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Civil Society in Local Political Dynamics: An Analysis of the Al-Jihad Mosque in Pulo Brayan City

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines the conflict of interest between civil society and the Medan City Government over the religious public space of the Al-Jihad Mosque in Pulo Brayan City. Using Jürgen Habermas's public sphere theory as the sole analytical framework, this study explores how the mosque community maintained, lost, and reclaimed its public space after the Medan City Government demolished the Al-Jihad Mosque in the early 1990s for the Yos Sudarso flyover project. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with the Head of the BKM, congregation members, and community leaders, as well as documentation of the mosque's historical archives, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model accompanied by source triangulation. The results of the study indicate that the demolition without compensation triggered collective resistance through mutual cooperation, symbolic protests, and legal channels, until the judicial process restored the community's rights to the land, followed by the independent reconstruction of the mosque. This study concludes that civil society, which is in a weaker bargaining position, is still able to reclaim contested public space and ultimately negotiate a more collaborative relationship with the government that previously displaced it, so that the case of the Al-Jihad Mosque becomes a concrete illustration of the application of Habermas's public space theory in the religious and urban context of Indonesia.

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Keywords: Public Space, Civil Society, Conflict of Interest, Al-Jihad Mosque, Local Politics.

INTRODUCTION

Civil society is a crucial pillar of a democratic system because it provides a space for public participation outside the state and the market to advocate for public interests. In the Indonesian context, civil society organizations are not only non-governmental organizations (NGOs), but also develop through religious institutions, including mosques. As institutions closely connected to the community, mosques serve not only as places of worship but also as public spaces where citizens build collective awareness, strengthen solidarity, and encourage participation in community life (Hefner, 2000, pp. 15–18), while also being an important prerequisite for the consolidation of democracy at the local level (Diamond, 1994, pp. 4–17).

However, the public space provided by mosques is not always secure from the interests of others. When a mosque stands on strategic land for urban development, this religious public space can come into direct conflict with the development interests of the local government. This is the problem experienced by the Al-Jihad Mosque in Pulo Brayan City, which was previously demolished by the Medan City Government to make way for the Yos Sudarso flyover project, before being rebuilt by the community through legal struggle and mutual cooperation. This incident serves as the main background for this research, as it clearly demonstrates how religious public space can become an arena for conflicting interests between civil society and the state, even though the relationship between Islam and democracy in Indonesia generally takes place within a more constructive framework (Azra, 2019, pp. 122–125).

Various studies on the relationship between religion and local politics generally focus on practical political issues, voting behavior, and the mobilization of religious-based political support (Anwar, 2018, pp. 201–205). Research specifically examining the conflict of interest between mosque-based civil society and local government development interests over religious public spaces is still relatively limited. However, cases like this are important to understand because they demonstrate that civil society is not always at the forefront.
in a harmonious relationship with the state, but can also be in a position of conflicting interests, as is clearly seen in the long history of the Al-Jihad Mosque.

The case of the Al-Jihad Mosque is interesting because it doesn't stop at a single chapter. Its history encompasses three major, sequential chapters: the community's self-help in establishing a religious public space, the loss of that space due to city government development policies, and the reclaiming of that public space through social and legal struggles. These three

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chapters span a long period of time, from the initial establishment of a small prayer room in 1932 to the completion of the mosque's permanent reconstruction in 2009. This long period makes the Al-Jihad Mosque a rich case study for understanding how civil society, public space, and state power interact over time.

The significance of this case also lies in the fact that conflicts between civil society and the government do not always end in permanent defeat for one party. After a lengthy legal and social process, the relationship between the Pulo Brayan community and the Medan City Government has actually developed into a more collaborative one, marked by the presence of city government elements at the groundbreaking ceremony for the mosque's reconstruction. This dynamic is what drives this research beyond merely narratives of conflict, but also explores how public space reclaimed by civil society can ultimately be renegotiated with the government, without losing civil society's independence in managing that space.

The long period spanning from 1932 to the completion of the mosque's reconstruction in 2009 also makes this case rich in intergenerational dimensions. The generation that founded the langgar during the Dutch colonial period, the generation that built the permanent mosque during the independence era, and the generation of mosque youth who witnessed the demolition in the early 1990s, all inherited a common thread: the belief that this religious public space belongs to the Pulo Brayan community and must be continuously protected across time. This intergenerational dimension is what makes the conflict of interest over the religious public space of the Al-Jihad Mosque unavoidable. Not just an ordinary land dispute, but rather a matter of collective community identity that has been formed and passed down from one generation to the next.

