In countries with state-led national Islamic associations, the informal rule to ban Salafism experienced what the two authors refer to as “layering” – meaning incremental amendments to an existing rule. State elites changed the way in which existing rule were applied (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 16–17). From the late 1980s/early 1990s onward, state elites permitted Salafi communities to establish a presence in their national territories. In return, the state expected political acquiescence on the part of these state-authorized Salafi groups. Institutional change can be bottom-up or top-down. In countries with bottom-up changes, the Muslim faithful called for greater religious liberty. In those with top-down changes,
incoming presidents deemed it politically expedient to open the Islamic sphere to the Salafi creed.

Beginning in the early 1990s, jihadi ideology and activism began to exert its influence in sub-Saharan Africa. Countries with informal religious control mechanisms became locked in: state-led national Islamic associations would help prevent or curb homegrown Salafi jihadism and foster the consolidation of quietist Salafism. Countries without such informal religious control mechanisms, meanwhile, experienced a different kind of lock in. Their inability to influence the developments within their Islamic spheres combined with their lack of regular interaction with Islamic elites allowed homegrown jihadi Salafism to spread unhindered, and to propagate its ideology among wider sections of the population. As the book’s empirical chapters demonstrate, government elites lacking state-led national Islamic associations responded to this threat either with inaction or with indiscriminate violence – or a mixture of both. These responses would foment domestic radicalization processes.

Figure I.5 visualizes how the book employs the critical juncture framework in the study of organizational gatekeepers in sub-Saharan Africa’s Islamic spheres. The causal arrows linking the antecedent conditions to the diverging outcomes are incomplete. The intention here is not to provide a causal graph but rather to illustrate the importance of critical junctures for the subsequent evolution of state–Islamic relations. As the empirical analysis will demonstrate in due course, states have to resort to a variety of strategies that together cause the diverging outcomes contained in the graph. Given this study’s inductive approach, the complete causal graphs are provided after the empirical analysis in Chapter 7.

Engaging with Alternative Variables

Scholars frequently emphasize the multicausal and process-driven nature of Islamic radicalization (Hafez and Mullins 2015; Hwang 2018; Schuurman 2018). This section briefly revisits the variables that those working on the topic regard as particularly salient for the emergence of violent Islamic extremism.

A first school of thought highlights the importance of religious convictions. Although not all forms of violent Islam can be ascribed to a particular subset of Salafism (Woodward et al. 2013), most
antecedent conditions

productive condition: political uncertainty

permissive condition: elite perception of Salafism as a threat to regime stabilization

critical juncture

creation of state-led national Islamic associations: steering, gatekeeping, co-opting, and demobilizing capacities as policy response options

diverging outcomes

containment of politically assertive and homegrown jihadi Salafism

consolidation of quietist Salafism

productive condition: political uncertainty

no critical juncture: crisis without change / missed opportunity / lack of policy response options

emergence and consolidation of politically assertive Salafism

emergence of jihadi ideology and violence

absence of permissive condition; elite perception of Salafism as a resource for regime stabilization

Figure I.5 Theoretical illustration of the core argument
contemporary Islamist extremists do adhere to the jihadi Salafi school of thought (Byman 2015; Maher 2016; Rabasa and Benard 2015; Thurston 2016b; United Nations Development Programme 2017; Wiktorowicz 2005). Second, an equally prominent strand of the literature emphasizes the role of economic marginalization. Poverty alienates the faithful from mainstream society, thus providing fertile recruitment ground for jihadi clerics. This is especially true for young males in postcolonial countries with underperforming economies and fledgling social services (El Said 2013; Mazarr 2007; United Nations 2015). In Europe’s Christian-heritage societies or in Africa’s Christian-majority countries, discrimination and cultural alienation often accompany economic deprivation (Evans and Phillips 2007; Kepel 2015).

Third, scholars working on jihadism in postcolonial states point to a link between tribal or ethnic cleavages and the escalation of jihadi violence. Tribal leaders embrace jihadi ideology to justify violence against the state or other communities. For these observers, violent extremism is not a result of ideological conviction but rather an opportunity to exploit long-held narratives of exclusion (Benjaminsen and Ba 2018; Collombier and Roy 2018; Olivier Roy 2017; United Nations 2015). Fourth, accounts of jihadi Salafism’s trajectory in individual countries illustrate the importance of geographic proximity to states in which jihadi Salafi groups are already present. Countries taking in migrants from states in which jihadi groups operate are equally at risk (Harrigan 2013; Lacroix 2011; Pirio 2007). Fifth, and related to some of the previous variables, autocratic governance, corruption, and human rights violations are all seen as conducive to the rise of extremist ideology – as they hamper economic development and decrease the overall legitimacy of the state (Allan et al. 2015; United Nations 2015).

