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Social Implications of Adopting Application of Sharia in South-West Nigeria: A Case Study of Ibadan.

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Abstract

This study examines the social implications of adopting Sharia law for peaceful coexistence among the Yoruba in Ibadan Metropolis, South-West Nigeria. Anchored on legal pluralism, natural law theory, and the social justice framework, the research explores how the introduction of Sharia may affect intergroup relations, social cohesion, and human rights in a religiously plural setting. Ibadan was purposively selected as a microcosm of Yoruba religious diversity, where informal Sharia panels already operate alongside customary and statutory courts. A mixed-methods cross-sectional design was employed, combining survey data from 309 respondents with 16 key informant interviews drawn from religious, legal, and community leadership. Findings reveal widespread opposition to Sharia adoption, with 75.4% of respondents rejecting its introduction. Religious affiliation emerged as a significant predictor of attitude ($\chi^2 = 98.234$, $p < 0.001$), as 92.5% of Christians opposed Sharia compared to 65.9% of Muslims who supported it. Beyond attitudinal divisions, 78.6% believed Sharia would negatively affect social relationships, and 69.6% anticipated adverse effects on non-Muslim integration. Additionally, 60.5% expressed concern that Sharia would not respect fundamental human rights, particularly those of women and religious minorities. Qualitative findings revealed intra-Muslim variations from cautious acceptance to conditional support, shaped by prior exposure to Sharia based systems and concerns about implementation. The study concludes that introducing Sharia law in Ibadan poses significant risks to social cohesion and interfaith trust. As such, any consideration of Sharia implementation be limited to personal law for consenting Muslims, supported by clear constitutional safeguards and robust protections for minority rights.

Keywords: Sharia law, legal pluralism, peaceful coexistence, human rights, Ibadan Metropolis.

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Introduction

The adoption and implementation of Sharia law in parts of Nigeria have long stirred debates around legal pluralism, religious identity, and national unity. While Sharia law is constitutionally permitted in personal and civil matters for Muslims, its broader implications for multi-religious and ethnically diverse communities remain complex. In the South-West, particularly Ibadan Metropolis, a predominantly Yoruba and religious plural society, the perceived spread of Sharia law raises questions about religious tolerance, social cohesion, and the boundaries of legal jurisdiction. Given the historical coexistence of Islam, Christianity, and traditional beliefs among the Yoruba, this study examines how Sharia law might affect intergroup relations, communal trust, and the framework of peaceful coexistence.

Sharia, from the Arabic term meaning 'the path" or "the way," is derived from the Qur'an, the Hadith, and scholarly consensus, guiding Muslim behaviour and governance. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, and Nigeria have adopted Sharia law fully or partially, sometimes blending it with democratic systems World Population Review, 2025). In Nigeria, with over 240 million people and more than 250 ethnic groups, Islam accounts for 53.5%, Christianity 45.9%, and other faiths, 0.6% (Byer, 2023). Nigeria's plural legal system recognises common law, sharia law and customary law. While Saria is not predominantly implemented in Muslim-majority northern states, its relevance and reception in the South-West remains underexplored.

In Ibadan, Sharia's implementation faces challenges from Yoruba customs, colonial legacies, and legal pluralism. Practices such as primogeniture and indigenous inheritance systems often conflict with Islamic prescriptions, leading to reliance on non-binding Sharia panels. Busari et al., 2024; Bello, 2024). This tension underscores the need to examine Sharia's implications for legal, social, and cultural dynamics in Ibadan, a city where Islam, Christianity, and traditional beliefs coexist.

Ibadan was purposively selected as the case study for several compelling reasons. As the largest indigenous city in sub-Saharan Africa and the capital of Oyo State, Ibadan serves as a microcosm of Yoruba cultural and religious diversity, hosting a significant population of Muslims, Christians and traditional religious adherents who have historically coexisted peacefully. The city's rich history as a pre-colonial political centre, its experience with colonial legal administration, and its contemporary status as a hub of education, commerce,

and interethnic interaction make it an ideal site for examining the implications of Sharia law in a pluralistic setting.

Importantly, Ibadan has witnessed the establishment of informal Sharia panels, such as the one at Oja Oba Central Mosque, which operate alongside customary and statutory courts, creating practical tensions that warrant empirical investigation. The city's demographic composition with substantial Muslim and Christian populations allows for meaningful comparison of attitudes across religious lines, while its Yoruba cultural foundation provides a consistent ethnic framework within which to assess the interplay between religious law and indigenous customs. Furthermore, Ibadan's proximity to Lagos, where a more formalised Sharia arbitration panel exist, and its representation of the broader South-West geopolitical zone, make findings from this study potentially transferable to other Yoruba cities facing similar debates about legal pluralism and religious accommodation.

It is imperative to examine the implications of adopting Sharia law in South-West Nigeria, especially in cities like Ibadan that have historically fostered interreligious harmony, in order to inform equitable policymaking and preserve intercommunal peace. Hence, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of the Yoruba towards the introduction of Sharia law in Ibadan Metropolis?
2. What are the implications of Sharia law for the human rights of the citizens in Ibadan Metropolis?

The aim of this study is to assess the possibilities and implications of Sharia law in South-West Nigeria. The objectives are to analyse the attitudes and perceptions of the Yoruba towards the introduction of Sharia law in Ibadan Metropolis and examine the implications of Sharia law for the human rights of citizens in Ibadan Metropolis.

Peaceful coexistence in multi-religious societies extends beyond the absence of violent conflict (negative peace) to encompass positive peace the presence of equitable structures, mutual respect, and opportunities for all groups to participate in social, legal, and political life (Galtung, 1969). Social inclusion, defined as the process of improving the terms of participation in society for disadvantaged groups (World Bank, 2013), is particularly salient where legal pluralism creates overlapping and potentially conflicting normative orders.

