

# Effect of Muslim Perspective of Predetermination of Life Events on Interreligious Dialogue in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Jean-Bernardin Ayu Ebok, Ali Adan Ali and Peter Mbaro

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) Nairobi, Kenya.

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## ABSTRACT

The Muslim perspective on predetermination of life events is a complex and delicate topic that has been the subject of much discussion and debate. According to Islamic theology, Allah has complete control over all aspects of the universe, including the destiny of every individual. This belief in predestination is a fundamental tenet of Islam and is based on the idea that Allah has already determined the cause of every person's life before they are born. Interreligious dialogue is an important aspect of Muslim life and is seen as a means of promoting understanding and tolerance between different faiths. The main purpose of this study was to establish the effect of Muslim perspective of universal human brotherhood on interreligious dialogue in Nairobi County, Kenya. The research project adopted mixed research design while targeting 3 major mosques and 3 churches in Nairobi's South C, Central and West regions. The target population comprised of one thousand, eight hundred and six. Faithful Christians and Muslims. The sample size included 93 faithful Muslims and 93 faithful Christians, giving a total of 186 respondents. Simple random and purposive sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample. The study used questionnaire method to collect data from 180 religionists. In addition, interview method was used to collect data from Imams and the clergy. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze quantitative data. Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 22 was used to process the quantitative data. The analyzed data was summarized using tables and figures. Further, qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis.

**Keywords:** life predetermination. Muslim perspective, Interreligious Dialogue, Faithful Muslims, Faithful Christian, divine will

## INTRODUCTION

A person's worldview within the Islamic faith is greatly influenced by the Muslim viewpoint on predetermination, or Qadar. The idea of qadr holds that everything that happens in a person's life both good and bad is predetermined by Allah's divine will (Khan, 2015). The complicated theological concept of predestination has disastrous consequences for individuals and even entire nations due to misinterpretation. This is due to the fact that God has never altered the grace he has given anyone unless they have first made changes to their inner state; God is truly Hearer, Knower. (Qur 'an; 8: 5 3). It is thought that qadar was the main factor in the Muslims' moral decline and that it paralyzed their energy. Because of the concept of qadar, Muslims believe that all they do and achieve is subject to God's will. As a result, they have been unable to defend their rights and keep their nations free from despotism, which has hampered their advancement as a whole. According to Moazzam, such an attitude would rob man of allurges for positive struggle, learning and acquisition and would make his life useless (Zakaria, 2015). Thus, Afghani believes that human will is generated by perception (idrak) of the external occurrences and is actually one of the causal links in the chain of causes which explains the tight relationship between nature and human will. God is the source of the reasons that underlie all external events, subordinating each event to a corresponding

cause. Afghani thus acknowledges God's authority over human (Zakaria, 2015). In the same line, the **Qadarites** advocate for the principle of human freewill. They believe that individuals have the inherent ability to make choices and are responsible for their actions. In contrast, the **Jabarites** hold a different perspective. They emphasize the concept of divine predestination, asserting that all events and actions are determined by Allah's will. There, these contrasting views highlight the diverse ways in which Islamic thought grapples with the balance between divine control and human agency.

Dialogue has come to be recognized as an umbrella term for a wide range of peaceful exchanges gathering interactions and collaborations between two or more religious traditions. According to Elius (2019), interreligious dialogue is truly important for maintaining a harmonious relationship and peaceful co-existence among religious groups. According to Jette (2018), a robust theoretical tradition in religious education applies the knowledge of philosophical hermeneutics to interreligious education. In this context, interreligious learning focuses more on fostering understanding between the self and other than it does on imparting religious information. International, national, and local political policymakers have voiced their concern about the issue of growing intolerance (i.e., misunderstandings, negative stereotypes, and provocative images that are being used to depict those who practice and believe differently) since the end of the 20th century and especially at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> (Moyaert, 2019).

