THE IMPACT OF SHARIA PANEL COURT PROVISIONS ON BLASPHEMY IN KANO: POLITICAL ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND PERSPECTIVES

Shuaibu Abubakar Abubakar*

Abstract

Blasphemy allegations in Kano State have long escalated into socio-political crises that expose the tension between religious interpretation, constitutional rights, and governance. This paper examines how the Sharia Panel Court's blasphemy provisions operate in practice, drawing on in-depth interviews with legal practitioners, religious scholars, human rights advocates, and community leaders, together with document analysis of court judgments and legislation. Using Legal Pluralism and Conflict Theory as complementary lenses, the study argues that blasphemy adjudication in Kano unfolds within a contested space between formal and informal legal authority, one that regularly generates disputes over rights, justice, and state power. Findings show that ambiguous legal language, the politicisation of accusations, and weak fair-trial protections undermine the Sharia Panel Courts' stated aim of upholding religious sanctity, and that a persistent gap between public expectations of instant justice and the slower pace of formal proceedings fuels mob violence. The paper recommends legal clarification, judicial capacity-building, depoliticisation of accusations, stronger alternative dispute resolution, sustained interfaith dialogue, and clearer jurisdictional boundaries to protect fundamental rights alongside religious sensitivities.

Keywords: Blasphemy, Sharia Panel Courts, Kano, Legal Pluralism, Conflict Theory, Human Rights, Politicisation, Nigeria

* Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sa'adu Zungur University, Bauchi, abubakarshuaibu137@gmail.com / abubakarshuaibu@sazu.edu.ng

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's legal architecture reflects its religious and ethnic diversity, combining common law, customary law, and Islamic personal law within a single federal structure. This arrangement did not arise from post-independence design choices alone; it is, in large part, a legacy of British colonial administration, which maintained separate legal frameworks for Muslim and non-Muslim populations and, in doing so, embedded jurisdictional tensions that still shape legal practice across northern Nigeria today.[1]

Kano State, among the most populous and predominantly Muslim states in the federation, adopted the Sharia Penal Code in full in 2000, including provisions on blasphemy. Defined broadly as any contemptuous act or utterance directed at God, religious figures, or sacred texts, blasphemy attracts severe penalties under Sharia, up to and including capital punishment.[2] Enforcement of these provisions by Kano's Sharia Panel Courts has repeatedly triggered socio-political unrest and drawn sustained scrutiny from local and international observers.[3]

This paper looks beyond doctrinal interpretation to the political dynamics, institutional strains, and competing stakeholder perspectives that surround blasphemy adjudication in Kano. Grasping these dynamics matters for understanding the wider implications for human rights, inter-religious relations, and the stability of Nigeria's federal arrangement. A qualitative approach was chosen deliberately: it is

[1] Abdulmumini A Ibrahim, 'Sharia Criminal Justice in Northern Nigeria: A Focus on the Penal Code' (2015) 8(1) African Journal of Legal Studies 101.

[2] Rudolph Peters, *Islamic Criminal Law in Nigeria* (Brill 2018).

[3] Human Rights Watch, *'Between a Rock and a Hard Place': Blasphemy, Apostasy, and Free Expression in Africa* (Human Rights Watch 2020).

better suited than purely doctrinal analysis to capturing the contextual meaning and lived experience that a subject this sensitive demands.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Blasphemy adjudication in Kano's Sharia Panel Court has consistently generated contentious outcomes, producing socio-political unrest and serious human rights concerns. Accusations often trigger mob violence, extrajudicial killings, and public protest well before any formal proceeding begins, let alone concludes.[4] Several interlocking problems sustain this volatility.

