Theological Contestations of the Digital Self: An Interfaith Ethical Framework for Biometric Identification in Kenya

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Abstract

Background:
The accelerated deployment of biometric identification systems, notably Kenya's Huduma Namba, between 2021 and 2026 has provoked substantial theological-ethical debates within the country's major faith communities. These debates centre on competing conceptions of personhood, bodily integrity, and the legitimate boundaries of state authority.

Purpose and objectives:
This article aims to develop a structured interfaith ethical framework for assessing biometric identification in Kenya. Its objectives are to systematically compare Islamic and Christian theological perspectives on the human person and communal trust, and to apply this analysis specifically to the Huduma Namba initiative.

Methodology:
The study employs a comparative theological methodology, analysing foundational religious texts, contemporary scholarship, and official publications from Kenyan Christian and Islamic bodies issued from 2021 to 2026. This source material is examined through a normative ethical lens.

Findings/Key insights:
The analysis identifies a core thematic divergence. Christian theological critiques frequently foreground the concept of the individual as created in the imago Dei, expressing concern that biometrics may violate bodily sanctity and personal sovereignty. Islamic discourses predominantly engage principles of public interest (maslaha) and prevention of harm (darar), pragmatically balancing technological utility against risks of state surveillance and social exclusion.

Conclusion:
The constructed framework illustrates that neither theological tradition presents a uniform position. A robust ethical evaluation must therefore acknowledge internal pluralities within each faith and the particular socio-political context of Kenya's digital identification programme.

Recommendations:

Policymakers should institute formal, inclusive consultation mechanisms with diverse theological experts. Religious institutions are encouraged to produce nuanced, context-specific guidance for their adherents on digital identity systems.

Key   words:

biometric identification, Huduma Namba, theological ethics, interfaith dialogue, digital identity, Kenya, Christianity, Islam

Contribution   statement:

This article offers a novel, structured framework for interfaith ethical analysis of technology in Africa, centring indigenous religious discourses to move beyond predominantly secular evaluations of digital governance.

Keywords: *Digital ethics, biometric identification, postcolonial theology, East Africa, interfaith dialogue, Huduma Namba, theological anthropology*