



## ESCAPING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS NOISE: The Pros and Cons of the Use of Mosque Loudspeakers in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** One of the controversial issues in religious practice in contemporary Indonesia is concerned with the noise raising from places of religious worship. This study aims to explain the pros and cons of Indonesia's state policy on the guidelines for using loudspeakers in Muslim places of worship (mosques and musallas). The primary data is obtained from state regulations (Indonesia Ministry of Religious Affairs) regarding guidelines for using loudspeakers. The secondary data is gathered from relevant literature sources. The current study employed content and thematic analyses in qualitative research. This study finds the concept of loudspeaker moderation as an alternative for resolving the pros and cons of the state policy regarding the regulation of the use of loudspeakers. Loudspeaker moderation integrates three pillars, namely the landmark (mosque), the soundmark (*azan*), and the ethicmark (guidelines for the use of loudspeaker), toward the soundworld. The study findings may have implications for factors that may provide a rational understanding of the policy on regulating loudspeakers in places of worship, especially in mosques and musallas throughout Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Soundscape, Islamic Religious Noise, Pros and Cons, Regulations of Loudspeaker, Place of Worship (Mosque and Musalla), Loudspeaker Moderation, *Azan*

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### Introduction

Issues relating to religious freedom in Indonesia have yet to be resolved. An exciting case sample regarding the matter is using a loudspeaker when conducting the *azan*, as shown in the Meliana

case.<sup>1</sup> Many people feel bothered by the use of loudspeakers in mosques, but there is nothing they can do about it.<sup>2</sup> For example, suppose someone complains or criticizes the sound of the *azan*, which is voiced through a very loud loudspeaker. In that case, they will immediately be accused of not liking the *azan*, blaspheming Islam. They can even lead to ethnic, religious, racial, and group riots, as happened in Tanjungbalai, North Sumatra, Indonesia, in 2016.<sup>3</sup>

The riot in Tanjungbalai started with a Chinese woman named Meliana, who complained to the mosque administrator near her house. Meliana and her family were disturbed by the sound of the mosque's loudspeaker, which she said was deafening.<sup>4</sup> The complaint rapidly spread by word of mouth from one resident to another, becoming a wild problem encompassing nuances of ethnic and religious conflicts. Within a few hours, the embers of the ancient heritage of hatred between races, groups, and religions ignited the fire of mass anger. They scorched several temples, pagodas, and other buildings.<sup>5</sup> Meliana was later charged with violating the blasphemy article and sentenced to eighteen months in prison under articles 156 and 156a of the Criminal Code.<sup>6</sup>

The Tanjungbalai case is the culmination of socio-religious friction regarding the issue of voicing the *azan* using a

<sup>1</sup> Siti Aliyuna Pratisti, "Negotiating Soundscape: Practice and Regulation of Adzan in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 10, no. 2 (2020): 11.

<sup>2</sup> Wahib, "Pelantang Sumbang Citra Buruk Untuk Islam," February 25, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Syahrin Harahap et al., "The Phenomenon of Social and Religious Conflicts in Tanjungbalai, Medan, Indonesia," *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 22, no. 8 (2017): 31-39. See also Anwar Sadat Harahap, Hardi Mulyono, A. Nuzul, Milhan and Taufik Siregar, "Dalihan Na Tolu as a Model for Resolving Religious Conflict in North Sumatra: An Anthropological and Sociological Perspective", *Samarah Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 3 (2023): 1943-1970

<sup>4</sup> Najma Moosa, "How Loud Is Too Loud? Competing Rights to Religious Freedom and Property and the Muslim Call to Prayer (Adhan or Azan) in South Africa," *Religions* 12, no. 1 (2021): 349.

<sup>5</sup> Mufdil Tuhri, "Religious Violence Through Lens of Cavanaugh's Theory: The Case of Burning Vihara in Tanjungbalai," *Intizar* 26, no. 1 (2020): 9-16.

<sup>6</sup> Leo Suryadinata, "Identity Politics in Indonesia: The Meliana Case," *Perspective: Researchers At Iseas – Yusof Ishak Institute Analyse Current Events* 1, no. 42 (2019): 1-8.

loudspeaker, which is consistently contested in the Indonesian public religious sphere.<sup>7</sup> According to Iswandi,<sup>8</sup> Meliana's case in Tanjungbalai was caused by religious violence that originated from social media at the time. Religious violence is not a religious phenomenon but rather a social media phenomenon that is influenced by the sacredness of the religion (the *azan*). Before the Tanjungbalai case, similar protests had occurred in Jakarta in 2007 and again in 2013, when the people living around the Damai Kristus Church protested against the sound of the church bell.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the church displays symbols. Luckily, there were no casualties in the incident because Ustad Jufri (a local cleric) and Joko Widodo (Governor of Jakarta at that time) succeeded in encouraging peace talks.<sup>10</sup>

Besides non-Muslims such as Meliana, many Muslims themselves, such as Zaskia Mecca<sup>11</sup> and Rina,<sup>12</sup> feel disturbed by the mosque's loudspeaker if it is used without rules.<sup>13</sup> It shows that the guidelines for using the loudspeaker to voice the *azan* have nothing to do with the issue of the majority and minority. Those who disagree with the use of a very loud loudspeaker during the

<sup>7</sup> Elisabeth Sundari et al., "Perlindungan Bagi Kelompok Agama Minoritas Menghadapi Kelompok Agama Mayoritas: Studi Kasus Ahok dan Meliana," *Jurnal Hukum* 36, no. 2 (2022): 181; Siti Aliyuna Pratisti, "Negotiating Soundscape: Practice and Regulation of *Azan* in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 10, no. 2 (2020): 76.

