INTRODUCTION

Women's Rights in an African Muslim Democracy

ON AN OTHERWISE TYPICAL DAY, the president of Niger's largest umbrella women's association, the Coordination des Organisations Non Gouvernementales et Associations Féminines Nigériennes (CONGAFEN, Coordinating Body of Women's NGOs and Associations of Niger), was at work when two plainclothes police officers came to her office.[1] The policemen asked to see her. Thinking that she was going to be arrested, her colleagues in the Office on the Advancement of Women in the Ministry of Social Development vacated the room, leaving the women's leader and two friends behind. The police officers, however, had not come to take the president of CONGAFEN into custody. Instead, they had come to deliver a message. Representatives of Niger's national women's associations were being summoned to meet with the country's new leader at the presidential palace the following afternoon.[2]

Days before, on April 9, 1999, the state radio's regularly scheduled program was interrupted with military marches—a musical signal that a coup d'état had taken place. The prime minister announced that in an "unfortunate accident," President Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara had been shot and killed as he was about to board a helicopter.[3] Commandant Daouda Malam Wanké, the ostensible head of Baré's personal security, became Niger's new head of state and set up a transitional government.[4] Wanké promised the Nigérien people and concerned foreign countries that he would stay in power temporarily and soon organize free and fair elections.[5]

When the police officers left her office, the president of CONGAFEN started thinking about her fast approaching meeting with the country's new leader. She reflected on her association's five-year-long push for the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a treaty widely known as an international bill of rights for women. At the time, 163 countries had ratified CEDAW.[6] Niger, however, had

yet to ratify the convention. To generate mass support for its ratification, women's activists organized informational seminars about CEDAW and reached out to public opinion leaders to garner their backing. The president of CONGAFEN thought the meeting would be an opportune time to bring the issue to Wanké's attention. She assembled a dossier about CEDAW—a copy of the treaty, along with a study of the treaty's compatibility with Islam, Niger's dominant religion—and went to sleep.

The next morning, representatives of national women's associations gathered at the presidential palace. When it was her turn to greet Wanké, the president of CONGAFEN placed the dossier with information about CEDAW into his hands and said, "On behalf of women in Niger, here is what we expect of you." Wanké took a quick glance inside the file and said that the transitional government would examine it. Following that encounter, the minister of foreign affairs and the minister of social development—both women—kept after Wanké about the status of the convention. On August 13, 1999, approximately four months after the meeting at the presidential palace, Wanké's government ratified CEDAW by military decree. In doing so, the state made a legally binding commitment to eliminate discrimination against women in the predominantly Muslim country of Niger.

When Are Women's Rights Policies Adopted?

Gender equality in predominantly Muslim countries has been in a state of intense debate over the past decades. Women in some societies have fought for and won new access to education, political representation, and reproductive health. In other times and places, women's efforts to secure their rights have been thwarted. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have examined these debates, with some concluding that women are less likely to gain equality in Muslim-majority countries—particularly poor, agrarian countries—as long as men and women remain attached to what they call Islamic doctrine and traditional values.[7] Others argue that there is no inherent reason why Muslim women cannot enjoy their basic human rights, pointing to the agency of Muslim women artists, political party activists, religious scholars, and working-class women.[8] More important for others is understanding why some authoritarian Muslim-majority states collude with religious and traditional leaders whereas others do not.[9]

Few analysts have examined debates over women's rights in predominantly Muslim democracies, where enhanced freedoms to speak and assemble have opened up space for autonomous women's and religious organizing. Precisely

how Muslim-majority democracies address women's issues—that is, who puts issues on the national agenda, how issues are framed, and who has the final say—has mostly gone without comment by social scientists.[10] The lack of research on women's rights policymaking in Muslim-majority democracies is an important gap not just for understanding gender equality in Muslim-majority societies but also for understanding state responsiveness to social movements and the spread of international norms.

This book addresses this gap by examining women's rights debates in the Muslim-majority African country of Niger. Landlocked between the Mediterranean countries of Algeria and Libya and the coastal countries of Benin and Nigeria, Niger forms part of the semiarid Sahel. More than 90 percent of Niger's 13.7 million people are Muslim.[11] Since its first transition to multiparty politics in the early 1990s, Niger has seen vibrant and at times vitriolic debates take place over what the state ought to do about gender inequality. In a country consistently ranked as one of the poorest in the world, analysts would expect what they call religious and traditional values to dominate discussions over women's rights to the point of forestalling reform. Yet some debates in Niger have resulted in far-reaching policy change, while others, to repeat an oft-used expression, have remained in the drawers.

Of numerous debates over women's rights, this book focuses on the conflict that arose over four proposed women's rights reforms in Niger since its first democratic transition. Two proposals to help improve women's lives were adopted by the Nigérien state: (1) the ratification of CEDAW in 1999, and (2) the adoption of a gender-based affirmative action law for all elected offices, positions in the executive cabinet, and promotions in public administration in 2000. In contrast, Niger has yet to complete its (1) revision of its overarching policy on marriage, divorce, and inheritance law, and (2) ratification the African Union's regional treaty on women's rights. The challenge is to explain policy change as well as continuity; policy adoption as well as rejection. This challenge drives the book's central question: *Under what conditions do states adopt women's rights policy?*

The Impact of Mobilization

This book argues that both *how civil society mobilizes* and the *domestic political context* are central to understanding Niger's seemingly inconsistent record of women's rights policy adoption. I break this argument down into three claims. When women's activists mobilize, states are more likely to adopt women's rights policy. Women's activists, however, do not operate in isolation or

in a political vacuum. When conservative activists mobilize against reforms, states are less likely to adopt them. Last, the adoption of women's rights policy hinges on the domestic political context.

To give a definition, women's activists mobilize in the name of women, claiming to represent women's interests. By women's activists, I mean women in civil society and in the state. On the former, scholars of women's movements in Africa such as Aili Mari Tripp have focused their analytic lens on the rise and impact of women's activists.[12] A major concern of such scholars was with whether women in society are autonomous from the state. This focus on women's independence from the state was and remains relevant. Women are better able to exert influence when they form their own organizations, when the organizations set their own agendas, and when the organizations select their own leaders. Without these powers, women's activists remain under the thumb of the state, their central purpose being limited to advancing the state's priorities. In the extreme, states repress autonomous women's organizing. Such was the case in authoritarian Nigeria under Ibrahim Babangida, whose government imprisoned the head of the Country Women Association of Nigeria following a confrontation with the Better Life for Rural Women Program, an association led by Babangida's wife.[13]

Autonomous women's associations help advance women's rights reforms, but they rarely work alone. A consensus finding among scholars of social movements is that activists are more likely to succeed when they form alliances with actors with direct control over policymaking, such as political party leaders, parliamentarians, and high-ranking civil servants.[14] A comparative study of women's movements in Europe and Latin America finds that women's interests are more effectively defended when women's activists, politicians, and civil servants form a "triangle of empowerment."[15] Amy Mazur's assessment of the scholarship on feminist policy concludes that women's coalitions are vital to understanding variation in feminist policy outcomes.[16] Mozambique's "extremely progressive" family law reform would not have been adopted without combined pressure from women parliamentarians; the regional women's organization Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA); and women's organizations such as Forum Mulher, the Association of Women Lawyers (AMMCJ), and Women, Law, and Development (MULEIDE).[17] Women in civil society, academia, and political parties formed a "triple alliance" in South Africa to lobby for a constitutional article that prioritized gender equality over so-called tradition in 1994 and the adoption of a Domestic Violence Act in 1998.[18] This book similarly suggests that when women in and outside the state

mobilize in predominantly Muslim contexts, they are more likely to influence policy adoption.