The definition of blasphemy is broad enough to invite highly subjective interpretation, leaving individuals with little practical basis for knowing in advance what conduct might amount to an offence.[5] Accusations are also routinely exploited by political actors and religious hardliners to pursue political agendas, silence dissent, or settle personal scores, which corrodes confidence in the judicial process itself.[6] At a constitutional level, the penalties attached to blasphemy, particularly the death penalty, sit uneasily alongside Nigeria's guarantees of freedom of expression, thought, conscience, and religion, and against the international human rights instruments Nigeria has ratified. This tension was thrown into sharp relief by the ECOWAS Court of Justice's 2025 ruling, which found specific blasphemy provisions in Kano's law to be in breach of Nigeria's

[4] Amnesty International, *Nigeria: State of Insecurity: A Country under Siege* (Amnesty International 2021).

[5] Michael O Idowu, 'Blasphemy and Human Rights in Nigeria: A Jurisprudential Analysis' (2019) 14(2) Nigerian Bar Journal 45.

[6] Vikram Chauhan, 'The Politics of Blasphemy Laws: A Global Perspective' (2022) 26(4) International Journal of Human Rights 589.

international human rights obligations.[7] Accused persons, meanwhile, tend to face intense public pressure, intimidation, and thin legal representation, all of which raise serious doubts about the fairness of proceedings conducted in such a charged atmosphere.[8]

Gender is another dimension too often treated as incidental. The case of Bridget Agbahime, killed in Kano in 2016 following a blasphemy accusation, illustrates how such accusations can fall disproportionately on women and religious minorities, a pattern that deserves explicit rather than passing attention. Beyond the immediate parties, blasphemy incidents tend to deepen fault lines both between religious communities and within the Muslim community itself, eroding social cohesion and feeding mutual suspicion.

A further structural factor is frequently mentioned but rarely examined in its own right: the role of poverty and economic inequality in making mob violence an attractive outlet for grievance. Communities with limited access to formal justice and material resources appear especially susceptible to mobilisation around religious outrage, a dynamic that merits more than the anecdotal treatment it usually receives.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

This paper sets out to: (i) analyse how Sharia Panel Court provisions on blasphemy are applied in Kano State; (ii) examine the political factors that influence the initiation and prosecution of blasphemy cases; (iii) identify the principal challenges facing legal practitioners, religious scholars, human rights advocates, and accused persons within

[7] ECOWAS Court of Justice, 'ECOWAS Court Orders Nigeria to Amend or Repeal Blasphemy Laws' (Judgment, 11 April 2025).

[8] International Crisis Group, *Nigeria: Preventing Another Cycle of Violence in the North* (Africa Report No 267, 2018).

the blasphemy framework; (iv) explore the range of stakeholder perspectives on blasphemy law and its implementation; and (v) propose recommendations for a more balanced, rights-consistent, and stable approach to blasphemy in Kano State.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study addresses the following questions: (i) How are Sharia Panel Court provisions on blasphemy interpreted and applied in Kano State, and what variation exists in that application? (ii) What political considerations shape the initiation and prosecution of blasphemy cases? (iii) What challenges confront legal practitioners, religious scholars, human rights advocates, accused persons, and the judiciary in blasphemy proceedings? (iv) What perspectives do stakeholders hold on the role and impact of blasphemy law, particularly regarding freedom of expression and religious harmony?

4. SCOPE AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The study is confined geographically to Kano State, with its focus trained on the application and impact of blasphemy provisions within the Sharia Panel Court system. Kano was chosen not arbitrarily but because of its central role in implementing the Sharia Penal Code and its history of significant blasphemy-related incidents. Temporally, the study spans the period from the Code's full implementation in 2000 to the present, concentrating on the political, social, and human rights dimensions of the issue rather than on theological or purely jurisprudential questions. Findings should not be read as automatically transferable to other northern Nigerian states, where Sharia is applied with differing degrees of rigour and within different political settings.

