

# THE SPATIAL POLITICS OF MOSQUES: CONTESTED AUTHORITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SPLIT IN MAKASSAR'S POST-ISLAMIST URBAN SOCIETY

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## ***ABSTRACT***

*This study investigates the paradoxical duality of urban mosques in Makassar, Indonesia, which simultaneously serve as centers of spiritual vitality and arenas of spatial and ideological contestation. We argue that this duality constitutes a spatial symptom of the collective psychological split among Muslim societies in the post-Islamist era. By applying Asef Bayat's analytical category of post-Islamism—in which political Islam's energy shifts toward socio-cultural piety rather than state control—this study integrates it with Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. The research employs a quantitative descriptive approach with qualitative-theoretical interpretation, utilizing survey data from 307 respondents across 13 sub-districts. The findings reveal a fundamental tension: while mosques demonstrate high congregational satisfaction, good management, and successful adaptation to urban needs, they also exhibit a possessive logic of space. This logic manifests through dense mosque proliferation, soundscape contestation, significant resistance to religious plurality, and persistent ideological contestation within mosque pulpits. These findings challenge the simplistic interpretation of mosque abundance as mere collective piety, revealing instead a tension between psychological fragmentation and collective struggles for spatial domination, both of which undermine principles of inclusive citizenship*

***Keywords:*** Makassar, Post-Islamism, Psychological Split, Spatial Domination, Spatial Politics, Urban Mosques

## **INTRODUCTION**

**F**or Muslims, mosques function not only as houses of worship but also as spaces imbued with complex social and political dimensions. Mosques were among the Prophet's strategic projects

upon his migration to Yathrib; the first project completed by the Prophet was the construction of a mosque, which became a symbol of Islam's presence in Yathrib (al-Mu'nis, 1981). In the subsequent development of Islamic civilization,

mosques became a collective manifestation of the Muslim community in space and simultaneously a symbol of its existence (Shuhaimi & Abdullah, 2012). Specifically in South Sulawesi, the presence of mosques serves as a historical marker of the geographical presence of Muslims; for example, the Old Katangka Mosque marks the territory of the Kingdom of Gowa (Maisyah et al., 2023). Thus, mosques symbolize the Islamization of particular spaces and geographical areas, while also indicating the presence and collective existence of Muslims. Furthermore, mosques play an important role in building social cohesiveness, as they are neutral spaces that can transcend all forms of social class differences. Mosques weave the threads of collective brotherhood and foster social solidarity through religious rituals (Mawani, 2019). Nevertheless, this traditional role in fostering cohesion persists even as mosques in modern urban society have also become sites of spatial necessity and identity contestation in the post-Islamist era (Lussier & Ahnaf, 2024).

Amidst the shift in the ideological agenda from Islamism to post-Islamism—marked by the transition from pursuing an Islamic state to accepting democratic values as a social necessity (Bayat et al., 2013),—the role and function of mosques in urban society have increasingly been seen not only as a public spiritual space but also as an arena of contestation and spatial domination. The rise of piety in urban society has simultaneously led to a proliferation of mosques across the city.

In this complex social reality, mosques can be transformed into symbols of exclusive control over space owned by Muslims, becoming markers of geographical dominance that indirectly exclude other communities. Mosques embody control over space across multiple dimensions: the soundscape (Pratisti, 2020) and physical space through unconscious expansive mechanisms. In urban settings, mosques are thus not

merely places of worship but also arenas of interest-based contestation, reinforcing the identity and spatial ownership over certain geographical areas (Sushanti et al., 2024). This dominant function, however, stands in tension with the positive role of mosques in fostering social cohesion and solidarity (Mawani, 2019). The problem lies precisely in this dual character. While mosques serve as instruments of spatial domination (Samorè, 2024), Indonesian Muslims are simultaneously burdened with the responsibility of moderation projects that emphasize inclusiveness, plurality, and tolerance. A dilemma thus arises: Indonesian Muslims are expected to appear as a tolerant community, yet the density of mosques suggests otherwise—namely, massive spatial domination as an unavoidable consequence of urban society (Crimson, 2002).

