

Reviewer comment -1

This manuscript addresses a critical and timely topic—aligning religious governance with international human rights norms—with significant scholarly and policy relevance. The framework built on ICCPR and ICESCR, along with the proposed eight assessment indicators, provides a valuable analytical tool for evaluating religious regulatory systems. However, substantial revisions are needed to strengthen its theoretical rigor, empirical grounding, and practical applicability, as detailed below.

1. The connection between third-generation human rights and religious freedom remains underdeveloped. Explicitly elaborate how environmental protection (Indicator 8) and collective cultural rights link to religious governance, with references to relevant third-generation rights frameworks. Additionally, clarify the conceptual boundaries between "religious organizational autonomy" and state regulatory authority to avoid ambiguity.
2. The eight indicators lack specific operational definitions and measurement criteria. For each indicator (e.g., religious financial autonomy), provide tangible benchmarks (e.g., disclosure requirements, funding sources) to guide practical application. Supplement Table 1 with illustrative examples of compliant/non-compliant practices for clarity.
3. The current case studies (U.S., Japan) are limited. Incorporate diverse national contexts (e.g., European countries, Global South nations) to test the framework's cross-cultural applicability. Analyze how existing religious governance in these contexts aligns with the proposed indicators, highlighting successes and gaps.
4. The model provisions need more nuanced guidance for implementation. For instance, clarify how "least restrictive means" (Article 4) balances public safety with religious autonomy, using concrete regulatory scenarios (e.g., religious gatherings during public health crises). Address potential conflicts between indicators (e.g., non-discrimination vs. religious education autonomy) with resolution mechanisms.
5. Streamline Section III and IV to avoid redundant discussions on state neutrality. Strengthen transitions between theoretical principles, indicators, and legislative recommendations to enhance logical flow.