The justification for the study rests on several grounds. Blasphemy accusations in Kano have repeatedly produced violence, loss of life, and social fragmentation, making a rigorous, evidence-based account

of the underlying dynamics indispensable to any credible peacebuilding effort. The existing literature, useful as it is, leaves important questions unanswered, particularly regarding the specific mechanisms by which accusations are weaponised, the operational strains on the Sharia Panel Courts, and the perspectives of stakeholders beyond victims and legal experts. The findings are intended to equip policymakers, legal reformers, religious leaders, and civil society with evidence capable of informing interventions that are genuinely responsive to both religious sensitivities and fundamental rights. Academically, the study feeds into ongoing conversations on legal pluralism, the interaction between religious and secular law, and the practical difficulties of implementing human rights protections in religiously diverse societies. Finally, by surfacing the structural weaknesses in the current system, the research supports the case for reforms capable of delivering fairer trials and reducing recourse to mob justice.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 Conceptual Review: Blasphemy and Its Legal Frameworks

Blasphemy is a contested concept whose meaning shifts across religious traditions and legal systems.[9] Within Islamic jurisprudence, it is generally understood to cover any act or utterance considered disrespectful towards Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, or sacred texts such as the Quran.[10] Interpretations of what actually constitutes blasphemy, and of the appropriate punishment, differ considerably across schools of thought and historical periods.[11] Classical scholarship placed significant weight on establishing clear intent and

[9] Niaz A Shah, *Blasphemy: A Comparative Study* (Routledge 2010).

[10] Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (American Trust Publications 1999).

[11] Peters (n 2).

rigorous proof before a finding of guilt; some contemporary applications take a markedly stricter line.

In Nigeria, blasphemy provisions exist in parallel within the secular Penal Code, where section 204 carries comparatively modest penalties, and within the Sharia Penal Codes adopted by several northern states from 1999 onward.[12] Kano's Sharia Penal Code Law of 2000 explicitly criminalises acts such as insulting the Prophet Muhammad, with penalties ranging from imprisonment to death.[13] The coexistence of these parallel frameworks inevitably produces jurisdictional friction, and that friction sits at the centre of the problem this study addresses. None of this arose in a vacuum: British indirect rule institutionalised a separate system of native courts for Muslim communities, embedding a structural dualism that has never been fully resolved.[14]

5.2 Empirical Review

The empirical literature on blasphemy in Nigeria converges on several recurring themes. Human rights organisations have documented numerous instances in which accusations escalated rapidly into mob violence, resulting in deaths and property destruction.[15] The cases of Deborah Samuel in Sokoto (2022) and Bridget Agbahime in Kano (2016) stand out as particularly stark illustrations of how quickly accusation can turn lethal. The Agbahime case in particular reveals the gendered dimension of blasphemy prosecutions: as a woman and a Christian, she occupied overlapping categories of vulnerability in a

[12] Ibrahim (n 1).

[13] Kano State Sharia Penal Code Law 2000 (Laws of Kano State, Nigeria).

[14] Ibrahim (n 1).

[15] Amnesty International (n 4); Human Rights Watch (n 3).

setting where such accusations can function as instruments of social and religious boundary enforcement.

Scholars including Onapajo and Olawuyi have argued that blasphemy laws, especially those carrying severe penalties, suppress freedom of expression, most directly for religious minorities and critics of religious authority, but also for dissenting voices within the Muslim community itself.[16] The mere prospect of accusation, and its social consequences, appears to induce self-censorship that extends well beyond what the formal law requires. Umar's research traces the legal trajectory of blasphemy trials through the Sharia Courts and consistently identifies weaknesses in fair-trial standards, access to legal representation, and susceptibility to external pressure.[17] The ECOWAS Court of Justice's 2025 ruling, which found certain blasphemy provisions in Kano's law to breach international human rights obligations, represents a significant external challenge to the status quo.[18] Analyses from the International Crisis Group and others suggest that blasphemy accusations are frequently less an expression of genuine religious grievance than a tool of political mobilisation, used by elites to rally supporters, suppress rivals, or maintain social control.[19]

5.3 Gaps in the Literature

Several gaps remain despite this body of work. The precise mechanisms through which political actors leverage Kano's Sharia

[16] Hakeem Onapajo, 'Islamism and the Paradox of Religious Freedom in Nigeria' (2014) 3(1) African Conflict Journal 77; Sulaiman Olawuyi, 'The Sharia Debate and Freedom of Religion in Nigeria' (2017) 32(3) Journal of Law and Religion 391.