This article argues that urban mosques in Makassar have become an arena where the contestation of religious authority—between the drive for exclusive identity, the demands of democratic reality, and the inescapable spatial logic of urban society—unconsciously unfolds within the social reasoning of Muslims. This contestation ultimately gives rise to a psychological split within the Muslim community regarding how mosques are presented in all their dimensions. Accordingly, this study proposes the hypothesis that the abundance of mosques in urban areas cannot be interpreted solely as a new form of collective piety. Rather, it represents a complex reality in which unconscious ideological struggles occur, particularly in the post-Islamist era. Public piety must be balanced with macro-scale political and social agendas, as well as with a critical effort to unravel the unconscious and hidden impulses embedded in more complex collective social behavior. This argument is based on a survey involving 307 respondents distributed across 13 sub-districts in the city of Makassar.

## Literature Review

Studies on mosques are abundant and diverse, and have even developed into an independent field. Rusdi et al. recorded 933 articles from 2013 to 2016 covering economic studies and mosques (Rusdi et al., 2023). Current scholarly works on mosques can generally be mapped into three major clusters. First, a vast majority of studies emphasize the role of mosques as economic catalysts and centers for community empowerment (Azzama & Mulyani, 2019; Fahmi et al., 2023; Kostaman & Amriza, 2023; Mahdi et al., 2024; Muhlis et al., 2023; Mutalib, 2023; Pranata & Maulana, 2024; Ridwanullah & Herdiana, 2018; Rusdi et al., 2023; Supawanhar et al., 2024); Second, scholars have extensively discussed mosques as vital institutions for reinforcing cultural values and religious moderation (Faiz & M Mujibuddin, 2023; Indria et al., 2024; Murdan et al., 2022; Qanita et al., 2025; Rohman et al., 2023; Rosidin, 2024); Third, another prominent strand of research highlights the function of mosques in accelerating political activities and mass mobilization (Ahmanideen & Iner, 2024; Hasan, 2009; Lussier & Ahnaf, 2024; Sheikh et al., 2024). Furthermore, recent studies have begun exploring the socio-spatial dimensions of mosques, ranging from architectural energy consumption (Ahmad et al., 2024; El-Maraghy et al., 2024; Fuadah & Arzaqina, 2025; Khan, n.d.) and geographical distribution density (Himmah & Al Ahsani, 2024) to philosophical interpretations of the meaning of mosques (Nawawi, 2023; Samoeri et al., 2024).

However, to date, region-specific studies that comprehensively assess the performance of mosques from a post-Islamism perspective remain very rare, particularly those that analyze these spatial practices as manifestations of a broader socio-political condition. This scarcity is especially evident when combining survey methods with

qualitative interpretation to analyze the phenomenon of mosques in urban society.

## Conceptual Framework

This article constructs an interdisciplinary analytical lens to examine the phenomenon of mosques in Makassar. The main argument is that surface-level spatial practices, such as architecture (Khan, n.d.), density (Samorè, 2024), and soundscape (Riyanto, 2024), cannot be fully understood without connecting them to the broader socio-political context that gives rise to internal tensions within the Muslim community. To that end, this framework integrates two levels of analysis: a macro-ideological analysis using post-Islamism theory to address why these tensions arise, and a micro-spatial analysis using Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space to address how these tensions are concretely manifested and contested in space.

Following Bayat et al. (2013), the concept of post-Islamism is employed in this study as an analytical category to diagnose the ideological conditions underlying the urban mosque phenomenon in Makassar. Bayat conceptualizes post-Islamism not as an anti-Islamic project, but rather as a condition in which the energy and passion of political Islamism have transformed (Affan, 2024; Bayat et al., 2013). The focus shifts away from capturing state power (Roy, 1994) toward fusing religiosity with rights and Islam with democracy in the socio-cultural sphere (Bayat et al., 2013; Ghani, 2019). It is this transformation that inherently creates a collective psychological split, where ordinary Muslims face a constant pull between the demands to be democratic, inclusive citizens and the enduring urge to manifest exclusive public piety.