<sup>8</sup> Iswandi Syahputra, "Penggunaan Media Sosial dan Kemarahan Religius Dalam Kasus Pembakaran Vihara di Kota Tanjungbalai, Indonesia," *Epistemé* 13, no. 1 (June 2018): 168.

<sup>9</sup> Mojca Kovačić, "Official Regulations and Perceptual Aspects of Bell Ringing," *The Project City Sonic Ecology-Urban Soundscapes of Bern, Ljubljana and Belgrade*, financed by Swiss National Science Foundation within its SCOPES Programme in 2013-2016 (2017): 59-73.

<sup>10</sup> R. Tuasikal, Gereja ini Tak Bunyikan Lonceng dan Pasang Salib. kbr.id., retrieved from [https://kbr.id/saga/11-2014/gereja\\_ini\\_tak\\_bunyikan\\_lonceng\\_dan\\_pasang\\_salib\\_35629.html](https://kbr.id/saga/11-2014/gereja_ini_tak_bunyikan_lonceng_dan_pasang_salib_35629.html), February 8, 2022, 4.

<sup>11</sup> VOI, "Zaskia Mecca's Criticism of Waking Sahur Using Loudspeakers Is Indeed Regulated by Islam Seriously," April 23, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> AFP, "Piety or Noise Nuisance? Indonesia Tackles Call to Prayer Volume Backlash," October 14, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Vikas Bhatnagar, "Noise Pollution vis-a-vis Freedom of Religion," *Bharati Law Review* 2, no. 1 (2017): 89.

*azan* will soon be labeled as Muslims who hate and insult their religion.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, uncontrolled use of the mosque's loudspeaker may lead to the decline of Islam. The loud voice that is not solemn will tarnish the face of Islam because it shows the low ethics and manners of Muslims in social life.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the urgency of this study is to explain the state policy regarding guidelines for the use of loudspeakers in Muslim places of worship in a rational and unemotional way to those who are pro and contra since the issuance of Circular Letter Number 5 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for the Use of Loudspeakers in Mosques and Musallas by the Indonesia Ministry of Religious Affairs on 18 February 2022.

There are two impacts of using a loudspeaker in a place of worship: piety and noise.<sup>16</sup> It is creating piety if it is set to increase the solemnity of worship. It causes noise if used without rules, thus disturbing the comfort of others.<sup>17</sup> A loudspeaker is used to spread the sound as a sign of the time of worship in a religion.<sup>18</sup> Blanton calls it the apparatus of belief.<sup>19</sup> Jews with their trumpets, Zoroastrians with their holy fire, Christians with their church bells,<sup>20</sup> and Muslims with their sound of *azan* (call to prayer).<sup>21</sup> The *azan* describes the function of the mosque and musalla, which are

<sup>14</sup> Wahib, "Pelantang Sumbang Citra Buruk Untuk Islam," February 25, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Sukron Kamil and Zakiyah Darojat, "Mosques and Muslim Social Integration: Study of External Integration of the Muslims," *Insaniyat: Journal of Islam and Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2019): 37-48.

<sup>16</sup> Haeril Halim, "Piety or Noise Pollution? Indonesia Tackles Call to Prayer Volume Backlash," *The Jakarta Post*, October 14, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Soizick Crochet, "About Noise in Religious Context: Religious Communication Perspective," *Journal of Strategic Communication* 7, no. 1 (September 2016): 38.

<sup>18</sup> Douglas J. Davies and Michael J. Thate, "Monstrosities: Religion, Identity, and Belief," *Religions* 8, no. 102 (May 2017): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson Blanton, "The Apparatus of Belief: Prayer, Technology, and Ritual Gesture," *Religions* 7, no. 69 (June 2016): 1.

<sup>20</sup> Muray Parker and Dirk H.R. Spennemann, "For Whom the Bell Tolls: Practitioners' Views on Bell-Ringing Practice in Contemporary Society in New South Wales (Australia)," *Religions* 11, no. 425 (January 2020): 24.

<sup>21</sup> Usman and Ahmad Ghufran Ferdiant, "The Tradition of Early *Azan* Beyond the Fasting of Ramadhan in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 3, no. 1 (January-June 2018): 1.

very substantive for the existence of Muslims.<sup>22</sup> Bilal bin Rabbah is the first muezzin (a person who voices the *azan*) in the second year of Hijri. Bilal voiced the *azan* from the top of the mosque's minaret as a sign of prayer times for Muslims. Bilal has a loud and melodious voice.<sup>23</sup> However, in practice, voicing the *azan* using a loudspeaker as a call to worship and a sign of spiritually oriented piety identity<sup>24</sup> is considered to cause noise in public spaces<sup>25</sup> because loudspeakers make the *azan* heard not only in the internal area of the Muslim places of worship but also out into the external area or public space of other communities.<sup>26</sup> This condition requires further regulation.

If there are no regulations on using the mosque's loudspeaker, the sound of the sacred *azan* may become noise pollution for others.<sup>27</sup> Crochet calls it noise is spiritual death.<sup>28</sup> The Indonesia Ministry of Religious Affairs once regulated loudspeakers in mosques and musallas. The regulation was in force through the Instruction of the Director-General of Islamic Community Guidance Number Kep/D/101/1978 concerning Guidelines for Using Loudspeakers in mosque and musalla.<sup>29</sup> However, the

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<sup>22</sup> Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 12-13.

<sup>23</sup> Richard J. H. Gottheil, "The Origin and History of the Minaret," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 30, no. 2 (March 1910): 10.

<sup>24</sup> Tamimi Arab Pooyan, *Amplifying Islam in the European Soundscape: Religious Pluralism and Secularism in the Netherlands* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 23.