Indeed, the distinction between civil society and the state may blur in ways that help advance women's interests, as Lee Ann Banaszak demonstrates in her study of feminist bureaucrats in the United States.[19] Women, like the president of CONGAFEN introduced at the beginning of this chapter, may simultaneously work for a state agency and lead a women's organization, facilitating communication between state and civil society. Feminists in state bodies such as Chile's Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM) may provide women's movements with a focal point around which to organize, in addition to proposing women's rights policy.[20] Women who begin their careers in the state may later become leaders in civil society, taking their knowledge of how the state works with them. Having close ties with the state, however, may delegitimize the women's movement and deradicalize women's demands. Women's movements may falter if too many of their leaders take up positions in the government or parliament.[21] Nevertheless, when working in concert with women in civil society, women inside the state play a key role in advancing women's rights policy.

Having identified who women's activists are, we can now examine the major ways in which activists influence policy. One important way that women's activists in and outside the state help make reform possible is by putting issues on the national agenda. The importance of this work of making problems public cannot be underestimated. In the absence of women's mobilization, practices that discriminate against women may remain taken for granted or seen as part of the so-called natural order. In the pages that follow, I show that women's activists were the first to name inequality in the family and underrepresentation in elected office as matters of political import, requiring national-level policy change. Attention to women's issues, moreover, may dissipate. Thus, women's repeated mobilization may help keep issues from permanently falling off the national agenda.

Another major way women's activists help advance policy change is by presenting policy proposals as politically legitimate or, to use a term developed by Michael Schatzberg, "thinkable."[22] That is, women's activists propose specific solutions to the problem that they have named. Policy solutions have different meanings; they can be interpreted in multiple ways. In their efforts to make reforms thinkable, women's activists invoke what Schatzberg calls "politically valid subjacent concepts." These concepts may come and go or change depending on the specific historical context. In democratic Niger,

women's activists were relatively successful when they were able to tie their proposed reforms to local conceptualizations of democracy and fairness. In addition to appealing to politically legitimate concepts, activists may use salient symbols and causal stories to further make change imaginable. These concepts, symbols, and stories are often deployed through the media and in public rituals. If successful, women's demands become part of the mainstream discourse and appear to represent the will of the public.

The persistent mobilization of women's activists in and outside the state plays a vital role in helping make the adoption of women's rights policy possible. Policy adoption often occurs only after women mobilize around an issue—not in a one-off event but over years or, in some cases, decades. This is because at any point in the policymaking process, women's demands may be derided, ignored, or silenced. Over multiple iterations, women's activists may adjust their demands, form new alliances, and modify their tactics to overcome derision and be heard. Thus, continuing in spite of difficulty over a prolonged period helps make women's rights policy adoption more likely.

The impact of women's movements on policymaking in Muslim-majority countries has not been explored enough. By examining how and under what conditions women's mobilization in Muslim-majority countries influences the uptake of women's rights reforms, this book contributes an important set of case studies to the comparative scholarship on women's movements. Women's mobilization has been found to influence reform in the so-called advanced industrialized world, including the United States.[23] Women's activism has been shown to be an important driver of reform in religiously diverse or predominantly Christian African countries such as Cameroon, Mozambique, South Africa, and Uganda.[24] Scholars have documented the rise, diversity, and dynamism of women in Muslim-majority societies such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Morocco, but few have systematically examined the policy impact of women's mobilization in predominantly Muslim societies.[25]

This book's second claim is that the persistent mobilization of opposing activists in and outside the state also plays a vital role in women's rights policymaking. Despite a swell of research on the mobilization of women around the world, little is known about the resistance that women's activists encounter in their efforts to improve women's lives through state channels.

The conservative or opposing actors of interest here are conservative religious activists. Religious activists mobilize in the name of religion, claiming to represent the interests of a religious community. Conservative religious activists are a particular overlapping subcategory of religious activists and conservative activists in that they seek to promote so-called traditional

religious values. In Niger, conservative Muslim activists are commonly referred to as Islamists. Because the phenomenon of anti–women's rights mobilization is not limited to Muslims, I prefer to use the broader term *conservative activism.*

Like women's activists, conservative activists are more effective in shaping women's rights policy outcomes when they mobilize against women's rights policy repeatedly. In the early years of the democratic transition, conservative activists in Niger were met with disdain by the mainstream press. Over time, however, mainstream newspapers and radio stations treated conservative activists more favorably, inviting conservatives to publish or air long opinion pieces. As a result, conservative activists carved out a space for the articulation of arguments against women's rights reforms in the public sphere. It was through an iterative process that conservative activists avoided marginalization and began to influence women's rights policymaking.

Just as women's advocates rely on having activists inside the state, conservative activists are more successful in influencing women's rights policy debates when they form alliances with statist actors. In Niger, an important state-based source of support for conservative activists is the Association Islamique du Niger (AIN). The AIN, created by President Kountché's government in 1974, is considered the closest entity to a state church. In the democratic transition, the AIN formally became an independent association, but it acts as a quasi-state body. AIN's leaders are often called on by the state to open major religious ceremonies, and the central headquarters in Niamey serves as a semiofficial family law court and civil registry.[26] Conservative activists are better able to sway policymakers when they have the support of the central Islamic association. When conservative activists and the AIN are divided over a women's rights issue, conservative activists struggle to advance reform.

Akin to women's activists, conservative activists play an important role in women's rights policymaking by putting new issues on the national agenda. Though not inherently at odds, conservative activists may place their issues in competition with the concerns of women's activists. In Niger, conservative activists made secularism, or *laïcité*—the state's stance as a secular republic—a public problem. At the end of authoritarian rule, conservative activists demanded that the new constitution identify Niger as a Muslim country. They opposed any inclusion of the term *état laïc,* arguing that the constitution ought to reflect the realities (in their words) of the majority of the Nigérien people.[27] In subsequent years, conservative activists would frame women's demands for family law reform as part of an anti-Muslim, prosecularist plot.

Recall that a policy proposal can take on multiple meanings. Conservative activists can also influence policymaking by presenting proposed reforms as unthinkable. To present women's rights policy as politically illegitimate, conservative activists may invoke the same politically valid subjacent concepts used by women's activists. In democratic Niger, conservative activists appealed to people's understandings of democracy and fairness to contest women's rights policy proposals. In addition to connecting the policy proposal at hand to other political concepts, conservative activists may deploy salient symbols and construct causal stories through the media and by enacting public rituals. When successful, conservative activists paint a picture of mass opposition to reform. At the extreme, conservative mobilization may make a proposed reform a taboo subject, even among women's activists.