In contexts such as Ibadan, where English common law, customary law, and informal Sharia panels operate concurrently, social inclusion requires that no religious community faces barriers to accessing justice, that minority rights are protected, and that legal institutions enjoy perceived legitimacy across group lines. Research on religious courts in plural democracies including Kenya's Kadhi courts (Kivoi, 2015; Cussac, 2008), India's personal law systems (Williams, 2006), and South Africa's customary law recognition (Himonga & Nhlapo, 2014) demonstrates that legal pluralism can either enhance or undermine social cohesion depending on constitutional safeguards, intergroup trust, and the scope of religious court jurisdiction.

This study contributes to this literature by providing empirical evidence from Ibadan, a majority Yoruba, religiously diverse city where informal Sharia panels operate without formal constitutional authorisation. It examines whether the perceived expansion of religious legal authority threatens positive peace by creating inclusion/exclusion dynamics along religious lines

Theoretical Framework

Legal pluralism describes the coexistence of multiple legal systems within a society, as in Nigeria where English common law, Sharia law, and customary law operate concurrently (Griffiths, 1986; Tamanaha, 2008). Merry (1998) notes it reflects situations in which two or more legal systems coexist in the same social field, recognising the legitimacy of religious and traditional norms. In Northern Nigeria, twelve states have formally adopted Sharia, covering personal law and minor criminal matters, raising debates on constitutional limits, religious freedom, and gender equity (Ostien & Dekker, 2010; Nmehielle, 2004). Concepts such as Bowen's (2003) "normative ordering" and 1981 Von Benda-Bechmann's "forums for shopping" illustrate how individuals navigate overlapping legal systems, highlighting challenges in aligning religious law with constitutional rights (Yusuf, 2014). In Ibadan, forum shopping is already evident as Muslims occasional seek resolution through informal Sharia panels like the one at Oja Oba Central Mosque for inheritance matters, while also engaging with customary courts for disputes governed by Yoruba traditions.

Natural Law Theory asserts that legal systems must align with universal moral principles, discoverable through reason or divine revelation (Finns, 2011). Sharia, grounded in the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence, presents law as divinely ordained, emphasizing

justice and moral accountability (Hallaq, 2009; An-Na'im, 2008; Kamali, 2008). While some Muslims view Sharia as a path to moral governance, tensions arise when provisions conflict with constitutional protections of equality and human rights (Baderin, 2005; Wacks, 2012).
The Social Justice Framework evaluates legal systems based on fairness, rights distribution, and protection of marginalized groups (Fraser, 2009). In Nigeria, it enables assessment of whether Sharia fosters social responsibility through institutions such as zakat (obligatory alms giving) and the principle of maslaha (public interest), or whether it undermines gender equality, religious freedoms, and constitutional rights (Last, 2000; Hefner, 2011; Imam, 2005). Scholars like Nussbaum (2011) and Sen (2009) emphasize promoting human capabilities and freedoms beyond moral or religious norms.

The three theoretical frameworks employed in this study do not operate in isolation but rather intersect, complement, and at times conflict with one another, creating a productive analytical tension that mirrors the complexities of Ibadan's pluralistic society. Legal pluralism provides the structural lens for understanding how English common law, Sharia law, and Yoruba customary law coexist and compete within the same social field, mapping the jurisdictional overlaps and forum shopping that characterise Ibadan's legal landscape. Natural Law Theory supplies the moral and theological depth necessary to comprehend why Muslims communities advocate for Sharia implementations, viewing it not as one legal option among equals but rather as divinely ordained governance rooted in justice and moral accountability. The Social Justice Framework introduces a critical evaluative dimension, assessing whether the outcomes produced by these overlapping systems protect or undermine he rights of women, religious minorities, and other marginalised groups. The tensions among these frameworks are analytically valuable: legal pluralism's descriptive neutrality may conflict with social justice's prescriptive demands for equality; natural law's absolutist claims of divine revelation may clash with both the pragmatic accommodations of legal pluralism and the universal rights orientation of social justice. Yet it is precisely through holding these frameworks in productive tension that this study captures the full complexity of Sharia's implications for Ibadan, where Muslim convictions about moral governance (natural law) encounter Christian concerns about marginalisation (social justice) within a legally pluralistic society where multiple normative orders already compete for authority. Together, these frameworks enable an analysis that respects religious convictions, maps institutional

complexities, and evaluates outcomes for all citizens, providing the theoretical rigour necessary to address the study's two objectives.

Methodology

This study adopted an inductive, descriptive, and explanatory cross-sectional design to examine the implications of Sharia law in Yoruba land, South-West Nigeria. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approached, the research captured both the prevalence of perceptions and the deeper rationales behind them, aligning with a case study framework. The quantitative component measured patterns and attitudes at a single point in time, while the qualitative strand explored contextual explanations and experiences from key informants, offering rich insights into the potential social, legal, and human rights consequences of Sharia law.

Data were collected in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, a major urban centre and cultural hub of Yoruba land, comprising eleven Local Government Areas. The study population included adult residents ages 18 years and above, encompassing Muslims, Christians, and traditional religion adherents, community leaders, legal practitioners, clerics, and civil society actors actively engaged in shaping discourse on Sharia law.

This study adopted a convenience sampling method. A sample size of 309 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula for sample size determination, assuming a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and an estimated population proportions of 50% to maximise sample size variability. An additional 10% was included to account for potential non-response. Despite its limitations, convenience sampling was considered appropriate given the explanatory nature of the study. Inclusion criteria required at least one year of residency in Ibadan and proficiency in English or Yoruba. For the qualitative component, 16 in-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected stakeholders, including Islamic scholars, Christian leaders, traditional rulers, legal practitioners, and government officials. However, it is important to acknowledge that some Muslims stakeholders, including traditional chiefs and lecturers, declined to participate, which may limit the representation of Muslim perspectives in the qualitative findings.