These variables operate at different levels. The focus in much of the literature and many of the policies designed to undermine radicalization processes is on individual or structural factors. The book directs attention to the effect of different organizational playing fields and the varying degrees to which they prevent or allow jihadi Salafism to penetrate societies. The various chapters build on the assumption that religious ideologies matter. Findings confirm this assumption: homegrown jihadi Salafism does emerge and prosper in countries where the state lacks steering capacity in the Islamic sphere. The book’s research design controls for a number of alternative variables, including
economic marginalization, geographic proximity to areas in which jihadi Salafism already operates, the presence of politicized ethnic cleavages, and autocratic governance, as well as other pertinent alternative explanations. By holding alternative variables constant and by linking organizational gatekeepers in the Islamic sphere to the consolidation of quietist Salafism, these findings question several hitherto prominent explanations for jihadi Salafism. To posit that state-imposed religious control mechanisms prevent and curb the phenomenon’s homegrown form is not to deny or downplay the effect of alternative variables in countries where these mechanisms are absent, and in which homegrown jihadi Salafism turns into a serious security challenger. As this book also demonstrates, several alternative variables contribute to the spread of homegrown jihadi Salafism in countries without state-led national Islamic associations. Jihadi organizations are complex entities, and individuals may join them for different reasons at different times. Where organizational gatekeepers are absent, economic and political variables greatly contribute to jihadi Salafi recruitment.

Structure of the Book

Chapter 1 establishes the book’s conceptual and methodological parameters. It specifies the multiple manifestations of Salafism across sub-Saharan Africa and introduces the various strategies that states have at their disposal when it comes to engaging with their domestic Salafi community. The chapter further outlines the selection criteria of the country cases and examines the variation in the dependent and independent variables. Six cases are at the heart of this study: Niger, Chad, Uganda, Mali, Mauritania, and Kenya. Niger, Chad, and Uganda serve as positive cases, meaning ones with state-led national Islamic associations. Mali, Mauritania, and Kenya serve as negative cases, namely, countries without such associations. The chapter concludes by explaining how the book generates data, and how causal inferences are drawn on the basis of it.

Chapter 2 analyzes state–Islamic relations in the countries in which autocratic incumbents created state-led national Islamic associations: Niger, Chad, and Uganda. It covers the time period between the early 1950s – the political era immediately prior to the end of European colonialism – and the late 1980s – the point in time prior to the onset of
political liberalization. The chapter investigates the presence of the productive and permissive conditions that triggered a critical juncture in the Islamic sphere and the emergence of state-led national Islamic associations. The chapter highlights the authoritarian origins of those associations, and discusses the implications of these bodies for the composition of the Islamic landscape in the years following their formation.

Chapter 3 analyzes state–Islamic relations in the countries in which autocratic incumbents failed to create state-led national Islamic relations: Mali, Mauritania, and Kenya. It covers the same time period as Chapter 2. The empirical analysis accounts for the lack of a critical juncture in their respective Islamic spheres. In the absence of productive conditions, these three countries experienced crises without institutional change. Autocratic elites failed to create steering capacity in their Islamic spheres. The chapter demonstrates the implications of that failure.

Chapter 4 returns to countries with state-led national Islamic associations. It covers the time period between the late 1980s and 2019. It retraces the dynamics that led to changes in the informal mandate of these associations. It examines how countries with state-led national Islamic associations have prevented or curbed homegrown jihadi Salafi activism.

Chapter 5 contrasts the developments outlined in Chapter 4 with those in countries without state-led national Islamic associations. In the latter, political and jihadi Salafism spread unhindered. These countries reacted to these developments with indiscriminate violence and/or inaction. Both choices would foment domestic jihadi radicalization processes.

Chapter 6 examines four additional countries: Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Senegal, and Ghana. These further cases serve theory testing. Senegal and Ghana confirm the findings of the positive cases. However, in both countries the modus operandi of religious regulation differs from the three positive theory-generating cases. Burkina Faso and Nigeria confirm the findings of the negative cases. In both countries, the state has historically refrained from establishing steering capacity in the Islamic sphere.

Chapter 7 summarizes the book’s empirical findings. It explains the variation on the outcome variable – that is, the presence or absence of homegrown jihadi Salafism in ten countries of West and East Africa.
Subsequently, the chapter applies set-theoretic methods to illustrate which state strategies qualify as necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the prevention and containment of homegrown jihadi Salafism and which qualify as necessary and jointly sufficient for the enduring presence thereof. The chapter also discusses the relationship between political and jihadi Salafism. Finally, the causal salience of several prominent alternative explanations is scrutinized.

Chapter 8, the book’s conclusion, discusses the wider implications of the research results. The book challenges conventional understandings of statehood in Africa and previous assumptions about the consequences of religious regulation. The chapter sets forth scenarios through which other scholars can verify or refute the book’s main arguments in the future. It outlines how the findings presented might assist policymakers, even if this book was not written with policymaking in mind. The final section contains a plea for more African-led discussions about the future of state–Islamic relations and the role of the state in managing religious affairs.