<sup>25</sup> T.S. Lee, "Technology and the Production of Islamic Space: The Call to Prayer in Singapore," in René T. A. Lysloff and Leslie & Gay, eds., *Music and Technoculture* (Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 40.

<sup>26</sup> Dania Shofi Maziyah, "Batasan Pengaturan Forum Eksternum dalam Pembentukan Peraturan Perundang-undangan di Indonesia," *Tesis (Surabaya: Universitas Airlangga, 2019)*, 44-45.

<sup>27</sup> Siti Aliyuna Pratisti, "Negotiating Soundscape: Practice and Regulation of Azan in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 10, no. 2 (June 2020): 76.

<sup>28</sup> Crochet, "About Noise in Religious Context: Religious Communication Perspective," 40.

<sup>29</sup> Perdana Putra Pangestu, "Harmonisasi Sosial Perkotaan: Telaah Probabilitas Konflik Pada Tradisi Bangun Sahur Atas Regulasi Pengeras Suara Masjid," *Jurnal Penelitian* 15, no. 1 (Februari 2021): 162.

implementation of the regulation failed in some communities.<sup>30</sup> The use of loudspeakers in Muslim places of worship goes without rules, guidance, and supervision. Finally, after 40 years, the Indonesia Ministry of Religious Affairs issued a Circular Letter to the Director-General of Islamic Community Guidance Number B.3940/DJ.III/Hk.00.7/08/2018 concerning the Implementation of the Instructions of the Director-General of Islamic Community Guidance Number Kep/D/101/1978 concerning Guidelines for Using Loudspeakers in mosques and musallas.<sup>31</sup> On February 18, 2022, the Circular was confirmed by the Circular Letter of the Minister of Religious Affairs Number 5 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for Using Loudspeakers in Mosques and Musallas. This latest Circular has reaped pros and cons in the community.<sup>32</sup>

Those Circulars intend to regulate the use of loudspeakers when voicing the *azan*. If it is not regulated, it conflicts with other communities human rights and interests. Many people feel bothered by the use of loudspeakers in mosques, but there is nothing they can do about it.<sup>33</sup> Past studies regarding this topic were written by Renteln,<sup>34</sup> Crochet,<sup>35</sup> Bhatnagar,<sup>36</sup> Arab,<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hasdar, "Persepsi Masyarakat Terhadap Pembatasan Pengeras Suara oleh Dirjen Bimas Islam Kemenag RI di Sinjai," *Skripsi* (Sinjai: Program Studi Bimbingan Penyuluhan Islam, Fakultas Ushuluddin dan Komunikasi Islam Institut Agama Islam Muhammadiyah Sinjai, 2019), 97.

<sup>31</sup> See Ismatu Ropi, *Religion and Regulation in Indonesia* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 43-50.

<sup>32</sup> Mansyur, "Kisah Pro-Kontra Pengeras suara Masjid: Aturan Pengeras Suara Diperbarui Usai 44 Tahun," <https://jejakrekam.com>, March 3, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Wahib, "Pelantang Sumbang Citra Buruk Untuk Islam," February 25, 2022, <https://youtu.be/oq65V1L-aLA>.

<sup>34</sup> Alison Dundes Renteln, "The Tension between Religious Freedom and Noise Law: The Call to Prayer in a Multicultural Society," in Hanoch Dagan et al., eds., *Religion and the Discourse of Human Rights* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2014), 375-411.

<sup>35</sup> Soizick Crochet, "About Noise in Religious Context: Religious Communication Perspective," *CoverAge: Journal of Strategic Communication* 7, no. 1 (2016): 28-42.

<sup>36</sup> Vikas Bhatnagar, "Noise Pollution Vis-À-Vis Freedom of Religion," *Bharati Law Review* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1-10.

<sup>37</sup> Pooyan Tamimi Arab, *Amplifying Islam in the European Soundscape: Religious Pluralism and Secularism in the Netherlands* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

Harahap,<sup>38</sup> Syahputra,<sup>39</sup> Pratisti,<sup>40</sup> Moosa,<sup>41</sup> and Sultan et al.<sup>42</sup> To fill in the gap of previous studies, this qualitative research aims to explain the pros and cons of Indonesia's state policy on the guidelines for using loudspeakers in Muslim places of worship.

This study is qualitative.<sup>43</sup> The study data includes primary data and secondary data. The primary data were obtained from state regulations (Indonesia Ministry of Religious Affairs) regarding guidelines for using loudspeakers in Muslim places of worship. The secondary data were obtained from studies using a loudspeaker for the *azan* in the last five years. Data were collected by examining literary sources relevant to the research objective, i.e., the pros and cons of state policy on the guideline for using loudspeakers in mosques and musallas. The current study employed content and thematic analyses in qualitative research, which are revealed thematically. Data were analyzed to understand the reactions of Indonesians who are either in favor of or against the government policy on the guidelines for loudspeaker use. The present study examined regulations that specifically relate to the scope/limitation of 'noise,' wherein loudspeakers' time of use and volume serve as indicators, then compared them to the public's reaction.

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<sup>38</sup> Syahrin Harahap, et al., "The Phenomenon of Social and Religious Conflicts in Tanjungbalai, Medan, Indonesia," *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 22, no. 8 (2017): 31-39.

<sup>39</sup> Iswandi Syahputra, "Penggunaan Media Sosial dan Kemarahan Religius Dalam Kasus Pembakaran Vihara di Kota Tanjungbalai, Indonesia," *Epistemé* 13, no. 1 (June 2018): 149-172.

<sup>40</sup> Siti Aliyuna Pratisti, "Negotiating Soundscape: Practice and Regulation of Azan in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 10, no. 2 (2020): 75-83.

