

Sajjad Adeliyan Tous and James T. Richardson, *Managing Religion and Religious Changes in Iran: A Socio-Legal Analysis*. Elements in New Religious Movements. Cambridge University Press, 2024. DOI: 10.1017/9781009460095.

This 72-page brief monograph, *Managing Religion and Religious Changes in Iran: A Socio-Legal Analysis*, is the latest in the “New Religious Movements” series of the Cambridge Elements Series (20,000–30,000 words or 40 to 80 pages). The lead author is Sajjad Adeliyan Tous, an independent scholar, who, according to his Research Gate profile, is pursuing an L.L.M. degree in criminal law and criminology at the University of Tehran, and whose “work reflects an interest in the nuanced intersections of law, religion, and politics, examining how these domains interact with and influence one another in both theory and practice” (<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sajjad-Adeliyan-Tous>). Co-author James T. Richardson is Emeritus Foundation Professor of Sociology and Judicial Studies at University of Nevada, Reno. Two relevant articles by Richardson are “Managing religion: Courts as ‘partners’ and ‘third party partisans’ in the social construction of religious freedom” (2017) and “Managing religion: The judicialization of religious freedom” (2015). Therefore, the current Element is a most interesting collaboration between a talented graduate student, whose academic work shows great promise, and a seasoned, well-respected, and well published professor emeritus.

After a brief “Introduction and Relevant Background” (1–6), the authors present their analysis in five clearly organized sections: “1 Religion and Religious Freedom in Iran’s Post-Revolutionary Constitution” (6–11); “2 Religious Freedom Status of Minority Religious Groups in Iran: An Overview” (11–23); “3 Religious Life, Cultural Diffusion, and Religious Pluralism in Iran” (24–32); “4 Social Control of New Religious Movements in Iran: A Chronology and Analysis” (32–45); “5 Conclusions, Relevant Sociological Theories, and Theoretical Applications” (45–57); and “References” (58–72). As the opening “Abstract” indicates, the focus of this study is to provide a contextually and theoretically informed analysis of how the post-Revolutionary (post-1979) “authoritarian theocracy of Iran” controls minority faiths and especially new religious movements (NRMs), in a process that “culminated in the passage of a piece of stringent legislation in 2021” (4) which is “Article 500 *bis*” (i.e., “recurrent”) of the Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran—Book Five.

“Article 500 *bis*” is an amendment to “Article 500” without replacing the original provision. This controversial 2021 legislation, titled “Law of Adding Two Articles to the Fifth Book of the Islamic Penal Code (*Ta‘zīrāt* and Deterrent Punishments),” adds amendments to Articles 499 and 500 (in Book Five, “Chapter One—Crimes against the national and foreign security of the State”), the legislative history of which is discussed, in some detail, in Section 4, “Social Control of New Religious Movements in Iran: A Chronology and Analysis” (32–45). The

impact of this legislation, however, is not discussed. Thus, the final sentence of this Element creates an element of suspense, to wit: “Only time will reveal if the resolution finally obtained in 2021 is a lasting one that settles the perceived contradictions in Iranian society or, perhaps more accurately, if what happened is just another temporary solution that will lead to continuing conflicts” (57). Space does not permit a legal analysis here. It is hoped that the lead author will contribute a detailed analysis of “Article 500 *bis*” in a later publication.

That said, Article 500 *bis*, as amended, is now in place and applied against minority religions in Iran, particularly Bahā’is and evangelical Christians (often pejoratively referred to as “Zionist Christians”). The authors note that Dr Anja Pistor-Hatam (Professor of Islamic Studies at Kiel University) “points to Iran’s treatment of the Baha’is as a bellwether trial in the court of public opinion,” then quoting Pistor-Hatam herself as stating: “The case of the Baha’i Faith clearly is the litmus test regarding the human rights of religious minorities in Iran” (22, n. 31). The court of international public opinion does not look favorably on “Article 500 *bis*.”

In light of this problem, the authors offer a solution, which, if followed, would redound to a more favorable opinion regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran and its treatment of religious minorities, especially NRMs. Early in this Element, the authors present a brief section on “Religious Freedom” (12–14). Later in Section 5, “Conclusions, Relevant Sociological Theories, and Theoretical Applications” (45–57), in opining on possible solutions to the problem of profound restrictions of freedom of religion in Iranian society, the authors propose the following: “If relaxing control of the religious life of the people is ever to be envisaged, solutions can be found in the Iranian Constitution and international human rights law, albeit with somewhat different interpretations than are currently accepted in Iran,” especially considering that the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran “absolutely guarantees citizens have the right to freedom of belief,” also noting that “Iran is a signatory to the ICCPR” (i.e., the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), as 04 April 1968 (signature date) and 24 June 1975 (ratification date). “Implementing this constitutional provision from a more open perspective,” the authors further opine, “could offer citizens more religious freedom,” cautioning that “[w]hether such an approach will ever be implemented by decision-makers in Iran remains to be seen” (48).

The most salient and useful feature of this short book is its rich and multifaceted theoretical discussion, by way of a “sociology of law perspective” (54), thereby creating a framework of analysis that can be tried and tested elsewhere, “with a discussion of specific applications of sociologically oriented theoretical perspectives to what has happened in Iran and, by implication, what may be occurring in other authoritarian Islamic regimes” (4). Therefore, not only is *Managing Religion and Religious Changes in Iran: A Socio-Legal Analysis* a welcome methodological

contribution by virtue of its exemplary sociology of law framework of analysis (and review of the relevant academic literature), but also (and especially) for its merits as a model of the collaborative potential of senior scholars working with promising graduate students, as is the case here.

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