According to Swidler (2014), humans live in a society with a wide variety of ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, and they connect with one another on a daily basis through their interactions with neighbours, friends, co-workers and other religious groups. As a result, interreligious encounters are now common in daily life. Elius (2019) asserts that interreligious communication is crucial to preserving good relations and peaceful cohabitation between religious communities.

Islam's conception of predetermination holds that Allah has predetermined every aspect of human existence and that there is no way to change it. Islamic violence has greatly been influenced by the idea that Allah has already determined one's fate. For instance, in recent years, numerous European nations have seen devastating incidents that have been attributed to "Islamist terrorism" (Kaya and Tecmen 2019). This has resulted in a clash of civilizations between the West and Islam. Right-wing populists gained political support in Europe and the USA due to worries about the growing inter-civilizational conflict (Brubaker 2017a, 2017b; Joppke 2018; Haynes 2019a). Representative politicians and pro-Muslim voices in the media emphasize what they perceive to be the cultural, political, and social risks of "uncontrolled" Muslim immigration, which they believe would result in inter-civilization conflict (Haynes, 2020). The common tactic of right-wing populists is to portray Islam as a religion and Muslims as a fundamental threat to the historically and culturally defined "Christian" or "post-Christian" nations of the USA and Europe, challenging them on all fronts politically, socially, religiously, and culturally (Brubaker 2017a; Haynes 2016; Kaya and Tecmen 2019; Kratochvíl 2019; Ozzano 2019).

In Africa, Muslims and Christians relations have a long and rich history of sharing and are therefore open to each other's differences as well as similarities. In modern-day Africa, Christian-Muslim interactions frequently lead to a heightened theological conflict and divergence between the two faiths. There was limited communication and minimal interest in communication and understanding between the two communities from the late fourteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century saw the beginning of the Muslim-Christian rivalry. Every faction fought for supporters for their respective campaigns. Missionaries and Arab scholars from outside oversaw both of the campaigns (Sanneh, 2015).

Kenya has a minority Muslim population compared to the dominant Christian population. Evidence has indicated that a small number of Kenyan citizens are organizing support for the Al-Shabaab Islamist violence, including enlisting the help of their fellow citizens to join Al-Shabaab and other Islamist groups. Consequently, they are responsible for the majority of the violence committed by the group inside Kenya's borders. James and Martine contend that there are a variety of personal reasons why people engage in

Islamist violence, and that ideology may not be a sufficient justification for such behavior (Chome, 2019).

The previous studies conducted have barely scratched the surface of this complex issue. There were no studies linking the Muslim perspective of predetermination of life events with interreligious dialogue. Therefore, this study aims to provide detailed in-depth information on the effects of Muslim Perspective of predetermination of life events on interreligious dialogue. Additionally, the data collection instruments and data collection procedures are discussed. The section also contains the data analysis, presentation and ethical considerations of the study.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted mixed research design because of its ability to integrate both quantitative and qualitative data in such a way that they complement and corroborate each other to provide a richer and more detailed result of the study. The study was carried out in Nairobi County, Kenya, where Christians and Muslims engage in robust interreligious discourse.

The study targeted 3 mosques and 3 churches. The targeted mosques included: Jamia Mosque (Nairobi Central), Masjid Al-Huda (Nairobi West) and Noor Mosque (Nairobi East) while the targeted churches were Cathedral Basilica of the Holy Family (Nairobi Central), Mariakani Christian Centre (Nairobi West) and New Apostolic Church (Nairobi East). One Imam was selected from each of the selected mosques while one clergy was selected from each of the selected churches. Therefore, the target population of the study comprised of one thousand, eight hundred and six Faithful Christians and Muslims. All this people were derived from the average number of church attendees on Sunday and Mosque attendees on Fridays.