Based on this description, this research aims to analyze the conflict of interest between civil society and the government over religious public space, through a case study of the demolition and reconstruction of the Al-Jihad Mosque in Pulo Brayan City. This research uses a theoretical framework, namely the public sphere theory proposed by Jürgen Habermas, to examine in depth how civil society maintains, loses, and then reclaims its religious public space. The research findings are expected to contribute to the development of civil society studies based on religious institutions, as well as provide input for mosque managers, local governments, and the community in maintaining inclusive and equitable public spaces (Mu'ti & Nashir, 2021, pp. 95–99).

Based on the background outlined above, this research is formulated into one main question: how the dynamics of the conflict of interest between civil society and the Medan City

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Government over the religious public space of the Al-Jihad Mosque unfold, and how civil society maintains, loses, and reclaims this public space. This main question is then broken down into three sub-questions as follows.

First, how did the Al-Jihad Mosque's religious public space develop independently by the community? Second, how did the re-feudalization of public space occur through the Medan City Government's development policies? Third, how did civil society resist and reclaim its public space? These three sub-questions are structured in line with the three operational indicators of the public space theory used in the study, so that the answers to the research questions can be consistently traced from the theoretical review to the discussion.

THEORITICAL REVIEW

Public Sphere Theory: Conflict of Interest between Civil Society and the State

Historically, Habermas's idea of the public sphere arose from his observations of the development of European bourgeois society in the 18th century, when coffee houses, salons, and newspaper publications became new spaces where middle-class citizens gathered to discuss common issues free from the power of the palace or church. These spaces later became the forerunners of modern public discourse, which became an important prerequisite for the growth of democracy. Although the context of its birth originated in Europe, Habermas's idea of the public sphere remains relevant for reading public spaces in other contexts, including religious public spaces such as mosques in Indonesia, as long as its core elements, namely open access and freedom of citizen discourse, remain the focus of analysis.

Previous Studies

Studies on public space and civil society in Indonesia continue to develop, although research specifically examining the conflict between civil society and local governments in religious public space remains relatively limited. Husna (2025), in her study on political Islam and public space, emphasized that the relationship between the state and religious organizations in Indonesia is often characterized by contestations of interests over public space, although these contestations do not always lead to open conflict. Meanwhile, Bening (2025), through a case study of the closure of the Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) Yasmin in Bogor City, found that legal decisions favoring the house of worship were not immediately implemented in the field due to social and political pressures at the local level, so that resolving conflicts over places of worship requires a dialogical approach beyond formal legal channels alone. Both studies demonstrate that religious public

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space in Indonesia is vulnerable to becoming an arena for contestation of interests, but neither specifically uses the single framework of Habermas's public space theory to interpret the three phases of formation, refeudalization, and reconquest of public space in a single case over a long historical period. This gap is what this research attempts to fill by consistently applying a theoretical framework to the case of the Al-Jihad Mosque, which has a history of more than seven decades, and is also the main difference between this research and previous studies.

This research deliberately uses only one theoretical framework, namely the theory of the public sphere proposed by Jürgen Habermas, so that the analysis can be focused in depth on one main issue, namely the conflict of interest in the religious public sphere. Habermas describes the public sphere as a realm of social life where citizens can gather freely to form opinions and share interests, free from state intervention or market interests. In an ideal public sphere, citizens interact through rational-critical discussions on an equal footing, without the dominance of any particular power. The mosque, in this context, can be understood as one form of religious public space, a place where the congregation gathers, deliberates, and builds shared awareness through worship activities, religious studies, and lectures (Habermas, 1991, pp. 27–43).

However, Habermas also emphasized that public space in practice is never completely free from the intervention of power. He used the term refeudalization of public space to describe the condition when public space that was previously open and autonomous is again controlled by the interests of the state or certain economic interests, so that citizens lose control over the space that should be shared. This concept is relevant to reading the demolition of the Al-Jihad Mosque, when a religious public space that had been cared for by the community for decades was suddenly taken over by the development interests of the city government without the full consent of the community owners (Habermas, 1991, pp. 27–43).

To deepen the understanding of how civil society responds to the takeover of public space by the state, this study also absorbs Nancy Fraser's idea of counter-spaces (subaltern counterpublics), namely alternative spaces formed by groups in society who are in a weaker position to maintain their interests and identity when the main public space has been taken over by more dominant interests. This idea remains within the broad framework of public space theory, because it essentially explains how the seized public space can be rebuilt by marginalized groups (Fraser, 1990, pp. 56–80).

In addition, to understand the forms of community resistance that do not always take the form of open confrontation, this research also utilizes the concept of everyday resistance from James C. Scott, which explains that community groups that

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Those in a weaker position in terms of power often resort to various forms of resistance, ranging from social solidarity, symbolic protests, to formal legal channels, as a strategy to defend their interests without having to face state power head-on (Scott, 1990, pp. 4–16, 136–140). These three ideas, Habermas, Fraser, and Scott, are used in an integrated manner as a unified theory of the public sphere, with Habermas as the main framework and Fraser and Scott as additional explanations regarding the dynamics of struggle and resistance within the public sphere.