Complementing this ideological layer, Lefebvre's theory of the production of space provides a tool for reading how these tensions and psychological splits are materially produced into space. For

Lefebvre (1991), space is not merely an empty volume that has no meaning and significance for humans (Hendra, 2018). Lefebvre argues that space is a social, political, and economic product. Space is not only produced by individual actions, but also by broader social forces, such as the state, capitalism, and racism (Fuchs, 2019; Lefebvre, 1991). The production of space is a stage or process of physical and social space creation, where space is created through social interaction and human activities, such as daily social relationships and the dynamics of power (Fuchs, 2019).

To analyze this spatial production, Lefebvre divides space into a triad: (1) spatial practice (the perceived), which refers to the space directly experienced and shaped by human interactions in daily life; (2) representations of space (the conceived), which is the planned space constructed by social forces such as capitalism, the state, or religious authorities through attached symbols and meanings; and (3) representational space (the lived), which is the space lived symbolically and emotionally by its inhabitants. This lived space often serves as a bottom-up arena where life is experienced fully, acting as a form of resistance or appropriation against the conceived space (Lefebvre, 1991). By applying this framework, researchers can understand space not purely as material factors, but as integral parts of social practices, making the urban mosque both the result and precondition of social production.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative survey approach, complemented by an in-depth qualitative-theoretical interpretation (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). This design was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex phenomena under study without strictly relying on conventional qualitative field data, such as

in-depth interviews. Quantitative data from surveys were used to broadly map the statistical patterns of spatial perceptions and practices in Makassar mosques. Meanwhile, a qualitative-theoretical interpretation was applied to these statistical patterns to explain why and how they emerged as manifestations of deeper socio-political conditions (Moleong, 2017).

The research was conducted between February 2023 and January 2024 in Makassar, a major metropolis in Eastern Indonesia characterized by high socio-religious dynamics. Quantitative sampling was systematically conducted across 13 of the 14 sub-districts on the Makassar mainland, excluding the island sub-district (Sangkarra) due to accessibility constraints. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 307 respondents, consisting of mosque administrators and regular congregants. The respondents were selected using multistage random sampling: the first stage involved randomly selecting representative mosques from each sub-district to ensure geographical distribution, and the second stage involved randomly selecting respondents from these mosques to minimize selection bias. The questionnaire was specifically designed to measure variables such as perceptions of the soundscape, internal management dynamics, sermon content, and resistance to the establishment of other houses of worship.

Data analysis was conducted in two interconnected stages. First, descriptive quantitative analysis: data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to objectively present empirical findings and map the frequencies of key variables indicating spatial contestation and tension (Komara et al., 2022). Second, qualitative-theoretical analysis: rather than processing separate qualitative field data, the quantitative findings were systematically interpreted

through a dual theoretical framework (Ghony et al., 2020). Post-Islamism theory was used to frame these findings in a broader socio-political context, as a symptom of the shift of Islamism's energy to the socio-cultural realm. Furthermore, Lefebvre's theory of space production was used as an analytical tool to analyze these findings as material and spatial manifestations of the psychological division that constitutes the main hypothesis of this study. This analysis process systematically linked empirical data in the field with broader theoretical arguments.

## DISCUSSION

### Mosques and the Representation of Spiritual Vitality in Urban Communities

Although the abundance of mosques in Indonesia reflects strong religious enthusiasm, it also presents unique spatial challenges in an urban context. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Mosque Information System (SIMAS, 2022), there are over 660,000 Islamic places of worship nationwide. In South Sulawesi, particularly in its capital, Makassar, the density is striking. Makassar City alone houses 1,258 mosques distributed across various spatial zones (RRI, n.d.). While this average suggests approximately 933 congregants per mosque, the spatial distribution on the ground is highly uneven.