[17] Muhammad Umar, 'Sharia Courts and Human Rights in Northern Nigeria: A Case Study of Blasphemy Trials' (2019) 7(1) Journal of Human Rights in Africa 1.

[18] ECOWAS Court of Justice (n 7).

[19] International Crisis Group (n 8).

Panel Courts, and how the judiciary responds to such pressure, have not been explored in sufficient depth. Detailed qualitative data capturing the lived experience of stakeholders beyond victims and legal experts, including community leaders, scholars from different schools of thought, and court officials, remains scarce. Gender and class as structural factors shaping vulnerability to accusation have received only sporadic attention, and the role of poverty in catalysing mob violence has been noted anecdotally rather than examined systematically. The role of social media in accelerating the spread of accusations and inciting violence has likewise been flagged as significant without being studied in any depth. This study attempts to address these gaps.

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

6.1 Legal Pluralism

Legal pluralism describes the coexistence of multiple legal orders within a single geographical or political space.[20] In Nigeria, this is evident in the simultaneous operation of common law, customary law, and Sharia; within Kano specifically, the Sharia Penal Code sits alongside the federal criminal code and constitutional provisions, creating a space in which competing legal authorities routinely assert jurisdiction over the same conduct. The framework illuminates several dynamics relevant to blasphemy: different legal systems, Sharia courts, secular courts, and informal community norms, claim simultaneous authority over blasphemy cases, producing confusion and, at times, open power struggles.[21] This tension is most visible where Sharia provisions collide with the Nigerian Constitution's guarantee of fundamental rights.

---

[20] John Griffiths, 'What Is Legal Pluralism?' (1986) 18(24) Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law 1.

[21] Tunde Bamidele, 'Legal Pluralism and Its Implications for Human Rights in Nigeria' (2012) 56(1) Journal of African Law 1.

Individuals and groups may, in effect, choose their forum, a Sharia court, a secular court, or, in extreme cases, mob action, depending on which route seems likely to deliver the most favourable or expedient outcome. This drift towards extra-legal action follows directly from jurisdictional ambiguity. Legal pluralism also draws attention to how actors within the Sharia Panel Court system, and the wider community, actively negotiate and reinterpret religious and legal norms when confronted with competing demands.

6.2 Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, developed in different registers by Marx and Weber, understands society as existing in a state of ongoing tension arising from competition over scarce resources, including power, status, and the authority to define social norms. Applied to blasphemy in Kano, the framework highlights several power dynamics. Accusations can function as instruments within broader struggles between religious and secular elites, between rival factions within the Muslim community, and between political competitors.[22] Blasphemy laws, on this reading, become mechanisms through which dominant groups maintain ideological authority, police moral boundaries, and suppress voices that challenge their interpretations of religion or their social standing.

The conflict theory lens also exposes how blasphemy laws disproportionately affect minorities, the economically marginalised, and those holding unconventional views, thereby reinforcing rather than merely reflecting existing inequalities. It further illuminates the tension between the state's obligation to protect the rights of all citizens and its accommodation of religious legal systems, particularly

[22] Randall Collins, *Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science* (Academic Press 1975).

where those systems produce outcomes at odds with constitutional guarantees.

Taken together, the two frameworks offer complementary purchase on the problem. Legal pluralism explains the structural conditions under which blasphemy controversies arise; conflict theory explains why those controversies assume the particular political and social forms they do. Together, they position the Sharia Panel Court's handling of blasphemy not as a purely legal or religious matter but as a political phenomenon rooted in Kano's specific history of power relations and competing legal authority.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, well suited to exploring complex social phenomena and generating the kind of contextualised insight that quantitative methods tend to flatten.[23] The design is exploratory and interpretivist, allowing sustained engagement with the meanings stakeholders themselves attach to blasphemy cases rather than seeking to isolate variables or establish linear causation, an approach that suits a topic as politically sensitive as this one.