Primary data were gathered using a structured, bilingual questionnaire and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into Yoruba,

with back-translation employed to ensure accuracy and cultural appropriateness. A pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents from diverse religious backgrounds to refine question wording, identify ambiguous items, and assess the instrument's reliability. The final questionnaire covered seven areas: socio-demographics, general awareness of Sharia law, perceived implications, social impact, legal system and governance, human rights considerations, and recommendations. In-depth interviews followed a flexible guide that explored stakeholders; experiences with legal pluralism, their views on Sharia's compatibility with Yoruba culture, and their assessments of potential social and human rights implications. To ascertain that respondents held sufficient comprehension to answer meaningfully, the questionnaire included three objective knowledge check items: (a) sources of Sharia (Qur'an, Hadith, scholarly consensus); (b) areas of Sharia application in Nigeria (personal status for Muslims, criminal law in some northern states); (c) an example of a Sharia legal principle (zakat, inheritance rules, prohibition of riba). Respondents answering at least two of three correctly were classified as having adequate foundational knowledge.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarise respondents' characteristics and perceptions. Inferential statistics, specifically chi-square tests, were employed to examine associations between religious affiliations and key outcome variables. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report. Coding was conducted manually, with themes derived both deductively from theoretical frameworks and inductively from participants' responses. To enhance trustworthiness, findings were triangulated across quantitative and qualitative sources, and member checking was employed with selected interview participants to verify interpretations.

Ethical considerations were central to the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants after explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Participants were assured of anonymity through the use of pseudonyms in the interview transcripts and the removal of identifying information from all data records. Confidentiality was maintained by storing data in password protected files accessible only to the research team. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Special attention was given to protecting sensitive information shared during interviews, particularly regarding religious tensions or criticisms of legal authorities.

The inclusion of a diverse sample, particularly respected religious and community leaders, enhanced the credibility and depth of the findings. The triangulation across methods and sources strengthened the validity of conclusions, while the transparent reporting of limitations, including stakeholder participation, supports the study's trustworthiness. This methodology ensured that the study captured a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of Sharia law's potential adoptions and implications in the pluralistic Yoruba society of Ibadan Metropolis.

Findings and Interpretations

Objective 1: To analyse the attitudes and perceptions of Yoruba toward the introduction of Sharia law in Ibadan Metropolis

Table 1.1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	170	55.0
	Female	139	45.0
Religious Affiliation	Christianity	214	69.3
	Islam	91	29.4
	Traditional	4	1.3
Age Group	18–25	44	14.2
	26–35	104	33.7
	36–45	96	31.1
	46–60	54	17.5
	60+	11	3.6
Educational Qualification	Secondary	13	4.2
	Tertiary	296	95.8
Marital Status	Single	106	34.3
	Married	197	63.8
	Divorced	1	0.3
	Widowed	5	1.6
Ethnic Group	Igbo	6	1.9
	Hausa	2	0.6
	Yoruba	286	92.6
	Others	15	4.9
LGA of Residence	Akinyele	71	23.0
	Egbeda	30	9.7
	Ibadan North East	4	1.3
	Ibadan North	70	22.7
	Ibadan North West	4	1.3

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Ibadan South East	12	3.9
	Ibadan South West	25	8.1
	Ido	28	9.1
	Lagelu	30	9.7
	Oluyole	26	8.4
	Ona Ara	9	2.9
Indigene of Ibadan	Yes	108	35.0
	No	201	65.0
Familiar with Sharia Law	Yes	213	68.9
	No	40	12.9
	Maybe	56	18.1
Source of Knowledge about Sharia Law	Friends/Family	13	4.2
	Media	90	29.1
	Others	6	1.9
	Personal Study	36	11.7
	Religious Teachings	139	45.0
	School	35	11.3

1.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 309 respondents participated in the study, drawn from eleven Local Government Areas within Ibadan Metropolis. Of these, as shown in the Table 1.1, 55.0% were male, while 45.0% were female. In terms of religious affiliation, 69.3% were Christians, 29.4% were Muslims, and 1.3% adhered to Traditional religion. Regarding age distribution, 14.2% of respondents were between 18-25 years, 33.7% were between 26-35 years, 31.1% fell within 36-45 years, 17.5% were aged 46-60 years, and 3.6% were 60 years and above.

In terms of educational qualification, 95.8% had tertiary education, while 4.2% had attained secondary education. With respect to marital status, 63.8% were married, 34.3% were single, 1.6% were widowed, and 0.3% were divorced. Ethnically, 92.6% of the respondents were Yoruba, 1.9% were Igbo, 0.6% were Hausa, and 4.9% belonged to other ethnic groups. Respondents resided across various LGAs as follows: Akinyele (23.0%), Ibadan North (22.7%), Egbeda (9.7%), Lagelu (9.7%), Ido (9.1%), Oluyole (8.4%), Ibadan South West (8.1%), Ibadan South East (3.9%), Ibadan North East (1.3%), Ibadan North West (1.3%), and Ona Ara (2.9%).

In terms of indigene status, 35.0% were indigenes of Ibadan, while 56.0% were non-indigenes. On familiarity with Sharia law, 68.9% of respondents indicated they were familiar, 18.1% responded with ‘maybe’, and 12.9% were not familiar. Sources of knowledge about

Sharia law included religious teachings (45.0%), media (29.1%), personal study (11.7), school (11.3%), friends/family (4.2%), and other sources (1.9%).

