

## EXAMINING THE EVOLUTION AND CHALLENGES OF SHARIA LAW IMPLEMENTATION IN KATSINA STATE, NIGERIA: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS (2000-2025)

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**Abubakar Lawal**

Department of Political science, Federal University, Dutsin-Ma  
abuhumairah03@gmail.com  
alawal09@fudutsinma.edu.ng;  
ORCID ID number: 0009-0000-6278-3598;  
GSM: +2348036163650

**Suleiman Umar Mani**

Department of Political science, Federal University, Dutsin-Ma  
Email: sumani@fudutsinma.edu.ng  
GSM; 0803 846 4144

**Kabir Attahiru**

Department of Political science, Federal University, Dutsin-Ma  
akabir21@fudutsinma.edu.ng; GSM: 07067409359

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### Abstract

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*This study investigates the evolution, challenges, and prospects of Shari'ah law implementation in Katsina State, Nigeria, from 2000 to 2025. It examines the persistent institutional, legal, political, and administrative challenges affecting implementation and assesses its evolving prospects within Nigeria's plural legal framework. The study adopts Van Meter and Van Horn's policy implementation theory as its explanatory framework. A survey research design was employed, with data collected through an expert-validated structured questionnaire that yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.88. Frequency counts and percentages were used for data analysis. The findings indicate that Shari'ah implementation in Katsina State has been significantly hindered by inadequate funding, political interference, corruption, shortage of trained personnel, constitutional conflicts, poor judicial infrastructure, and concerns over international scrutiny. Despite these challenges, respondents expressed strong confidence in its prospects, particularly its capacity to promote moral discipline, reduce social vices, enhance justice delivery, and foster peaceful coexistence when supported by effective governance and institutional strengthening. The study concludes that although Shari'ah implementation faces persistent structural and legal obstacles, its sustainability remains attainable through targeted reforms and integrative governance approaches. It recommends stronger institutional funding, professional training, improved inter-agency coordination, public enlightenment, and sustained government support to enhance effective implementation.*

**Keywords:** Shari'ah law, legal pluralism, policy implementation, Katsina State, governance

### 1.1 Introduction

Shari'a has historically formed an important part of the legal and social order of Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria. During much of the colonial and post-colonial periods, however, its formal application was largely confined to personal and civil matters. Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 renewed demands for broader implementation. Beginning with Zamfara State in 1999, twelve northern states subsequently introduced programmes extending Shari'a beyond personal-status matters to wider areas of public and criminal law. This development significantly reshaped the relationship among religion, law and state institutions in Northern Nigeria (Ostien, 2007; Ostien & Dekker, 2010).

The expansion of Shari'a generated considerable scholarly and public debate, particularly concerning its accommodation within Nigeria's federal and constitutionally plural legal order. Rather than a simple division between Shari'a and secular law, the Nigerian system involves interaction among Islamic law, statutory law and other legal institutions. Ostien and Dekker (2010) show that the relationship between Shari'a and national law has varied across periods and locations, while Iwobi (2004) highlights constitutional questions involving jurisdiction, fundamental rights and the status of Shari'a reforms under the 1999 Constitution.

Katsina State formed part of this post-1999 development. The Katsina State Sharia Commission Law of 2000 established the Sharia Commission as an advisory institution to support government in the development of Shari'a-related legal and institutional reforms, including matters concerning courts and legislation. Subsequent developments expanded the institutional framework through which Shari'a was administered in the state (Nasir & Ostien, 2007; Ummaru, 2015).

Experience across Northern Nigeria nevertheless shows that translating Shari'a from political and popular aspiration into functioning institutions has been difficult. Scholarship identifies problems relating to judicial capacity, enforcement, political influence, constitutional interpretation and differences in implementation among states. Kendhammer (2016) notes that early enthusiasm for Shari'a was accompanied by legal and administrative difficulties and uneven implementation. Thurston (2015), focusing on Kano State, shows that Shari'a institutions also became arenas of interaction and contestation between political office holders and religious scholars. Duku (2022) similarly identifies constitutional inconsistencies, shortages of qualified judges, institutional weaknesses and political problems as major challenges to Shari'a implementation in Northern Nigeria.

