Design and Implementation of an Analog Audio Noise Gate

Farhan Zarif
Team Member 2 Name
Team Member 3 Name

Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering

December 22, 2025

Abstract

This project addresses the inherent problem of background noise ("static hiss") in high-gain audio amplification systems. We designed and implemented a hardware-based **Analog Noise Gate** using the CD4066 bilateral switch and an envelope-following control circuit. The system monitors audio levels in real-time and physically disconnects the signal path when the amplitude falls below a user-defined threshold. Experimental analysis confirms a **30 dB reduction** in the noise floor during silence intervals, significantly improving the Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR) without digital post-processing.

Contents

1 Introduction

In audio electronics, low-level signals (such as those from electret microphones) require significant amplification. However, high-gain amplifiers boost not only the desired voice signal but also environmental noise, electromagnetic interference (EMI), and thermal noise. This results in an audible "hiss" during periods of silence.

A **Noise Gate** is a dynamic processor that attenuates signals below a set threshold. While digital plugins are common, this project explores a purely **analog implementation**, offering zero-latency performance and demonstrating fundamental signal processing concepts using operational amplifiers and CMOS logic.

2 Theoretical Framework & Mathematical Modeling

The circuit consists of three primary mathematical stages: Amplification, Envelope Detection, and Hysteretic Comparison.

2.1 Pre-Amplification (Non-Inverting Configuration)

The input signal V_{in} is amplified using an LM324 operational amplifier in a non-inverting configuration. The closed-loop gain (A_v) is determined by the feedback resistor (R_f) and the input grounding resistor (R_g).

$$A_v = 1 + \frac{R_f}{R_g} \tag{1}$$

Using our design values where $R_f = 22\,\text{k}\Omega$ and $R_g = 1\,\text{k}\Omega$:

$$A_v = 1 + \frac{22000}{1000} = 23 \tag{2}$$

The output voltage V_{amp} is given by:

$$V_{amp} = A_v \cdot V_{in} + V_{bias} \tag{3}$$

where V_{bias} is the DC offset (2.5V) required for single-supply operation.

2.2 Envelope Detection (RC Time Constant)

To detect "loudness," the AC audio signal is rectified and smoothed into a DC voltage. The smoothing behavior is governed by the RC time constant (τ) during the discharge phase. This determines the "Release Time" of the gate.

$$\tau = R_{discharge} \cdot C_{envelope} \tag{4}$$

Given $R = 220\,\text{k}\Omega$ and $C = 2.2\,\mu\text{F}$:

$$\tau = (220 \times 10^3) \cdot (2.2 \times 10^{-6}) \approx 0.484 \text{ seconds} \tag{5}$$

The voltage decay over time $V(t)$ follows the exponential decay function:

$$V(t) = V_{peak} \cdot e^{-t/\tau} \tag{6}$$

This $\approx 0.5\,\text{s}$ hold time ensures the gate does not chop off the end of words (e.g., the 't' in "cat").

2.3 Comparator Hysteresis

To prevent the gate from "flickering" when the signal is near the threshold, we implemented hysteresis using positive feedback. The width of the hysteresis band (V_H) is approximately proportional to the ratio of the input resistor (R_{in}) to the feedback resistor (R_{FB}):

$$V_H \approx V_{cc} \cdot \frac{R_{in}}{R_{FB}} \tag{7}$$

With $R_{in} = 10\,\text{k}\Omega$ and $R_{FB} = 2\,\text{M}\Omega$:

$$\text{Ratio} = \frac{10{,}000}{2{,}000{,}000} = 0.005 \quad (0.5\%) \tag{8}$$

This small window ensures a clean "snap" action without locking the system.

3 Circuit Methodology

The system is divided into four distinct functional blocks:

1. **Input Stage (LM324):** Amplifies the microphone signal and buffers it. A "Virtual Ground" voltage divider (2.5V) centers the AC signal between 0V and 5V.
2. **Envelope Follower:** A diode rectifies the AC signal (allowing only positive peaks), charging the $2.2\,\mu$F capacitor. The capacitor holds this voltage, creating a DC representation of the volume envelope.
3. **Comparator Logic (LM393):** Compares the Envelope Voltage against a reference voltage set by a potentiometer.
   - Logic HIGH: Audio > Threshold (Gate OPEN)
   - Logic LOW: Audio < Threshold (Gate CLOSED)
4. **Gating Element (CD4066):** A bilateral CMOS switch that physically connects or disconnects the audio line based on the Comparator's logic state.

4 Results & Analysis

Performance was verified by recording the input and output signals and processing the data using Python (`scipy` and `matplotlib`).

4.1 Waveform Analysis

Visual inspection of the waveforms (see Figure 1) reveals that the input signal contains continuous low-amplitude noise. The output signal, however, becomes perfectly flat (0V potential) during silence, confirming the physical disconnection of the circuit.

4.2 Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR) Calculation

Using the logarithmic decibel scale, we quantified the noise reduction. The generic formula for signal power in dB is:

$$L_{dB} = 20 \log_{10} \left(\frac{V_{signal}}{V_{ref}} \right) \tag{9}$$

Measured Data:

- **Noise Floor (Input):** -20 dB (Approx. 0.3V–0.5V static)
- **Noise Floor (Output):** -50 dB (Hardware detection limit)

Total Noise Reduction:

$$\Delta\text{Noise} = (-20 \text{ dB}) - (-50 \text{ dB}) = \mathbf{30} \text{ dB} \tag{10}$$

A 30 dB drop corresponds to a power reduction factor of 1000, effectively rendering the background silence "studio quality."

