THE SOUND HOREG PHENOMENON: Between Entertainment and Social Disturbance

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Abstract: The phenomenon of *sound horeg*, characterized by the use of high-powered sound systems in public entertainment, has become widespread in Indonesia, particularly in East Java. While it is often perceived as a form of cultural expression and community entertainment, it also raises social concerns due to noise disturbances. This study examines *sound horeg* from social and cultural perspectives using the framework of Religious Moderation. Employing a library research method, this study analyzes academic literature, news reports, and relevant documents. The findings indicate that Religious Moderation offers a balanced analytical framework; the principle of justice requires equal treatment of all forms of public entertainment; and the principle of balance is essential to harmonize cultural values, economic interests, environmental sustainability, public health, and religious considerations. Properly managed, *sound horeg* has the potential to strengthen social cohesion and preserve local wisdom without falling into extremes.

Keywords: Sound horeg, religious moderation, society, culture

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Introduction

Indonesia, as a nation with remarkable cultural diversity, preserves a wide range of local traditions that remain vibrant and dynamic within society. One contemporary phenomenon emerging from the intersection of local cultural practices and technological development is the practice of *sound horeg*.¹ This term refers to the use of high-volume, high-powered sound systems, commonly employed in street parties, wedding celebrations, neighborhood parades, and other community-based entertainment events.² In various regions, particularly in East Java, *sound horeg* has become a symbol of festivity, community identity, and a medium of cultural expression as well as social participation among local communities.³

Nevertheless, the presence of sound horeg does not always yield positive outcomes. The extremely loud sounds, often lasting late into the night have generated frequent complaints from residents who feel disturbed by the noise.4 This situation has led to social tensions between event organizers and local residents, and recurring grievances submitted to law enforcement authorities. Within this context, debates arise between the preservation of cultural practices and the need to maintain public order and communal comfort.⁶ This phenomenon is particularly compelling to study not merely from technical or legal perspectives, but also through social, cultural, and religious lenses. This is especially relevant in the Indonesian context, where the government has continuously promoted Religious Moderation as an approach to fostering social harmony. As a cultural practice that occupies public spaces and involves community participation, sound horeg directly intersects with the mission of Religious Moderation, which emphasizes building a society that is harmonious, tolerant, and respectful of diversity.8 Therefore, this study seeks to examine the phenomenon of sound horeg between entertainment and social disturbance through the perspective of Religious Moderation.

Several previous studies are relevant to the present discussion, each employing different approaches. The first study is entitled "The Influence of Sound Horeg on the Surrounding Environment in the Perspective of Qur'anic Verse Al-A'raf: 31 according to the Interpretation of Ibn Kathir" by Fauzi et al., published in 2024.9 Using a tafsîr approach, this study concludes that the use of sound horeg carries both positive and negative impacts. Ibn Kathir's interpretation of Surah Al-A'raf verse 31 emphasizes the importance of moderation toward the environment, as well as the prohibition of excess, whether in food, drink, or daily behavior. In this case, the message is considered relevant to highlight the moderation in using *sound horeg* to avoid disturbances to society.¹⁰ Secondly, a study entitled "Sound Horeg in the Scale of Sharia: A Jurisprudential and Socio-Community Analysis" by Adhim, published in 2025.11 Through a jurisprudential and socio-community approach, this study reveals that sound horeg not only causes physical disturbances, such as hearing damage and sleep disorders, but also involves elements of immorality, including excessively loud music, dancing deemed inappropriate to social norms, and unrestricted interaction between men and women.¹² Although both research are different from the author's current research, this work remains important for illustrating both the positive and negative dynamics of sound horeg.

In addition, the third study entitled "Analysis of Sound Horeg in East Java: A Hadith Perspective and Its Medical Implications for Noise and Social Ethics" by Saputra, published in 2025.¹³ Through a hadith and public health perspective, this study discovers that the tradition of sound horeg can still be preserved with some adjustments. These adjustments include organizing events in open spaces, maintaining gender segregation, observing modest dress codes, scheduling events not to disrupt religious practices, and controlling volume levels to remain below harmful thresholds.¹⁴

Then, the fourth study entitled "The Effectiveness of Legal Resolutions Concerning Sound Horeg through Restorative Justice" by Parikesit et al., published in 2025.¹⁵ Using a restorative justice approach, this research finds that legal disputes involving sound horeg are more effectively resolved through restorative rather than repressive measures.¹⁶ Although these two studies differ from the current research focus, both provide valuable insights into possible solutions and conflict resolution mechanisms arising from the sound horeg phenomenon.

