

## The Role of Islamic Teachings in Maintaining Civil Liberties: The Case of Idah Local Government, Kogi State

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### Abstract

Sometimes, Islam is regarded as a religion that promotes antagonism between Muslims and non-Muslims. But this is not the case. Islam is a religion of peace that regulates the affairs of humans. Civil liberty is the basic human rights enshrined in the laws that govern communities for their good and progress. They include, for example, right to life, freedom speech and worship among others. This research was done in the context of Idah local government area of Kogi state to show how Islam contributes to the upholding of civil liberty in the area. Adopting both the primary and secondary sources of data collection, in its approach to the discussion, the findings of the research showed that the Quran and the Hadith are the primary source of Islamic beliefs and practices. The paper showed how the teachings of Islam contribute towards maintaining the civil liberty of the people. It was shown in the study that through the knowledge of Allah of the creator of humans, through the belief in punishment and reward, through its teaching on good neighbourliness and the freedom of speech and expression, Islamic teachings contribute, in their own way, in upholding civil liberties in Idah Kogi state. This way, the study has therefore contributed to the debate on the relationship between religion and civil liberties in academic discourse.

**Keywords:** Islam, Civil Liberty, Quran, Bible and Hadit

### Introduction

The religion traceable to Jesus bears the name of Christianity derived from his designation of the Christ. That of Moses and Buddha are known respectively as Judaism and Buddhism (Alih 2011). The religion of Muhammed (SAW) has a distinctive appellation termed Islam. Islam (Salam (*Salama*)), in its primary sense means, to be tranquil, to be at rest, to have done one's duty, to have paid up, to be at perfect peace. In its secondary sense, it means to surrender oneself to Allah with whom peace is made. The noun derived from it, means peace, greeting, safety and salvation. Islam presides over the social, the political, the religious, the spiritual, the emotional, the psychological and the physiological spheres of humans. It is concerned with the present world and the one to come. Thus, it guides the human life in the present with a view to directing it to the world to come.

Civil liberties, on the other hand, is the freedom from arbitrary interference in one's individual pursuit by both the government and individual (Nolen 2025). Civil liberties are mostly enshrined in the constitutions of nations to have them protected legally from abuse. In most democracies, civil liberties are explicitly provided for in constitutions and believed to have been guaranteed in principle and practice. Civil liberties are mostly regarded in line with human rights. They are believed to be inherent in humans to enable them function and express themselves as full humans. This is why civil liberties are most times called civil rights. It is believed that it is the duty of the government to protect these civil liberties in order to have a functional society where rights abuses are checkmated. Some of these civil liberties include freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of expression/speech, freedom of assembly, right to privacy, right to equally treatment under the law, right to own property among others. One thing important to note is that these civil liberties are not absolute and are dependent of the type of government operating in a state. They do not also mean that humans should abuse or break the law in the pursuance of their civil liberties. They have limitations and most times exist more in principle than in practice. They can also be restricted in the time of emergency and crisis (Yang 2020; Graeber 2024).

The question of the role of religion in ensuring that civil liberties are maintained in communities have been raised. Some have even stated that religious teachings are the basis of civil liberties and as such religion has a great role to play in maintaining civil liberties in the society (Destro 1987). Others think otherwise, claiming that religious teaching are anti-civil liberties and as such would pose a problem to upholding civil liberties in the society (Yadev 2021). The argument of this article is that religion plays an important role in maintaining civil liberties in the society. In other to prove this, the article aims to show how Islam, through its teachings, contributes to upholding civil liberties in Idah local government of Kogi State. It does this by relying on two sources: primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data collection was the oral interview in which seven (7) people were interviewed between December 2024 and February 2025. These were people from the study area, and were mostly males purposely drawn based on their knowledge of the subject being discussed. The secondary source was the literature— journal articles, books and online materials— which provided information on issues of civil liberties and Kogi State as well. Finally, since the teachings of Islam are mostly derived from the Quran, this paper relied on citing passages in the Holy Quran, and analysing them descriptively to show how they contribute toward upholding civil liberties among the people of Idah in Kogi State.