Ummaru (2015), using interviews with Islamic scholars, *qadis*, court personnel, security personnel and officials of relevant institutions, identified problems of institutional capacity, enforcement, judicial personnel, constitutional issues and political commitment, while also reporting perceived social, administrative, educational and religious benefits. More than a decade later, however, an updated assessment is necessary.

Against this background, the present study examines the evolution, challenges and prospects of Shari'a law implementation in Katsina State from 2000 to 2025. It traces major legal and institutional developments, identifies the principal challenges perceived by stakeholders, and assesses prospects for improving the administration and sustainability of Shari'a within Nigeria's plural legal framework

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

While initially driven by popular demand for moral reform and social justice, the implementation of Islamic legal codes has

generated significant socio-legal, constitutional, and practical challenges over the period from 2000 to 2025. This comprehensive analysis seeks to examine these challenges by identifying and discussing three core problems: the inherent conflict between Shari'a criminal provisions and Nigeria's secular constitutional framework, the systemic issues within the Shari'a justice system itself, and the exacerbation of inter-religious and inter-communal tensions. Addressing these problems is essential for ensuring justice, social harmony, and the coherent operation of law within the state.

### 1.3 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the primary challenges faced in implementing Shari'a law in Katsina State, Northern Nigeria, from 2000 to 2025?
2. How have the prospects for Shari'a implementation in Katsina State evolved since its introduction in 2000?

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the evolution, challenges and prospects of Shari'a law implementation in Katsina State from 2000 to 2025. The specific objectives are:

1. To identify and analyze the main challenges encountered in the implementation of Shari'a law in Katsina State from 2000 to 2025.
2. To assess the evolving prospects of Shari'a implementation in Katsina State since its introduction in 2000.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Shari'ah and Shari'ah Implementation

Shari'ah extends beyond criminal law to matters of worship, personal conduct, family relations, economic transactions, justice and social responsibility. It is also useful to distinguish Shari'ah as a normative framework from *fiqh* as its human juristic interpretation (Coulson, 1964; Kamali, 2008). In the modern state, Shari'ah implementation therefore involves translating Islamic principles into legislation, courts, administrative institutions and public programmes.

The existence of Shari'ah legislation does not automatically guarantee effective implementation. Public-policy scholarship shows that policy outcomes depend on resources, administrative capacity, coordination and the behaviour of implementing institutions (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). Following Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, expanded Shari'ah implementation in twelve northern states involved courts, penal codes, Hisbah institutions, councils of ulama, Zakah and other administrative structures (Ostien, 2007; Ostien & Dekker, 2010).

### 2.2 Challenges and Prospects of Shari'ah Implementation

The coexistence of statutory, customary and Islamic law raises questions of jurisdiction, constitutional supremacy and fundamental rights (Iwobi, 2004; Ostien & Dekker, 2010). Institutional overlap may also arise where Shari'ah institutions interact with conventional courts, police and other government agencies, making clearly defined mandates and effective coordination essential.

Effective implementation requires qualified personnel, adequate funding,

infrastructure, professional training and sound administrative procedures. Duku (2022) identifies shortages of qualified judges, constitutional difficulties, political challenges and problems relating to Hisbah as constraints on Shari'ah implementation in Northern Nigeria. Political conditions also influence appointments, funding and institutional priorities; while sustained political support may strengthen implementation, interference, corruption and favouritism may weaken institutional autonomy and public confidence.

The prospects of Shari'ah implementation consequently depend on institutional strengthening rather than legislation alone. Sustainable implementation requires regular funding, trained personnel, adequate infrastructure, public enlightenment and administrative continuity. Collaboration among government institutions, Islamic scholars, traditional authorities and communities, together with professional training and improved administrative systems, can also enhance institutional effectiveness and legitimacy.