Based on this theoretical framework of public space, this study developed three operational indicators that were consistently used to interpret field data. First, the indicator of public space formation, namely the extent to which mosques were built and managed independently by the community as spaces for deliberation and collective learning. Second, the indicator of public space re-feudalization, namely the extent to which these spaces were unilaterally taken over by state interests in the name of development. Third, the indicator of public space reclaiming, namely the extent to which the community, through counter-spaces and various forms of resistance, succeeded in reclaiming lost public space. These three indicators were consistently used to interpret all research findings in the discussion section, ensuring that the analysis remained focused on a single theoretical framework without extending to theories outside the study of public space.

The selection of this single theoretical framework also aims to enable the research to comprehensively answer the fundamental question of how conflicts of interest over religious public space occur and are resolved, without burdening the discussion with various general and overlapping civil society theories. Thus, Habermas's public sphere theory, enriched by Fraser's notion of counterspace and Scott's notion of everyday resistance, becomes the sole analytical tool used consistently from the theoretical review section to the conclusion of this research.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research on the conflict of interest between civil society and the government over the religious public space of the Al-Jihad Mosque, Pulo Brayan City, uses a qualitative approach with a case study research type (Creswell & Poth, 2024, pp. 42–47), as commonly used in exploratory and interpretive research on complex social phenomena (Sugiyono, 2023, pp. 15–21). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand the socio-political phenomena that have occurred in the long history of mosques, especially the relationship between civil society and the city government in competing for religious public space. The focus of the research is directed at how this public space is maintained, lost, and reclaimed by the community, read

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through the single framework of Habermas's public sphere theory. Research data were obtained through field observations, in-depth interviews with the Head of the BKM, community leaders, and mosque congregations, as well as historical archive documentation, photographs, and media clippings owned by the Al-Jihad Mosque and Madrasah Foundation.

The data sources in this study are divided into two categories. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with the Head of the Al-Jihad Mosque Student Council (BKM), a long-time member of the congregation who has been active in mosque activities, and BKM administrators who have direct knowledge of the history of the conflict and the mosque's reconstruction. Secondary data were obtained through archival photo documentation and historical records compiled by the Al-Jihad Mosque and Madrasah Foundation, mass media clippings regarding the demolition, and copies of legal documents such as Supreme Court Decisions, Building Use Rights Certificates, and Building Permits. The combination of these two data sources allowed the researcher to construct a more complete reconstruction of the event, while also cross-checking the informants' recollections with available documentary evidence.

The data analysis technique in this study uses the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2024, pp. 71–79), in line with the general principles of qualitative data analysis which are interactive and continuous (Harahap, N., 2020, pp. 88–94). Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data from interviews and documentation to align with the three operational indicators of public space theory that were developed in the theoretical review section. The data presentation is arranged in the form of a chronological narrative and thematic tables, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, to facilitate reading the patterns of formation, refeudalization, and reclaiming of public space. Conclusions were drawn continuously throughout the research process, while still referring to the theoretical framework of public spacesed. To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies source triangulation techniques, namely comparing data from interviews with various informants (the Head of the BKM, administrators, and congregation) and verifying them with archival documents and media clippings, and method triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documents obtained in the field (Aisyah & Fauzi, 2023, pp. 120–126). With this method, the study is expected to be able to provide an objective and in-depth picture of the conflict of interest over the religious public space of the Al-Jihad Mosque as a representation of civil society in Pulo Brayan Kota Village.

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DISCUSSION

Al-Jihad Mosque as a Religious Public Space for the Pulo Brayan Community

Before exploring the conflict of interest that is the core of this research, it is important to first understand how the Al-Jihad Mosque functions as a religious public space in the daily lives of the Pulo Brayan community. The Mosque Prosperity Agency (BKM) acts as a manager, ensuring that this public space remains vibrant and serves as a place for meetings, learning, and collective deliberation, not simply a place for worship. An interview with the Chairman of the BKM of the Al-Jihad Mosque, Ir. Muhammad Zul Akbar Syah, revealed that the establishment of the BKM is inseparable from the mosque's long history of maintaining its public space.

"The background to the formation of the Al-Jihad Mosque Community Development Board (BKM) is inseparable from the mosque's long history. After the mosque was rebuilt, the BKM was established as an institution tasked with managing and improving the mosque's prosperity so that all religious, educational, social, and community activities can run smoothly and provide broader benefits to the community." (Interview with Ir. Muhammad Zul Akbar Syah, June 8, 2026).