### The Study Area

The study area is Idah, a town and a local government in Kogi State, north central Nigeria. Idah is a place that is historically important to the people of Kogi state. It is the headquarters of the Igala kingdom, a dominant tribe of Kogi state. It lies on the eastern bank of the River Niger and covers about 32 km. As of 2006 census, the place had a population of about 79,815 persons living in it. The bulk of its population is the Igala tribe. It is an important fishing town in Kogi state, being ruled by the Attah, the traditional title of rulers of the Igala people. It was (and still is) in the Nineteenth century a trading town that attracted both local and foreign traders who traded on agricultural produces or minerals (Britannica 2025). It has the presence of the Nigeria Navy with a navy outpost called Nigeria Navy Ship Lugard located there (The Guardian Newspaper 2019). The river Niger plays a significant role in its life, providing commercial routes linking the town to Lokoja to the northwards and Anambra and Edo states to the south and west respectively. This contributes in making it a commercial town whose economy is mainly dependent on agriculture (palm produce, yams, cassava, rice, fish) thereby being a major supplier of food items to the people of Kogi state. The locals are also engaged in canoe-making, fish net-making, and cotton weaving.

In terms of religion, Islam is dominant in the area with a minor Christian presence. According to Kogi Reports (2019), it was believed that Islam came to Idah through two sources. The first source was the Hausa traders that came all the way from Kano and Gobir to trade around the bank of the River Niger. It was believed that these traders helped to bring Islam to the town. The second source has it that it was through Ayegba Om'Idoko, the then Attah of Igala who was fighting to be independent of the clutches of the Jukuns. In a bid to actualise this independence, it was believed that he extended an invitation to some malams from Bebeji in Kano, to help prepare charms with which they were to fight the war with the Jukuns who had a great military might. The war was successful according to this source and the Attah then offered these malams a place to settle in Idah. It was believed these malams were offered Igala women as wives (Kogireports 2019). Thus, these malams helped the spread of Islam in the area. Whatever source Islam came to the people of Idah, what matters is that in the present religious distribution of the town, Islam is very dominant contributing a lot to people's lives and development. Thus, its contributions in the maintenance of the people's civil liberties, are worth investigating.

### Conceptual Issues

**Islam and Civil Liberty:** Islam basically mean total submission to the will of Allah. By this definition; all parts of one's body, one's thought, sayings, seeing, hearings and movement are all submissive to the will of Allah. The holy book (Qur'an) becomes one's manual to regulate one's actions. These include those which were practised by the holy prophet Muhammed (SAW) for the Muslims to emulate. Therefore, in Islam, it is believed that whoever testified that no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammed (SAW) is the messenger of Allah abides by the teaching of Qur'an as practicalised by Prophet Muhammed (S.A.W). Such a person is regarded as a Muslim. On the contrary, whoever denounces the oneness of Allah and Prophet Muhammed (SAW) is regarded as an unbeliever or a non-Muslim.

While civil in a common sense means to behave in a reasonable or polite manner, liberty is a condition of being free from imprisonment,

slavery or forced labour (Burk & Mark 2021). Civil liberties as have been described in the introduction, refers to the basic freedom of the human from an arbitrary interference in one's individual pursuit by both the government and individuals. Civil liberties entail that they are rights embedded in the human person from creation and by the virtue of being a human. In this sense, it is expected that every human should be guaranteed these liberties— eg right to life, right of expression, equality before the law, right of worship among others—as citizens of a country. Where these civil liberties are lacking, it is believed that governments are not upholding the basic rights of their citizens. Such governments are mostly regarded as abusive, denying citizens their rights as humans.

Most democracies of the world therefore try the much they can to uphold the civil liberties of their citizens. One good point to make regarding the issue of civil liberties is that they are not absolute. They are most times dependent on certain contingencies—that one has the freedom of expression does not mean that such should not have a line drawn as regards where such liberties begin and end. That one has the right to worship, for example, does not mean that your ways of worship should infringe in that of other people's ways of worship or life. Equally, that one has the right to expression does not mean using such a right to abuse your fellows or even your leaders. Thus, the exercise of civil liberties is also guided by the laws of a country which also protect them. Worthy to mention is that even with their enshrinement in many countries' laws, they are sometimes abused and not properly upheld by some governments. In Africa, this has been the case since the rights of citizens are most times abused by their leaders (Amnesty international 2024; Mazorodze 2023). This is seen in the enactment of certain laws aimed at restricting the exercise of these civil liberties.