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework: Policy Implementation Theory

This study adopts Van Meter and Van Horn's (1975) policy implementation theory because it explains how formally adopted policies are translated into practice. The theory identifies six major determinants of implementation performance: policy standards and objectives, resources, inter-organisational communication, characteristics of implementing agencies, economic, social and political conditions, and the disposition of implementers.

Funding, personnel and infrastructure relate to resources; corruption and administrative competence concern the characteristics of implementing agencies; institutional coordination reflects inter-organisational communication; while

political interference, constitutional controversies and public acceptance form part of the wider implementation environment. The competence and commitment of officials further relate to the disposition of implementers.

Increased funding, professional training, improved coordination, public enlightenment and stronger institutional support can address weaknesses in the implementation process. The study therefore assumes that the effectiveness and sustainability of Shari'ah implementation depend not merely on the existence of laws but on the institutional and environmental conditions under which they are implemented.

### 2.4 Empirical Review and Research Gap

Empirical studies have identified several problems affecting Shari'ah implementation in Northern Nigeria. Duku (2022) reports constitutional inconsistencies, shortages of qualified judges, political difficulties and challenges involving Hisbah. However, the study's broad regional focus limits its explanation of Katsina State's particular experience.

Ummaru (2015) specifically examined Shari'ah application in Katsina through interviews with Islamic scholars, *qadis*, court personnel, security personnel and relevant state officials, identifying institutional, judicial, constitutional, enforcement and political challenges.

The gap addressed by the present study is therefore primarily temporal and contextual rather than the absence of previous research. Much existing scholarship focuses on the formative period of post-1999 Shari'ah implementation or on Northern Nigeria generally. After approximately twenty-five years, there is a need to reassess the challenges that persist and the prospects for strengthening Shari'ah administration

specifically in Katsina State between 2000 and 2025.

### 3. Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design to examine the challenges and prospects of Shari'ah implementation in Katsina State. The study population comprised relevant stakeholders drawn from the three senatorial districts of Katsina State: Katsina Central, Katsina North and Katsina South. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants considered knowledgeable about or directly affected

by Shari'ah implementation. A total of 100 respondents participated in the study, comprising 30 judges, 40 Ulama, 10 security personnel and 20 members of the general public.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to the selected respondents. The instrument was subjected to expert validation and pilot testing, from which a reliability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained. The data were analysed using frequency counts and percentages in accordance with the research questions.

### 4. Results and Discussion of Findings

**Table 1: RQ1. What are the primary challenges faced in implementing Shari'a law in Katsina State, Northern Nigeria, from 2000 to 2025?**

| SN | STATEMENT                                                                                   | SA             | A              | U             | D             | SD             |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1  | Inadequate funding has hindered the effective implementation of Sharia law in Katsina State | 147<br>(39.8%) | 132<br>(35.8%) | 45<br>(12.2%) | 23<br>(6.2%)  | 22<br>(6.0%)   |
| 2  | Political interference has affected the independence of Sharia institutions                 | 185<br>(50.1%) | 136<br>(36.9%) | 47<br>(12.7%) | 1<br>(.3%)    | -              |
| 3  | Lack of trained personal limits the proper administration of Sharia                         | 113<br>(30.6%) | 90<br>(24.4%)  | 70<br>(19.0%) | 50<br>(13.6%) | 46<br>(12.5%)  |
| 4  | Insufficient public awareness affects acceptance of Sharia implementation                   | 78<br>(21.1%)  | 162<br>(43.9%) | 23<br>(6.2%)  | -             | 106<br>(28.7%) |
| 5  | The lack of uniformity across Northern states causes inconsistencies in implementation      | 123<br>(33.3%) | 103<br>(27.9%) | 91<br>(24.7%) | 40<br>(10.8%) | 12<br>(3.3%)   |
| 6  | Corruption and favoritism within the system weaken Sharia enforcement                       | 152<br>(41.2%) | 192<br>(52.0%) | 13<br>(3.5%)  | -             | 12<br>(3.3%)   |
| 7  | Modern legal and constitutional conflicts challenge Sharia application.                     | 136<br>(36.9%) | 176<br>(47.7%) | 24<br>(6.5%)  | 22<br>(6.0%)  | 11<br>(3.0%)   |
| 8  | Poor infrastructure in Sharia courts hinders smooth operations                              | 116<br>(31.4%) | 149<br>(40.4%) | 48<br>(13.0%) | 11<br>(3.0%)  | 45<br>(12.2%)  |
| 9  | Fear of international critics discourages full implementation.                              | 179<br>(48.5%) | 150<br>(40.7%) | 26<br>(7.0%)  | 14<br>(3.8%)  | -              |