This statement demonstrates that the Al-Jihad Mosque's public religious space was not born out of thin air, but rather is continually maintained and managed to ensure its open access to the public. One concrete manifestation of this public space's function is seen in the organization of the Al-Jihad Madrasah as a means of learning the Quran and religious education, as well as regular religious studies, religious lectures, and commemorations of Islamic holidays that consistently bring together residents from various backgrounds. The successful management of this public space has also been recognized by the mosque's congregation. Mukhlis Munthe, who has been active
following the activities of Al-Jihad Mosque for more than ten years, stated the following.

"During my time here, I've seen the BKM actively organize religious studies, Islamic holiday activities, charity drives, and various community-based activities. Without the BKM, the mosque's activities might not be as well-organized and focused as they are now." (Interview with Mukhlis Munthe, June 8, 2026).

Furthermore, Mukhlis Munthe also explained that this religious public space not only functions as a gathering place, but also as a space where discourse and social awareness are formed through the pulpit of sermons and lectures, a characteristic which in public space theory is referred to as the process of forming opinions through open discussion and communication between citizens.

"When we talk about politics, it doesn't always have to be about political parties or elections.

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In mosques, that influence can also be seen in how the administrators and religious teachers shape the community's way of thinking. For example, during Friday sermons or lectures, a preacher standing at the pulpit can deliver a message that touches the congregation, motivates them to do good, cares more about their surroundings, and even changes their perspective on a particular issue." (Interview with Mukhlis Munthe, June 8, 2026).

This open and strategic public space is what has made the Al-Jihad Mosque attract the attention of various parties, including political actors and local government officials. The Head of the Community Empowerment Agency (BKM), Ir. Muhammad Zul Akbar Syah, explained that the mosque's open public space has even attracted the attention of political figures and regional head candidates on several occasions.

"In some local political moments, regional head candidates and political figures have attended the Al-Jihad Mosque. They usually come to perform prayers, socialize, and interact with the surrounding community. However, the mosque remains a place of worship open to all Muslims, regardless of background or political affiliation." (Interview with Ir. Muhammad Zul Akbar Syah, June 8, 2026).

It is this openness and strategic value of this religious public space that, on the one hand, makes the Al-Jihad Mosque a respected social space, but on the other hand, it makes it vulnerable to the interests of other parties, including the city government's development interests. This dynamic has actually occurred historically and will be detailed in the following section.

In addition to the madrasah and regular religious studies, the Al-Jihad Mosque's public religious space is also revitalized through the youth organization, the Al-Jihad Mosque Islamic Youth Association (PRIMA). Since the late 1980s, it has served as a platform for Pulo Brayan's young generation to learn how to organize, engage in da'wah activities, and channel their aspirations regarding issues surrounding the mosque. It was this youth organization that, when conflicts of interest with the city government reached their peak, became a social force actively voicing community opposition, as will be described in the following section. Thus, the Al-Jihad Mosque's public religious space is not only filled by older generations, but also by the younger generation who will contribute to its sustainability.

Conflict of Interest: Demolition of Al-Jihad Mosque by Medan City Government

The long history of the Al-Jihad Mosque began with the establishment of a small prayer room in 1932 at the intersection of Helvetia Street and Medan Belawan Street, now known as Colonel Bedjo Street/Sea Commodore Yos Sudarso Street, pioneered by Muhammad Ibrahim,

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Kasumu Mando, and Sutan Sunaro, three prominent traders and tax officials of Pulo Brayan during the Dutch colonial period. The prayer room was expanded during the Japanese occupation, then rehabilitated into a mosque building in 1954 under the leadership of Abdul Gani, Kasumu Mando, and Usman St. Batuah, until finally it was inaugurated with the name "Al-Jihad Mosque" in February 1967 to coincide with the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday by Lieutenant Colonel Yusuf Maureksa (Al-Jihad Mosque and Madrasah Foundation, 2026). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, this religious public space grew steadily, marked by the establishment of the youth organization of the mosque, the Al-Jihad Mosque Islamic Youth Association (PRIMA) in 1987, as well as plans to expand the building to four floors, which began in 1978.

Before the conflict of interest arose, the relationship between the Al-Jihad Mosque and the city government was actually quite harmonious. In 1966, Medan Mayor Drs. Soerkani visited to inspect the mosque's construction site, and at its inauguration in February 1967, the invitees included the Mayor of Medan Drs. Soerkani and the Chief of Staff of the Bukit Barisan II Military Command, Lieutenant Colonel Yusuf Maureksa. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, this religious public space even served as a venue for awarding prizes to the winners of the adult and child Qur'an Recitation Competition (MTQ) for Pulo Brayan, in addition to various activities such as the shahada, religious studies for men, and youth development at the mosque. This initially fluid relationship between the mosque and the city government then changed drastically when urban development interests began targeting the land where the mosque was built (Al-Jihad Mosque and Madrasah Foundation, 2026). Aminuddin, Nasution, and Pia (2025, p. 607) noted that the presence of political figures and government officials in such socio-religious spaces is usually part of a political branding strategy to build emotional closeness with the religious mass base, a pattern that is also seen in the presence of the Mayor of Medan in various religious moments at the Al-Jihad Mosque before the relationship turned into a conflict of interest.