Table 1.2 Public Perception of Sharia Law and Its Social Implications:

Variable	**Response Category**	**Frequency**	**Percent (%)**
Adoption of Sharia Law	Yes	76	24.6%
	No	233	75.4%
General Implication	Positive	55	17.8%
	Neutral	30	9.7%
	Negative	222	71.8%
Peaceful Coexistence	Strongly agree	31	10.0%
	Agree	31	10.0%
	Neutral	27	8.7%
	Disagree	77	24.9%
	Strongly disagree	143	46.3%
Potential for Tension	Yes	239	77.3%
	No	44	14.2%
	Maybe	26	8.4%
Impact on Social Relations	Yes	243	78.6%
	No	38	12.3%
	Maybe	27	8.7%

As shown in Table 1.2, public perception of Sharia law in Ibadan is predominantly negative. A substantial majority of respondents 75.4% opposed its adoption, with only 24.6%

expressing support. Similarly, 71.8% viewed the general implications of Sharia as negative, compared to 17.8% who viewed it positively and 9.7% who remained neutral.

Regarding peaceful coexistence, opposition was even more pronounced. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that Sharia would promote peaceful coexistence (24.9% disagreed, 43.3% strongly disagreed), while only 20.0% agreed or strongly agreed. Consistent with this pattern, 77.3% believed Sharia law has the potential to create tension, and 78.6% stated it would affect social relationships.

These findings reveal deep concern among Ibadan residents about the potential consequences of Sharia implementation. The overwhelming majority who believe Sharia would affect social relationships suggests that residents anticipate significant disruption to interpersonal connections and community bonds. This concern is compounded by the majority view that Sharia would not improve moral behaviour, undermine one of the key arguments often advanced for its adoption. The polarisation in perceptions where non-Muslims anticipate negative social outcomes while some Muslims view Sharia positively reflects broader societal tensions in multi-religious settings. While Muslims may view Sharia law as a spiritual and moral imperative, non-Muslims tend to see it as a potential source of marginalisation and conflict. The findings suggest that opposition to Sharia may not stem from ignorance but from genuine concerns about equity, inclusiveness, and the preservation of Ibadan's diverse social fabric.

It is important to interpret this negative perception in light of participants' objective knowledge. Among the 201 respondents (65.0%) who demonstrated adequate understanding of Sharia's sources and provisions, opposition to adoption remained high at 72.1% only marginally lower than the 75.4% in the full sample. This difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.452$, $p = 0.228$). Opposition to Sharia adoption in Ibadan is therefore not primarily driven by ignorance or misinformation; it persists even among those with informed understanding of Sharia's provisions.

Note: Of the 233 respondents who opposed adoption, 145 (62.2%) demonstrated adequate objective knowledge of Sharia, indicating that opposition is not attributable to lack of understanding

1.2 Adoption of Sharia Law by Demographic Categories

Table 1.3: Adoption of Sharia Law by Demographic Categories

Adoption of Sharia Law by Various Demographics				
Category Type	**Category**	**No**	**Yes**	**Total**
Respondent's Gender	Male	134	36	170
	Female	99	40	139
Religious Affiliation	Christianity	198	16	214
	Islam	31	60	91
	Traditional	4	0	4
Age Group	18 – 25	36	8	44
	26 – 35	83	21	104
	36 – 45	74	22	96
Adoption of Sharia Law by Various Demographics				
Category Type	**Category**	**No**	**Yes**	**Total**
	46 – 60	34	20	54
	60+	6	5	11
Educational Qualification	Secondary	7	6	13
	Tertiary	226	70	296

Total		233	76	309

Table 1.3 represents the response on the adoption of Sharia law by demographic categories. Among the 139 female respondents, 99(71.2%) did not support the adoption of Sharia law, while 40 (28.8%) did. Among the 170 male respondents, 134 (78.8%) did not support its adoption, and 36 (21.2%) did.

By religious affiliation, 198 Christians (92.5%) opposed the adoption of Sharia law, while 16 (7.5%) supported it. Among Muslims, 31 (34.1%) were against adoption, while 60 (65.9%) were in support. All four respondents who identified with traditional religion opposed the adoption of Sharia law.

In terms of age, among respondents aged 18–25, 36 (81.8%) opposed adoption and 8 (18.2%) supported it. In the 26–35 age group, 83 (79.8%) opposed and 21 (20.2%) supported it. In the 46–-60 age group, 34 (63.0%) opposed while 20 (37.0%) supported adoption. Among respondents aged 60 and above, 6 (54.5%) opposed and 5 (45.5%) supported adoption.

Regarding educational qualification, among those with secondary education, 7 (53.8%) opposed adoption while 6 (46.2%) supported it. Of those with tertiary education, 226 (76.4%) opposed and 70 (23.6%) supported the adoption of Sharia law. Chi-square tests revealed that religious affiliation was significantly associated with support for Sharia adoption (χ^2 = 98.234, df = 2, $p < 0.001$). Age group also showed a significant association (χ^2 = 12.456, df = 4, p = 0.014), with opposition declining among older respondents. Gender (χ^2 = 2.341, df = 1, p = 0.126) and educational qualification (χ^2 = 3.012, df = 1, p = 0.083) were not statistically significant predictors at the $p < 0.05$ level.

The significant religious divide in attitudes with 92.5% of Christians opposing Sharia compared to 65.9% Muslims supporting it aligns with the theoretical frameworks employed in this study. Legal pluralism helps explain the jurisdictional tensions that Christians anticipate, while natural law theory illuminates why Muslims view Sharia as morally imperative. The social justice framework captures the human rights concerns that dominate Christian opposition and the selective support among Muslims who emphasize proper implementation and constitutional compliance.

1.3 Qualitative Insights on Attitudes Towards Sharia Law

The in-depth interviews revealed three distinct attitudinal patterns that help explain the quantitative findings.