Makassar is replete with mosques, ranging from commercial districts to narrow, densely populated alleys. Notably, the architectural structure and aesthetic quality of these buildings often serve as a source of prestige for local communities. It is common to find magnificent mosques flanked by traditional houses in lower-to middle-class neighborhoods. This landscape indicates that the community's drive to produce religious spaces remains remarkably high despite economic

constraints. Mosques function as social capital not only for lower- and middle-class communities but also for political elites, who leverage them to garner public sympathy. Thus, as lived spaces, mosques successfully produce social cohesion and a well-functioning communal space.

The majority of mosques in Makassar have been officially recognized and registered with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (72.6%), while a small number remain unregistered, often because they were established long before formal registration requirements existed. This registration process indicates that mosques are understood as legal entities that must be regulated and officially recognized by religious authorities. Regarding their social function, mosques continue to serve as arenas for public cohesion and urban piety, as reflected in the occupancy rate of prayer rows (*shaf*) during daily prayers. For the Maghrib prayer, which takes place after sunset when most urban residents have returned home, the highest occupancy rate—4 rows—was reported by 63.2% of respondents. By contrast, for Dhuhr and Asr prayers, when most urban residents are at work, an average of only 2 rows were reported by 68.4% of respondents. The Friday congregational prayer is always crowded and full, according to 79.8% of respondents. These findings reveal a fairly high level of urban spiritual vitality, despite the high mobility and work demands of urban life. Moreover, the collective spiritual needs of urban communities are well accommodated by mosques as religious spaces.

The findings also demonstrate that mosques in Makassar have adapted to the needs of urban communities as places of worship, particularly in terms of professional management, the cleanliness of worship facilities (including the main prayer hall, ablution areas, and toilets), and the worshipper comfort. At the managerial level, mosques project an image of stability and service orientation, reflecting

the adoption of modern, transparent, and professional governance. Specifically, 88.3% of respondents reported that their mosque employs cleaning staff on a monthly salary to maintain comfort during worship, and 81.8% reported that the mosque is equipped with air conditioning operating during the five daily prayers. In terms of education and quality of religious services, 86.3% of respondents stated that their mosques have imams (also remunerated), and 65.1% reported that regular religious studies are organized by mosque administrators, conducted by professional *da'wah* institutions and competent religious scholars. These findings represent an important achievement, demonstrating that the basic institutional and managerial functions of mosques in Makassar are functioning effectively. The acceptance of modern governance concepts and principles has become evenly embedded across mosques in the city.

### Mosque Density and Space Control: Representation of a Representation of a Split Collective Rationality

Field data successfully reveals another dimension of urban mosques: their function as territorial markers leading to high spatial density. As summarized in Table 1, the quantitative findings indicate significant dynamics regarding spatial control, soundscape contestations, and identity boundaries in Makassar City.

**Table 1:** Indicators of Spatial and Possessive Logic in Makassar Mosque

No	Dimension	Percentage
1	Respondents reporting the presence of two or more closely located mosques	67,1 %
2	Recitation of the Quran/ <i>dhikr</i> broadcast before the <i>adhan</i>	76,2 %
3	Respondents agreeing on the need for regulations to control mosque noise levels	65,8 %
4	Respondents perceiving overlapping pre- <i>adhan</i> sounds as a nuisance	36,8 %
5	Rejection of the establishment of other religious houses of worship	32,2 %
6	Respondents acknowledging attempts by certain groups to control mosque management	23,5 %
7	Mosques claimed privately or by specific organizations	15,3 %

Source: Primary Survey Data, 2023-2024

In the physical-spatial dimension, 67.1% of respondents reported that there were two mosques located within walking distance of each other in their neighborhood. This finding supports the earlier observation of mosque proliferation in Makassar. This proliferation is reinforced by a new trend in philanthropy among business conglomerates, leading to the emergence of private mosques. The data show that 15.3% of respondents acknowledged that the mosques they attend are owned by private individuals or organizations. This phenomenon significantly alters spatial politics: mosques are no longer solely communal property (*waqf*) but have also become private property that signals the status and piety of wealthy individuals, while simultaneously creating more exclusive spatial enclaves. This constitutes the most tangible form of possessive reasoning over space, where sacred space becomes part of private property that affirms class hegemony (Samorè, 2024). The abundance and density of mosques, which quantitatively signify spiritual vitality, also unconsciously foster an impulse toward domination and possessive reasoning over space within the communal subconscious. This is reinforced by the finding that 32.2% of respondents rejected the presence of other houses of worship in their area.