The sample size included 93 faithful Muslims and another 93 faithful Christians, giving a total of 186 respondents. Random sampling procedure was employed to select 10% of the targeted 898 Muslim and 886 faithful Christians to give a total of 180 faithful Muslims and Christians. On the other hand, purposive sampling procedure was used to select 1 Imam and 1 Clergy from each of the 3 targeted mosques and churches in the 3 Nairobi regions under study to give a total of 6 Muslim and Christian religious leaders. Thus, giving a total sample size of 186 respondents that took part in the study.

The study employed survey questionnaires for attendees and Interview Guides for religious leaders (imams and clergy). A self-administered survey questionnaire containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions was administered to 90 Muslim attendees and another 90 Christian attendees to fill through hand-delivery by the researcher and trained research assistants. Interview Guides were selected for six religious' leaders (3 Imams and 3 Clergy) in each of the selected mosques and churches in Nairobi's South C, West and Central regions for in-depth questioning.

Data analysis involved the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software version 22 for analysis. SPSS was used to generate descriptive and inferential statistics through correlation in line with the study objectives and presented in frequency tables, bar charts and pie charts. Qualitative analysis was conducted using thematic analysis and presented in narrative form.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The following attributes were looked at: religion, gender, age range, education level, occupation, attitude toward interreligious discussion, and degree of involvement in interreligious dialogue. Less than two thirds (60%) of the respondents who took part in the study were Christians while more than a third (40%) of them were Muslims. All 6 religious leaders were male. The age bracket of the participants ranged from 18 years

to 85 years. The youth took the lion share of the study respondents, (49%). Their education level ranged from undergraduate, degree, masters and PhD holders. In terms of occupation, the respondents exhibited a range of employment statuses whereby self-employment was the most prevalent category. The study's findings indicated that an overwhelming majority of 85% of the respondents reported a high level of engagement in interreligious dialogue, signifying that they actively participate in such dialogues.

### **Muslim Perspective of Predetermination of Life Events Affecting Interreligious Dialogue**

The goal of the study was to investigate how Muslim Perspective of Predetermination of Life Events affects Interreligious Dialogue. The research issue was addressed using the following factors: Participants' perception that God has already predestined or established everything in a person's life; Islamic viewpoint influencing the interreligious dialogue's outcomes in Kenya.

The vast majority (78%) believed that God had already predestined certain aspects of life. Just 8% of respondents were unsure if life was planned, while 12% believed that a person's free will greatly influences their destiny.

In the same line, the interviewees were asked whether Islam believes in predestination, one of the interviewees had the following to say: When asked their views on predestination, one of the imams and one of the clergy had the following to say:

Everything in the universe is predetermined by Allah, but humans have free will and are accountable for their choices (Imam 1, 2023).

Christian beliefs on predestination vary among denominations. Some believe in predestination, while others emphasize free will. Generally, Christians believe in God's sovereignty and human responsibility (Clergy 1, 2023).

The respondents were further asked to give their views on whether they believe everything in a person's life is predestined by God. Regarding the statement, Imam 3 had the following to say:

In Islam, it's believed that everything is predestined, but human choices are also respected in addition,

Regarding the same sentiment, clergy 2 had the following to say:

Christian views on predestination vary, but many believe in God's overarching plan while also emphasizing human free will (clergy, 2).

The respondents were also asked on how the belief in God's predestination affect human freedom in Islam. Imam 2, had the following to say:

Islam reconciles predestination with human freedom, emphasizing personal responsibility and accountability for one's actions.

Regarding the same sentiment, clergy 1 had the following to say:

Many Christians believe in the balance of God's sovereignty and human free will, emphasizing the responsibility of individuals for their choices (Clergy 1, 2023).

Further, the respondents were asked to give the extent they felt that the Quranic teaching on predestination can influence interreligious dialogue between Muslims and attendees of other religions. Two clergies

indicated that it was to a great extent, while two Imams indicated to a moderate extent.