Strong oppositions rooted in rights concerns were noted in some participants. Several Christian participants expressed unequivocal opposition to Sharia adoption, echoing the 92.5% opposition found in the survey. A Pentecostal pastor with over 35 years in Ibadan described Sharia as:

"Destructive, ungodly, inhuman and deadly both on short term and long term… Sharia law is life destructive, religion biased and merciless. It should never be allowed to see the light of the day in Oyo State." (Participant 01, Christian Pastor)

A female veterinarian articulated concerns about everyday life under Sharia:

"as non-Muslims, one may not know what will constitute haram to them. Therefore, one may have to walk on egg shells around them or even cut off deeper relationships with them." (Participant 05, Christian Female)

A legal practitioner grounded his opposition in constitutional principles:

"Sharia law is against the constitution… Some of the punishments are not constitutionally correct." (Participant 07, Christian Lawyer)

While Muslims participants who supported Sharia emphasized proper implementation. A teacher with Islamic background stated *"Sharia law is a kind of constitution laid down by Almighty Allah to regulate our lives and dealings with people."* (Participant 04, Muslim Teacher)

Another participant, a legal practitioner with experience in northern Nigeria offered a more nuanced view:

"Sharia is a noble idea if well practiced without rancour and evil premeditated intentions. Sharia as prescribed in Saudi Arabia where Islam could be said to have originated from, is quite different from what we practice here as Sharia." (Participant 02, Christian Legal Practitioner)

A significant theme across interviews was the supremacy of the Nigerian constitution. As one lecturer emphasized:

> "Let me hasten to state that neither the Al Qur'an nor the Holy Bible is the predominant basis of our law in Nigeria: it is the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). Each citizen therefore… to make a choice of which law he/she wants to be subjected to (Participant

02). This perspective aligns with the 73.8% survey finding that Sharia should apply only to Muslims."

1.4 Diversity Within Muslin Perspectives: From Cautious to Enthusiastic

While the quantitative data showed 65.9% of Muslims supporting Sharia adoption, qualitative interviews revealed significant diversity in the reasoning and conditions underpinning this support. An Imam with over 40 years of residency in Ibadan and direct experience living in Yobe State, where Sharia is formally implemented offered a cautious perspective that acknowledged implementation challenges. While affirming that "Sharia teaches morals mostly," he warned that its adoption in Ibadan would be "strange and challenging." Drawing on his experience in northern Nigeria, he noted practical consequences: "People might relocate because of Sharia, they might leave Ibadan because we live in a secular law." He also acknowledged rights concerns, stating that Sharia would affect "freedom of expression, freedom to wear what you like" because "Sharia is against unnecessary exposure by women." Despite these concerns, he expressed optimism that proper orientation could facilitate integration: When people have the right orientation, they can merge the two. There will be conflict initially but with time people will get used to it and adjust." His recommendation that "the National Orientation Agency can share the information with a lot of jingles" reflected a pragmatic approach to implementation.

This cautious perspective contrasted with that of a younger Imam with only five years in Ibadan and no direct experience with Sharia implementing states. He expressed stronger support with fewer reservations, emphasizing that Sharia would "promote morality" and "stop moral decadence." However, he acknowledged constitutional constraints, noting that integration would only be possible "if the constitution gives room for Sharia" and warning that "if the constitution does not identify Sharia there will be problem."

The diversity within Muslim perspectives, from cautious acceptance to enthusiastic support, suggests that Muslim attitudes are not monolithic. Factors such as direct experience with Shaia implementing states, length of residency in Ibadan, and understanding of constitutional constraints appear to shape the conditions under which Muslims would accept Sharia implementation. This nuance is critical for policymakers seeking to understand the spectrum of Muslim opinion beyond simple support or opposition.

Objective 2: To examine the implication of Sharia law in the human rights of citizens in Ibadan Metropolis

Table 2.1 presents respondents perceptions of how Sharia law would affect the human rights of citizens in Ibadan metropolis. The findings reveal widespread concern across multiple dimensions of right protection.

Table 2.1: Perception of Human Rights Under Sharia Law

Variable	Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Respect of Fundamental Human Rights	Yes	84	27.2%
	No	187	60.5%
	Maybe	38	12.3%
Women/Minority Right under Sharia	Yes	113	36.6%
	No	190	61.5%
	Maybe	6	1.9%

The data reveals that a clear majority of respondents (60.5%) believes that Sharia law does not respect fundamental human rights, while only 27.2% believe it does, and 12.3 remain uncertain. This finding indicates deep seated apprehension about the compatibility of Sharia law with internationally recognized human rights standards. Similarly, concerning women and minority rights specifically, 61.5% of respondents believe such rights would not be protected under Sharia, compared to 36.6% who believe they would be protected, and a mere 1.9% who were unsure. The consistency between theses two measure both showing approximately 60% negative perceptions suggests a coherent and widespread concern about human rights implications.

2.2 Specific Rights Concerns

Respondents were asked to identify which specific rights they believed would be at risk under Sharia law. The findings reveal a hierarchy of concerns:

Table 2.2: Specific Rights Concerns Under Sharia Law

Rights Concern	Frequency	Percent
All Rights	144	46.6%
Freedom of religion	56	18.1%
Right to fair hearing	39	12.6%
Freedom of expression	22	7.1%
Gender equality	22	7.1%
Right to dress as desired	15	4.9%
Others	11	3.5%

Nearly half of all respondents (46.6%) expressed concern about all listed rights, indicating a generalised apprehension that Sharia law poses a comprehensive threat to human rights protections. This holistic concern suggests that for many residents, the issue is not about specific provision but about the fundamental orientation of Sharia law toward rights.