Hence, the present study differs in its approach from the previously mentioned studies, as well as from other related research. This study adopts the framework of Religious Moderation, which has been widely promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. Nonetheless, the earlier studies have made significant contributions and serve as important references for this research. Therefore, this study is expected to complement and refine previous investigations by employing the perspective of Religious Moderation. Accordingly, the research addresses several key questions: What is meant by the *sound horeg* phenomenon within the social and religious context of society? How is the concept of Religious Moderation defined by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia? How can the *sound horeg* phenomenon be analyzed through a Religious Moderation approach? These questions form the core focus of the present study.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research to provide a comprehensive description and in-depth analysis of the phenomenon under investigation.¹⁸ The primary data sources consisted of various written materials, including books, journal articles, government reports, and official documents related to the concept of Religious Moderation and the sound

horeg phenomenon. These sources served as the units of analysis, offering insights into both theoretical and practical aspects of the subject. Data collection was conducted through systematic document review, involving careful selection, reading, and note-taking of relevant information from the identified sources. Emphasis was placed on selecting sources that are credible, up-to-date, and directly related to the research questions.¹⁹

The analysis procedure followed a qualitative content analysis approach within the framework of Religious Moderation as promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs.²⁰ The process involved critically examining, comparing, and interpreting the data, identifying patterns, contradictions, and key themes. Conclusions were drawn cautiously, ensuring they were supported by sufficient evidence and well-grounded arguments. This approach allowed the study to explore the socio-cultural dynamics of *sound horeg*, particularly the tension between cultural preservation and communal well-being, and to assess how the principles of Religious Moderation could offer a harmonizing solution.²¹

Results and Discussion Definition and Phenomenon of *Sound Horeg*

Sound horeg is a term commonly used in East Java to describe high-capacity audio systems capable of producing loud, resonant sounds.²² The word "horeg" originates from the Javanese language, meaning "to vibrate", and refers to the strong vibrations generated by the powerful bass at high volume.²³ This vibration has become the distinctive characteristic of sound horeg, making it a unique phenomenon within the sphere of community entertainment culture.²⁴ Therefore, sound horeg can be defined as a high-powered audio system that produces sound so intense that it generates physical vibrations in the surrounding environment.

The emergence of *sound horeg* cannot be separated from the development of local traditions and advancements in sound system technology in Indonesia. Bilatul Kh. *et al.* state that sound systems have become an inseparable part of community life.²⁵ In Sumbersewu, e.g., residents interact with sound systems almost daily, whether in religious gatherings, reunions, or other social events.²⁶ Along with technological developments and increasing demand for louder and clearer sound quality, a new type of sound system with extremely powerful bass emerged, which came to be known as *sound horeg*.²⁷

Sound horeg has continued to evolve and become a tradition in various events such as celebrations, weddings, and community entertainment activities. With its capacity to create a lively atmosphere and enhance collective enthusiasm, sound horeg has become a symbol of festivity in many parts of Indonesia, particularly in East Java.²⁸ However, the tradition of using sound horeg has also raised new challenges, especially concerning its impact on health, social environments, and religious norms.²⁹ The level of noise produced often exceeds the threshold of human comfort, making it a central issue in discussions about the sustainability of this practice.³⁰

The noise generated by *sound horeg* significantly disrupts community comfort. Continuous exposure to loud sound can lead to various physical health problems, such as sleep disturbances, increased stress, and elevated blood pressure.³¹ It can also affect mental health, as symptoms such as anxiety, irritability, and emotional tension are often reported by individuals who are directly exposed for prolonged periods.³² Furthermore, the strong vibrations produced by *sound horeg* may cause damage to property, such as cracked windows and dislodged roof tiles.³³

Excessive use of *sound horeg* possibly triggers social conflict. Residents who feel disturbed or disadvantaged frequently submit

complaints to authorities and sometimes resort to protests or demonstrations.³⁴ Such conflicts not only disrupt public order but may also harm social relations within the community.³⁵ In addition, the use of sound horeg often raises ethical and social issues, particularly within religiously observant communities. During celebrations involving sound horeg, practices are often observed that are considered inconsistent with Islamic norms, such as unrestricted interaction between men and women (ikhtilâm),³⁶ clothing that does not comply with modesty requirements, and disturbances to the performance of obligatory prayers.³⁷ These conditions create a dilemma between efforts to preserve local cultural traditions and the negative consequences for social order and communal well-being.³⁸ Therefore, a fair and balanced approach is required to accommodate cultural preservation without neglecting ethical and religious values upheld by society. In this context, the concept of Religious Moderation can serve as an analytical framework for understanding and addressing these issues in a proportional manner.

Religious Moderation

Epistemologically, the term religious moderation derives from the word *moderate*. In the Indonesian Dictionary, moderate means "*middle way*". When it is combined with the suffix -*si* to form *moderasi* (moderation), it refers to the reduction of violence and the avoidance of extremism.³⁹ Similarly, in Arabic, moderate is expressed through the word *wasath*, while moderation corresponds to *wasathiyah*.⁴⁰ Both terms are equivalent to *tawassuth* (middle position), *i'tidâl* (justice), and *tawâzun* (balance).⁴¹ Therefore, moderation can be understood as an attitude of choosing the middle path, being fair, and maintaining balance.