Regarding the statement: Islamic Perspective Predetermining Effects of Interreligious Dialogue in Kenya, respondents provided the following insights: I believe that human freedom and good predestinations can co-exist, the vast majority (75%) of the respondents indicated that the statement affected interreligious dialogue to a greater extent, less than a third, 20.9% indicated to some extent, while only 4.1% indicated that the statement did not affect interreligious dialogue at all.

When asked to what extent the statement: I believe that if God predestines everything, then human freedom is an illusion, an overwhelming majority (81.1%) of the respondents felt that the statement affected to a great extent, 6.1% felt it was to some extent, while the remaining 8.8% indicated that the statement did not affect interreligious dialogue at all. These findings underscore the gravity of discussions surrounding the relationship between divine predestination and human autonomy, emphasizing its significant role in shaping interfaith conversations and potentially influencing religious perspectives.

On the question to what extent the statement: I believe that God's predestinations and human freedoms are mysterious and beyond our comprehension; an overwhelming majority (83.8%) of the respondents indicated that the statement affects interreligious dialogue to a great extent, 12.2% indicated that the statement only affected to some extent, while the remaining (1.4%) of them indicated that the statement did not affect interreligious dialogue at all. These findings highlight the widespread recognition of the profound and complex nature of the relationship between divine will and human agency, emphasizing its substantial role in shaping discussions among various religious groups.

Further, the respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they felt the statement: I am not sure about the relationship between God's predestination and human freedom, affected interreligious dialogue. Nearly two thirds (64.9%) of the respondents indicated that the statement affected the interreligious dialogue to a great extent, less than a third 27.7% indicated that the statement affected to some extent, while only 6.8% of them indicated that the statement did not affect interreligious dialogue at all.

When asked to what extent the statement regarding the Quranic teaching on predestination can influence interreligious dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims, the vast majority (77.7%) of the respondents indicated that the statement affected interreligious dialogue to a great extent, below a third (17.6%) of them indicated that the statement only affected the dialogue to some extent, while only 4.1% of them indicated that the statement did not affect interreligious dialogue at all.

## DISCUSSIONS

The findings illustrate a complex interplay of beliefs within the surveyed group regarding the concept of predestination in both Islamic and Christian contexts. The majority (78%), agreeing with the notion that everything in a person's life is predestined by God. This aligns with the Islamic belief in divine predestination (Qadr). In Islam, it's a widely held belief that Allah has ordained everything that happens and humans have free will within the framework of that divine plan. The 12% who disagreed might represent individuals with differing theological perspectives, perhaps leaning towards a more deterministic understanding where human actions hold greater weight in shaping one's destiny. Meanwhile, the 8% who were unsure could signify a segment of respondents seeking further theological clarity, highlighting the complexity of reconciling divine predestination with individual agency.

The contrasting views within Christianity, as mentioned by Clergy 3, reflect the diverse doctrinal stances on predestination within Christian denominations. Some place more emphasis on God's predestined purpose, while others emphasize moral responsibility and human free will. The respondents' differing viewpoints on predestination are a result of the complex theological terrain within Christianity, which is highlighted by the

diversity of their ideas.

The diverse perspectives within the surveyed group regarding the concept of predestination resonate with the varied interpretations found within Islamic theology and the Quran. Islamic theologians, such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah, have historically engaged in extensive debates regarding the balance between divine predestination (Qadr) and human free will. Al-Ghazali, for instance, emphasized the importance of individual moral responsibility, arguing that humans possess free will within the framework of God's divine plan. On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyyah, known for his strict adherence to traditional Islamic theology, stressed the sovereignty of God's will in all matters, including human choices (Arikewuyo, 2020).