Niger is not the only country where the demands of women's activists are met with organized resistance. Scholars have noted that backlash against women's activism occurs in other parts of Africa. In Mali, women who attended the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 found that other Malians viewed them as "Westernized," "feminist," and disconnected from Malian realities.[28] An expert on Islam and women's studies in northern Nigeria writes, "Many question [Gender and Development] programs on principle, viewing them as illegitimate because they are 'Western.' In line with this, Muslim women activists, including myself, may be branded Western agents, funded by foreign powers to undermine Islam."[29] In Uganda, a lecturer lamented, "I would say that the idea of feminism was not part and parcel of the Uganda thing, it is something that has been brought in."[30]

Nor is conservative mobilization against women's rights reform unique to Africa. Writing about the former Soviet Union, scholars find that "feminism is not just controversial; it is stigmatized."[31] Women's activists in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States have also encountered backlash from other women's leaders, political parties, and conservative organizations.[32] Thus, another contribution of this book is its focus on why states sometimes respond to the demands of conservative religious activists when there is concerted women's mobilization.

Let me be clear that the line between women's activism and conservative activism is porous.[33] In some instances, women's activists and conservative activists may form a common front, coming together to lobby policymakers for reform. Religious activists do not always mobilize against the adoption of women's rights policy. A religious community may become internally divided over women's issues, with some supporting women's rights reform and others

opposing reform. At times religious activists are neutral, neither opposing nor supporting the adoption of women's rights policy. These shifts reflect the fact that women's activists and religious activists are not silos but dynamic, interactive entities.

I have thus far focused on how women's activists and conservative activists influence women's rights policymaking. The third claim that this book advances is that the national-level political context in which women's rights debates occur is important. Here I will discuss how the domestic political context matters.

States are not unitary actors. While scholars tend to view African politics as ruled by "big men," African states are composed of multiple actors, and significant negotiation may take place among them.[34] In democratic states, entities other than the executive branch ostensibly have the power to modify and reject proposed legislation. In moving between authoritarian and democratic rule, Niger oscillated between having no elected parliament, a relatively dependent parliament, and a relatively autonomous parliament. These changes affected women's rights policymaking. This is because a relatively autonomous parliament is a veto player, an actor whose approval is required to change the status quo.[35] In the chapters that follow, I show that in the case of the gender quota law and in the case of the Maputo Protocol, a relatively autonomous parliament modified or rejected women's policy proposals. In contexts where parliaments have such powers, the backing of the president, though important, is not always sufficient for the adoption of women's rights policy.

Parliament is an unusual state actor to make a center of focus. Scholars of African politics generally expect parliaments to play a minimal role in policymaking. African parliaments typically follow British or French models, in which the parliament's primary function is to debate, question, and affirm government-directed policy.[36] The implication is that the locus of policymaking lies in the ministries, not in parliament. "Instead, the action is elsewhere," as two analysts of Senegal's National Assembly write, in providing constituency services and seeking out donor funding to help advance their districts' economic development.[37] In Africa's illiberal democracies, moreover, power is highly centralized in the presidency such that the parliament operates like a rubber stamp.[38] I present case studies from an African liberal democracy where parliament can and does intervene in policy debates.

In addition to varying in terms of parliamentary autonomy, the political context varies in the degree to which religious authorities wield political influence. Church-state relations may in one time period be separate and antagonistic and characterized by assertive or extreme secularism.[39] In political

contexts where church and state are assertively separated, religious authorities have less say over policymaking. Well-known examples of countries with a strict separation of church and state are France since the late nineteenth century, Tunisia under Habib Bourguiba's presidency, and Turkey during Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's reign. At the other end of the spectrum, church-state relations may be fused. Where church and state are closely intertwined, religious authorities have greater powers over policymaking. Iran since its 1979 revolution is a prime example of a religious state.

Most states fall in the middle of the spectrum between assertive secularism and strict clericalism. In these contexts, religious authority is public but partial. The United States and Senegal are examples of these passive secularist states. Where the state is neither pro-church nor anti-church, religious authorities do not have complete control over policymaking. Yet religious authorities are seen as legitimate players on the political field; their input on policy proposals may be sought and respected. Thus, policymaking may become stalled when women's activists and conservative religious activists clash over reform.

The Nigérien state partially and uneasily relies on religious authorities to carry out some of the state's day-to-day tasks. Courts are allowed to apply a combination of so-called customary and Islamic law to resolve disputes over marriage, divorce, and inheritance. The state has maintained close ties with Muslim leaders through the AIN, whose central headquarters serves as a semi-official court and civil registry through which Nigériens can register marriages, formalize divorces, and seek resolutions in matters of inheritance. Nigérien presidents regularly invite AIN's leaders to officiate religious-state holidays and seek the blessing of religious leaders such as Cheick Kiota and Mama Kiota of the Niassene *Tijaniyya* Muslim congregation—arguably the largest religious order in the country.

At the same time, Niger is officially a secular state. Successive constitutions emphasize the separation of the state from religion in Niger.[40] Unlike Nigeria to the south, where states in the northern part of the country have expanded the use of so-called Islamic law, most Nigériens are not interested in seeing their country turn into an Islamic state.[41] The *Tijaniyya* leadership does not call for the integration of Islam into politics, nor do Niger's Muslim politicians. Nigériens are aware of the extension of Islamic law across northern Nigeria and have close cultural and economic ties with their neighbors. The discourse of political Islam and the hardliner religious organizations of northern Nigeria has spread to Niger, but those calling for an Islamic state remain in the minority.[42]

This ambiguous position between extreme secularism and extreme clericalism is, according to political scientist Abdourahmane Idrissa, "a central element which defines the contemporary Nigerien context."[43] I contend that this dual stance influences women's rights policymaking. With the state's partial reliance on the church, religious authorities, including conservative religious activists, become informal veto players. Furthermore, once hardened, partial power-sharing arrangements between state and church become institutions in and of themselves, having long-lasting effects on how citizens and the state conceive what is thinkable and unthinkable.[44] Mounira Charrad has made a similar observation for authoritarian Algeria, where the postindependence state formed partial alliances with traditional and religious elites and subsequently struggled for decades to reform its family law.[45] I show that partial alliances between church and state resulted in protracted women's rights policymaking in a Muslim-majority democracy when conservative activists mobilized against reform.

In sum, women's mobilization, conservative mobilization, and the domestic political context in which actors vie for influence are important for understanding how women's rights policies are made. As political scientist Margaret Levi writes, "Policies are the outcome of an exchange between the ruler and the various groups who compose the polity."[46] How states seek to regulate the lives of women and men are not the direct outcome of so-called religious doctrine—a commonplace argument that I address next.

The Conventional Wisdom

By examining women's rights policy adoption in a predominantly Muslim country, this book demonstrates that the relationship between Islam and gender equality is not as simple as some claim.