In terms of the soundscape, 76.2% of respondents reported that the Quran or *dhikr* is recited in their mosques before the *adhan* (call to prayer). Notably, 36.8% of respondents perceive these sounds as a nuisance, indicating a divided perception of the same acoustic space. Furthermore, 65.8% of respondents agreed with regulations to control mosque noise. This phenomenon shows that urban communities recognize the abundance of mosques as a symbol of spatial dominance, yet they also desire peace and quiet in their private spaces—a characteristic of individualistic urban communities

(Hirschkind, 2006; Riyanto, 2024). Thus, the density of mosques and the desire to regulate sound intrusion are not two separate phenomena but rather manifestations of the same psychological split in post-Islamist society.

The density of mosques logically creates sonic saturation: when the *syiar* (religious broadcast) from one mosque collides with that of another and permeates private spaces, it ceases to be *syiar* and begins to be perceived as a disturbance. The desire to regulate is an attempt to regain control over lived space, to negotiate the boundaries between sacred-communal space and private-domestic space. In short, the phenomenon of spatial and sound density in mosques is a manifestation of one pole of the psychological split: the urge to assert the exclusivity of identity. On the other hand, the desire to regulate sound is a manifestation of the other pole: the demand to live in civic inclusivity and modern comfort.

The battle for identity has shifted to the socio-cultural realm, where spatial domination through density and sonic domination have become an art of presence that is not articulated politically. From this perspective, the rejection of other places of worship is not merely an act of intolerance but a defensive act to maintain hegemony over a lived space that is perceived as threatened by plurality. Considering mosque property as an absolute Muslim possession indirectly embeds a possessive logic of not sharing space with others. Thus, strong internal cohesion and external friction are two sides of the same coin: both are products of a community that simultaneously seeks to maintain the warmth of its communal space while reflexively asserting the boundaries of its identity in a diverse urban space. The logical consequence is that possessive reasoning, fostered by the abundance and privatization of space, correlates directly with attitudes toward plurality. When a community unconsciously becomes

accustomed to viewing the space around it as "ours," the presence of "the other" is perceived as a threat or intrusion. This context explains why the data on resistance to the establishment of non-Muslim houses of worship are so significant (with a 32.2% rejection rate). This rejection is not an isolated act but the culmination of a long, unconscious process of affirming spatial dominance.

This phenomenon indicates a religious surge that now floods public space, expressed through spatial dominance. Religious fervor is no longer directed toward practical political agendas such as the establishment of an Islamic state, but is instead manifested through the physical domination of spaces of piety (Arifianto, 2020), such as mosques. On the other hand, this phenomenon can be interpreted within Lefebvre's (1991) framework of spatial production as a collective effort to transform perceived space into a landscape that is visually and symbolically dominated by Islam. In a post-Islamist context, where identity energy is no longer channeled through formal politics, the struggle to maintain hegemony over lived space becomes crucial. Thus, the density and proliferation of mosques in Makassar are not merely demographic data. This phenomenon constitutes a social text that reveals a collective psychology: an unconscious impulse for domination born of the dichotomy between the desire to assert identity in a space considered one's own and the demand to coexist in the pluralistic reality of the city.

Therefore, the density of mosques, intra-group management conflicts, and sonic contestations in Makassar are not isolated issues. They are interconnected social texts that reveal a collective psychology: a continuous negotiation between the urge to dominate urban spaces with an exclusive identity and the pragmatic necessity to coexist in a pluralistic, democratic city.