The turning point of the conflict occurred towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, when the land where the Al-Jihad Mosque stood was included in the planned Yos Sudarso flyover, initiated by the Medan City Government. The interests of the city's infrastructure development were directly at odds with the community's interest in the sustainability of the religious public space they had cared for for decades. In 1991, after Friday prayers, Medan Mayor H. Bahtiar Jafar met with the management and congregation of the Al-Jihad Mosque. The meeting concluded that the community and congregation still objected to the plan to relocate the Al-Jihad Mosque to another location, a stance that demonstrated that civil society in Pulo Brayan was not simply

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willing to surrender its public space to the development interests offered by the city government.

The tension then escalated into open conflict. Several members of a youth organization, ordered by a village official, removed and demolished equipment from the Al-Jihad Mosque, while the community and foundation administrators protested, including one administrator, Zul Akbar, who raised the Indonesian flag. As a symbol of resistance against policies deemed unfair. Ultimately, government officials forcibly demolished the mosque using heavy equipment without providing compensation to the foundation. This incident, as recorded in documentation and newspaper clippings of the time, is clear evidence that religious public spaces can experience re-feudalization, namely unilateral takeover by powerful interests with far greater resources (Al-Jihad Mosque and Madrasah Foundation, 2026). Harahap, Nst, and Rabbani (2024, p. 441) confirm that the dynamics of the relationship between religious actors and local political-government actors in Indonesia are always colored by conflicting interests, as is also clearly seen in the conflict of interest between the Al-Jihad Mosque Foundation and the Medan City Government.

Visual documentation from that period captures the heartbreaking atmosphere of the Pulo Brayan community. Several archival photographs show young people from the mosque standing pensively watching the building that had been their place of study and worship for decades being razed to the ground, while the authorities carrying out the demolition remained unmoved despite protests by raising the national flag. Several newspaper clippings from the period also reported on the dispute between the Medan City Government and the management of the Al-Jihad Mosque Foundation, indicating that this issue was not merely an internal matter for the residents of Pulo Brayan, but had become a broader public concern in Medan (Yayasan Masjid dan Madrasah Al-Jihad, 2026). The phrase "my dear mosque, poor mosque" circulating among the congregation at that time also illustrates the depth of the community's sense of loss for a religious public space that had been cared for across generations.

Interestingly, the community did not stop worshipping even though the mosque building was destroyed. Community leader, H. Syahbuddin Ks, took the initiative to clear the debris of the mosque so that the congregation could continue to perform congregational prayers, while the foundation administrators rebuilt the makeshift mosque using available materials such as plywood walls. The community's struggle was then pursued through legal channels, accompanied by attorney Amin Daulai, SH, from the Legal Aid Bureau of the University of North Sumatra (BBH USU), until finally the state administrative court process ruled in favor of the Al-Jihad Mosque and Madrasah Foundation in the land dispute with the Medan City Government. Certainty over the status of the land was then strengthened with the issuance of a land title certificate. And building

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permits in the name of the foundation in the early 2000s, as stated by the foundation's management and recorded in internal documentation collected by researchers during field research (Al-Jihad Mosque and Madrasah Foundation, 2026).

The legal process undertaken by the foundation's management was not a short one. The dispute was initially resolved through state administrative courts, given that the disputed object was related to a city government official's decision regarding land use. H. Syahbuddin Ks, as the foundation's administrator, accompanied by legal counsel from BBH USU, consistently visited the disputed location and collected evidence of community ownership of the land throughout the trial. The lengthy legal process, from the demolition in the early 1990s to the issuance of the verdict in 1996, demonstrates that reclaiming public space through formal state channels requires considerable time, patience, and consistency from civil society facing government power.

To clarify the flow of events, Table 1 below summarizes the main chronology of the conflict of interest over the religious public space of the Al-Jihad Mosque.

Table 1. Chronology of Conflict of Interest over the Religious Public Space of the Al-Jihad Mosque

Year	Key Events
1932	The small prayer room that was the forerunner of the Al-Jihad Mosque was erected at the intersection of Jalan Helvetia – Jalan Medan Belawan.
1954	The langgar was rehabilitated into a mosque and minaret building under the leadership of Abdul Gani, Kasumu Mando, and Usman St. Batuah.
February 1967	The inauguration of the mosque building with the name "Al-Jihad Mosque" by Lieutenant Colonel Yusuf Maureksa.
1978	The foundation excavation for the planned expansion of the mosque into four floors has begun.
1990–1991	The Medan City Government's plan to build the Yos Sudarso flyover; Mayor H. Bahtiar Jafar met with the congregation; the community rejected the relocation.
1991–1993	Forced demolition by authorities using heavy equipment without compensation; public protests, including the raising of the Red and White flag.