7.2 Study Population and Sampling

The study population comprises key stakeholders involved in or affected by blasphemy cases in Kano State. A purposive sampling strategy identified participants able to offer substantive insight based on direct experience, professional knowledge, or community

[23] John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th edn, Sage 2018).

standing.[24] Target participants included lawyers with experience handling blasphemy cases or engaged with religious freedom issues more broadly; imams and Islamic scholars from different schools of thought within Kano, who could offer varied interpretive perspectives; representatives of local and international organisations working on religious freedom; traditional or informal leaders who mediate disputes and can speak to community-level responses; Sharia Panel Court officials and judges, where access permitted; and, where safety could be assured, former accused persons or their family members, whose first-hand testimony is otherwise irreplaceable.

Sample size was determined by data saturation, with collection continuing until no substantially new themes emerged.[25] It should be acknowledged that the limited availability of some participant categories, Sharia judges in particular, may introduce a degree of skew into the findings; this limitation is addressed explicitly in the discussion below.

7.3 Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

In-depth, semi-structured interviews served as the primary instrument, allowing the researcher to follow emerging threads and unexpected responses in a way structured instruments would not permit.[26] Questions were deliberately open-ended. Document analysis complemented the interviews, drawing on the Kano State Sharia Penal Code Law, publicly available court judgments in blasphemy cases, the

[24] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (4th edn, Sage 2015).

[25] Greg Guest, Arwen Bunce and Laura Johnson, 'How Many Interviews Are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability' (2006) 18(1) Field Methods 59.

[26] Herbert J Rubin and Irene S Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (3rd edn, Sage 2012).

ECOWAS Court of Justice's 2025 ruling, human rights reports, and selected media coverage of significant incidents; together, these sources provided the triangulation needed for robust qualitative findings.

Fieldwork proceeded in stages: institutional ethical clearance was secured prior to data collection, alongside any clearance required from relevant Kano State authorities; participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose, their right to withdraw, confidentiality protections, and the intended use of the data, with anonymity strictly maintained for those in vulnerable positions; interviews were conducted in quiet, private settings, audio-recorded with explicit consent, and transcribed verbatim; and selected documents were systematically reviewed for content bearing on blasphemy law, its application, and documented incidents.

7.4 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's widely used framework, guided the analysis of the qualitative data.[27] The process moved through familiarisation with the data via repeated reading, generation of initial codes, organisation of codes into candidate themes, review and refinement of those themes, clear definition and naming of each, and, finally, construction of an analytical narrative supported by participant quotations and document references.

Trustworthiness was pursued through triangulation of interview and document data to support credibility, rich contextual description to facilitate transferability, a clear audit trail of methodological decisions to support dependability, and explicit acknowledgement of researcher

[27] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology' (2006) 3(2) Qualitative Research in Psychology 77.

positionality to support confirmability. Member-checking was employed wherever it could be conducted safely.

8. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Theme 1: Ambiguity and Subjectivity in the Definition and Application of Blasphemy

A consistent finding across participant groups was the vagueness of the legal language defining blasphemy in the Kano Sharia Penal Code. This vagueness has real practical consequences: where the boundaries of the offence are unclear, a person cannot know with any confidence whether their words or conduct fall inside or outside the law. Judges and lawyers are left to exercise wide subjective discretion, and predictability, a basic requirement of the rule of law, is sacrificed as a result.

> "What constitutes 'insult' is often in the eye of the accuser, making it very hard to mount a proper defence."[28]

This uncertainty extends well beyond the courtroom. Community members interviewed for the study repeatedly described a perception that blasphemy demands an immediate, visceral response rather than patient judicial process, a disconnect between formal procedure and popular expectation that mob violence regularly fills.