The 9/11 attacks in the United States renewed interest in Muslim women. U.S. policymakers argued that "saving" Muslim women would help prevent future attacks.[47] Within this context, a 2002 study by a political scientist argued that "Muslim societies are distinct" in their "treatment and status of women and girls," which ultimately hinders democratization.[48] Two other political scientists, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, published in 2003 a major study on attitudes toward gender equality in seventy countries. Inglehart and Norris found that Muslims tend to hold the most conservative attitudes about gender equality, more so than their Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist counterparts. This finding led the authors to conclude that "an Islamic religious

heritage is one of the most powerful barriers to the rising tide of gender equality."[49]

These post-9/11 studies are not the first to attribute women's subordination on the Islamic faith. In the 1980s and 1990s, researchers argued that Catholic countries were more conservative on issues of gender equality and thus had lower levels of women's political representation.[50] Other studies found that the percentage of a population that is Muslim negatively correlates with the percentage of women in parliament, and that Muslim-majority countries tend to grant women suffrage later than do non-Muslim-majority countries.[51]

There are four reasons, however, to be skeptical toward claims that Islam is a worse religion for women than are others. One cause for skepticism has to do with sample selection bias, which occurs when analysts use nonrandom samples of information to make generalizations about a larger population. This kind of bias threatens the external and internal validity of one's study.[52] Scholars and others commit sample selection bias when they extrapolate findings from predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East to the rest of the Muslim world. Muslim-majority societies in the Middle East are not representative of all Muslim societies. As Alfred Stepan and Graeme Robertson argue, predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East have distinctive histories of authoritarian rule, high military spending, interstate conflict, and great power patronage that make them exceptional and not representative of Muslim-majority countries.[53] Correspondingly, some studies find that the status of women in Arab Muslim countries is significantly lower than that of other predominantly Muslim countries.[54] Yet others still confound a world region with a world religion. For example, a 1997 study on women's rights around the world finds that "in practice, dominant interpretations of the Qur'an inhibit or constrain women's ability to achieve political and economic equality."[55] This claim, however, is based on information from the Middle East and North Africa, whereas the largest Muslim publics live outside the region, in countries such as Indonesia, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

Studies that rely on public opinion data to understand the relationship between Islam and women's rights further suffer from sample selection bias because individuals in Muslim-majority countries are less frequently surveyed than are individuals in other kinds of countries. Between 1981 and the end of 2009, less than 14 percent of Muslim-majority countries were polled by the World Values Survey (on which Inglehart and Norris rely). In contrast, the World Values Survey reached more than 35 percent of non-Muslim-majority countries. I do not fault the World Values Survey for its relative lack

of coverage of Muslim countries. The financial resources necessary for conducting large-scale surveys are significant. The surveys reach out to "ordinary" people, which elite-focused studies ignore, and they go to the most populous countries in the world. Yet the existing survey evidence from which scholars discern a negative relationship between Islam and women's rights does not adequately represent the spectrum of Muslim-majority countries in the world.

A second reason to question the conventional wisdom on Islam and women's rights has to do with spurious correlation. Michael Ross argues that it is not Islam that hurts women but natural gas and oil production.[56] Natural resource dependence, according to Ross, generates negative externalities for women in two ways: oil and mineral extraction tends to result in the employment of male workers over female workers, and it crowds out other industries that tend to employ women, such as textiles manufacturing. In oil- and mineral-rich countries, then, women are pushed into working in the informal economy, where they are more dispersed than are women who work in factories. As a result, women in oil- and mineral-rich countries have fewer opportunities to collectively mobilize. Norris's response to Ross's study maintains, "Patriarchal cultures in Arab states . . . have enduring historical roots that predate the discovery and production of oil."[57] Yet as discussed above, Arab countries are not representative of all predominantly Muslim countries.

Third, the conventional thinking about women's rights and Islam homogenizes and reifies Muslims, whereas in reality, the practice of Islam is diverse and dynamic. For instance, Inglehart and Norris assert, "Divorce is an important issue, especially in a few Catholic and many Muslim societies, where women have limited or no legal rights to dissolve the marriage."[58] Yet in Muslim-majority societies such as those in Indonesia, Malaysia, and across West Africa that follow the Maliki school of Islamic legal thought, women have legal rights to seek divorce.[59] According to court records of divorce cases in 1979, the divorce rate in northern Nigeria, which makes up one of the largest groups of Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa, was three times the divorce rate in the United States. Luigi Solivetti goes so far as to note that divorce "is a distinctive feature of Hausa society."[60] In Barbara Cooper's study of marriage in urban and rural Maradi, out of 212 marriages undertaken by 105 women, 51 percent ended in divorce.[61] Studies of the use of colonial courts in what is now known as Mali find that Muslim women sought out divorce in the courts more often than did men.[62]

To provide another illustration, some may see veiling and wife seclusion as indicators of women's low status. Arlene MacLeod's study of working-class

women in Cairo, however, finds that wearing a veil can both empower women and perpetuate gender ideologies.[63] If religious practices carry multiple and at times contradictory meanings for women, then it makes it difficult to rank "low" and "high" women's status by world religion. Scholars have found that women's participation in the formal economy varies widely across predominantly Muslim countries.[64] Abdullahi An-Na'im, a scholar of Islam and human rights, finds that opinions about gender norms differ among Sufi variants of Islam in Africa.[65]

Opinions about gender equality can change.[66] The sentiment that men make better political leaders in African countries may have roots not in Islamic doctrine but in colonial government decisions to favor only male "traditional" leaders. Judith Van Allen observes that the decline of Igbo women's political power was a consequence of British colonial rule. Her analysis of "the Victorian view of women and politics which produced the expectation that men would be active in politics, but women would not" turns political culture assertions about "traditional" societies on their head.[67] Colonial policy is just one of many factors, such as precolonial shifts in power relations related to new forms of trade, that may lead to a decline of female leaders.[68] The idea that men should have more right to employment and university education is not unfamiliar to those who are knowledgeable about the ways in which colonial governments excluded women from wage labor and formal education opportunities.[69]

Finally, the conventional thinking about Islam and women's rights does not explain variation in women's rights outcomes across Africa. Figure 1 plots the percentage of the population that is Muslim against the percentage of women in parliament in fifty-three African countries as of the end of 2012. If Muslims were particularly anti–women's rights, then one would expect countries at the right end of the figure to have lower percentages of women in parliament. The evidence, however, does not support the conventional wisdom: there is no statistically significant difference in women's numerical representation between African countries with higher percentages of Muslims and African countries with lower percentages of Muslims.