<sup>41</sup> Najma Moosa, "How Loud Is Too Loud? Competing Rights to Religious Freedom and Property and the Muslim Call to Prayer (*Azan*) in South Africa," *Religions* 12, no. 349 (2021): 1-33.

<sup>42</sup> M. Iqbal Sultan, et al., "Disclosing Behind Mosque and Musalla Loudspeaker Policy Report: Analysis of Kompas.com and Detik.com," *Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi*, 16, no. 2 (2023): 238-258.

<sup>43</sup> John Guenther and Ian Falk, "Generalising from Qualitative Evaluation," *Evaluation Journal of Australasia* 2, no. 1 (June 2021): 1-16.; Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods* (London: Sage Publications, 1980), 80-100.

The researchers chose three regulations based on the availability of access,<sup>44</sup> namely: First, the Instructions of the Director-General of Guidance for Islamic Society of the Indonesia Ministry of Religious Affairs Number Kep/D/101/1978 concerning Guidelines for Using Loudspeakers in Mosque and Musalla; Second, Circular Letter of the Director-General of Islamic Community Guidance Number B. 3940/DJ.III/Hk.00.7/08/2018 concerning the Implementation of the Instructions of the Director-General of Islamic Community Guidance Number Kep/D/101/1978 concerning Guidelines for the Use of Loudspeakers in Mosques and Musallas; and Third, Circular Letter of the Indonesia Minister of Religious Affairs Number 5 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for the Use of Loudspeakers in Mosques and Musallas. This study also uses the comparative law method to look for similarities and differences between the contents of regulations related to the guidelines for using a loudspeaker for the *azan*.<sup>45</sup>

Researchers have an interest in determining which regulations are the most likely and appropriate to provide information in explaining the research problem. This study starts by selecting the relevant regulations. Data on regulations and literature are categorized thematically based on the information obtained. Existing studies on this topic can be categorized thematically into three main themes. First, the theme relating to the noise of loudspeakers for *azan* and religious freedom written by Renteln,<sup>46</sup> Crochet,<sup>47</sup> Bhatnagar,<sup>48</sup> Arab,<sup>49</sup> and Moosa.<sup>50</sup> Second, the theme

<sup>44</sup> J. Stokes, *How to do Media and Cultural Studies* (London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2019), 20.

<sup>45</sup> Maurice Adams and John Griffiths, eds., *Practice and Theory in Comparative Law* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 279-301.

<sup>46</sup> Alison Dundes Renteln, "The Tension between Religious Freedom and Noise Law: The Call to Prayer in a Multicultural Society," in Hanoch Dagan et al., eds., *Religion and the Discourse of Human Rights* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2014), 375-411.

<sup>47</sup> Soizick Crochet, "About Noise in Religious Context: Religious Communication Perspective," *CoverAge: Journal of Strategic Communication* 7, no. 1 (2016): 28-42.

<sup>48</sup> Vikas Bhatnagar, "Noise Pollution Vis-À-Vis Freedom of Religion," *Bharati Law Review* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1-10.

relating to the noise of loudspeakers for *Azan* and conflict resolution was written by Harahap<sup>51</sup> and Syahputra.<sup>52</sup> Third, the theme relating to the noise of loudspeakers for *Azan* and regulation was written by Pratisti<sup>53</sup> and Sultan et al.<sup>54</sup> Unlike these past studies, my current study elaborates on the relationship between regulating loudspeakers for *azan* (limitation of volume and time) and the pros and cons of public reactions. The data categorization aims to answer the research problem. The categorized data is tested using various theories or relevant literature. Furthermore, the data is analyzed descriptively-interpretatively<sup>55</sup> Moreover, it presented conceptual themes as new research findings.

### **The Soundscape of Religious Noising: Moderation between Freedoms and Harmony**

The term 'soundscapes' was coined by the Finnish geographer Granö in his 1929 work 'Reine Geographie'. The term was used to describe a listener-centric acoustic environment.<sup>56</sup> The soundscape

<sup>49</sup> Pooyan Tamimi Arab, *Amplifying Islam in the European Soundscape: Religious Pluralism and Secularism in the Netherlands* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

<sup>50</sup> Najma Moosa, "How Loud Is Too Loud? Competing Rights to Religious Freedom and Property and the Muslim Call to Prayer (*Azan*) in South Africa," *Religions* 12, no. 349 (2021): 1-33.

<sup>51</sup> Syahrin Harahap, et al., "The Phenomenon of Social and Religious Conflicts in Tanjungbalai, Medan, Indonesia," *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 22, no. 8 (2017): 31-39.

<sup>52</sup> Iswandi Syahputra, "Penggunaan Media Sosial dan Kemarahan Religius Dalam Kasus Pembakaran Vihara di Kota Tanjungbalai, Indonesia," *Epistemé* 13, no. 1 (June 2018): 149-172.

<sup>53</sup> Siti Aliyuna Pratisti, "Negotiating Soundscape: Practice and Regulation of *Azan* in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 10, no. 2 (2020): 75-83.

<sup>54</sup> M. Iqbal Sultan, et al., "Disclosing Behind Mosque and Musalla Loudspeaker Policy Report: Analysis of Kompas.com and Detik.com," *Profetik Jurnal Komunikasi*, 16, no. 2 (2023): 238-258.

<sup>55</sup> J. Miles and P. Gilbert, eds., "Descriptive and Interpretive Approaches to Qualitative Research," in *A Handbook of Research Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71-80.