Quranic verses add further depth to this discussion. Surah Al-Imran (3:154) states, "Then He forgave you after that so that perhaps you would be grateful." This verse emphasizes God's capacity for forgiveness, suggesting a level of divine intervention in response to human actions. Similarly, Surah Al-Inshiqaq (84:19-20) states, "Indeed, this is in the former scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses, highlighting the concept of predetermined knowledge that aligns with God's omniscience. In contrast, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:197) states, "And you do not will except that Allah wills," underlining the idea of divine will shaping human desires and intentions. These verses, among others, contribute to the multifaceted nature of the predestination debate in Islam. In Christianity, views on predestination can vary widely among different denominations, with some emphasizing God's overarching plan and others emphasizing human free will, as mentioned by the study findings. These beliefs reflect the diversity within religious traditions and the theological interpretations of different scholars and communities.

In Islam, the belief in God's predestination coexists with the concept of human freedom. Muslims believe that everything in life is predestined by God, yet human beings are endowed with free will (Rumi, 2020). This reconciliation is based on the understanding that God's knowledge of future events does not negate human agency. Instead, Islam teaches that humans have the freedom to make choices and decisions. Individuals are accountable for their actions and are morally responsible for the choices they make during their lifetime. The Quran emphasizes personal responsibility and accountability for deeds, and individuals are rewarded or punished based on their intentions and actions in this world.

Similarly, many Christians also grapple with the balance between God's sovereignty and human free will. While theological perspectives vary among Christian denominations, a common understanding is that humans have the capacity for free choice and they are responsible for their moral decisions. This balance reflects the complexity of reconciling divine foreknowledge and human agency, leading to diverse interpretations within Christian theology (Kaya, 2016). Both in Islam and Christianity, the coexistence of divine predestination and human freedom emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility. Despite the belief in predestination, individuals are viewed as accountable moral agents and their choices and actions have real consequences both in this life and in the afterlife. This understanding encourages individuals in both religious traditions to act responsibly, make ethical decisions, and strive for goodness in their lives.

The study findings on the extent to which Quranic teaching on predestination can influence interreligious dialogue between Muslims and attendees of other religions appear to be in line with Wahab (2022) and Rahman et al (2017), who observed the concept of predestination in Islam as a concept that emphasizes God's ultimate control over events, including individual fates. However, Islam also strongly emphasizes human responsibility and accountability for one's actions. This balance between divine predestination and human agency provides a framework for understanding the complexities of life and can contribute to meaningful discussions in interreligious dialogues.

Johnson (2020) observes that the acknowledgment of God's divine plan can foster humility and respect, encouraging participants to approach discussions with a sense of openness and understanding in interreligious dialogue. According to Mernissi (2015), Muslims can recognize the diversity of beliefs and

perspectives within other faith traditions while affirming the concept of divine predestination in their own faith. This recognition promotes tolerance and acceptance of different viewpoints, leading to productive and respectful dialogues.

The consensus among the majority of respondents, affirming the compatibility between human freedom and divine predestination in the context of interreligious dialogue aligns with the perspective found in the teachings of Islamic theologians and the Quran. Islamic theologians, such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah, have historically engaged in profound discussions about the relationship between human free will and divine predestination. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of human intentions and moral responsibility within God's predetermined plan (Arikewuyo, 2020). This fosters a balanced view that acknowledges both divine decree and human agency. Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah stressed the significance of individual choices and actions, asserting that humans are accountable for their decisions despite God's overarching plan. In the Quran, verses such as Surah Al-18:29 affirm, "And say: 'The truth is from your Lord.' Then whoever wills, let him believe; and whoever wills, let him disbelieve," highlighting the Quran's recognition of human free will and personal choice. Additionally, Surah Al-2:256 states, "There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error," emphasizing the voluntary nature of faith, further supporting the idea of individual freedom. The respondents' acknowledgment of the compatibility between human freedom and divine predestination resonates with the teachings of prominent theologians and Quranic verses, affirming that these concepts can coexist harmoniously within the context of interreligious dialogue. This alignment reflects the profound wisdom established in Islamic teachings and the academic discourse of Islamic scholars, encouraging polite dialogue that promotes mutual understanding and collaboration across diverse faith communities.