Nor does the Islamic barrier hypothesis explain trends in the adoption of gender quotas in Africa. Gender quotas have a major impact on the percentage of women elected to public office around the world.[70] If countries with an Islamic heritage had lower levels of support for gender equality, then one would expect countries with high percentages of Muslims to be less likely to adopt gender quotas. As of December 31, 2009, political parties or governments in thirteen out of nineteen Muslim-majority African countries adopted
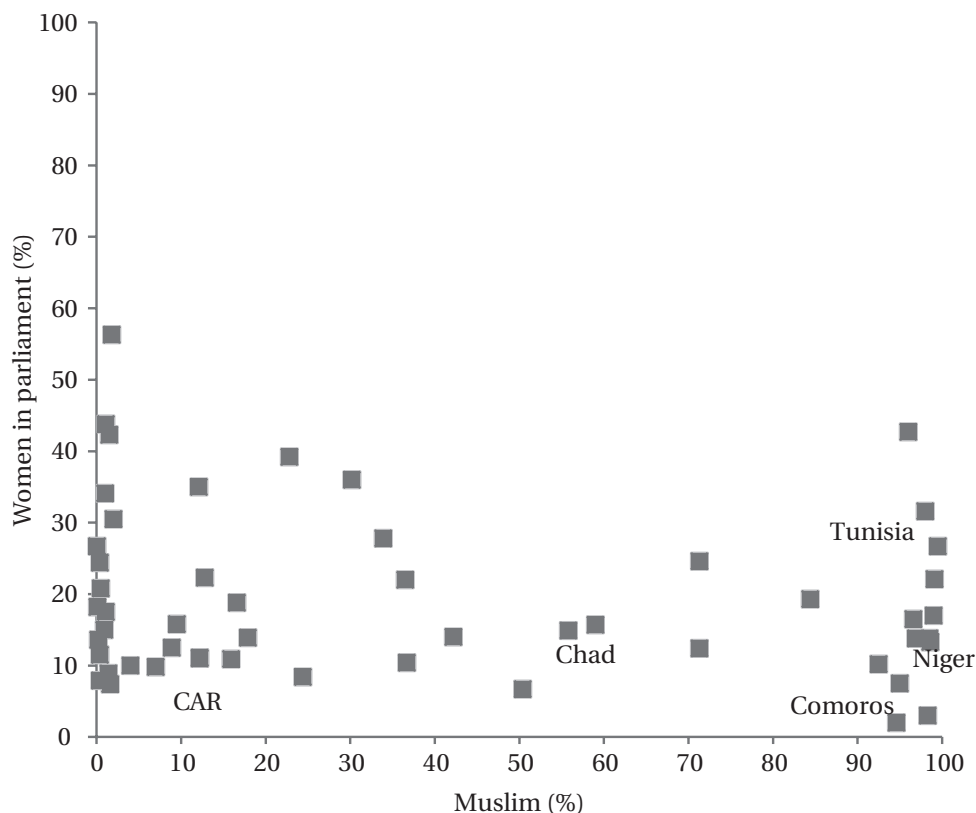
Figure 1. Women's numerical representation in parliament in Africa, 2012

Note: N=53 countries. The figure does not include South Sudan. Parliament refers to unicameral or lower house parliaments as of December 31, 2012. See Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Women in National Parliaments, Situation as of 31 December 2012"; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Mapping the Global Muslim Population*, 29–31. Data on women in parliament in Ghana and Guinea come from IPU, "PARLINE Database on National Parliaments."

gender quotas for national legislative posts. In contrast, political parties or governments in slightly more than half of thirty-three non-Muslim-majority African countries adopted quotas.

I find that Muslim-majority African countries have been no slower to adopt gender quotas. Indeed, some of the earliest adopters of gender quotas were predominantly Muslim countries. One of the first African countries to adopt a law mandating a gender quota was Egypt (95 percent Muslim) in 1979.[71] One of the first major political parties to adopt a voluntary gender quota was in Senegal (96 percent Muslim) in 1982.[72] Perhaps Muslim-majority countries adopt gender quotas to overcome the public's bias against women candidates. If Muslim voters oppose having women in office, then why would parties and governments adopt quotas and risk losing votes? A more detailed understanding of the politics of women's rights in Muslim-majority countries is necessary.
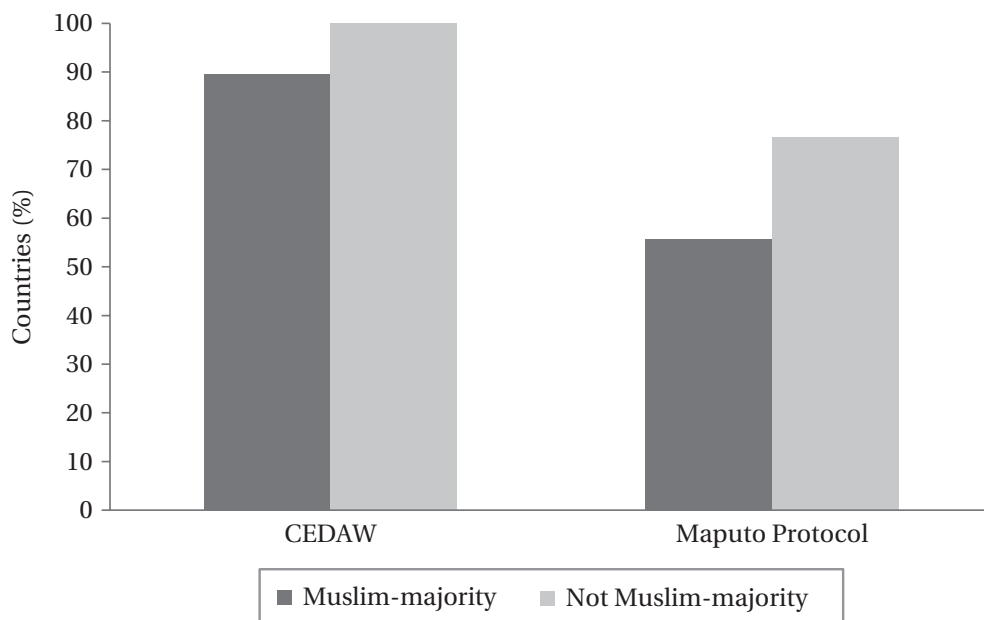
Figure 2. Ratification of international women's rights treaties in Africa, 2003–12

Note: N=53 countries for CEDAW. N=52 countries for the Maputo Protocol. The figure does not include South Sudan. The Maputo Protocol columns do not include Morocco because Morocco was not a member of the AU between 2003 and 2012. See UN Treaty Collection (TC), "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women"; African Union, "List of Countries . . ."; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Mapping the Global Muslim Population,* 29–31.

Whether a country is predominantly Muslim does not explain differences in the commitment of African countries to international women's rights treaties. Figure 2 shows the percentage of Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority countries that ratified CEDAW and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) by the end of 2012. One hundred percent of non-Muslim-majority countries ratified CEDAW (34 out of 34), and 89 percent of Muslim-majority countries ratified CEDAW (17 out of 19), a difference that is not statistically significant using Fisher's exact test. Slightly more than 76 percent of predominantly Christian or religiously mixed countries ratified the Maputo Protocol (26 out of 34), and 55.6 percent of predominantly Muslim countries ratified the Maputo Protocol (10 out of 18)—a difference that is also not statistically significant using Fisher's exact test.