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1994/1996	The state administrative legal process won the Al-Jihad Mosque Foundation in a land dispute with the Medan City Government.
2000	Issuance of land title certificate for Al-Jihad Mosque Foundation.
Year	Key Events
2005	The issuance of a building permit; the laying of the first stone for the construction of a permanent mosque by Ustad H. Syahbuddin Ks, witnessed by Deputy Mayor Ir. H. Maulana Pohan.
2005–2009	Permanent reconstruction of the Al-Jihad Mosque through community self-help and mutual cooperation.

Source: Processed by researchers from the results of interviews and archival documentation of the Al-Jihad Mosque and Madrasah Foundation (2026).

The chronology in Table 1 shows that the conflict of interest over the religious public space of the Al-Jihad Mosque was not a single event, but rather a long process that lasted for more than a decade, starting from the struggle for space, community resistance, and finally resolution through formal legal channels. This series of events shows that civil society resistance to state interests does not always take the form of open political confrontation, but also through social solidarity, symbolic protest, and legal mechanisms, as explained in the concept of everyday resistance (Scott, 1990, pp. 4–16, 136–140). This conflict of interest over religious public space is the core of the local political dynamics that the case study of the Al-Jihad Mosque in Pulo Brayan City aims to demonstrate.

Reconstruction of Public Space: Resistance and Renegotiation of Civil Society

After a lengthy legal process, the Pulo Brayan community did not passively accept the loss of their religious public space. An interview with Chairuddin Chan, S.Pd.I., a member of the Al-Jihad Mosque Community Service Board (BKM), revealed that the community has made various efforts to reclaim this public space through social participation, mutual cooperation, and support from various community leaders, as conveyed by the following informant.

"I believe the BKM plays a significant role in the community's social life. This can be seen in the history of the Al-Jihad Mosque itself. In the past, the mosque was demolished by the Medan City Government for infrastructure development. However, the community did not remain silent. With the initiative of community leaders, congregants, and local residents, the mosque was rebuilt

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through mutual cooperation and community participation. To this day, this spirit of togetherness is still evident in every activity.
done." (Interview with Chairuddin Chan, S.Pd.I, BKM Manager of Al-Jihad Mosque, 2026).

The statement shows that the process of rebuilding the Al-Jihad Mosque is a concrete form of civil society's efforts to build a counter-public space when the main public space has been taken over by state interests (Fraser, 1990, pp. 56–80). The community raised funds for the initial construction phase, which initially only had a capital of around twelve million rupiah, assisted by CV Dika Consultan in preparing working drawings and budget plans, until the laying of the first stone for the construction of a permanent mosque was carried out by Ustad Drs. H. Syahbuddin Ks and witnessed by the Deputy Mayor of Medan Ir. H. Maulana Pohan during the construction period of 2005–2009.

The fundraising process for the mosque's reconstruction also demonstrates the character of civil society, which relies on horizontal solidarity among residents, rather than state aid. The foundation's management actively approached donors, both from the congregation and the wider community, to finance each stage of the construction, from obtaining the building permit to constructing the multi-story structure. Friday prayers continued to be held regularly despite the limitations of the emergency building, a practice that demonstrates that the function of the religious public space never completely ceased even though the physical structure was not fully restored.

The physical construction phases are also documented in considerable detail in the foundation's archives. After the construction plan drawings were agreed upon with CV Dika Consultan for the 2005-2009 period, work began with the casting of pillars on the ground floor, followed by the installation of reinforced concrete for the second floor columns, until finally the multi-story structure stood firmly, replacing the makeshift building that previously only had a roof and walls made of makeshift materials. Throughout the construction process, congregational prayers never stopped for even a single day, demonstrating that the community viewed the continuation of the mosque's worship and social functions as a priority that could not be postponed, even though the physical structure was still in the process of being completed.

This moment is interesting to observe because it shows that the relationship between civil society and the city government, after going through a long phase of conflict of interest, can develop again into a more collaborative relationship without eliminating independence.
civil society in managing its own religious public space. This dynamic is relevant to the findings (Soemitra, A. 2014) that the Al-Jihad Mosque managed to maintain its management autonomy

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despite facing pressure from city government policies. The presence of the Deputy Mayor of Medan in laying the first stone for the permanent construction can be read as a form of state re-recognition of the legitimacy of the public space that was previously taken over unilaterally. The high level of community participation in religious study activities, Islamic holiday commemorations, social assistance, the Al-Jihad Madrasah, Baitul Maal wat Tamwil (BMT), and mutual cooperation activities to date shows that the public space that was once forcibly seized has been successfully restored to the full ownership of the Pulo Brayan community.