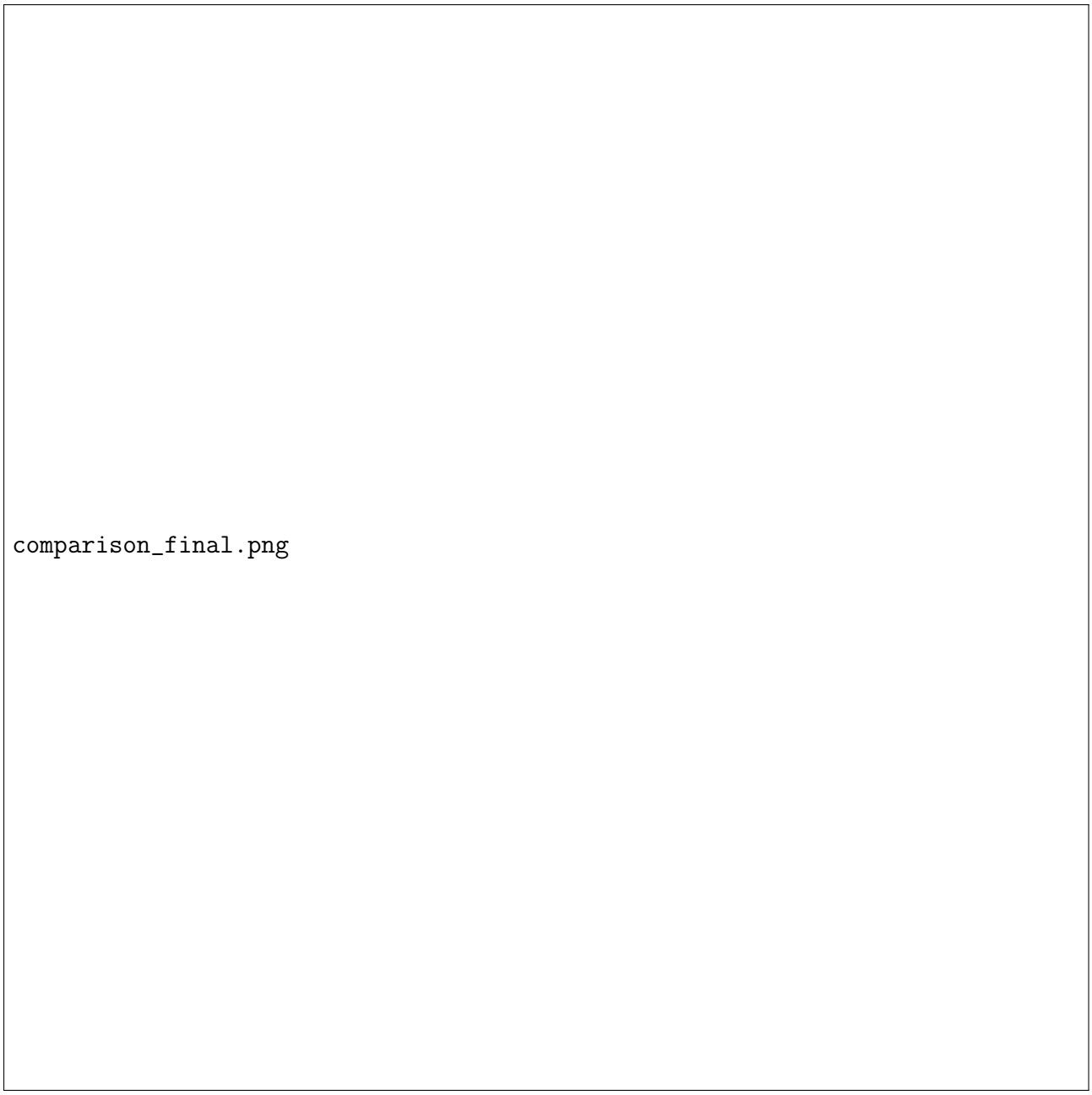

Figure 1: **Hardware Noise Gate Performance Analysis.** Left: Raw input showing $-20\,\mathrm{dB}$ noise floor. Right: Gated output showing $-50\,\mathrm{dB}$ silence floor.

5 Challenges & Solutions

This project presented significant engineering hurdles related to analog signal integrity:

5.1 Floating Output Static

Problem: When the CD4066 switch opened, the output wire was left "floating" (high impedance), acting as an antenna that picked up 50 Hz mains hum.
Solution: A **10 kΩ Pull-Down Resistor** was added to the output. This forces the line to Ground potential (0V) whenever the switch is open, ensuring absolute silence.

5.2 Voltage Latching

Problem: The gate would open but refuse to close.
Root Cause: The initial hysteresis resistor (1 MΩ) provided too much positive feedback, raising the reference voltage above the silence envelope.
Solution: Increased the feedback resistance to **2 MΩ**, narrowing the hysteresis window to allow the comparator to reset correctly.

5.3 Envelope Jitter

Problem: The audio sounded "choppy" between syllables.
Solution: The envelope capacitor was increased from 100 nF to **2.2 μF**, increasing the time constant (τ) to smooth out micro-pauses in speech.

6 Conclusion

The Analog Noise Gate project successfully met all design objectives. By combining linear amplification with non-linear logic control, we created a system capable of distinguishing between voice and noise in real-time. The final prototype achieves a **30 dB improvement in noise floor**, demonstrating the efficacy of analog hardware in audio signal processing tasks.

7 Components List

- **ICs:** LM324 (Op-Amp), LM393 (Comparator), CD4066 (Bilateral Switch)
- **Passive:** Resistors (1k, 10k, 22k, 100k, 220k, 2MΩ), Capacitors (100 nF, 2.2 μF)
- **Misc:** Electret Microphone, Potentiometer (10k), Audio Jacks