Two African countries that have not ratified CEDAW are Somalia and Sudan, which are predominantly Muslim (98.5 and 71 percent, respectively). This could lend support to the conventional wisdom that predominantly Muslim countries are more wary of promoting women's rights. Yet one still needs to explain why the majority of predominantly Muslim countries in Africa,

such as Algeria, Egypt, Mali, and Senegal, have ratified CEDAW. It is also true that many Muslim-majority African countries issued reservations to CEDAW, more so than did Christian-majority or religiously mixed African countries.[73] More than a third of Muslim-majority countries issued reservations on CEDAW (7 out of 19).[74] In contrast, slightly more than 8 percent of non-Muslim countries issued reservations (3 out of 36). However, one is still left with the challenge of explaining differences among predominantly Muslim countries. Guinea, Mali, and Senegal, for instance, did not place reservations on CEDAW.

Religiosity does not help explain patterns in the ratification of women's rights treaties. Take, for instance, African countries in which 80 to 85 percent of survey respondents said that religion was somewhat or very important in their lives. Among these countries, the number of years it took to ratify CEDAW varied from one year (Cape Verde) to seventeen years (Botswana). Now take African countries in which more than 95 percent of survey respondents reported that religion was somewhat or very important in their lives. Liberia, which is highly religious, ratified CEDAW in five years. Lesotho, which is also highly religious, took sixteen years to ratify the convention. These patterns across Africa show that Islam cannot explain whether and how soon countries commit to promoting women's rights in Africa. As Sondra Hale, a critic of "overprivileging Islam," asserts, "Islam does not and cannot explain the condition of women."[75]

Studies that posit a link between Islam and women's rights do not make it clear how the predominance of one religion would eventually result in women's rights policy adoption or rejection. For all the attention that analysts give to women in Muslim-majority countries, we lack an adequate theoretical understanding of how states adopt women's rights policies and why attempts at reform sometimes fail.

Additional and Alternative Explanations for Women's Rights Policymaking

Other factors may help explain why states adopt women's rights policy when they do. These potential influences include the international context, the ideology of the leader or political party in power, and the attributes of the proposed policy. I show that although these are important, they do not fully explain Niger's record of policy adoption and rejection.

The international context can influence women's rights policy adoption in many ways. For one, states that care about their international reputation may

be more likely to adopt women's rights policies when the adoption of the policy has become an international norm. Two scholars, Christine Wotipka and Francisco Ramirez, analyzed the ratification of CEDAW in 142 countries between 1979 and 1999.[76] In their findings, they show that states paid attention to what others did. As more states in the world (or in the region) ratified CEDAW, slower-moving states were more likely to follow suit. In the absence of an international norm, states may not see an issue as important enough to address. Jennifer Chan-Tiberghien contends that Japan did not adopt policies to protect minority groups until the 2000s because the international community did not pay much attention to minority rights until 2001.[77] Similarly, Japan's leaders only began to address issues of birth control, sexual harassment, and domestic violence after the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing.

Indeed, as I will show in this book, in Niger, leaders were attuned to the international discourse surrounding women's rights. For the most part, Nigérien leaders did not like having their country ranked at the bottom of any list, whether it be in terms of wealth or women's representation. Women's activists compared Niger with other countries and invoked global trends to argue for policy change. At the same time, conservative activists in Niger challenged the idea that their country was behind the rest of the world and saw Niger's ostensibly low status as a thinly veiled critique of the fact that the country is predominantly Muslim.

Second, states may be more likely to adopt women's rights policy when their international donors support the change; that is, the international context may provide material incentives for states to enact women's rights policy.[78] President Paul Biya of Cameroon, for instance, adopted women's rights policies in part to attract foreign aid to fuel domestic patronage.[79] Another study finds that countries that receive higher levels of foreign aid are faster to adopt gender quotas.[80] Other studies, however, do not find a correlation between foreign aid and other women's rights outcomes.[81] This book shows that women's rights policymaking can be stalled even when international donors lobby for policy change.

Third, states may be more likely to adopt women's rights policies when local activists connect with activists from other countries. Transnational advocacy networks (TANs) have been shown to influence human rights outcomes around the world, as well as the adoption of gender quota laws.[82] The scholarship on TANs, however, does not adequately explain what happens when countermovements emerge. Nor does the scholarship fully address the possibility that TAN activity may inspire countermobilization.[83] The dominant

models of TAN effectiveness assume that there are only two major actors—the state and pro-rights activists—whereas this book presents a three-actor framework.[84]

The last remaining way in which the international context might influence women's rights policymaking is through international law. Through an incremental process of "judicial policymaking," the European Court of Justice (ECJ) expanded the protection of women's pregnancy and maternity leave policy in the European Union's member states.[85] A coalition of international and Nigérien lawyers used the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice to enforce Niger's 2003 antislavery law. The Court of Justice fined the Nigérien state for not meeting its obligations to a woman who was a slave, Hadijatou Mani.[86] The ruling is now binding for ECOWAS's fifteen member states. A significant body of research suggests that states that ratify CEDAW adopt more women's rights policies than states that do not, and it appears that women's living conditions improve more in countries that have ratified CEDAW than in countries that have not.[87] In a study of more than 132 countries, ratifying CEDAW decreased the gender gap in education and increased the likelihood that a state would adopt policies allowing greater access to contraception.[88]

The ideology of the country's leader or party in power might influence women's rights policymaking. For example, Habib Bourguiba of Muslim-majority Tunisia was ideologically committed to changing gender relations in his country. (In his will, Bourguiba asked that his mausoleum be inscribed with the words, "Supreme Combatant, Father of the Tunisian Nation, and Liberator of Tunisian Women.")[89] Under Bourguiba's rule, the government passed sweeping family law reform in 1956 that included the abolishment of polygamy. Thirty years earlier, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk of Turkey enacted a series of reforms based on an ideological commitment to secularizing the country. Women's movements in western Europe were more successful when the party in power leaned to the left, and leftist parties have done a better job of recruiting female candidates to run for office than have non-leftist parties.[90] Since the 1970s, Democrats in national and state legislatures in the United States have been more likely to propose and vote in favor of women-friendly legislation than have Republicans.[91]

On the other hand, left-leaning leaders and political parties can and do fall short of promises to promote equality between women and men. Having a left-leaning party in power did not influence whether states adopted women-friendly employment and child-care policies in France, the Netherlands, Sweden, or the United States.[92] The Provisional National Defense Council in

Ghana under Jerry Rawlings was a leftist party, but it also suppressed autonomous women's mobilization.[93] In South Africa, the left-of-center African National Congress has increasingly disappointed feminist activists.[94]

Last, the attributes of the proposed reform might affect its adoption. Policy proposals that touch on so-called doctrinal issues may be met with more controversy and slower adoption than proposals that do not.[95] A limitation with this explanation, however, is whether one can determine a priori which issues are doctrinal and which ones are not, because religious texts like the Bible and the Qur'an cover an extraordinarily wide variety of issues, from business to education to reproductive health. Omnibus reforms may be more difficult to pass than single-issue reforms.[96] The thinking here is that the more articles and issues addressed in a reform, the higher the chances that someone will find something to object to. The proposed and rejected 1994 family law reform in Niger was an omnibus policy containing more than nine hundred articles. Yet similarly large pieces of family law legislation have been adopted in other predominantly Muslim countries, such as Morocco, Senegal, and Tunisia. In this book, I analyze the politics behind two omnibus women's rights treaties: one that was ratified and one that was rejected. A final way of thinking about policy attributes and whether they influence policy adoption is to examine the perceived impact of the reform on gender relations. Gender role change policies, which would potentially make women less dependent on men, may be more difficult to pass than role equity policies, which simply extend rights to women. That is, one might expect women's rights reforms to pass more easily when they do not challenge existing gender norms.[97]

Why Niger?