Reading the Al-Jihad Mosque Conflict through Habermas's Public Sphere Theory

To make it easier for readers to understand the flow of thought of this research briefly before going into the explanation of each phase, Figure 1 below summarizes the three-phase conceptual model of public space theory as applied to the case of the Al-Jihad Mosque, while also visualizing the tug-of-war relationship between civil society and the state throughout its historical time span.



Figure 1. Three-Phase Conceptual Model of Public Space Theory in the Case of Al-Jihad Mosque

When read as a whole through the single framework of public space theory, the history of the Al-Jihad Mosque reveals three interrelated phases. The first phase was the formation of an

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autonomous religious public space, when the Pulo Brayan community independently established and maintain the prayer room until it develops into a mosque, as a space where residents can discuss, learn, and build collective awareness without interference from outside powers.

The second phase is the re-feudalization of public space, when the Medan City Government, in the name of developing the Yos Sudarso flyover infrastructure, unilaterally took over the public space through forced demolition without compensation. This phase accurately illustrates how a previously autonomous public space can be re-controlled by state interests when development interests are deemed to be of higher standing than the community's rights to the space they have built over the years.

The third phase is the reclaiming of public space through the creation of counter-spaces and various forms of resistance, ranging from symbolic flag-raising protests, to the mutual cooperation of building makeshift mosques, to resolution through formal legal channels all the way to the Supreme Court. These three phases together demonstrate that civil society, despite being in a much weaker bargaining position compared to state power, still has the capacity to maintain, temporarily lose, and ultimately reclaim its public space. The case of the Al-Jihad Mosque thus serves as a concrete empirical illustration of Habermas's theory of public space in the local religious and political context in Indonesia.

These findings also provide important insights into the theory of public space itself when applied to the Indonesian context. Unlike the European bourgeois public space described by Habermas, the religious public space in Pulo Brayan did not stop at the re-feudalization phase, but instead successfully progressed through a recovery phase that ultimately re-engaged elements of the city government collaboratively. This demonstrates that the relationship between civil society and the state over public space is dynamic and subject to change over time, rather than a fixed, one-way relationship. The implication is that managers of other religious public spaces facing similar challenges can learn from the case of the Al-Jihad Mosque that social solidarity, orderly symbolic protests, and formal legal channels are a proven combination of strategies in defending civil society interests without resorting to destructive confrontation.

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Table 2. Application of Three Phases of Public Space Theory in the Case of Al-Jihad Mosque Source: Processed by researchers based on the theoretical framework of Habermas (1991), Fraser (1990), and Scott (1990).

Public Space Theory Phase	Conceptual Explanation	Findings in the Al-Jihad Mosque Case
Formation of Public Space	Citizens voluntarily form autonomous spaces to discuss and deliberate free from state intervention.	The establishment of the independent prayer room in 1932 until it developed into the Al-Jihad Mosque in 1967, was managed by residents through deliberation and mutual cooperation.
Refeudalization of Public Space	Public spaces that were originally autonomous were unilaterally taken over by state and market interests.	Forced demolition of the Al-Jihad Mosque by the Medan City Government for the Yos Sudarso flyover project without compensation (1990–1993).
Reclaiming Public Space	Weaker groups form counter-spaces and engage in resistance to restore their interests.	Construction of an emergency mosque, symbolic protests, legal action up to the Supreme Court decision, and permanent construction 2005–2009.

Table 2 above summarizes how the three phases of public space theory used in this study consistently explain the entire series of findings, from the formation, loss, to the reclaiming of the Al-Jihad Mosque's religious public space. The alignment between the theoretical framework and the field findings confirms that a single public space theoretical framework is sufficient to fully understand the dynamics of the conflict of interest in this case, without the need for additional, more general civil society theories.

Implications of the Al-Jihad Case for Relations Between Civil Society and City Government

The case of the Al-Jihad Mosque cannot be viewed as an isolated incident. The phenomenon of eviction of places of worship or religious public spaces for urban infrastructure projects is not

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uncommon in many major Indonesian cities, given that strategic land in densely populated areas is often occupied by community-led social and religious spaces long before modern urban planning policies were formulated by the government. In many similar cases, local governments tend to view these spaces simply as plots of land that hinder development projects, without considering the socio-religious values and the long history the community has built upon them. The case of Al-Jihad demonstrates that this view has the potential to generate prolonged resistance and significant social costs for both parties.
parties, as illustrated by the time span of dozens of years needed to fully resolve this dispute.