"The public often does not wait for the court; they believe blasphemy is an instant offence that calls for an instant response."[29]

The implications for due process are severe. Where the law is ambiguous and public feeling runs high, the formal judicial system is

[28] Interview with Legal Practitioner A (Kano, 15 May 2025).

[29] Interview with Community Leader B (Kano, 2025).

routinely bypassed altogether, and a conviction handed down by a court can carry less practical weight than a sentence already carried out in the street.

Theme 2: Politicisation and Instrumentalisation of Blasphemy Accusations

A second theme, arguably the most politically sensitive of all, concerns the extent to which blasphemy accusations serve political rather than religious ends. Several participants, including legal practitioners, political analysts, and civil society representatives, described a recurring pattern in which allegations are timed to coincide with political contests or directed against individuals who have challenged entrenched interests.

> *"It is often not really about God at all. It is about silencing an opponent or gaining popularity before elections."*[30]

This instrumentalisation takes different forms. Some accusations are orchestrated deliberately, on the calculation that nothing mobilises a constituency more reliably than perceived religious transgression. Others begin as personal or commercial disputes reframed in religious terms, precisely because the blasphemy label carries such devastating social consequences for the accused. Traditional and religious leaders were described by several participants as playing an ambivalent role in these dynamics, capable of de-escalating tension when they choose to, but sometimes complicit in stoking it for reasons of their own.

Conflict theory is particularly useful here. A blasphemy accusation functions, in effect, as a political resource, one made especially potent by the fact that its religious framing makes it difficult to contest

[30] Interview with Political Analyst C (Kano, 10 June 2025).

without appearing to defend the underlying offence. This dynamic is corrosive of both democratic governance and judicial integrity.

Theme 3: Challenges to Fair Trial and Human Rights

Consistent with earlier research, this study found that accused persons in blasphemy cases face formidable obstacles to a fair hearing, operating at several levels: intimidation of defence counsel, inadequate access to legal representation, and an atmosphere of public hostility from which few judges appear entirely insulated.

> *"Finding lawyers willing to defend someone accused of blasphemy is genuinely difficult. The risk of reprisal, social, professional, and sometimes physical, is real."*[31]

The constitutional dimension of this challenge featured prominently in several accounts. Nigeria's constitution nominally guarantees freedom of expression, yet the Sharia courts, in practice, sometimes operate as though that guarantee stops at their door.

> *"Nigeria's constitution is supposed to be supreme, yet Sharia courts often act as if they exist in a separate legal universe."*[32]

Document analysis of the ECOWAS Court of Justice's April 2025 ruling confirms this assessment: the court found that specific blasphemy provisions in Kano's Sharia Penal Code breach Nigeria's obligations under international human rights law, particularly regarding freedom of expression.[33] While the ruling represents a significant external catalyst for reform, its practical effect within Kano remains to be seen. It is also worth noting the intersectional dimension

[31] Interview with Human Rights Activist D (Kano, 22 May 2025).

[32] Interview with Human Rights Advocate E (Kano, 2025).

[33] ECOWAS Court of Justice (n 7).

of fair-trial challenges: available evidence suggests that women and religious minorities, already structurally disadvantaged within Kano's legal landscape, face compounded vulnerability in blasphemy proceedings, a dimension this study could not investigate as fully as it deserves.

Theme 4: Divergent Perspectives on Justice and Religious Authority

The study also found significant divergence, both among religious scholars and within the wider community, over the appropriate treatment of blasphemy, disagreements that are anything but merely academic: they map onto real institutional and political divisions and shape how cases are handled and how outcomes are received.