When the word moderation is paired with religion, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) defines it

as practicing religion in a balanced way: upholding one's own faith (exclusive) while respecting the religious practices of others with different beliefs (inclusive). 42 This balance, or middle path, in religious practice prevents individuals from falling into extreme attitudes such as excessive fanaticism and revolutionary tendencies. 43 Thus, religious moderation is the key to fostering tolerance and harmony at the local, national, and even global levels. 44

This understanding is supported by the basic principles of religious moderation itself, namely maintaining balance between two aspects. For example, balance between reason and revelation, body and soul, rights and obligations, individual interests and communal welfare, obligations and voluntary acts, religious texts and scholarly interpretations, ideals and realities, as well as between the past and the future. According to Kemenag, religious moderation embodies fairness and balance in perceiving, responding to, and practicing these paired concepts. All of these are in line with the substance of Islamic teachings, which consistently emphasize justice and balance in all aspects.

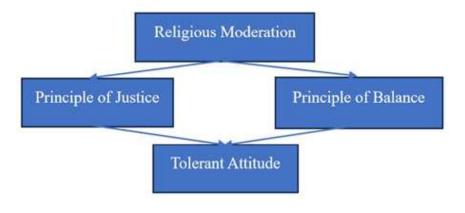
The explanation of these two main principles is as follows: first, the principle of justice. The Arabic terms al-¿adl or ¿adâlah mean uprightness, balance, and placing something in its proper place. Ibn Manzur defines ¿adâlah as a characteristic of individuals who uphold truth and avoid injustice,⁴⁹ while Ibn Faris emphasizes its relation to fairness and balance.⁵⁰ These definitions align with the concept of justice itself, namely, upholding rights impartially, without bias or deviation.

Second, the principle of balance refers to a perspective, attitude, and commitment to uphold justice, humanity, and equality.⁵¹ To be balanced does not mean lacking an opinion, but rather expressing views firmly without being harsh, since the position is always grounded in justice. Importantly, such fairness does not infringe upon the rights of others or cause

harm. Balance, therefore, can be understood as performing actions in moderation—neither excessive nor deficient, neither overly conservative nor overly liberal.⁵²

Through these two principles, Kemenag asserts that religious moderation gives rise to tolerance.⁵³ In Arabic, tolerance is often translated as tasâmu%, which denotes openness, generosity, and broad-mindedness. Ibn Manzur defines samâ%ah as generosity and open-mindedness in social interactions,⁵⁴ while Fairuzabadi interprets it as gentleness and ease in social relations.⁵⁵ Thus, tolerance in this context refers to openness to hearing different views, functioning in two directions: expressing one's perspective while also accepting others' perspectives within certain boundaries, without undermining one's own religious beliefs. According to Kemenag, this essence of tolerance is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving national harmony.⁵⁶ Accordingly, the principles of religious moderation formulated by Kemenag serve as an analytical tool in examining the phenomenon of sound horeg. The conceptual framework of religious moderation as outlined by the Ministry of Religious Affairs can be illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 1. Religious Moderation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs



Analysis of the *Sound Horeg* Phenomenon

The phenomenon of *sound horeg* has generated diverse responses, both supportive and critical. These differences arise from varied perspectives in evaluating the issue. Supporters often emphasize its role as a form of entertainment and cultural expression within society,⁵⁷ whereas critics tend to highlight the potential for social disruption and immoral practices associated with the phenomenon.⁵⁸ Therefore, the approach of Religious Moderation provides a relevant analytical framework, with the expectation of fostering tolerance through the application of justice and balance. The explanation of these two principles is as follows:

First: Justice, as a principle of Religious Moderation, must be upheld in examining the sound horeg phenomenon. Essentially, sound horeg, despite its noise, is not the only form of public entertainment. Festivals and ticketed music concerts also rely on sound systems that often exceed the safe limits established by the World Health Organization (85 decibels, dB). However, while such festivals are considered legal, sound horeg is frequently categorized as a disturbance.⁵⁹ Thus, the issue is not merely about excessive noise but also reflects broader questions of social inequality and injustice.

Indeed, both festivals and concerts are inherently noisy. A study published by the *American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery* measured sound levels at modern concerts and found that average noise levels reached 99.8 dB, with a maximum of 125.6 dB.⁶⁰ This is not far from *sound horeg*, which has been reported to reach levels up to 135 dB. Both obviously exceed the WHO's safe thresholds as well as national regulations. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Environment Decree No. 48 of 1996 on Noise Standards, permissible limits are only 55 dB for residential areas and 70 dB for commercial, recreational, and industrial zones.⁶¹ Therefore, the government must adopt a fair and comprehensive stance on *sound horeg*, ensuring that responses are consistent and not discriminatory across similar cases.