For the city government, an important lesson from this case is that community involvement from the planning stage of a development project, accompanied by deliberation and fair compensation, is far more efficient than resorting to forced demolition, which has the potential to trigger prolonged resistance and lead to lengthy legal proceedings. For civil society, the Al-Jihad case also provides a lesson that the combination of social solidarity, orderly symbolic protests, and formal legal channels has proven to be an effective strategy for maintaining public space without resorting to destructive means. Thus, the Al-Jihad Mosque case is not only relevant as a local historical record of Medan City, but also as a learning reference for the relationship between the state and civil society regarding religious public spaces in other cities in Indonesia facing similar issues.

This finding aligns with Husna's (2025) study, which asserts that the relationship between the state and religious organizations in Indonesia is often characterized by contested interests over public space. However, unlike the case of the closure of GKI Yasmin in Bogor City, studied by Bening (2025), where the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of the church could not be implemented due to socio-political pressure from local residents, the case of the Al-Jihad Mosque shows the opposite pattern: the ruling in favor of the foundation was successfully followed up to permanent reconstruction, without any obstacles from local residents. This difference emphasizes that the effectiveness of post-dispute restoration of religious public space is not solely determined by the content of the legal decision, but also by the extent to which the decision receives support or at least is not rejected by the community surrounding the disputed space. This comparison also serves as an important note that land ownership documentation, social cohesion of the congregation, and consistency of litigation channels are the capital that determines the success of civil society in reclaiming its public space.

Another comparison can also be drawn from Wulandari's (2023) study regarding the conflict over the use of public space in the Menara Mosque and Sunan Kudus Tomb area. This contrasts

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with the Al-Jihad case, which presents a vertical conflict between civil society and the state over... ownership of space, the conflict in the Kudus case is more horizontal, namely between users of the religious public space itself due to the high intensity of religious tourism activities. This comparison shows that conflicts over religious public space in Indonesia can occur in various different forms, thus strengthening the originality of this study which specifically dissects the long-term vertical conflict between civil society and the city government through the single framework of Habermas's public space theory, rather than horizontal conflicts between space users as is commonly studied in architectural and urban planning studies.

Research Limitations

This study has three limitations that need to be frankly stated, while also opening up opportunities for policy and further research. First, the use of a single public space theoretical framework provides a sharp analytical focus on conflicts of interest over religious space, but other aspects of local political dynamics, such as voting behavior or political party affiliation of Pulo Brayan residents, are not discussed in depth. Further research could combine public space theory with a behavioral political approach to obtain a more comprehensive picture. Second, the reconstruction of events in this study relies on a civil society perspective, namely informant interviews and foundation archives, without access to the official archives of the Medan City Government. Consequently, local governments should be encouraged to open their urban planning policy archives to the public to allow for more balanced reconstructions of similar cases in the future. Third, this study focuses on a single case study, so its findings cannot be directly generalized to all conflicts over religious public space in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the three-phase pattern identified—formation, refeudalization, and retaking—can serve as a starting point for local governments and managers of other places of worship to recognize potential similar conflicts early on and design more participatory deliberation and compensation mechanisms before development policies are enacted.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the core of the local political dynamics in the Al-Jihad Mosque case lies in the conflict of interest between civil society and
The government's control over religious public spaces. The history of the demolition of the Al-Jihad Mosque due to the Medan City Government's flyover construction policy, community resistance through mutual cooperation, symbolic protests, and legal channels leading to the

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Supreme Court's ruling, and its successful reconstruction through community initiative and participation, serve as concrete evidence that civil society is capable of defending its public spaces even when faced with state power with far greater resources.

Read through Habermas's theoretical framework of public space, this case demonstrates three interrelated phases: the formation of an autonomous public space, the refeudalization of public space by state interests, and the reclaiming of public space through counter-space and community resistance. Thus, the Al-Jihad Mosque and the BKM that manages it not only contribute to the development of the religious life of the Pulo Brayan community, but also serve as a concrete manifestation of civil society's capacity to defend and ultimately negotiate its interests with the government, thereby strengthening local democracy and the sustainability of an inclusive public space for the community.

Suggestion

Based on these findings, this study offers several recommendations. First, for the Medan City Government and other local governments, infrastructure development policies that intersect with religious public spaces and other community public spaces should involve deliberation and fair compensation from the planning stage, to avoid prolonged conflicts of interest as occurred in the case of the Al-Jihad Mosque. Second, for BKM administrators and managers of other religious public spaces, the experience of the Al-Jihad Mosque demonstrates the importance of historical archival documentation and complete proof of land ownership as a form of mitigation against potential conflicts of interest with other parties in the future. Third, for future researchers, this research is open to further development by comparing the Al-Jihad Mosque case with other cases of conflicts over religious public spaces in major Indonesian cities, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship patterns between civil society and the state in competing for public space.

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