<sup>56</sup> J.D. Porterous and Mastin J.F., "Soundscapes," *J Architect Plan Res* 2, no. 3 (1985): 169-86. See also Dongxu Zhang et al., "Soundscape in Religious Historical Buildings: a Review," *Heritage Science* 12, no. 45 (2024): 8-9.

is a concept for identifying or recognizing a place by certain sounds or voices representing its cultural identity.<sup>57</sup> The places referred to here are the mosque and musalla, and the sound refers to the *azan*. According to Howes<sup>58</sup> and Thomas,<sup>59</sup> The sound of the *azan* is an acoustic artifact of the Muslim community that is both public and private. On the other hand, Bull, Farina, and Schulte-Fortkamp contend that sound does not distinguish between public and private spaces, as it is formless.<sup>60</sup> This means that in public spaces where everyone can hear a sound, the sound of the *azan* is for public consumption. Therefore, sounding the *azan* through a loudspeaker that everyone in public can hear is equivalent to sounding a siren from an ambulance or fire engine. The sound of the siren can no longer be considered a private sound, as anyone within its range can hear it.

However, the sound of the *azan* through a loudspeaker is incomparable with that in the context of a different nature, e.g., an ambulance or fire engine siren. This is because the *azan* contains religious lyrics or sentences. Using loudspeakers to sound the *azan* has led to disputes in several countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands. The *azan* as a call to prayer for Muslims is protected by the German constitution, for example, because freedom of worship extends to public advocacy for one's beliefs.<sup>61</sup> In the Netherlands, mosques have the legal right to sound the *azan* using loudspeakers. It has the same legal status as ringing church bells during religious ceremonies. This law allows local governments to

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<sup>57</sup> Schafer R. Murray, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 2011), 23.

<sup>58</sup> David Howes, "Scent, Sound and Synesthesia: Intersensoriality and Material Culture Theory," in Christopher Tilley et al., eds., *Handbook of Material Culture* (London et al.: SAGE Publications, 2006), 161-172.

<sup>59</sup> Julian Thomas, *Time, Culture and Identity: An Interpretative Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge 1996), 11-22.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000), 10-20; Almo Farina, *Soundscape Ecology: Principles, Patterns, Methods, and Applications* (Netherlands: Springer, 2014), 4; Brigitte Schulte-Fortkamp et al., *Soundscapes: Human and Their Acoustic Environment* (London: Springer, 2023), 11.

<sup>61</sup> Allievi Steffano, *Mosques in Europe: Why a Solution has Become a Problem* (London: Alliance Publishing Trust, 2010), 1-4.

regulate the frequency, duration, and volume of public calls for religious services, such as the *azan*. Its purpose is to prevent potential disturbances in the community caused by noise from loudspeakers used for the *azan*.

Noise can be defined as unwanted noise that may cause discomfort to its listeners.<sup>62</sup> According to the World Health Organization (WHO), noise is any sound that is no longer necessary and adversely affects the quality of life, health, and wellbeing. According to the Decree of the Indonesian Minister of Environment No. 48 of 1996, noise refers to unwanted sound at certain levels and periods originating from activities that may cause problems for human health and environmental wellbeing/comfort. According to the Ministerial Decree, the standard quality of noise level in places of worship is 55 dB (fifty-five decibels).<sup>63</sup> Hence, religious noise from loudspeakers in places of worship is produced, given that it exceeds the aforementioned standard quality of noise level. Meanwhile, the 2022 Circular Letter regulates the volume of loudspeakers according to the need, with a maximum of 100 dB (decibels). Based on these definitions and limits, there are two indicators of noise. First, in cases where noise causes problems in human health. Second, in cases where noise causes problems with environmental wellbeing/comfort, Azan's use of loudspeakers should balance two factors, individual and public rights, so that the generated noise does not cause problems with human health and environmental wellbeing/comfort.

In religion, state policy aims to balance the two implementations of rights: freedom as an individual right and restrictions (regulations) as a public right.<sup>64</sup> Individual (internal) rights include the right of freedom to manifest religion and

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<sup>62</sup> Soizick Crochet, "About Noise in Religious Context: Religious Communication Perspective," *Journal of Strategic Communication* 7, no. 1 (2016): 29.

<sup>63</sup> Crochet, "About Noise in Religious Context: Religious Communication Perspective," 30.

<sup>64</sup> Marzuki Wahid dan Rumadi, *Fikih Madzhab Negara: Kritik atas Politik Hukum Islam di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2001), 23-24.

worship for each religious community.<sup>65</sup> It is under the words of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia Article 28 E paragraph (1) and Article 29 paragraph (2).<sup>66</sup> The public (external) right is that people must submit to government policies stipulated by law when exercising their rights, such as not disturbing public order and peace.<sup>67</sup> It is stated in Article 28J paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Restrictions on freedom rights have also been regulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). However, the restrictions on the right to freedom of religion in the UDHR and Article 18 paragraph (3) of the ICCPR are very different. Article 18 paragraph (3) of ICCPR emphasizes restrictions only on the right to manifest religion (forum externum), not on the right to maintain/to change religion (forum internum),<sup>68</sup> while in UDHR, these restrictions are generalized.<sup>69</sup> Western countries (Europe and America) also impose restrictions on the rights to religion; for

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<sup>65</sup> Audrey Lebret, "Covid-19 Pandemic and Derogation to Human Rights," *Journal of Law and the Biosciences* 1, no. 1 (January 2020): 1-15.

<sup>66</sup> Wirjono Prodjodikoro, *Asas-Asas Hukum Tata Negara Indonesia* (Bandung: Sumur, 1983), 40.