### Civil liberties in Kogi State: A Brief Overview

Kogi state in terms of geo-political zone, belongs to the north central Nigeria. It is state with mixed ethnicities with the Igala people being the most dominant. Its economy is dependent commerce and agriculture with the River Niger playing a very important role in the agricultural activities of the people. Its capital city is Lokoja, a busy place located very close to the River Niger. It is a state with a majority Muslim population as Islam is a thriving religion in the state. Politically, its seat of power is Lokoja.

Just as many states in Nigeria, the issues of civil liberties are problematic in the state. As indicated by InvictusAfrica (2024), inspite of the legal frameworks in the state to protect the abuse of basic rights of humans, Kogi has not succeeded in guaranteeing the civil liberties of its citizens. Gender-based violence, according to the report of Invictus Africa is one of the abuses of basic human rights in the state. Thus, as has been emphasised, civil liberties exist in principle and not in practice in the state. How successive governments have maintained the people's civil liberties have not been assessed in literature. Hence, there is a dearth of materials on the maintenance of civil liberties or their abuses in the state. However, a few clues can be deduced from literature and the recent political happenings in Nigeria over the past years. In a fieldwork study by Titus (2014), it was reported how unreported cases of killings in one local government of the state. The study indicated how these killings may have included extra-judicial killings arising from inter party violence and how many of them remain undocumented and unnoticed. These killings violet the basic rights of the people to life. It becomes more problematic in recent times with the problem of

farmers-herders conflict rife in the state at present. Reports how that many deaths are associated with this conflict which has been age-long in the state (Dimelu, Salifu & Igboke 2016).

Like many Nigerian states, the issue of politics being taken too seriously by the people of Kogi state is also a factor. For some politicians in the state, politics is a do or die affair. It means to win elections by all means. This approach to politics has not helped the cause of civil liberties in the state. For instance, during the 2023 general elections, cases of election-related killings were recorded. The most prominent being the killing of a People's Democratic Party women leader who was burnt alive in her home by unidentified thugs (Primum Times 2019) during the governorship election of 2019 in the state. In addition to this, issues of election violence, perceived injustice against some ethnicities and lopsided developmental strides in the state all tell the story of civil liberties on trial in the state. The issue of discrimination based on ethnicity is there. The findings of Joshua & Alichio (2021) indicate how ethnic-based segregation exists in the state. Cultural-cum religious affiliations is also a factor in discrimination in the state which are undermine civil liberties. These all show glimpses of abuse of civil liberties in the state to which Idah is part of.

### **Islamic Teachings in Idah: Efforts Towards Safeguarding Civil liberties**

The Quran is a guide that extends to all human endeavours. Allah said "Nothing has we (Allah) omitted from the book (Quran)", Quran 6:38. The book (Quran) guides us how to live in the society peacefully with Muslims and non-Muslims which leads to the safeguarding of civil liberties of the people. In Idah, as seen in the whole of Kogi state, politics is played with a view grabbing power by all means. This is why political thuggery is one of the social problems that is detrimental civil liberties in Idah. This menace has become detriment to civil liberties in the area. Thugs move from place-to-place maiming, terrorising, intimidating and causing harm to innocent individuals. This leaves them with an abused civil liberty of the right to vote freely and be voted for in an election.

According to an informant (IF 1, December 13, 2024), political thuggery in the area is caused by the breaking of oaths by the politicians. By this, he meant that politicians in the area do not always keep to the terms of agreements that they entered into prior to elections. This is against the teaching of Allah who said "He will call you to account for your deliberate oaths: for expiration feed ten indigent persons, on the scale of the average for the food of your families, or clothe them, or give a slave his freedom of that is beyond your means. Fast for three days. That is the expiration for the paths ye have sworn. But keep to your oaths" (Q5:89). This means that politicians, if they heed to the counsel of Allah, there will be a reduction in political thuggery in Idah through which people's civil liberties are abused. Killing, maiming and the disenfranchisement of people in the area through political thuggery are abuses of the people's civil liberties and Allah frowns at such.