This book's central arguments were developed by comparing cases of women's rights policy adoption and rejection within a single country, the Republic of Niger.[98] Niger's debates over women's rights merit wider attention because they defy two conventional wisdoms. One, addressed earlier, is that having a long history of Islam hinders the advancement of gender equality. Empirically, Niger challenges the Islamic barrier hypothesis because it adopted policies to promote women's political representation and access to family planning. The other conventional wisdom is that poor countries do the bidding of their international donors. In terms of per capita gross domestic product, Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world, taking in a significant amount of international aid. Yet Niger has resisted appeals from international donors, including the World Bank, to reform its family laws.

YEARS	REGIME	REPUBLIC	PRESIDENT
1960–74	Authoritarian	First Republic	Hamani Diori
1974–87		*Régime d'exception*	Seyni Kountché
1987–89			Ali Saibou
1989–91		Second Republic	Ali Saibou
1991–93	Transitional		Ali Saibou
1993–96	Democratic	Third Republic	Mahamane Ousmane
1996	Transitional		Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara
1996–99	Authoritarian	Fourth Republic	Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara
1999	Transitional		Daouda Malam Wanké
1999–2009	Democratic	Fifth Republic	Mamadou Tandja
2009	Transitional		Mamadou Tandja
2009–10	Authoritarian	Sixth Republic	Mamadou Tandja
2010–11	Transitional		Salou Djibo
2011–	Democratic	Seventh Republic	Mahamadou Issoufou

Figure 3. Regimes, republics, and rulers in Niger, 1960–2012

Niger's experimentation with authoritarian, transitional, and democratic rule provides additional insight into the question of when states adopt women's rights policies. Between 1993 and 2011, Niger witnessed three successful military coups d'état, three competitive presidential elections, and at least one period of authoritarian rule (see Figure 3). Did debates over women's rights take a notably different turn in democratic contexts than in authoritarian contexts? It is useful for readers unfamiliar with Niger to first have an overview of Niger's political history.

Niger gained independence from France on August 1, 1960. Between 1960 and 1989, three authoritarian governments ruled Niger. Niger's first president, Hamani Diori, oversaw the elimination of all opposition parties. Diori was deposed in a military coup in 1974. His successor, Lieutenant Colonel Seyni Kountché, enacted a period of *régime d'exception,* which banned political parties in general and dissolved the national parliament. When Kountché died of a brain tumor in 1987, Colonel Ali Saibou became Niger's third president. Saibou ushered in a period of *décrispation,* in which

political prisoners were freed and noncompetitive presidential elections were held.

The stories presented in this book pick up in the early 1990s. Shortly after coming to power, Ali Saibou conceded that authoritarian rule was no longer viable in Niger. In 1991, under Saibou's authorization, Niger's leading politicians and intellectuals held a national conference (following the example of Benin, Niger's neighbor to the south). Participants at the conference promulgated a new constitution that established a semipresidential, democratic regime. Mahamane Ousmane, an economist and statistician from Zinder, won the 1993 presidential election by forming a coalition with other opposition parties.

Political infighting resulted in government deadlock until 1996, when the military overthrew Ousmane in a bloodless coup. Colonel Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara, an orchestrator of the military takeover, headed the political transition and ran for president in a race plagued by fraud and boycotts from the opposition. Between 1996 and Baré's unexpected death in 1999, Niger was judged by most comparative standards to be an autocracy.[99] Under General Daouda Malam Wanké, relatively free and fair presidential and legislative elections were held in 1999. The 1999 transfer of power from a transitional to a competitively elected government marked a return to democracy in Niger until 2010, when President Mamadou Tandja dissolved the Constitutional Court and the National Assembly and organized a controversial constitutional referendum in August 2009 so that he could run for a third term. In the midst of massive demonstrations both against and for Tandja, the military invaded the presidential palace and arrested Tandja in February 2010. Yet another transitional government organized free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections in 2011.

Methods

I focus on four proposed women's rights reforms in the book. They are the ratification of CEDAW (which occurred in 1999), the adoption of a gender quota (which occurred in 2000), the reform of family law (which was repeatedly rejected), and the ratification of the Maputo Protocol (which was repeatedly rejected). This comparative case method allows me to make analytical generalizations about the causal mechanisms of policy adoption.[100]

Of the at least forty-one women-friendly policies that Niger considered between 1960 and 2008, I selected these four for several reasons (see Figure 4).[101] As previously indicated, it is important to examine the politics behind policies

ISSUE	YEARS	WOMEN'S ACTIVISTS	CONSERVATIVE ACTIVISTS	INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY	FORMAL VETO PLAYERS	OUTCOME
Family law	1960–2011	Mobilized	Mobilized	Mobilized	Executive cabinet	Rejected
Gender quota law	1999–2001	Mobilized	Not mobilized	Not mobilized	Executive cabinet, National Assembly	Adopted with amendments
CEDAW	1994–99	Mobilized	Mobilized	Mobilized	Executive cabinet	Ratified with reservations
Maputo Protocol	2002–11	Mobilized	Mobilized	Mobilized	Executive cabinet, National Assembly	Ratification rejected

Figure 4. Women's rights reforms examined in the book

that were rejected as well as those that were adopted. Family law reform, arguably the most contentious women's rights issue in democratic Niger, was repeatedly brought up, debated, and abandoned. By contrast, the adoption of a gender quota law is, for many women's activists, a relative success story. CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol are both omnibus treaties, yet they met different outcomes; given that previous studies suggest that omnibus policy proposals are more difficult to adopt than single-issue proposals, I wanted to understand why one omnibus policy would be adopted and not another. Women mobilized for all four reforms, and conservative activists mobilized for three of the four; their varying degrees of success help me tease out whether and how activism influences policy adoption and non-adoption.

Earlier, I outlined the general expectation that international trends and donors influence low-income countries. Across these policies and over time, I examine the different kinds and levels of involvement of international norms and actors on policymaking. International actors supported the adoption of family law reform, the ratification of CEDAW, and the Maputo Protocol, yet Niger adopted only one of these proposed reforms. The international community, as I show later in this book, was only minimally or indirectly involved in lobbying for the adoption of the gender quota law (though the international community mobilized to help implement the quota after its adoption).

To identify the conditions under which states adopt women's rights policy, I conducted 14 months of fieldwork between 2006 and the beginning of 2013 in Niger.[102] I interviewed 133 people, some multiple times over the course of several years. By the end of my fieldwork, I had spoken with 36 women's activists, 29 religious activists, 27 bureaucrats and judges, 9 ministers, 21 parliamentarians, and 14 representatives of the international community.[103] Seventy-one interviewees were women, and 62 were men. I gathered primary sources, such as declarations and pamphlets produced by women's and conservative associations, draft legislation, recordings of parliamentary debates, parliamentary committee reports, and stories from the state-backed *Le Sahel* and the independent *Le Républicain* (among other newspapers). Some of the book's arguments crystallized in moments of personal observation or conversation. I attended religious ceremonies, women's day parades, conferences, and workshops organized by the Ministry of Social Development, and when possible, I watched the evening television news. (For more on how I gathered evidence, see the Research Methods appendix.)