<sup>67</sup> Hanif Nur Widhiyanti, et al., "Limitation of Religious Freedom in Response to Covid-19," *Diponegoro Law Review* 6, no. 1 (January 2021): 78-95; Malcolm Evans, "The Freedom of Religion or Belief in the European Court of Human Rights since the Kokkinakis Case or 'Quoting Kokkinakis,'" in *The European Court of Human Rights and the Freedom of Religion or Belief* (Boston: Brill Nijhoff, 2019), 33-54; Peter Petkoff, "Forum Internum and Forum Externum in Canon Law and Public International Law with a Particular Reference to the Jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights," *Religion and Human Rights* 7, no. 3 (May 2012): 83-214.

<sup>68</sup> Article 18, paragraph (3) of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights reads, "Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others."

<sup>69</sup> Article 29, paragraph (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads, "In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely to secure due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society."

example, some of their provisions prohibit mosques from using loudspeakers.<sup>70</sup>

The rationale for the balance (moderate) between restrictions (external) and freedom of religion (internal) in Indonesia is manifested in the four sectors of state policy, which are religion and politics, religion and public services, religion and law, religion and public expression.<sup>71</sup> Specifically for the last sector, meaning that the state gives freedom to people to express their religion in public spaces; for example, voicing the *azan* with a loudspeaker is allowed as long as it fulfills the five provisions of religious moderation, namely following applicable legal provisions; does not violate human dignity; obeying mutual agreements; does not disturb public order; respecting the freedom of others.<sup>72</sup> In this regard, the policy regarding guidelines for the use of loudspeakers in voicing the *azan* in mosques and musallas is issued to regulate the volume and time in using a loudspeaker in public spaces (the guidelines do not prohibit or limit the *azan*).<sup>73</sup>

### **Pros and Cons of the Use of Mosque Loudspeakers: Textual and Rational Towards Loudspeaker Moderation**

Since they were first used in the 1930s, loudspeakers for the *azan* raised pros and cons. The term *aspek* (*anti-speaker*) was coined to call a group that opposes using loudspeakers to voice the *azan*.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Religious Rights and Freedoms in the Perspective of Islam, UDHR, and Indonesian-ness," Paper presented at the National Workshop on the National Human Rights Commission, 10 Years of Reform, Quo Vadis for the Advancement and Enforcement of Human Rights in Indonesia, Borobudur Hotel, Jakarta 8-11 (July 2008): 3.

<sup>71</sup> Hannah M. Ridge, "State Regulation of Religion: The Effect of Religious Freedom on Muslims' Religiosity," *Religion, State & Society* 48, no. 4 (May 2020): 256-275; James et al., eds., *Religion and the Public Sphere: New Conversations* (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), 23-33.

<sup>72</sup> Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), 34-40.

<sup>73</sup> Cynthia Brougher, "Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Institutions: A Constitutional Analysis," *Congressional Research Service* 1, no. 2 (June 2014): 7.

<sup>74</sup> Deden Indra Maulana, "Konflik dan Integrasi Komunitas Masyarakat Islam Anti-speaker (Aspek) dengan Masyarakat Islam non Anti-Speaker (Non Aspek): Kasus di Desa Kanoman Kecamatan Cibeber Kabupaten Cianjur," *Tesis* (Bandung: UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2014), 17-30.

Referring to textualist groups that are against loudspeaker regulations, such as the *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS), frequently abbreviated to PKS, the Ministry of Religious Affairs should not regulate technical matters related to worship, such as the use of loudspeakers for the *azan* and recitation in the community. Instead, such regulations can be managed by the community itself. On the other hand, nationalist groups such as Muhammadiyah and NU favor loudspeaker regulations, but they also emphasize the need to improve the quality of loudspeaker technicians. Loudspeakers were first used in mosques in Surakarta to amplify the sound of the *azan* to the surrounding environment.<sup>75</sup> However, some mosques and musallas also refuse to use it.<sup>76</sup> Since the 1960s, the Japanese trademark TOA has encouraged the widespread use of loudspeakers in mosques and musallas in Indonesia, although some refuse to use them. For example, the Great Mosque of Al-Azhar Jakarta was built in 1958, and it was only willing to use a loudspeaker in the 1970s.<sup>77</sup> However, over time, loudspeakers in mosques have become increasingly common, bringing all the advantages and concerns of the use.

Audah, Wahid, and Boediono once voiced their concern over the mosque's loudspeaker issue. Audah said, "Let us see from a religious perspective, for example, is it justifiable to use loud voices for worship, which goes beyond the environmental boundaries? Religion forbids such acts. It may disturb other people who worship at their house. There is also a sound from the mosque screaming to wake people up before dawn by force, with loud voices, during *tarhim*, and so on (in fact, only cassettes are installed). However, we do not know the conditions in our environment. Not everyone is happy with it. People who worship

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<sup>75</sup> H.M Dijk and Constant Van De Wall, "A European-Javanese Composer," in E. Barendregt. B. & Bogaerts, eds., *Recollecting Resonances: Indonesian-Dutch Musical Encounters* (Netherland: BRILL, 2014), 101.

<sup>76</sup> Nur Hidayanti dan Fahmi Irfani, "Konservatism dan Pola Pendidikan Islam di Masyarakat Kampung Salabentar Jampang Kecamatan Gunung Sindur," *Fikrah: Journal of Islamic Education* 2, no. 1 (Juni 2018): 26-27.