Insecurity is also an issue in Idah local government just as the whole of Kogi state. While a lot of issues are part of the reason insecurity persists in the area, the existence of insecurity is an example of the abuse of the people's civil liberties. The right to security of life is an important civil liberty which many governments of the world take very seriously. The issues of kidnapping for ransom and the killing of victims who fail to pay ransoms, are indications of the level of the abuse of the right to security in the area. These kidnappers are non-state actors and as such are against the very teaching of Islam. Neither the Quran or prophet Mohammad condones such acts. According to Balogun (2013) and Aliagan (2014), no teaching of the Quran

justifies kidnapping or the killing of innocent souls particularly non-combatants. It is also not a righteous deed as stated in Quran (Suratul Maidah)(5:8-9). In fact, according to Al-Shinqiti (n.d), Islamic jurisprudence clearly condemns kidnapping for ransom in whatever form. What is seen here is the fact that Islamic teachings clearly teachings Muslims in Idah to desist from kidnapping, killing and crimes since such are not compatible with the Islamic faith. Islam therefore, through its teaching, makes a conscious effort in reminding the people of Idah about the evils of kidnapping for ransom as abuse of people's civil liberties.

In another way, Islamic teachings in Idah also contribute to the maintenance of the people's civil liberties are through its emphasis on the consciousness of Allah and the knowledge of reward and punishment. With regard to this, the texts of the Quran are littered with passages which are meant to evoke the consciousness of Allah as a creator. Thus, in passages like Q112:1-4 we read teachings like "He is Allah, the one and only. The eternal absolute. He begetteth not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him and He is one (Q2:29). It is He Allah who created for you all things that are on earth Q2:29. What this means is that the consciousness of Allah as the creator among the people of Idah should be enough to make them realise the value in respecting people's civil liberties. This means, that for example, if an Idah Muslim clearly understands that Allah is the creator of the human life, it will be imperative on such a person not to harm or abuse humans in any way. Since Allah created all humans, then the rights of humans as Allah's creation should be upheld in Idah. This means that both kidnapping, political thuggery and all forms of acts that prevent the maintenance of civil liberty in the area will be avoided. Accordingly, the study found out that some persons in the area cited this knowledge as being cardinal in their respect for their fellows, including their rights. This is why an informant (IF 2, January 20, 2025) affirms that if people's civil liberty is to be maintained in Idah, the people of the area must always acknowledge the fact that Allah created all humans and respect them as such.

The knowledge of reward and punishment as stated in the Quran should also be an impetus for maintaining the civil liberties of the people in Idah. In the Quran, for example, Allah said in Q 99:7-8 "Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it. Anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it" This is a clear statement about reward and punishment for human actions. This point links back to the point of the paper on the knowledge of Allah as the creator of humans. The idea here is that if many Muslims in Idah affirm the fact that God created every human, then there will be a strong and genuine respect for the human the creature of Allah. Therefore, for civil liberty to be fully executed there must be fear of the creator and respect the right of every individual. According to an informant (IF3, February 2, 2025), the knowledge of the idea of reward and punishment makes me refrain from doing certain things since I know that such acts are punishable by Allah. For example, I respect my fellows and accord them their rights as humans. Another informant (IF 4, January 5, 2025) stressed the need for the teachings of Islam on reward and punishment of human actions to be a motivator for the people of the area to respect the civil liberties of their fellows. Thus, he believed that if people of the area could know that punishment awaits them should they act against the teachings of Allah in dealing with people, they will be more respecting of their fellows and their rights.

Similarly, the knowledge of the love of your neighbor is very important to maintaining civil liberties in Idah. In Islam and the teaching of the Quran, the idea of loving the neighbour is strongly emphasised. Thus, in Q 64 Allah said "It is He who has created you;



and amongst you are unbelievers, and some that are believers (Q 64:2). Equally, the holy prophet Muhammed (SAW) said “He who believes in Allah and the day of judgement should say the truth or be silent, he who believe in Allah and the day of judgment, should honour his neighbor. He who believes in Allah and the day of judgment should honour his guest” (Imam Bukhari Vol. 4). It could be said that in line with this view, the idea of Zakat in Islam is partly instituted. While zakat is strictly meant for Muslims, regular charity could be given to poor non-Muslims in the spirit of good neighbourly relations. This is an indication that Islam and its teachings value the neighbour well very irrespective of religious affiliations.