Among specific rights, freedom of religion emerged as the most frequently cited concern, mentioned by 18.1% of respondents. This finding is particularly significant in Ibadan's multi-religious context, where non-Muslims may fear that a Sharia based legal system would privilege Islam over other faiths or restrict religious practice. The right to fair hearing was the second most common specific concern (12.6%), reflecting anxieties about due process, legal representation, and judicial impartiality under Sharia proceedings.

Freedom of expression and gender equality were each mentioned by 7.1% of respondents, suggesting concerns about restrictions on speech and status of women under Sharia. The right to dress as desired was cited by 4.9%, likely reflecting anxieties about dress codes and

personal autonomy. Other concerns, mentioned by the 3.5%, included issues such as the prohibition of interest (riba) and its economic implications.

2.2.1 Perceived Effects on Social Inclusion

Beyond specific rights, the study examined broader dimensions of social inclusion namely, equal access to justice, protection from religious discrimination, and participation in legal processes. Only 22.3% (n=69) of respondents believed non-Muslims would have equal access to justice under a Sharia-based system, while 71.2% (n=220) believed they would face discrimination. Regarding participation, 18.4% (n=57) thought non-Muslims could meaningfully participate in legal decision-making under Sharia, whereas 68.9% (n=213) disagreed. The remaining respondents were either unsure or did not provide a response. These figures indicate that Sharia adoption is perceived not as a neutral legal addition but as a system that would systematically exclude non-Muslims a core social inclusion failure.

2.3 Religious Affiliation and Perceptions of Women and Minority Rights

Table 2.3 examines the relationship between religious affiliation and beliefs about whether women and minority rights would be protected under Sharia law. The association is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 147.513$, $p = 0.001$), revealing a stark religious divide on this question.

Table 2.3: Women and Minority Rights Under Sharia by Religious Affiliation

Religious Affiliation	Yes (Protected)	No (Not Protected)	Maybe	Total
Christianity	33 (15.4%)	176 (82.2%)	5 (2.3%)	214
Islam	80 (87.9%)	10 (11.0%)	1 (1.1%)	91
Traditional	0 (0.0%)	4 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4

Among Christian respondents, an overwhelming majority of 82.2 percent believed that women and minority rights would not be protected under Sharia law, while only 15.4 percent believed they would be protected, and 2.3 percent were unsure. This pattern reflects deep

concern within the Christian community about the implications of Sharia for their own rights and for vulnerable groups within society.

In start contrast, a substantial majority of Muslim respondents (87.9 percent) believed that women and minority rights would be protected under Sharia law, while 11.0 percent believed they would not be protected, and 1.1 percent were unsure. This dramatic difference 82.2 percent of Christians expressing lack of confidence compared to 97.9 percent Muslims expressing confidence reveals a fundamental divergence in how the two religious communities perceive the human rights implications of Sharia.

All four traditional religion respondents (100 percent) believed that women and minority rights would not be protected, aligning them with the Christian perspective. This finding suggests that non-Muslim communities share common concerns about rights protection under Sharia, regardless of their specific religious traditions.

The statistical significance of this relationship ($p=0.001$) confirms that religious affiliations is the primary predictor of beliefs about Sharia's impact on women and minority rights. This polarisation has profound implications for social cohesion and intergroup trust in Ibadan metropolis. This quantitative divide is reinforced by qualitative insights from within the Muslim community. Notably, a Chief Imam with over 46 years of residency in Ibadan and direct experience with Sharia implementation in Kano State explicitly identified women as the group most vulnerable under a Sharia-based legal system. When asked which group might be vulnerable, he responded simply: "women." Elaborating on gender equality, he stated: "Females are not expected to operate within the legal structure." This admission from a Muslim institutional leader carries particular weight, it confirms that concerns about women's rights under Sharia are not merely a product of Christian bias but are acknowledged by Muslim leadership. The Chief Imam's perspective aligns with the 82.2% of Christians who expressed lack of confidence in rights protection, while standing in tension with the 87.9% of Muslims who expressed confidence. This internal Muslim acknowledgement of gender inequality under Sharia adds credibility to the broader concerns documented in this study. When one community expressed confidence in a legal framework and another community views as threatening to their fundamental rights, the foundation for mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence is undermined.

2.4 Human Rights Concerns in Participants' Own Words

The qualitative data powerfully illustrated the 60.5% who believed Sharia would not respect fundamental human rights.

Freedom of Religion at Risk

A Christian Pastor articulated the core anxiety:

"Sharia leads to doctrinal differences particularly as it affects our ultimate belief in God whom we see as God of mercy and the Sharia law sees as merciless." (Participant 01)

Muslim Acknowledgement of Rights Concerns

Notably, even a Muslim participant who supported Sharia's moral objectives acknowledged human rights tensions. An Imam with over 40 years in Ibadan and experience in Yobe State stated that under Sharia, there would be restrictions on "freedom of expression, freedom to wear what you like," explaining that "Sharia is against unnecessary exposure by women." This admission from a Muslim voice that Sharia would impose restrictions on personal freedoms adds credibility to the 6.5% of respondents who believed fundamental human rights would not be respected under Sharia.

A female participant expressed concern about:

"Right to life, freedom of religion, freedom of speech." (Participant 05)

Women's Rights Concerns

Multiple participants identified women as particularly vulnerable. A public servant stated: "Women are not free to dress how they want, or go to public gatherings and use mix transport facilities." (Participant 03)

Another participant noted that Sharia law might be:

"More discriminatory against women thereby negatively impacting gender equality." (Participant 05)

Right to Fair Hearing

A pastor questioned the procedural justice under Sharia:

"No fair hearing… the risk of fair haring to victims." (Participant 01)

A legal practitioner added that:

"Some of the punishments are not constitutionally correct." (Participant 07)

Balanced Muslim Perspective

A Muslim participant offered a more nuanced view, acknowledging that protections would depend on implementation:

"Any aspect of Shaia that is retrogressive and against human rights should be annulled… Sharia should be well regulated and any aspect if it that infringes on people's fundamental human rights should be annulled." (Participant 02)

This perspective aligns with the 87.9% of Muslims who believed rights would be protected but with crucial caveat that proper regulation is essential.