<sup>77</sup> Abdullah Hakam Shah, et al., "Tipologi Keislaman Jamaah Masjid Agung Al-Azhar (MAA)," *Jurnal Al-Azhar Indonesia Seri Humaniora* 2, no. 3 (March 2014): 1.

in their homes, and maybe some are sick, will feel disturbed. Many verses of the Qur'an and Hadith forbid us from using loud voices when worshiping, and we should use a loudspeaker that is hundreds of times louder than ordinary voices. A mosque or musalla that is too noisy will lose its solemnity and will no longer be like a place of worship. It can even be considered a zirar mosque, which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ordered the mosque to be demolished. When the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) chose Bilal as a muezzin, it was not because of his loud voice, but because of his melodious voice.<sup>78</sup>

In line with Audah, Wahid, who represents the internal voice of Muslims, also criticized the use of loudspeakers in voicing the *azan*. According to Wahid, "The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that there are three types of people who are free from religious obligations, namely those who are insane (until they recover), those who are drunk (until they wake up), and those who are asleep (until they wake up). A person does not have any obligations when he/she sleeps. Thus, there is no reason to wake a sleeping person for prayer unless there is a legitimate reason in religion. Common sense is sufficient as a basis for reconsidering the etiquette of loud sounds or voices in the middle of the night, particularly when preceded by prolonged *tarhim* and *tilawah*. Additionally, it would be even more inappropriate in cases where technology such as digital players broadcast these loud sounds or voices. At the same time, the mosque administrator slumbers soundly at home."<sup>79</sup> At that time, the Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia, Boediono, once said, "We all understand very well that the *azan* is a holy call for Muslims to carry out their prayer obligations. However, other people may also feel the same way as I do: that the faint sound of the *azan* from afar is deeper to our hearts than that that is too loud, stomping, and too close to our ears."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ali Audah, "Harian Kami" edition 26 March 1971.

<sup>79</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, "Islam Kaset dan Kebisingannya," *Tempo*, February 20, 1982.

<sup>80</sup> Boediono, "Muktamar Dewan Masjid Indonesia," April 27, 2012.

The pros and cons of using the mosque's loudspeaker for the *azan* resurfaced after the issuance of Circular Letter Number 5 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for Using Loudspeakers in Mosques and Musallas.<sup>81</sup> Those who are pro think that the Circular does not prohibit Muslims from using a loudspeaker in carrying out their religious symbols but in the context of regulating religious expression in public spaces. The regulations are necessary not to violate the peace, order, and comfort of living together as a nation. The Circular generally regulates three main things: time, loudspeaker volume, and sound quality, to be set at a moderate point.<sup>82</sup> Those who support the regulations of the mosque's loudspeaker have four reasons. First, precedents from higher authorities. For example, the government of Saudi Arabia has restricted the country's use of loudspeakers. The mosques' loudspeakers in Saudi Arabia are limited in their ability to voice the *azan* (the call to prayer) and *iqamat* (the call to stand up to prayer), and the volume is limited to a third of the original volume.<sup>83</sup> Second, religious law. For example, The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) teaches that all worshipers who pray and ask Allah SWT must not hurt or discomfort each other by reciting aloud during prayer. Third, general moral principles such as sympathy and empathy. For example, adherents of Islam will too object if they hear loudspeakers sounding the teachings of other religions in their homes. Fourth is the principle of spirituality. For example, Jalaluddin Rumi once said, "Silence is the language of God. All else is poor translation."<sup>84</sup>

Meanwhile, those who oppose the policy regarding the regulation of loudspeakers have reasons regarding the legal status and content of the legal material. From the perspective of legal status, the Circular regarding loudspeaker regulation is not part of the hierarchy of laws and regulations in Indonesia, so it is not a

<sup>81</sup> Redaktur, "Pro-Kontra Aturan Penggunaan Pengeras Suara, Dewan Masjid: Aturan Dibuat Agar Masyarakat Harmonis," *KompasTV*, February 24, 2022.

<sup>82</sup> Berita Sorotan Kampus, February 25, 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Saudi Gazette, March 24, 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Denny, J.A., "Empat Alasan Mengapa Menteri Agama Soal Pengeras Suara Masjid Perlu Didukung," *Publika*, February 27, 2022.

legal product and, therefore, has no binding force.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the Circular should be intended to educate and foster the community and not to take action against the community (supervision). Regarding the content of the legal material, there are two issues: voice and time.<sup>86</sup> As explained in the Circular, it is necessary to consider the quality and feasibility of the voice transmitted through a loudspeaker. The voice must meet two conditions: sound suitable or not discordant and use excellent and correct pronunciation. A measure of good in the pronunciation of religious language should be adjusted to the culture of the surrounding community and not intervened by the state.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, regulations regarding the time of 5 minutes, 10 minutes, or 15 minutes are better left to the habits of the surrounding congregation so that the state does not exceed its authority and does not regulate it too deeply. Adapting to local culture is one of the basic principles of religious moderation.<sup>88</sup>

To bridge the pros and cons of using loudspeakers for *azan*, the role of technology can be deemed an alternative choice. Insofar as individuals have a right to a call to prayer, governments should follow a principle of maximum accommodation. In this context, although loudspeakers are not critical in notifying members of the group of the time of prayer, other modes of communication also serve this purpose. The use of new forms of technology offers a possible means for notifying followers effectively without disturbing nonmembers of the religious group. This could be achieved through messages sent on radio broadcasts, text messages to mobile phones, or those sent via new forms of social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook.<sup>89</sup> According to Lee,

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<sup>85</sup> Hasanuddin Hasim, "Hierarki Peraturan Perundang-Undangan Negara Republik Indonesia Sebagai Suatu Sistem," *Madani Legal Review* 1, no. 2 (Desember 2017): 125.

<sup>86</sup> "Pengeras Suara Masjid, Kini Diatur?," *TvOne*, February 24, 2022.

<sup>87</sup> See Jaco Beyers, "Religion and Culture: Revisiting a Close Relative," *AOSIS: Theological Studies* 73, no. 1 (July 2017): 8.

<sup>88</sup> Syaifudin Zuhri, "Regimented Islamophobia: Islam, State, and Governmentality in Indonesia," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (June 2021): 387-422.