Scholars such as Nazar (2021) and Rumi (2020) have contributed distinct viewpoints on the balance between divine predestination and human free will. Ibn Arabi, emphasized the concept of divine unity (Tawhid) and the idea that all creation, including human beings, is a manifestation of God's will. His teachings place a strong emphasis on how everything is interrelated and how human consciousness fits into the larger divine design. Rumi, frequently reflect on the spiritual journey and the idea of surrendering one's will to the divine while also recognizing the transformative power of individual choices and actions. Poetry by Rumi frequently highlights the value of love, discernment, and moral behavior as manifestations of human free choice within the larger context of divine providence.

Ibn Rushd emphasized on the limitations of human understanding when it comes to comprehending divine matters. Ibn Rushd argued that although human reason is an important instrument, human understanding of the deep secrets of God's plan and how it interacts with human agency is inherently limited (Zarkasyi, Zarkasyi, Prayogo and Da'i (2020). This viewpoint is consistent with the findings' assertion that this theological subject is incomprehensible to humans in its entirety. In the Quran, the concept of divine predestination is often presented in a way that emphasizes the unfathomable wisdom of God. For example, Surah Al-3:154 states, "And never think that those who have been killed in the cause of Allah are dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision." This verse highlights the depth of divine understanding that surpasses human comprehension. Similarly, Surah Al-6:103 reminds believers of the profound nature of God's knowledge, stating, "No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision. He is the Subtle, the Acquainted." "The nature of the viewpoints expressed by the responders with the Quran and the teachings of Islamic scholars highlights the humility that penetrates conversations about these important theological subjects. Understanding the mysterious character of both human agency and divine will which promotes polite discourse and highlights the richness and depth of Islamic theological conversations.

In the Quran, Surah Al-29:69 states, "And those who strive for Us – We will surely guide them to Our ways and indeed, Allah is with the doers of good." This verse emphasizes how important it is to make a sincere effort and strive for understanding. It implies that while there are aspects of divine predestination that are

beyond comprehension to humans, Islam values honest efforts to learn and understand. The respondents' acceptance of ambiguity is in line with these teachings, emphasizing the need of humility and openness in interfaith dialogue.

Surah Al-18:29 states, "And you do not will except that Allah wills." This verse from the Quran emphasizes the idea of divine decree and God's ultimate authority in deciding how things will happen. Similarly, Surah Al-76:30 affirms, "And you do not will except that Allah wills – Lord of the worlds," demonstrating the all-encompassing power of GOD over everything that exists. These verses contain the lessons found in the Quran regarding acknowledging divine determinism and submitting to God's will.

## CONCLUSION

The Muslim perspective on predestination, known as **Qadar**, plays a significant role in shaping the approach to interreligious dialogue in Nairobi County, Kenya. Understanding this perspective can offer insights into the dynamics of religious interactions and the potential challenges and opportunities for dialogue among different faith communities. The study shows how different Islamic and Christian cultures hold different views regarding the idea of predestination. Christians hold a variety of opinions, from believing in God's plan to emphasizing human free will. Some Muslims hold to the notion that everything in a person's life is predestined by God (Qadr) with an acknowledgment of human agency. Both religions place a strong emphasis on moral accountability and individual responsibility, encouraging moral decision-making. Despite these theoretical differences, the impact of Quranic teachings on interreligious dialogue is considered significant, encouraging humility, respect and tolerance. However, regardless of their religious stances, participants' attitudes, knowledge, active listening skills, empathy and understanding are what determine the effectiveness of a debate. The study highlights the importance of acknowledging the complexity of predestination and approaching interfaith discussions with sincerity and an awareness of the mystery of divine will as emphasized in Quranic teachings. The study recommends building relationship between religious leaders of both Muslims and Christians in order to gain more insights through sharing of religious beliefs on predetermination for the purpose of improving religious dialogue and relations between the two communities.

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