Divergent Muslim Perspectives on Human Rights

The qualitative interviews revealed significant diversity within the Muslim Community regarding human rights implications of Sharia. This diversity mirrors the quantitative finding that while 87.9% of Muslims believed women and minority rights would be protected, 11.0% did not.

A Muslim professor with 30 years of Ibadan residency expressed strong confidence in Sharia's rights protections, stating:

"Study it, you would see that all rights and true freedom are protected already."

When asked about vulnerable groups, he responded:

"Sharia caters for all, not targeted individuals."

This perspective aligns with the 87.9% of Muslim respondents who expressed confidence in rights protection under Sharia.

However, other Muslim voices in this study offered more nuanced assessments. An Imam with experience in Yobe State acknowledged that Sharia would impose restrictions on "freedom of expression, freedom to wear what you like, stating that Sharia is against unnecessary exposure by women." More significantly, a Chief Imam, with 46 years of Ibadan residency and direct experience in Kano State explicitly identified "women" as the most vulnerable group under Sharia, adding that "females are not expected to operate withing legal structure."

These divergent perspectives within Muslim community suggest that the start religious divide documented in the in the quantitative data (82.2% of Christians vs. 87.9% of Muslims) may mask significant intra-Muslim disagreement. The contrast between the professor's confident assertion that "all rights are protected" and the Chief Imam's acknowledgment of women's vulnerability reflects an ongoing debate within Islamic jurisprudence about the relationship between Sharia and contemporary human rights standards.

For Ibadan, where Muslim communities include both those who have lived alongside Christians for generation and those influenced by northern Nigerian implementation models, these intra-Muslim differences have important implications for any policy discussion about

Sharia implementation. (Participant 11, Professor, Muslim; Participant 09, Imam; Participant 10, Chief Imam)

Female Perspectives on Social Implications

A female law librarian with eight years of residency in Ibadan offered a measured assessment of Sharia's potential social implications. While she concluded tat implementation could affect interfaith relations:

"The implementation of Sharia law could impact interfaith relation and dialogues between Yoruba Muslims and Christians."

On the questions of whether Sharia would increase social tension, she responded:

"Yes. This is because of the different beliefs, human rights concerns, interfaith relations, etc."

This perspective from a female legal professional adds gender diversity to the qualitative findings while reinforcing the quantitative evidence that 78.6% of respondents believed Sharia would affect social relationships and 69.6% anticipated negative effects on integration of non-Muslims. (participant 08, Law Librarian, Christian, Female, 8 years Ibadan residency)

2.5 Implications for Human Rights Protection

The findings from carry significant implications for human rights protection in Ibadan metropolis. The majority perception that Sharia law would not respect fundamental human rights (60.5 percent) and would fail to protect women and minority rights (61.5 percent) indicates that any proposal to introduce Sharia would face substantiated opposition grounded in rights-based concerns.

The specific rights identified as being at risk particularly freedom of religion (18.1 percent) and the right to fair hearing (12.6 percent) point to the areas where public anxiety is most concentrated. Freedom of religion concerns reflect the reality of Ibadan's religious diversity and the fear that a Sharia-based system might privilege one faith over the others. Fair hearing concerns suggests apprehension about procedural justice and the quality of legal representation under Sharia courts.

The religious divide revealed in Section 2.3 is perhaps the most troubling finding from a human rights perspective. When one religious community (Muslims) expresses strong confidence that rights would be protected, while another (Christians) expresses equally strong convictions that rights would be violated, the stage is set for conflicting rights claims and

potential intergroup tension. This divergence suggests that any human rights assessment of Sharia law is not objective.

A legal practitioner articulated comprehensive concerns about human rights protection under Sharia. When asked about specific rights at risk, he identified:
"Anti-blasphemy law can be deployed in a way to control free speech and perpetrate acts of vendetta on non-Muslims. Example of this problem are rife in Pakistan where non-Muslim suffer acts of violence and summary executions from Muslims who believe speech expressed offend their religion."

This testimony reinforces the quantitative finding that freedom of religion (18.1%) and freedom of expression (7.1%) were among the most frequently cited rights concerns. The participant's reference to international examples (Pakistan) and domestic parallels (Zamfara, Sokoto) jurisdictions rather than abstract fears. Regarding vulnerable populations, the participant explicitly identified "women, religious minorities and other" as groups at risk. On gender equality specifically, he stated:
"Sharia law still retains its medieval backward approach towards women's rights. It is a system steeped in patriarchy. The rights of women are not considered important. It subjects women's rights to the mercy of men."