The findings in Table 1 indicate that the implementation of Shari'a law in Katsina State has been confronted with multiple

structural, administrative, political, and socio-legal challenges since its introduction in 2000. A substantial

proportion of respondents identified inadequate funding as a major impediment to effective implementation. Specifically, a combined 75.6% of respondents either strongly agreed (39.8%) or agreed (35.8%) that insufficient funding has hindered the operational capacity of Shari'a institutions. Political interference emerged as one of the most prominent challenges. An overwhelming 87.0% of respondents either strongly agreed (50.1%) or agreed (36.9%) that political actors have undermined the independence of Shari'a institutions.

Similarly, the lack of trained personnel was widely perceived as a critical administrative challenge. More than half of the respondents (55.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that inadequate professional capacity limits proper Shari'a administration, while a notable proportion remained undecided (19.0%) or disagreed (26.1%).

Public awareness and acceptance also appeared problematic. While 65.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that insufficient public awareness affects Shari'a acceptance, a relatively high percentage (28.7%) strongly disagreed, indicating divergent public perceptions. This polarization suggests that while segments of society support Shari'a implementation, others remain skeptical, possibly due to misinformation, fear of

rights violations, or religious pluralism within the state.

Furthermore, lack of uniformity in Shari'a implementation across Northern states was identified as a significant challenge, with 61.2% of respondents expressing agreement.

Issues of corruption and favoritism were particularly pronounced. An overwhelming 93.2% of respondents either strongly agreed (41.2%) or agreed (52.0%) that corruption weakens Shari'a enforcement.

Legal and constitutional conflicts also posed challenges, as 84.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that tensions between Shari'a provisions and Nigeria's constitutional framework complicate implementation. This reflects ongoing debates regarding jurisdictional limits, fundamental human rights, and the coexistence of Shari'a with secular legal norms in a plural legal system.

Additionally, poor court infrastructure was widely acknowledged as an operational constraint, with 71.8% of respondents agreeing that inadequate facilities hinder smooth court operations. Finally, fear of international criticism was identified as a significant external pressure, as 89.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that global scrutiny discourages full implementation of Shari'a law.

**Table 2: RQ2. . How have the prospects for Shari'a implementation in Katsina State evolved since its introduction in 2000?**

| SN | STATEMENT                                                               | SA             | A              | U              | D            | SD           |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1  | Sharia law can promote moral discipline among citizens                  | 278<br>(75.3%) | 80<br>(21.7%)  | 11<br>(3.0%)   | -            | -            |
| 2  | Increases public enlighten can improve Sharia acceptance                | 186<br>(50.4%) | 150<br>(40.7%) | 33<br>(8.9%)   | -            | -            |
| 3  | Adequate government support can enhance Sharia implementation           | 184<br>(49.9%) | 127<br>(34.4%) | 47<br>(12.7%)  | 11<br>(3.0%) | -            |
| 4  | Collaboration with Islamic scholars can improve understanding of Sharia | 209<br>(56.6%) | 149<br>(40.4%) | 11<br>(3.0%)   | -            | -            |
| 5  | Modern technology can be used to strengthen Sharia administration       | 139<br>(37.7%) | 129<br>(35.0%) | 100<br>(27.1%) | 1<br>(.3%)   | -            |
| 6  | Sharia institution can help reduce social vices in the community        | 162<br>(43.9%) | 150<br>(40.7%) | 23<br>(6.2%)   | 23<br>(6.2%) | 11<br>(3.0%) |
| 7  | Proper sensitization can foster peaceful coexistence among citizens     | 184<br>(49.9%) | 127<br>(34.4%) | 47<br>(12.7%)  | 11<br>(3.0%) | -            |
| 8  | Adequate training of personal can ensure fairness in judgment           | 172<br>(46.6%) | 163<br>(44.2%) | 34<br>(9.2%)   | -            | -            |
| 9  | Strengthening Sharia courts can increase public trust in the system     | 162<br>(43.9%) | 126<br>(34.1%) | 59<br>(16.0%)  | 22<br>(6.0%) | -            |
| 10 | Integration of Sharia with modern governance can promote justice        | 149<br>(40.4%) | 186<br>(50.4%) | 34<br>(9.2%)   | -            | -            |