In this context, justice includes ensuring that noise levels remain within permissible limits and providing communities with space to practice their traditions and entertainment activities.⁶² Historical examples illustrate this principle.⁶³ During the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab, two travelers from *Ta'if* raised their voices in the Prophet's Mosque, disturbing other worshippers. Umar did not punish them immediately but instead investigated the matter. Upon learning that they were not residents of Medina and were unaware of local customs, Umar excused their actions.⁶⁴ This reflects the principle of justice: penalties are not imposed indiscriminately but are adapted to the context and understanding of those involved.⁶⁵

Furthermore, Umar provided a practical solution by establishing an open courtyard east of the mosque, known as *Buthaiha*, as a designated space for loud conversations, poetry recitations, and elevated speech. He declared, "*Man kâna yurîdu an yalghama aw yunshida shi'ran, aw yarfa'a cawtahu, fal-yakhruj ilâ hâdhihi arra%bah*" (*Whoever wishes to speak loudly, recite poetry, or raise their voice, let them go there*). This demonstrates a form of justice that both preserves public order and ensures that people retain their right to cultural expression in designated spaces, thereby reducing social tension and potential harm.

Second, balance, besides the justice as previously explained, sound horeg must also be considered through the lens of balance. In this context, balance refers to the equilibrium between social entertainment, economic activity, environmental sustainability, public health, and religious values. While sound horeg has emerged as a local cultural practice shaped by technological progress,⁶⁷ and has become a symbol of festivity and social participation.⁶⁸ Its implementation must fulfill the following aspects of balance:

First, economic balance. although sound horeg can stimulate small-scale trade and create employment opportunities, it should

not impose excessive financial burdens on the community. Contributions, if required, must remain voluntary rather than coercive, since forced levies disproportionately benefit certain groups while disadvantaging others. Second, *environmental balance* event cleanliness and appropriate zoning must be prioritized. Following the precedent set by Umar ibn al-Khattab, sound horeg should ideally be located in open areas away from densely populated residential neighborhoods, thus minimizing disturbances and environmental risks.

Third, *health balance*: noise levels must be controlled to remain within safe thresholds, as excessive sound exposure poses significant risks to public health both directly and indirectly.⁷¹ Fourth, *religious balance*: event content requires supervision to ensure compliance with religious and moral values. Activities such as vulgar dancing, unrestricted intermingling of men and women, and behaviors that may provoke unrest or immorality should be strictly avoided.⁷² Hopefully, based on these four balances, the *sound horeg* activities can be implemented in an orderly, beneficial manner, and still maintain social, health, environmental, and religious values.

By upholding justice and these four dimensions of balance, the practice of *sound horeg* can reflect tolerance as a manifestation of Religious Moderation. Religious Moderation emphasizes fairness, proportionality, and respect for diversity without undermining core religious principles.⁷³ Within this framework, tolerance toward *sound horeg* means recognizing society's need for entertainment while also protecting the rights of others to live in peace, health, and a morally safe environment.

Tolerance, therefore, does not imply permissiveness without limits, but rather the pursuit of a fair middle ground.⁷⁴ This involves granting space for cultural and economic expression while safeguarding social comfort, health, and religious values. Thus, *sound horeg* can become a medium of social cohesion rather than a source of

conflict or unrest. This represents the essence of Religious Moderation—avoiding extremes of either unconditional permissiveness or outright prohibition.⁷⁵ Through this perspective, society is encouraged to approach traditions with wisdom, foster dialogue, and respect differences, thereby cultivating a peaceful, civilized, and harmonious coexistence between worldly needs and spiritual values.

Conclusion

The sound horeg phenomenon reflects a complex social dynamic, as it embodies a tension between cultural expression and the demands of public order and comfort. Divergent perspectives on this practice give rise to two opposing positions: one views sound horeg as a form of entertainment and cultural heritage, while the other perceives it as a source of disturbance and moral transgression. Through the framework of Religious Moderation, the phenomenon can be analyzed in a fair and balanced manner. The principle of justice requires equal treatment of all forms of public entertainment, whether traditional (e.g. sound horeg) or modern (e.g. music festivals), while remaining consistent with legal standards and public health considerations. At the same time, the principle of balance serves as an essential foundation in addressing sound horeg, as it calls for harmonization between the dimensions of entertainment, economy, environment, health, and religion to ensure that this cultural practice does not become a source of conflict. By upholding justice and balance, the ultimate goal of Religious Moderation—namely, the cultivation of tolerance—can be realized. In this context, sound horeg has the potential to serve as a medium for strengthening social solidarity and cultural wisdom, provided that it is managed within a moderate framework, avoiding both extremes of absolute prohibition and unrestricted permissiveness.

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