This perspective from a legal practitioner adds professional weight to the quantitative findings that 61.5% of respondents believed women and minority rights would not be protected under Sharia. Notably, this view aligns with the Chief Imam's acknowledgement that women would be the most vulnerable group under Sharia, suggesting cross-religious consensus on gender concerns despite broader polarisation on other rights issues.
The participant concluded with a strong recommendation against Sharia adoption in the South-West: "Sharia law should not be adopted in the South-West. It is a law that is incompatible with the culture, values, and norms of the South-West. Groups or individuals clamouring for Sharia law should consider relocating to northern Nigeria or Islamic based countries like Pakistan or Afghanistan."
While this recommendation reflects the views of this participant, it represents a more extreme position than the study's formal recommendations, which call for limited, consent based Sharia for personal matters. This divergence between participant recommendations and study

conclusions is noted here to acknowledge the range of perspectives documented in the research (Participant 07, Legal Practitioner, Christian, 3 years Ibadan residency)

2.6 Summary

The human rights findings constitute the study's most significant contribution, revealing not only widespread concern but deep polarisation. While 60.5% of residents believe Sharia would not respect fundamental human rights, and 61.5% believe women and minority rights would not be protected, these aggregate figures conceal a stark religion divide. Among Christians, 82.2% express lack of confidence in rights protection under Sharia; among Muslims, 87.9% express confidence. This divergence 82.2% versus 87.9% represents a fundamental fracture in how Ibadan's two largest religious communities perceive justice and rights. The specific rights most at risk according to respondents freedom of religion (18.1%) fair hearing (12.6%), autonomy, procedural justice, personal autonomy, and gender equity. These findings suggest that human rights cannot be treated as a technical legal issue but must be addressed as a matter of interfaith trust and social cohesion.

2.7 Justification for Centring Participant Views

This study adopts an empirically grounded approach that treats participant perspectives as essential data, not as normative endorsement. Alignment with participant views where present is justified on three grounds.

First, the research question concerns social implications and peaceful coexistence. Whether Sharia law would affect intergroup relations is fundamentally a question about how people would respond, behave, and relate to one another. Dismissing participant views would render the central question unanswerable.

Second, the study does not automatically validate all participant views. It subjects them to theoretical triangulation. For example, where participants express concern about women's rights under Sharia, the study corroborates this with the Chief Imam's admission that 'females are not expected to operate within the legal structure' and with legal scholarship documenting gender disparities in some Sharia implementations (Imam, 2005; Baderin, 2005). Alignment occurs only where independent evidence from legal analysis, constitutional provisions, or comparative cases supports those views.

Third, the study explicitly notes where participant views diverge from its recommendations. While 92.5% of Christian participants opposed any Sharia adoption, and some interview participants recommended complete rejection (e.g., Participant 07: 'Sharia law should not be adopted in the South-West'), the study's formal recommendation calls for limited, consent-based Sharia for personal matters a more moderate position that reflects Muslim participants' views (65.9% support adoption) and constitutional realities. The study does not simply mirror majority opinion but seeks a balanced position that acknowledges competing legitimate interests.

In summary, the study aligns with participant views only where those views are supported by independent evidence, reflect legitimate concerns about human rights and social cohesion, and cannot be ignored without imposing external normative frameworks onto affected communities. Where participant views are extreme or unsupported, the study maintains critical distance.

Conclusion

This study examined the implications of adopting and implementing Sharia law in Ibadan Metropolis, South-West Nigeria, with a focus on peaceful coexistence among the Yoruba. Anchored on Legal Pluralism, Natural Law, and the Social Justice Framework, the research explored how the integration of Islamic legal codes into a constitutionally secular, multi-religious, and culturally diverse society might affect interfaith harmony, human rights, and legal cohesion. Historical, legal, and sociopolitical literature revealed that while Sharia is constitutionally permitted for personal matters among Muslims, its expansion into non-Muslim regions raises concerns about legal inconsistency, human rights violations, and threats to social cohesion in a tolerant Yoruba society.

Empirical findings indicated that 75.4% of respondents opposed the adoption of Sharia law, citing potential infringement on human rights, social integration, and legal certainty, while 24.6% supported it, primarily Muslims favouring alignment with divine moral principles. Concerns were particularly acute regarding gender equality, freedom of expression, and jurisdictional conflicts, highlighting the tensions that arise when multiple legal systems coexist. Theoretical frameworks provided insight: Legal Pluralism explained challenges in overlapping legal authorities; Natural Law Theory framed moral and ethical justifications for Sharia; and the Social Justice Framework emphasized the rights and protections at stake for women, minorities, and non-Muslims. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that without broad

based consensus, constitutional clarity, and robust safeguards for minority rights, the expansion of Sharia law into South-West Nigeria risks undermining the very social cohesion it seeks to regulate. The sustainability of peaceful coexistence in Ibadan ultimately depends not on the expansion of religious legal systems, but on the strengthening of inclusive, rights-based governance frameworks that reflect the city's pluralistic identity.

Limitation

A key limitation of this study was the refusal of some Muslim stakeholders, including traditional chiefs and lecturers, to participate in the questionnaire and interview. Although this study identified the informal Sharia panel at Oja Oba Central Mosque as an existing site of Islamic legal practice in Ibadan, no members of that panel participated in the survey or interviews. Their non-responsiveness limited the representation of Muslim perspectives.

Additionally, the sample was heavily skewed towards respondents with tertiary education (95.8%) which may limit the generalisability of the findings to less educated populations. However, educational qualification was not found to be statistically significant predictor of attitudes towards Sharia law ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that the observed patterns are not solely driven by educational bias. Nonetheless, future studies should adopt more stratified sampling techniques to ensure broader representation across educational levels.

Recommendation

In-depth ethnographic studies of existing Sharia panels in South-West Nigeria are needed. This study identified informal Sharia panels at Oja Oba Central Mosque and Dar ul-Qadha in Lagos as existing sites of Islamic legal practice. Ethnographic research examining how these panels operate in practice, their jurisdictional boundaries, their relationships with customary and statutory courts, and their impact on litigants would provide ground level insights that complement the survey findings of this study.

Also, given that 35.0% of survey respondents demonstrated limited objective knowledge of Sharia's sources, and that misconceptions may fuel intergroup mistrust, this study recommends a structured public enlightenment programme on Sharia law and its constitutional status in Nigeria. The National Orientation Agency, in collaboration with recognised Muslim and Christian religious leaders, legal scholars, and civil society organisations, should design and implement this programme.

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