The modus operandi in doing the fieldwork was to retrace as many steps of the policymaking process as possible: When was policy change first proposed in and outside the state, and by whom? Who supported the proposed policy in and outside the state? What resources did activists have at their disposal, and what tactics did they employ to influence policymaking? When did countermobilization emerge in and outside the state, and by whom? What resources did conservative activists have at their disposal, and what tactics did they employ to influence policymaking? At what stages can a proposed policy be stalled or rejected? Who has the power to restart the process and to adopt policy? What formal and informal rules do policymakers follow? In other words, I undertook a microlevel investigation into women's rights policymaking.

The majority of interviews took place in Niamey, where much of the bargaining over national-level women's rights reform occurred. Niamey is a trilingual city, where it is not uncommon to hear French, Hausa, and Zarma in a single conversation. Many of the interviews were conducted in French, in which I am proficient. To not exclude non-Francophone Nigériens from my investigations, I asked friends or research assistants to accompany me and interpret for Hausaphones and Zarmaphones into French or English. To understand whether and how women's and religious activists mobilized for or against women's rights policy outside Niamey, I interviewed women's activists, religious activists, bureaucrats, and "ordinary" people in the towns of Dosso, Maradi, and Zinder and in the village of Kiota.

Most Muslims in Niger are Sunni, yet there is great diversity among the faithful. Some Muslims adhere to a Sufi Sunni order, particularly the *Qadiriyya* (whose origins can be traced to Mauritania) or the *Tijaniyya* (whose origins can be traced to Morocco). Others follow the *Wahhabi* or *Salafi* movements (whose origins can be traced to Saudi Arabia and whose ideas flow from northern Nigeria). I tried to ensure that the interviewees covered a range of orders.

When friends and colleagues in the United States and Niger learn about my research, they are sometimes intrigued not by the study itself but by the person doing the study. I am a Korean American female Buddhist who visited Niger while I was in my late twenties and early thirties, unmarried, and childless. Although I presented myself as a U.S.-based researcher with a business card from an American university, it is likely that some of my interviewees either saw me as a Korean studying in the United States or incorrectly assumed that I was Chinese, which also happens in the United States. At times, older interviewees referred to me as *ma fille;* it is quite possible that our conversations would have gone in a different direction had I been older, been married, and had children. Still, interviewees spoke rather openly with me about what I considered taboo topics based on my own upbringing. In particular, conservative religious men and women spoke frankly to me about sex, which surprised me. Some friends suggested my status as a foreign researcher may have made it easier to gain access to higher-level ministry and political party officials, though the ease of obtaining interviews and documents highly varied across ministries.

Ultimately, I sought to understand women's rights politics in Niger as, to use Chandra Talpade Mohanty's words, a feminist in solidarity rather than a feminist tourist or feminist explorer.[104] Feminists in solidarity, for Mohanty, seek to narrow the distance and identify points of commonality among women while recognizing differences in political context and priorities. Thus, as I sifted through the small mountain of materials I had gathered in Niger, I compared women's rights debates in Niger with what scholars have learned about women's rights debates in the United States and in other countries. At the same time, I tried to appreciate the particularities of the time and place I was studying.

Defining Women's Rights Policy

Women's rights reforms are reforms, decrees, or laws made in the name of improving women's lives. This definition follows Christina Wolbrecht's work

on women's rights policies as policies that "concern women *as women.*"[105] Gender equality policies are similar to women's rights policies. Note, however, that the former seeks to address women's status vis-à-vis mens, whereas the latter may maintain women's position in society relative to men's. For instance, a state subsidy to allow women to take paid maternity leave may seek to help women as women; it may also reify inequities in men's and women's work at home. A gender equality policy would provide parental leave for men and women to encourage a more equitable share of involvement in child rearing. I found in my interviews that many women's activists did not like to frame policies as *feminist* because of the negative connotations surrounding the word in the 1990s and 2000s.[106] Thus, in this book, I prefer to use *women's rights* or *women-friendly policy.*

I do not assume that women's rights policy adoption will automatically and uniformly improve women's lives. Policies adopted in the name of promoting women's rights may be used in ways that oppress women, including women minorities. For example, in the late 1990s, the Peruvian government enacted a mass sterilization campaign targeting poor, rural, and indigenous women by using a global feminist discourse to hide its population control agenda, with the support of feminist activists.[107] Nor do I assume that women's rights policy is the only type of policy that affects women's lives. Other policy areas, such as education, health, immigration, security, and welfare, may have a direct impact on the protection or violation of women's rights.

Plan of the Book

The book offers an analytic framework for understanding the adoption, and rejection, of women's rights policies. The framework focuses on the mobilization of social groups and the national-level political context. Chapter 1 situates Niger in a historical lens. The book then develops the central claims about mobilization and political context in chapters 2, 3, 4, and the conclusion.

Chapter 2 analyzes Niger's most controversial women's issue: family law reform. Women's activists in and outside the state helped put the issue of women's rights in marriage, divorce, and inheritance on the national agenda. Yet in spite of repeated demands (and the encouragement of international donors), Niger did not overhaul its laws governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Conservative activists, in the wake of a national debate over the issue of secularism, opposed family law reform on the grounds that it was anti-Muslim and pro-secularist. Making the proposed reform unthinkable, conservative activists publicly cursed three proponents of the reform in the

early 1990s and burned a draft family law bill in the early 2010s. These public rituals intimidated women's activists and policymakers alike into abandoning the family law project.

In chapter 3, I examine the politics behind the first legal gender quota to be adopted by a Muslim-majority democracy. Niger's quota mandates that at least 10 percent of elected positions (e.g., parliamentary seats) and at least 25 percent of ministerial posts and promotions in public administration go to each sex. Niger adopted a quota through a combination of women's mobilization, a lack of countermobilization, and a political context in which the National Assembly had relative autonomy. Women's activists in and outside the state helped put the issue of women's representation on the national agenda and helped make affirmative action thinkable. A veto player, parliament, vigorously debated over the gender quota, ultimately arriving at a compromise that weakened a key component of the bill.

Chapter 4 compares Niger's ratification of CEDAW with the nonratification of the Maputo Protocol. Concerted women's mobilization, divided conservative mobilization, and the absence of an autonomous National Assembly help us understand the ratification of CEDAW. Divided women's mobilization, concerted conservative mobilization, and the relative autonomy of the National Assembly help us understand the nonratification of the Maputo Protocol.

The conclusion summarizes the book's main findings. Although the book is about women and politics in an African country, it carries broader implications for the study of Muslim women's agency, women's movements, and international women's rights, which I discuss here. Finally, I identify where the scholarship on women and politics ought to go next.