> *"Some scholars cite early Islamic texts to insist on the death penalty, while others emphasise the principles of rehabilitation, forgiveness, and the importance of verified intent."*[34]

These interpretive differences reflect a deeper tension within Islamic jurisprudence between textualist and contextualist approaches, between those who treat Sharia as a fixed, eternal code and those who understand it as a living tradition requiring ongoing interpretation. The political stakes attached to these positions mean that theological debate is frequently entangled with questions of authority and legitimacy that have little to do with the underlying religious substance.

9. CONCLUSION

The application of Sharia Panel Court provisions on blasphemy in Kano State is not merely a legal puzzle or a theological controversy; it is a deeply politicised social problem with real human costs. This

[34] Interview with Religious Scholar F (Kano, 18 June 2025).

qualitative study finds that while the Sharia Panel Courts ostensibly exist to uphold religious sanctity, the implementation of blasphemy provisions is systematically undermined by ambiguous legal language, political manipulation, structural inequality, and fundamental tension with constitutional and international human rights standards. The prevalence of mob justice, the instrumentalisation of blasphemy accusations for political ends, and weak fair-trial protections together sustain a climate of fear and impunity at odds with democratic governance. The ECOWAS Court's 2025 ruling offers a potentially important external catalyst for reform, but a legal ruling alone cannot resolve problems that are as much political and social as they are legal. Gender, class, and ethnic dimensions of blasphemy prosecution remain insufficiently explored, both in the wider literature and in this study, and future work should treat structural inequality as a central analytical concern rather than contextual background. The same applies to the role of poverty and economic marginalisation in sustaining mob violence. The status quo is not sustainable, and the recommendations that follow are offered in that spirit: constructive reform aimed at de-escalating violence, protecting fundamental rights, and building a more just and stable order in Kano.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

For Policymakers

Blasphemy definitions in the Sharia Penal Code should be redrafted to produce precise standards that minimise subjective interpretation and align with the ECOWAS Court's 2025 ruling, alongside legislative efforts to harmonise Sharia provisions with Nigeria's constitutional guarantees. Mandatory, ongoing training should be established for Sharia Panel Court judges and practitioners, covering human rights principles, fair-trial standards, evidence-based adjudication, and conflict resolution alongside Islamic jurisprudence, with courts structurally shielded from external public pressure. Clear ethical

guidelines, backed by meaningful sanctions, should be developed for political actors who instrumentalise blasphemy accusations, alongside active encouragement of responsible leadership that prioritises community cohesion.

For Civil Society

Sustained dialogue between religious leaders, scholars, and community members, across faith lines and within the Muslim community itself, should be supported, with a focus on shared commitments to peaceful coexistence and due process. Investment in community-based alternative dispute resolution mechanisms can absorb minor religious disagreements before they escalate into formal accusations, reducing both the burden on the courts and the opportunity for politicisation. Targeted public education campaigns on the rule of law, the dangers of mob justice, and the importance of due process should reach beyond educated elites to engage ordinary community members directly.

For Religious Leaders

Structured forums for theological exchange can help bridge the divide between hardline and moderate scholarly interpretations of blasphemy. Where religious leaders speak with greater consensus about the importance of due process and the prohibition of vigilante justice, the space available for political manipulation of blasphemy accusations narrows considerably.

11. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Several areas merit priority attention. A systematic comparison of blasphemy enforcement across Kano, Kaduna, and Sokoto would help distinguish what is specific to Kano's political context from what reflects broader patterns in northern Nigerian Sharia implementation. Research centring gender, class, and ethnicity in analysing who is

accused, on what grounds, and with what outcomes, would deepen understanding of the law's discriminatory operation. Tracking the effects of the ECOWAS Court's 2025 ruling on both formal legal practice and community attitudes over time would provide valuable evidence for reform advocacy. The role of social media in disseminating blasphemy allegations, coordinating mob responses, and shaping public opinion warrants urgent investigation, given the speed with which digital communication can convert accusation into violence. Finally, a systematic study of the socio-economic conditions that make communities susceptible to mobilisation around blasphemy accusations would provide a more complete structural account of the phenomenon.