<sup>89</sup> Alison Dundes Renteln, "The Tension between Religious Freedom and Noise Law: The Call to Prayer in a Multicultural Society," in Hanoch Dagan et al.,

Singapore is one of the countries that implements such a policy.<sup>90</sup> He demonstrates how leaders in the Muslim community support alternative means of calling their members to prayer after there were objections to the use of loudspeakers.<sup>91</sup> After a series of consultations with the government about its noise abatement campaign,<sup>92</sup> Islamic organizations agreed to three changes: (1) Reduce the amplitude of loudspeakers in existing mosques, where they remain facing outside. (2) Re-direct loudspeakers toward the interior of new mosques to be built in the future, and (3) Broadcast the call to prayer five times a day over the radio.<sup>93</sup>

On the other hand, the principle of moderation (loudspeaker moderation) can be applied to bridge the pros and cons of using call-to-prayer loudspeakers. Moderation in the use of loudspeakers for *azan* in Indonesia employs the principle of balancing two extreme poles between religious commitment (esoteric), manifested through *azan* as one of the means for spreading the words of Islam, and religious spirit (exoteric), manifested through loudspeakers as a medium.<sup>94</sup> Muslims believe and know that *azan* is a ritual of utmost importance that must be carried out to indicate times for performing obligatory prayers.<sup>95</sup> Such awareness is considered a religious commitment.<sup>96</sup> However,

eds., *Religion and the Discourse of Human Rights* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2014), 403.

<sup>90</sup> Tong Soon Lee, "Technology and the Production of Islamic Space: The Call to Prayer in Singapore," *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 1 (1999): 86.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Watkin, "A Happy Noise to Hear? Church Bells and the Law of Nuisance," *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 4, no. 1 (1996): 545–555.

<sup>92</sup> Thio Li-ann, "Pragmatism and Realism Do Not Mean Abdication: A Critical and Empirical Inquiry into Singapore's Engagement with International Human Rights Law," *Singapore Year Book of International Law* 41, no. 1 (2004): 42.

<sup>93</sup> Tong Soon Lee, "Technology and the Production of Islamic Space: The Call to Prayer in Singapore," *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 1 (1999): 91.

<sup>94</sup> Sakban Lubis et al., "The Relevance of Jamal Al-Banna's Islamic Legal Thoughts with Religious Moderation in Indonesia," *Al-Istibath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 8, no. 1 (2022): 243.

<sup>95</sup> Srishti Maitra, "Azan as a Form of Chanting: The Islamic Sound World of Kolkata," *Society and Culture in South Asia* 1, no. 2 (2022): 23.

<sup>96</sup> Medina Chodijah and Salwa Mahalle, "The Muslim's Meaning of Life: How Religious Commitment and Attachment to God Influenced it?," *Khazanah Theologia* 5, no. 1 (2023): 65.

on the other hand, *azan*'s religious spirit, manifested through loudspeakers, indeed involves other groups in the community as a religious expression in public.<sup>97</sup> Religious expression and spirit that enter the public domain, in practice, require values of tolerance, ethics, and even regulations issued by the government.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

This study finds the concept of loudspeaker moderation as an alternative rational explanation for the pros and cons of the state policy in regulating the use of loudspeakers in voicing the *azan*. This finding helps strengthen the moderate da'wah model by using loudspeakers to develop Islamic da'wah within Indonesia's diversity and social heterogeneity. Loudspeaker moderation integrates three pillars, namely the landmark (mosque), the soundmark (*azan*), and the ethicmark (guidelines for the use of loudspeakers and religious harmony). Loudspeaker Moderation also aims to balance the logic of thinking between religious freedom and religious harmony, the positive aspects of loudspeakers and the negative aspects of loudspeakers, the internal use of loudspeakers and external use of loudspeakers, the private sphere, and the public sphere. There are two functions of the mosque's loudspeaker, namely for the use in the internal area inside the mosque and the external area outside the mosque. Inappropriate use of the mosque's loudspeaker means using the internal loudspeaker for external purposes and using the external loudspeaker for internal purposes. Therefore, it is necessary to exercise the Loudspeaker moderation. Using the external loudspeaker for external purposes (with adjustment of volume, time, and solemnity of the sound), for example, for the *azan* and *iqamat* only, and using the internal loudspeaker for internal purposes, for example, for prayer, *zikr*, praying, and reciting the Qur'an. The three pillars, namely the landmark (the function of the mosque), the sound mark soundscapes (*azan*), and the ethic mark

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<sup>97</sup> Simon Thompson, "The Regulation of Religion in Public Spaces," *Politics and Religion* 2, no. 1 (2022): 4.

<sup>98</sup> Thompson, 14-15.

(guidelines for the use of loudspeakers), should work synergistically.

The findings of this study may have implications for factors that may provide a rational understanding of the policy on regulating loudspeakers in places of worship, especially in mosques and musallas throughout Indonesia. Besides Indonesia, other countries such as Saudi Arabia have implemented regulations using the mosque's loudspeaker. Sanctions or penalties apply to all who violate the regulations. The pros and cons regarding the regulation of the mosque's loudspeaker are caused by two perspectives in viewing the religious policy: religious harmony on the one hand and human rights on the other. These two perspectives should be balanced with the third perspective, solemnity, and culture, to regulate the noise of the *azan* coming out from the loudspeaker. Besides the need for in-depth study on academic texts of the guidelines for the use of the mosque's loudspeaker, in its implementation, the Indonesia Ministry of Religious Affairs should continuously communicate with the Indonesian Ulama Council, the Indonesian Mosque Council, Islamic Community Organizations, and the Forum for Religious Harmony (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama* – FKUB).

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