## Mosques and the Contest of Islamist Residual Reasoning

Survey data captured significant empirical evidence of a battle for authority at the micro level—an undercurrent not always visible on the surface. Although representing a minority, these findings indicate deeper contestation. As many as 7.2% of respondents admitted that certain groups sought to control the management of their mosques; 6.8% reported disputes due to positional struggles; and 19.9% confirmed that their mosque is claimed as the base for a particular group, identified as belonging to them. This is a spatial political act that transforms communal space (lived space) into an exclusive ideological space (conceived space).

Similarly, there are still remnants of the Islamist ideological agenda that remain quietly spread across several mosques in Makassar. There are still preachers who use the pulpit as an arena for hate speech (17.3%); campaigns against heresy (22.5%); the issue of the caliphate (27.7%); the heresy of the Shia and Ahmadiyya (12.7%); *jihad* against the democratic system as a system of *thogut* (10.1%); and even conflicts due to *fiqhi* disputes (9.1%). These data show that the residue of Islamist reasoning (Roy, 1994; Tibi, 2012) has transformed and shifted from a formal political project to the socio-cultural realm (Fealy, 2004), specifically grassroots institutions, namely mosques.

Consequently, urban mosques are far from ideologically neutral. They serve as arenas for a war of position where various interpretations of Islam—ranging from moderate to puritanical—compete to control the soul of the institution. The apparent managerial stability on the surface masks a fierce, hidden contestation. This encapsulates post-Islamist dynamics perfectly: when tensions cannot be resolved through formal political channels, they unconsciously spill over into the concrete material spaces of the city. This condition ultimately sustains the collective psychological split within

the Muslim community, which is constantly caught between civic inclusivity and exclusive ideological assertions.

It should be emphasized that the significance of these findings (27.7% *khilafah* issues, 17.3% hate speech, etc.) lies in their contradiction with the satisfaction data of the congregation. How is it possible that a space that is ideologically highly contested is also perceived as a satisfying space by almost all of its users? It is this paradox that reveals the working mechanism of the war of position itself. This indicates a disconnect in the perception of ordinary congregants between the management of the space (cleanliness, punctuality, sound quality) and the ideological content of the space (the content of the pulpit). Ideological groups that aspire to control mosques seem to understand this well. Their strategy is not to win the hearts of all congregants directly, but to control the symbolic apparatus while ensuring that the management of ritual services continues to be satisfactory. Thus, the mosque metamorphoses into a schizophrenic space: a peaceful and satisfying space in the lived space—daily life experience of the congregation—but at the same time an arena for fierce ideological battles in the conceived space, conceptualized space, by the elites and ideological activists who are fighting over it.

## CLOSING

This study identifies a fundamental transformation of mosques in the social reality of urban communities in Makassar. Mosques have proven to have a dual nature: they function as arenas of positive spiritual vitality, providing cohesion and a sense of security that are greatly appreciated by their congregations. However, the abundance and proliferation of mosques that exceed functional needs have given rise to unrecognized negative excesses. When the physical presence of

mosques exceeds the limits of necessity, it indirectly fosters a possessive reasoning over space. As a result, competition and contestation over space—whether sonic, physical, or ideological—become an inevitable social reality in a dense urban landscape.

The negative excesses of this unrecognized domination of space become even more acute when intersecting with the ideological situation of post-Islamism. In this condition, the Islamization of public space, which was previously latent and communal, can now be articulated in an eloquent, overt, and systematic manner by certain ideological groups that aspire to control these spaces. A dangerous disconnect occurs: the majority of urban Muslims may not critically recognize their own impulse toward domination, but groups that espouse post-Islamist ideology are able to mobilize and exploit this impulse, thereby violating the principles of citizenship and inclusive public space.

Therefore, these findings have urgent policy implications. The proliferation of mosques needs serious attention from policymakers. Although the presence of mosques is essential for spiritual vitality, spatial policies must ensure that quantity does not compromise quality. The excessive presence of mosques, which is a physical manifestation of the impulse to dominate space, has been empirically proven to fuel resistance to plurality and become an arena for the residue of Islamist ideology. Without fair policy intervention based on the principle of shared space, the agenda of moderation and tolerance promoted by the state will continue to be eroded by this unconscious yet immensely powerful spatial dynamic.

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