From these teachings, it is seen that Islamic teachings encourage the love for one’s neighbour irrespective of religion or faith. This means that there should be a consciousness among Muslims to maintain good neighbourly relations. This has certain implications for maintaining civil liberties in Idah. It is a call for the people of the area to strive in seeing everybody in the area as a neighbour whose rights must not be violated. As informant 5 (February 10, 2025) pointed out, once we Muslims in the area see everybody as a neighbour, it becomes easier to respect people’s civil liberties. That way, the political thug would understand that those he/she is brutalising in the name of politics are his/her neighbours whose rights should not be violated. In the same way, the kidnaper who kidnaps his fellow humans for ransom in the area will see his victims as neighbours who ought to be protected and not kidnapped for ransom. The same way, the government official who uses power to abuse the ruled in the area will see the people he rules over as his neighbours whose civil liberties ought to be protected.

Another aspect of civil liberties which should be emphasized is the freedom of speech. As far as Islam is concerned, freedom of speech is guaranteed as long as it does not make for blasphemy. According to scholars (), Islamic teachings encourage the freedom of speech. Muslims are expected to speak freely on issues concerning them as far as such speeches do not amount to blasphemy. This is the case in Idah where such a teaching is maintained. This therefore implies that Islam contributes to maintaining civil liberties in Idah through its guarantee of the people’s freedom of speech. Because of this understanding, the people of Idah believe they are free to air their opinions on matters that concern them as far as those views are within the ambits of the Nigerian law, and such views do not amount to blasphemy based on Islamic teachings. As confirmed by an informant (IF 6, February 30, 2025), Islam guarantees us the freedom of speech. It is left for us not to abuse it or use it as a pretext for blasphemy. We air our opinions on matters of the day and things that concern us here in Idah. How those opinion may be given attention to by the government is another case altogether. For another informant (IF 7, February 10, 2025), at Idah people are free to air their views on matters that concern them. For the Muslims, such a right is guaranteed by Islamic teachings. We only have to be careful to draw a line between what to express as our opinions and what not to express as our opinions.

### Conclusion

This study was a genuine effort to delved into an uncharted territory; it was a work that studied the inter-relationship of Islamic teachings and the maintenance of civil liberties in Idah, Kogi State. Its argument rested on the belief that religion has a role to play as far as the maintenance of civil liberties is concerned. It used the context of Islam and its teachings in Idah to show how the people’s liberties can be maintained. It argued that although human rights issues are problematic in Kogi state, just as they are in Nigeria as a nation, Islamic teachings help to maintain civil liberties in the study area.

Through the people’s knowledge of Allah as the creator of all humans, acknowledgement of the idea of punishment and reward for human actions, understanding of the need for good neighbourliness and belief in the freedom of speech, among others, the idea of civil liberties is clearer to many people in the area. These help, in no small way, to maintain civil liberties among the people. While there still remains the problem of the role of the government in being sincere in maintaining people’s civil liberties in the state, what this study has shown is that Islam contributes its own quota towards making the consciousness of civil liberties strong among the people of Idah. This study therefore contributed to the general debate about the role of religion in maintaining civil liberties in the society.

### Conflict interest(s)

The author declares that they have no personal, professional or financial interest that may have inappropriately influenced the outcome of this research.

### Ethical considerations

The author declares that this article was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and principles for research.

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### Oral Interview

S/n	Name	Religion	Gender	Place of Interview
1	IF 1	Islam	Male	Idah
2	IF 2	Islam	Male	Idah
3	IF 3	Islam	Male	Idah
4	IF 4	Islam	Male	Idah
5	IF 5	Islam	Male	Idah
6	IF 6	Islam	Male	Idah
6	IF 7	Islam	Male	Idah

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