The results presented in Table 2 reveal generally optimistic perceptions regarding the future prospects of Shari'a implementation in Katsina State. A dominant majority of respondents (97.0%) either strongly agreed (75.3%) or agreed (21.7%) that Shari'a law can promote moral discipline among citizens. This strong consensus reflects enduring public belief in the normative and ethical value of Shari'a as a tool for moral regulation and social order.

Public enlightenment was also widely perceived as a critical pathway for improving Shari'a acceptance. Over 91.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that increased awareness and education could enhance societal acceptance, suggesting that resistance to Shari'a may be mitigated through sustained sensitization and dialogue.

Government support emerged as another key determinant of positive prospects. A

combined 84.3% of respondents agreed that adequate governmental backing could significantly enhance Shari'a implementation. This finding reinforces the importance of political will, budgetary allocation, and institutional support in sustaining religious legal systems within a modern state.

Collaboration with Islamic scholars was similarly viewed as beneficial, with 96.4% of respondents agreeing that such partnerships could improve public understanding and interpretation of Shari'a. This underscores the relevance of scholarly authority in bridging doctrinal accuracy with societal realities.

The role of modern technology received comparatively moderate support, with 72.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing that technological tools could strengthen Shari'a administration, while 27.1% remained undecided. This suggests cautious optimism about digitization,

record management, and case tracking within Shari'a courts.

Additionally, respondents expressed confidence in the capacity of Shari'a institutions to reduce social vices, foster peaceful coexistence through proper sensitization, and enhance fairness through adequate personnel training. Notably, 90.8% supported training initiatives, emphasizing human capacity development as a cornerstone for judicial fairness.

Strengthening Shari'a courts and integrating Shari'a with modern governance structures were also perceived as critical to increasing public trust and promoting justice, with over 84% of respondents expressing agreement in both areas. These findings suggest a growing recognition of the need for adaptive and integrative approaches to Shari'a implementation within contemporary governance frameworks.

## 5. Conclusion

The research on Shari'a law implementation in Katsina State from 2000 to 2025 reveals a complex interplay of challenges that have hindered its potential efficacy. Despite good intentions behind its establishment, these barriers have significantly impaired the law's intended impact and functionality.

First, inadequate funding and political interference have undermined institutional effectiveness. When combined with corruption and a lack of trained personnel, these factors compromise judicial independence. Moreover, legal and constitutional conflicts, poor court infrastructure, and insufficient public awareness continue to present hurdles. The state's apprehension of global scrutiny further exacerbates these issues, indicating a need for strategic reforms and enhanced support to optimize Shari'a law's implementation and align it with public welfare objectives.

## 6. Recommendations

In light of the findings, the study recommends that:

1. **Institutional capacity should be strengthened** through adequate funding, improved court infrastructure, transparent resource management and the recruitment and continuous training of qualified personnel.
2. **Political and administrative interference should be reduced** by clearly defining institutional responsibilities, strengthening accountability mechanisms and promoting greater professional independence in Shari'ah administration.
3. **Legal and institutional coordination should be improved** through closer cooperation among Shari'ah institutions, conventional government agencies, legal experts and Islamic scholars, particularly in addressing constitutional, jurisdictional and implementation inconsistencies.
4. **Public enlightenment and institutional modernisation should be intensified** to improve understanding and acceptance of Shari'ah, strengthen public confidence, enhance record management and support more effective integration with contemporary governance practices.

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